RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Importance of Vocabulary Learning to Improve Speaking Skills among English Language Undergraduates in a Public University in Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates the role of vocabulary knowledge in enhancing speaking proficiency among English language undergraduates in Pakistan, focusing on the relationship between vocabulary depth and students' confidence, fluency, and ability to express complex ideas. Despite the recognized importance of vocabulary in language acquisition, vocabulary instruction in Pakistan often emphasizes rote memorization without meaningful application, hindering students' ability to retain and utilize vocabulary effectively in spoken contexts. Data were collected through interviews and focus groups with English language students, and thematic analysis revealed three primary themes: the impact of vocabulary on speaking proficiency, barriers to vocabulary acquisition, and effective strategies for vocabulary retention. Findings indicate that a well-developed vocabulary base is essential for fluent and confident communication but is often constrained by limited contextual learning opportunities and lack of practical application. The study highlights the need for pedagogical shifts towards interactive and retrieval-based vocabulary learning strategies, such as group discussions, vocabulary journals, and feedback-driven activities, to better support students' communicative competence. These insights contribute to the development of more effective English language curricula tailored to provide quality education (Sustainable Development 4) that meets the needs of Pakistani students preparing for academic and professional success.

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency, particularly in spoken communication, is critical for academic and professional advancement in Pakistan (Khan, 2011). Similar to many countries where English is not the first language (Peng, et al., 2022; Asadova, 2023), English is widely recognized as a key medium for education and career development in Pakistan, where it serves as a second language (L2) in educational institutions (Rahman, 2002). Among the core language skills—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—speaking is highly valued, as it enables students to communicate effectively, present ideas confidently, and engage in academic discourse (Chaudhary, 2020). However, many English language undergraduates face challenges in speaking due to limited vocabulary knowledge, which restricts their ability to express ideas fluently and accurately (Ashraf et al., 2016; Rustam & Chinnery, 2023).

Vocabulary plays a foundational role in language acquisition, acting as the building block for both comprehension and production (Nation, 2013). Research has shown that vocabulary knowledge significantly impacts speaking skills, as a well-developed vocabulary allows learners to retrieve words quickly and express ideas with precision (Schmitt, 2000). In L2 contexts, such as that of English language learners in Pakistan, vocabulary learning is crucial for overcoming linguistic

barriers and enhancing communicative competence (Nation, 2001). Schmitt (2008) emphasizes that vocabulary knowledge is strongly correlated with fluency and coherence in spoken language, suggesting that without an adequate vocabulary base, students struggle with both the fluidity and accuracy of speech.

Qobilovna (2024) highlighted in his study that communicative competence is a crucial aspect of effective communication, encompassing the ability to interact appropriately in various social settings. In 1966, Dell Hymes firstly coined the term communicative competence in U. S conference (Cazden, 2011). She further said that Hymes defines competence with the common sense meaning of capability individual persons, not in an abstract language system: "It cannot be assumed that the formal possibilities of a system and individual knowledge are identical. … I should take the competence as the most general term for the capabilities of a person." (Hymes, 1972, p.282). Communicative competence refers to the broader set of skills; the ability to understand and produce grammatically correct sentences. It encompasses not just grammatical knowledge, but also the ability to navigate the social and cultural aspects of communication, ensuring that interactions are not only linguistically correct but also contextually appropriate. In fact, grammatical competence refers to the knowledge of vocabulary, pronunciation, syntax and the ability to construct grammatically correct sentences and understand the language at the formal level.

Mekhzoumi, Hamzah, and Krishnasamy (2018) surveyed 675 students in Malaysia on their use of mobile apps to learn English to study the factors underlying their intention to learn English through mobile apps. Their results indicated that performance expectancy and effort expectancy were both major factors in the students' intention to use mobile apps in English learning. Despite its importance, vocabulary learning is often neglected in the Pakistani education system, where teaching tends to prioritize grammar and reading over vocabulary acquisition (Khan, 2011). This oversight has contributed to students' limited active vocabulary, affecting their ability to participate in academic conversations and professional settings confidently (Ali & Mahmood, 2014). As students advance to higher levels of education, the gap in their speaking abilities becomes more pronounced, hindering their academic and career prospects (Shamim, 2008).

