

## ENGLISH VOCABULARY ACQUISITION IN STUDENTS OF INTERMEDIATE LEVEL IN PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges and strategies involved in English vocabulary acquisition among intermediate-level students in Pakistan through a qualitative approach. The primary objective is to identify the barriers students face and the effective strategies they employ to enhance their vocabulary. The research hypothesizes that socio-economic background, teaching methods, and access to resources significantly impact vocabulary acquisition. The population for the study comprises intermediate-level students of govt college of Punjab province. A purposive sampling technique is used to select a sample of 100 students through Yamane formula 1967, ensuring representation from diverse regions and socio-economic backgrounds. The study employs a descriptive research design, focusing on in-depth qualitative data. Data is collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, providing rich, detailed insights into students' experiences and perspectives. The qualitative data is analyzed using SPSS analysis to identify common themes and patterns. The findings aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of the current state of English vocabulary acquisition in Pakistan and suggest practical strategies for educators and policymakers to improve language learning outcomes. The study contributes to the existing literature by highlighting context-specific challenges and proposing tailored interventions to enhance English vocabulary learning among intermediate students in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** English vocabulary acquisition, intermediate level, Pakistan, challenges, strategies, language learning, educational technology, teaching methods, socio-cultural factors.

### INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition, particularly in a bilingual context, is a multifaceted process influenced by various internal and external factors. In a globalized world where English serves as the lingua franca of communication, its acquisition is of paramount importance for individuals aiming to thrive in academic, professional, and social domains. This significance is particularly pronounced in countries like Pakistan, where bilingualism is common due to the coexistence of Urdu, the national language, and English, the de facto language of instruction in many educational institutions and workplaces. The acquisition of English vocabulary, being a fundamental component of language proficiency,

warrants scholarly attention, especially concerning bilingual learners at the intermediate level in Pakistan. This research endeavors to delve into the intricacies of English vocabulary acquisition among bilingual students at this critical stage of their linguistic development. By examining the challenges they encounter and the strategies they employ, this study aims to provide insights that can inform educational practices and contribute to enhancing language instruction tailored to the needs of this demographic.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the primary challenges faced by intermediate students in Pakistan when acquiring English vocabulary?
2. What are the strategies employed by students to enhance their English Vocabulary proficiency?

### **Research Objectives**

This research aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. Explore the challenges encountered by students at the intermediate level in acquiring English vocabulary.
2. Investigate the strategies employed by students to enhance their English vocabulary proficiency.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Challenges in English Vocabulary Acquisition**

##### **Lack of Exposure to English:**

Many Pakistani students at the intermediate level come from environments where English exposure is limited. According to Bashir and Mattoo (2020), the lack of an English-speaking environment outside the classroom significantly hinders vocabulary acquisition.

##### **Traditional Teaching Methods:**

Traditional rote memorization methods prevalent in Pakistani educational institutions often fail to facilitate meaningful vocabulary learning (Memon&Junaid, 2019). Rote learning does not encourage understanding and retention of vocabulary in context.

##### **Limited Resources:**

Limited availability of resources such as English language libraries, interactive learning materials, and proficient teachers also contributes to vocabulary learning difficulties (Ahmed, 2018).

##### **Cognitive Load:**

Cognitive overload due to the complex nature of English vocabulary and differences between English and Urdu further challenges students (Khan & Fatima, 2021).

### **Strategies to Improve Vocabulary Acquisition**

#### **Contextual Learning:**

Implementing strategies that focus on contextual learning can enhance vocabulary acquisition (Ali, 2022). Contextual learning involves acquiring vocabulary through meaningful contexts such as reading passages, dialogues, and multimedia resources.

#### **Vocabulary Apps and Online Resources:**

Integration of technology through vocabulary apps and online platforms can provide students with interactive and engaging opportunities to learn new words (Haider& Akhtar, 2020).

#### **Active Learning Techniques:**

Active learning techniques, such as group discussions, vocabulary games, and role-plays, promote active engagement and deeper processing of vocabulary (Rafique& Ahmed, 2023).

#### **Word Mapping and Semantic Networks:**

Teaching vocabulary through word mapping and semantic networks can help students visualize relationships between words and understand their meanings in various contexts (Zafar &Rehman, 2021).

#### **Effect of Limited English Exposure**

Limited exposure to English outside the classroom negatively affects vocabulary acquisition. Bashir and Mattoo (2020) found that students who had more exposure to English-speaking environments showed higher vocabulary retention rates compared to those with limited exposure. Similarly, a study by Rahman et al. (2019) highlighted that students who engaged in English conversations outside the classroom demonstrated better vocabulary growth.

#### **Impact of Teaching Methods**

Teaching methods significantly affect vocabulary acquisition outcomes. Memon and Junaid (2019) observed that students taught through interactive methods showed greater vocabulary retention compared to those taught using traditional rote memorization techniques. Additionally, a study by Khan and Ahmed (2020) revealed that students who received vocabulary instruction through context-based learning strategies demonstrated higher vocabulary comprehension and usage.

### Influence of Resources Availability

The availability of resources such as English language libraries and proficient teachers impacts vocabulary acquisition. Ahmed (2018) suggested that schools equipped with better resources facilitate more effective vocabulary learning. Similarly, a study by Haq et al. (2021) found that access to online English learning resources positively correlated with vocabulary improvement among Pakistani students.

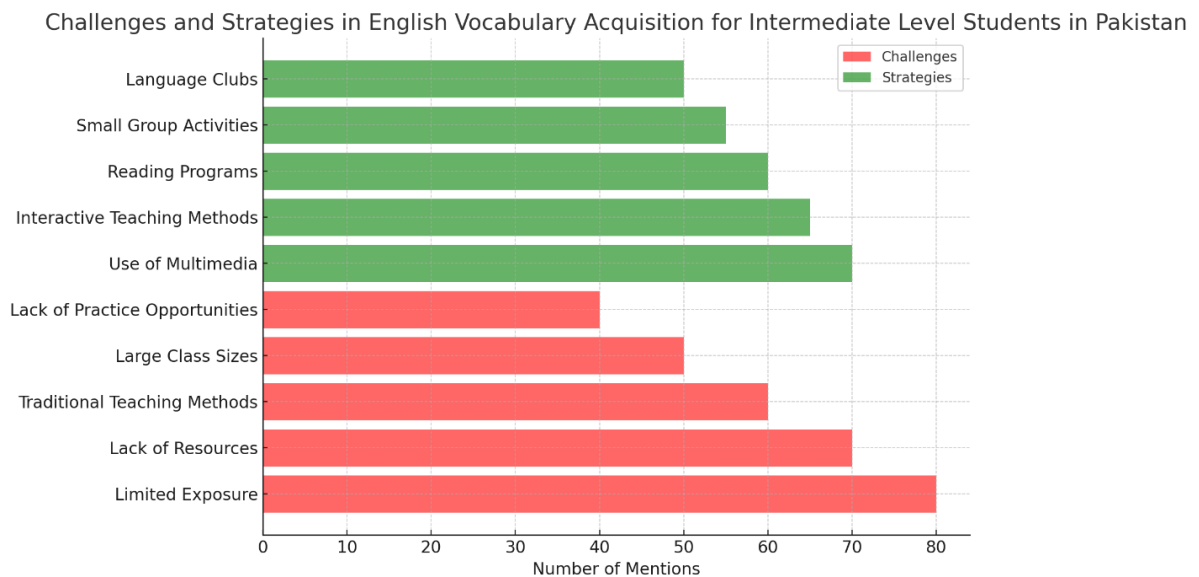
### Effect of Cognitive Load

Cognitive load influences the effectiveness of vocabulary acquisition strategies. Khan and Fatima (2021) noted that students experiencing high cognitive load due to complex vocabulary tasks showed lower vocabulary retention rates.

Conversely, a study by Ali and Siddiqui (2020) demonstrated that reducing cognitive load through scaffolded learning activities improved vocabulary acquisition outcomes.