Furthermore, existing vocabulary learning practices in Pakistan often lack strategic methods that facilitate retention and application in speaking contexts. Studies indicate that traditional rote memorization, commonly used in Pakistani classrooms, is insufficient for developing vocabulary depth (Ashraf et al., 2016). Researchers advocate for explicit vocabulary instruction that incorporates context, usage, and active retrieval, which can significantly enhance speaking skills (Folse, 2004; Nation, 2013). Additionally, recent studies highlight the promise of integrating technology, such as mobile-assisted language learning (MALL), which offers real-time feedback and retrieval exercises that improve vocabulary retention (Buragohain et al., 2023).

This study seeks to explore the role of vocabulary learning in improving speaking skills among English language undergraduates at a public university in Pakistan. Specifically, it examines the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and speaking proficiency, current vocabulary learning practices, and the challenges students face in acquiring sufficient vocabulary for fluent speech. By addressing these areas, this research aims to underscore the need for targeted vocabulary instruction and suggest pedagogical strategies that can bridge the gap between vocabulary acquisition and effective speaking. Ultimately, the study aims to contribute to the development of English language curricula that better support students' communicative competence especially in vocabulary and prepare them for academic and professional success in a globalized world. A rich vocabulary enables students to communicate with precision and fluency, increasing their ability to engage meaningfully in both academic and social contexts. For students, vocabulary development is a key factor in fostering empowerment, confidence, and success in the classroom and beyond.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Vocabulary plays a pivotal role in language learning, especially in enhancing communicative skills. According to Nation (2001), vocabulary knowledge underpins effective communication, with research showing that a robust vocabulary allows learners to retrieve words quickly and use them accurately. Schmitt (2008) found that vocabulary knowledge strongly correlates with speaking fluency, as learners with extensive vocabulary express ideas more coherently.

Despite its importance, vocabulary learning is often underemphasized in Pakistan's education system, where rote memorization is the predominant learning method (Ali & Mahmood, 2014). This approach limits students' ability to recall and use vocabulary contextually. Nation (2013) suggests that explicit vocabulary instruction and active learning techniques, such as retrieval practice, can significantly improve vocabulary retention and usage in speaking.

In Pakistan, developing English language speaking skills is a pressing challenge for ESL instructors. Despite English being a compulsory subject from primary school through higher education, students often struggle with fluency, pronunciation, and the confidence to express their views in English. This deficiency in speaking skills highlights systemic issues, such as a reliance on rote learning and limited practical language use in classrooms (Asatryan, 2016; Akram & Nosheen, 2013). According to Khan and Ali (2010), English is treated more as an academic subject than a language skill, leading students to focus on memorization for exams rather than practical language application. Teachers, too, may contribute to the issue by discouraging students' attempts at spoken English, thereby increasing anxiety and lowering engagement (Ahmad et al., 2017).

Cotter (2007) emphasizes the need for students to engage with language at a meta-linguistic level, fostering an understanding of grammar, vocabulary, and language structures to develop critical assessment skills for effectiveness and accuracy in communication. Backlund (1990) underscores the importance of social, self, and content knowledge in effective oral communication, noting that any deficit in these areas can impair spoken proficiency. Challenges such as limited vocabulary and grammar knowledge, social anxiety, and low confidence further contribute to students' difficulties (Bashiruddin, 2003). International studies also shed light on these issues; for example, Urrutia and Vega's (2006) study in Colombia showed that students found speaking particularly difficult, with many preferring not to speak in class.

Recent studies have introduced new strategies for improving speaking skills in ESL contexts, especially with the integration of technology and task-based learning. Research from 2023 highlights the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) and interactive applications for providing real-time feedback on pronunciation and fluency, creating a supportive and controlled environment for practicing speaking skills (Bhamani & Sarwar, 2019; Rustam et al., 2023). Additionally, task-based learning approaches encourage students to participate in realistic, communication-centered tasks that promote language use beyond traditional methods, providing meaningful engagement that improves spoken proficiency (FluentU, 2023). Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that integrates students' native languages to support English learning, is also gaining traction. By allowing students to discuss complex concepts in their first language before presenting them in English, translanguaging helps ESL learners grasp difficult language constructs and apply them confidently in speech (Voice 21, 2019).