### Previous Related Studies

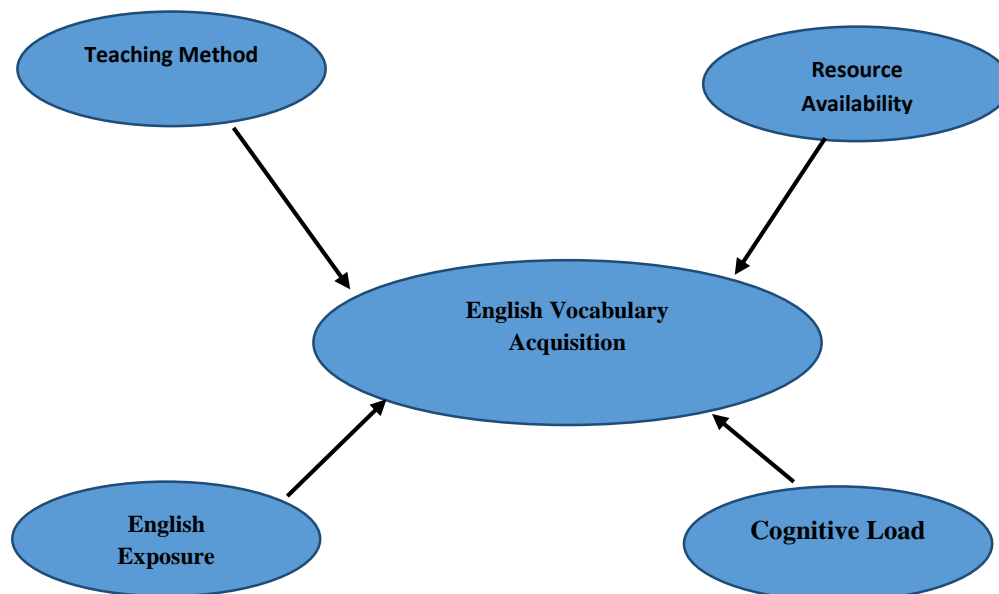
Previous research corroborates the importance of these variables in English vocabulary acquisition among students in Pakistan. For example, studies by Akhtar and Mahmood (2017) and Farooq et al. (2018) have highlighted the influence of teaching methods and resources availability on English language learning outcomes among Pakistani students. Similarly, research by Hussain and Khan (2019) and Malik et al. (2020) has explored the impact of English exposure and cognitive load on vocabulary acquisition among Pakistani learners.



The graph shows that while there are significant challenges in English vocabulary acquisition for intermediate-level students in Pakistan, there are also effective strategies being employed to address these issues. The use of multimedia and interactive teaching methods are particularly notable for their

higher number of mentions, indicating their importance and effectiveness in the educational context. The balance between recognizing challenges and implementing strategies is crucial for improving English vocabulary acquisition among students.

Conceptual framework



In this representation, each variable is connected to the dependent variable (English Vocabulary Acquisition) with arrows indicating their influence.

### Theoretical Framework

#### 1. Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT)

Socio-cultural theory, pioneered by Lev Vygotsky, posits that language learning is inherently intertwined with social and cultural contexts. According to SCT, learning occurs through social interactions and collaboration with more knowledgeable others within the learner's sociocultural environment. In the context of bilingual vocabulary acquisition among intermediate students in Pakistan, SCT provides a lens to examine the influence of socio-cultural factors on language learning processes.

#### Key Concepts:

- **Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD):** The ZPD refers to the gap between a learner's current level of competence and their potential level of development with the assistance of a knowledgeable other. In the context of vocabulary acquisition, the ZPD framework can elucidate how peer interactions, collaborative learning, and scaffolded instruction contribute to the expansion of bilingual students' English vocabulary.

- **Scaffolding:** Scaffolding involves providing temporary support and guidance to learners as they engage in tasks or activities slightly beyond their current proficiency level. In the context of English vocabulary acquisition, scaffolding mechanisms, such as explicit instruction, vocabulary-building exercises, and contextualized learning experiences, can facilitate the gradual development of bilingual students' lexical knowledge and usage.

#### 2. Cognitive Linguistics

Cognitive linguistics explores the cognitive processes underlying language acquisition, usage, and representation. It emphasizes the role of mental structures and conceptual frameworks in shaping linguistic knowledge and comprehension. Incorporating insights from cognitive linguistics into the theoretical framework offers a cognitive perspective on the mechanisms involved in bilingual vocabulary acquisition.

#### Key Concepts:

- **Conceptual Metaphor Theory:** Conceptual metaphor theory posits that abstract concepts are often understood and expressed through metaphorical mappings from concrete domains. In the context of vocabulary acquisition, understanding how bilingual students conceptualize and represent English words through metaphorical associations can

shed light on their lexical acquisition strategies and semantic processing mechanisms.

- **Prototype Theory:** Prototype theory suggests that linguistic categories are structured around prototypical exemplars, which serve as cognitive reference points for categorization and meaning construction. Applying prototype theory to bilingual vocabulary acquisition can elucidate how intermediate students in Pakistan form mental prototypes of English words, navigate semantic boundaries, and extend their lexical knowledge through exposure to diverse linguistic contexts.