Further, recent studies emphasize the role of social-emotional learning (SEL) in ESL education. SEL helps students develop self-confidence and resilience, reducing anxiety associated with speaking in a second language. The ESL classroom, through group activities and gamified language learning, has also shown positive effects on students' enthusiasm and proficiency in spoken English by creating a supportive, low-stakes environment (Buragohain et al., 2023). This finding aligns with the work of Hamzah and Ting (2009) in Malaysia, where group-based activities increased students' comfort with speaking, enhancing their ability to communicate in English. Hence, English language is a medium of communication and through this medium people are capable of performing many tasks. In all of the most important faculties of human beings, language is a medium through which people can influence others. It is a language that constructs ideologies, changes the ideologies, and persuades the people (Irfan, & Krishnasamy, 2024).

In conclusion, while Pakistani ESL education faces challenges in developing speaking skills, emerging international research and approaches—such as task-based learning, mobile-assisted language learning, and SEL—offer promising solutions. These strategies encourage a shift from rote memorization to interactive and communicative language practice, making speaking skills more accessible to students across diverse educational settings.

Research objectives

- To investigate the impact of vocabulary knowledge on the speaking proficiency of English language undergraduates at a public university in Pakistan.
- To identify the challenges faced by English language undergraduates in learning and retaining vocabulary necessary for fluent and accurate spoken communication.

Research questions

Q1. How does vocabulary knowledge influence the speaking proficiency of English language undergraduates at a public university in Pakistan?

Q2. What are the primary challenges faced by English language undergraduates in acquiring and retaining vocabulary that enhances their speaking skills?

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative, phenomenological research design to explore English language undergraduates' experiences and challenges related to vocabulary learning and its impact on their speaking proficiency. A qualitative approach is appropriate for examining participants' lived experiences, attitudes, and perceptions in-depth (Creswell, 2013).

Research design

The phenomenological design seeks to understand participants' subjective experiences with vocabulary learning in relation to their speaking abilities. Phenomenology is particularly suitable for this study, as it focuses on capturing the meanings participants ascribe to vocabulary acquisition and the perceived role of vocabulary in speaking fluency and accuracy (Moustakas, 1994). This approach allows for a nuanced exploration of individual experiences within the specific cultural and educational context of Pakistan.

Participants and sampling

The study uses purposive sampling to select participants who can provide diverse insights into vocabulary learning challenges and strategies. Fifteen English language undergraduates from a public university in Pakistan were selected based on their varying levels of speaking proficiency and engagement in English language studies (Patton, 2002). Participants were recommended by faculty members based on their familiarity with the students' abilities and struggles in speaking English.

Data collection methods

To gather comprehensive data, this study used semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, both of which are effective for capturing in-depth perspectives in qualitative research (Kvale, 2007).

Semi-structured interviews

Individual, semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers and their twelve students (six students from each class), to explore their personal experiences, strategies, and perceptions regarding vocabulary learning. Interviews focused on questions about their approaches to vocabulary acquisition, perceived impact on speaking, and challenges in using learned vocabulary during spoken communication. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was audio-recorded for accuracy (Patton, 2002).

Focus group discussions

Two focus group discussions, each with six participants were held to foster interaction and shared reflections on vocabulary learning experiences. Focus groups provide a platform for participants to discuss common challenges and exchange strategies, generating rich, collaborative data (Morgan, 1997). These discussions, lasting 60–90 minutes each, were also audio-recorded and later transcribed for analysis.

Data analysis

The data analysis of interviews and focus groups utilized thematic analysis, an approach suitable for discerning patterns and themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Initially, all

recordings were transcribed verbatim, allowing for an in-depth familiarization with the content. An open coding process then identified recurring themes, specifically focusing on strategies for vocabulary learning, associated challenges, and the perceived impact of vocabulary on speaking skills.

The coding phase enabled the organization of data into broader themes such as "vocabulary retention challenges," "speaking confidence," and "effective vocabulary acquisition techniques." These themes offered insights into participants' experiences and perceptions, contextualized with existing literature to confirm findings and explore new perspectives (Creswell, 2013).