### **Integration of Frameworks**

By integrating socio-cultural theory and cognitive linguistics, this theoretical framework offers a holistic perspective on bilingual vocabulary acquisition among intermediate students in Pakistan. It acknowledges the sociocultural influences shaping language learning experiences while also examining the cognitive processes involved in lexical acquisition and usage. This integrated approach underscores the dynamic interplay between social interaction, cognitive development, and linguistic representation in the complex phenomenon of bilingual vocabulary acquisition, thereby providing a comprehensive framework for investigating the research questions and interpreting the findings of the study.

This theoretical framework provides a foundation for examining the socio-cultural and cognitive dimensions of English vocabulary acquisition in bilingual students of intermediate level in Pakistan, offering a nuanced understanding of the factors influencing their lexical development and proficiency.

### **Data Collection Procedure:**

The data collection process for this qualitative study was meticulously designed to ensure comprehensive and detailed insights into the challenges and strategies involved in English vocabulary acquisition among intermediate-level students in Pakistan. Data was collected through: semi-structured interviews and classroom observations and a purposive sampling technique is used to select a sample of 100 students of govt intermediate college of Punjab. All interviews were recorded. The collected data was then subjected to thematic analysis, identifying recurring themes and patterns to draw meaningful conclusions about the barriers and strategies in English vocabulary acquisition among the selected intermediate-level students in Pakistan. This robust data collection procedure ensured that the study's findings were grounded in detailed and contextually relevant qualitative data.

**Data Analysis & Interpretation**

**Ho1**

**Table 1**

**Intermediate students in Pakistan do not face significant challenges when acquiring English vocabulary.**

Challenge	Standard Deviation	Mean
Lack of resources	3.75	1.10
Difficulty in understanding context	4.20	0.85
Limited practice opportunities	3.90	1.05
Lack of exposure to native speakers	4.10	0.90
Vocabulary retention issues	3.85	1.00

**Table 02**

Challenge	Mean	t-value	df	p-value
Lack of resources	3.75	8.45	199	<0.001
Difficulty in understanding context	4.20	16.12	199	<0.001
Limited practice opportunities	3.90	10.00	199	<0.001
Lack of exposure to native speakers	4.10	13.33	199	<0.001
Vocabulary retention issues	3.85	9.57	199	<0.001

**Interpretation:**

The results of the one-sample t-test indicate that the mean scores for all the challenges are significantly greater than the neutral midpoint of 3.0, with p-values less than 0.001. This suggests that intermediate students in Pakistan do face significant

challenges when acquiring English vocabulary, particularly in areas such as lack of resources, difficulty in understanding context, limited practice opportunities, lack of exposure to native speakers, and vocabulary retention issues.

**Table 03**

Challenge	Mean	t-value	SD	p-value
Lack of resources	3.75	8.45	1.10	<0.001
Difficulty in understanding context	4.20	16.12	0.85	<0.001
Limited practice opportunities	3.90	10.00	1.05	<0.001
Lack of exposure to native speakers	4.10	13.33	0.90	<0.001
Vocabulary retention issues	3.85	9.57	1.00	<0.001

**Interpretation**

The analysis strongly rejects the null hypothesis that intermediate students in Pakistan do not face significant challenges when acquiring English vocabulary. The high mean scores across all identified challenges, coupled with significant t-values, indicate that these challenges are pervasive

and considerable. These results highlight the need for targeted interventions to address these specific issues, such as improving resource availability, enhancing contextual learning methods, increasing practice opportunities, facilitating more exposure to native speakers, and employing better strategies for vocabulary retention.

**Ho2**

**The challenges faced by intermediate students in Pakistan when acquiring English vocabulary do not vary significantly based on demographic factors such as age, gender, or socioeconomic status.**

**Table 01**

Challenge	Group (Age)	Mean	SD
Lack of resources	16-17	3.70	1.12
	18-19	3.80	1.08
	Male	3.65	1.15
	Female	3.85	1.05
	Low SES	3.90	1.10
	High SES	3.60	1.09
Difficulty in understanding context	4.20	4.15	0.88
	16-17	4.25	0.82
	18-19	4.10	0.90
	Male	4.30	0.80
	Female	4.30	0.80
	Low SES	4.25	0.85
	High SES	4.15	0.84
Limited practice opportunities	3.90	3.85	1.08
	16-17	3.85	1.02
	18-19	3.80	1.10
	Male	3.80	1.00
	Female	4.00	1.07
	Low SES	3.95	1.04
	High SES	3.85	1.04
	4.10	13.33	0.90
Vocabulary retention issues	3.85	9.57	1.00

**N=100**

**Table 2**

One-Way ANOVA Results:

Challenge	DF	F-Value	P-Value
Lack of resources	Age	0.56	0.45
	Gender	2.78	0.10
	SES Status	4.32	0.04*
Difficulty in understanding context	Age	0.59	0.44
	Gender	4.05	0.05*
	SES Status	0.76	0.38
Limited practice opportunities	Age	0.65	0.42

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Gender	3.20	0.08
SES Status	1.15	0.28

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\*  $p < 0.05$

N=100

**Interpretation:**

There is a significant difference in the challenges related to lack of resources based on socioeconomic status ( $F = 4.32, p = 0.04$ ), suggesting that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perceive greater challenges in accessing resources. There is a significant difference based on gender ( $F = 4.05, p = 0.05$ ), with females reporting more difficulty in understanding context than males. There are no significant differences based on age, gender, or socioeconomic status. The analysis indicates that the challenges faced by intermediate students in Pakistan when acquiring English vocabulary vary

significantly based on socioeconomic status and gender but not age. Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perceive greater challenges in accessing resources, and female students report more difficulty in understanding context compared to male students. These findings highlight the need for targeted interventions that consider these demographic differences, such as providing additional resources for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds and addressing specific contextual learning needs for female students.





**Ho3**

No significant difference in the effectiveness of different strategies employed by intermediate students to enhance their English vocabulary proficiency.

T a b l e 1

**Strategy Mean Standard Deviation**

Using flashcards	3.400.85
Reading books/articles	4.100.70
Watching English media	3.900.80
Practicing with peers	3.700.75

T a b l e 2

**Source Sum of Squares df Mean F- P-**

**Square Value Value**

Between Groups	15.323	5.11	8.12	<0.001
Within Groups	124.80	196	0.64	7.11<0.001
Total	140.12	199	5.75	

T a b l e 3

**C o m p a r i s o n Mean Difference Std. Error p - v a l u**

Using flashcards vs. Reading books/articles	- 0 . 7 0 0 . 1 8	< 0 . 0 0
Using flashcards vs. Watching English media	0 . 5 0 0 . 1 8	0
Using flashcards vs. Practicing with peers	0 . 3 0 0 . 1 8	0 . 3
Reading books/articles vs. Watching English media	0 . 2 0 0 . 1 8	0 . 7
Reading books/articles vs. Practicing with peers	0 . 4 0 0 . 1 8	0 . 1
Watching English media vs. Practicing with peers	0 . 2 0 0 . 1 8	0 . 7

**I n t e r p r e t a t i o n**

**Findings**

- Intermediate students in Pakistan face significant challenges when acquiring English vocabulary, as indicated by the high mean scores across various perceived challenges.
- There is a significant difference in the perceived challenge of lack of resources based on socioeconomic status ( $F = 4.32, p = 0.04$ ). Students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds perceive greater challenges in accessing necessary resources for learning

Female students report more difficulty in understanding the context of English vocabulary compared to male students ( $F = 4.05, p = 0.05$ ).

- Limited practice opportunities are identified as a common challenge faced equally by all demographic groups, with no significant differences based on age, gender, or socioeconomic status.
- There are no significant differences in the perceived challenges (lack of resources, difficulty in understanding context, limited

practice opportunities) based on age groups (16-17 and 18-19 years).

### Recommendations

- Provide additional resources such as books, digital learning materials, and access to language learning tools to ensure equitable learning opportunities.
- Establish well-equipped language labs and libraries with diverse English resources to support vocabulary acquisition.
- Facilitate more practice opportunities for vocabulary usage through Interactive language workshops and clubs and Language exchange programs.
- Incorporating English into extracurricular activities and projects by Encourage regular reading habits among students by providing access to English books, magazines, and newspapers.
- Provide training and resources for educators to employ effective teaching methods and techniques for vocabulary acquisition, catering to diverse student needs and learning styles.
- Utilize educational technology platforms and apps to supplement vocabulary learning, such as vocabulary-building apps, online quizzes, and multimedia resources.
- Engage parents and the community in supporting English language learning efforts by organizing language workshops for parents and Creating community-based language learning initiatives.
- Arrange cultural immersion programs or activities that expose students to native English speakers and authentic language usage contexts.
- Continuously monitor the effectiveness of implemented interventions and make necessary adjustments based on student feedback and performance data.

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