To ensure credibility, the study employed triangulation through cross-verifying data from interviews and focus groups, enhancing reliability (Patton, 2002). Member checking allowed participants to review transcripts and initial findings, confirming the accuracy of their views (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Additionally, an independent researcher with expertise in qualitative methods reviewed the thematic findings, validating interpretations for objectivity (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The study adhered to ethical standards, prioritizing participant rights and data integrity. Informed consent was obtained, with participants fully informed of the study's objectives and assured of their right to withdraw at any stage. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing data and securing access exclusively for the research team

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The thematic analysis of interviews and focus group discussions provided critical insights into how vocabulary influences speaking proficiency, the challenges faced in vocabulary acquisition, and effective strategies that aid vocabulary retention and usage. The findings are structured into three primary themes: the impact of vocabulary knowledge on speaking proficiency, barriers to vocabulary acquisition, and effective strategies for vocabulary retention.

Impact of vocabulary knowledge on speaking proficiency

Participants highlighted the essential role vocabulary knowledge plays in effective communication, noting that a well-developed vocabulary correlates with higher levels of confidence and fluency. This relationship aligns with studies indicating that vocabulary is directly linked to a person's ability to articulate thoughts, ideas, and emotions (Schmitt, 2008; Nation, 2013).

Confidence in expression

A substantial vocabulary contributes significantly to confidence during verbal interactions. Participant 1 observed, "When I know more words, I don't hesitate as much. I can talk more freely without stopping to think about the right words." This sentiment reflects the connection between vocabulary depth and confidence, as noted in Schmitt's (2008) research, where increased lexical knowledge enhances communicative fluency, allowing learners to engage more fully in conversations without frequent pauses or interruptions.

Reduced hesitation and pauses

Participants with limited vocabulary reported frequent pauses during speech, which affected their confidence and fluency. Participant 2 explained, "If I don't know enough words, I have to pause and think, and that makes me feel nervous." This observation is consistent with Thornbury's (2005) research, which highlights that vocabulary gaps can disrupt speech flow and lead to anxiety and hesitation.

Enhanced ability to express complex ideas

Participants also expressed that an extensive vocabulary enables them to convey complex ideas effectively. Participant 3, for example, remarked, "In presentations, vocabulary helps me sound professional and makes it easier to explain difficult concepts." This finding aligns with Crossley and Salsbury (2011), who suggest that vocabulary knowledge supports nuanced communication, which is essential for academic and professional discourse.

Challenges in vocabulary acquisition and retention

Participants identified several barriers to vocabulary acquisition and retention, including ineffective learning methods, limited practical application, and difficulty with specialized vocabulary.

Rote memorization and lack of contextual learning

A recurring issue was the emphasis on rote memorization without contextual application, which limited retention. Participant 4 expressed, "We are taught lists of words to memorize, but we don't use them in class. So, I forget them quickly." This supports Ali and Mahmood's (2014) observation that rote memorization restricts vocabulary retention and practical application, as words learned without context are unlikely to become part of a student's active vocabulary.

Lack of real-life application

Another common barrier was the lack of opportunities to use new vocabulary in real-life contexts. Participant 5 noted, "I learn new words, but outside of exams, I don't get to use them, so I forget them easily." This finding is consistent with research by Brown and Perry (1991), which shows that vocabulary retention is enhanced when learners engage with new words in authentic settings, making them easier to recall and use.

Difficulty with complex vocabulary

Specialized or advanced vocabulary, particularly academic terms, also presented challenges. Participant 6 stated, "Academic words are hard to remember and use. They're different from everyday English, so I feel lost when I try to use them in presentations." This aligns with Folse's (2004) findings that advanced vocabulary requires dedicated instructional support, as such terms are often absent from casual interactions.

Effective strategies for vocabulary acquisition and retention

Participants shared strategies that they found helpful for retaining and using vocabulary more effectively, with an emphasis on interactive and contextual learning.

Peer interaction and group discussions

Many participants found that practicing vocabulary in group settings helped with retention and usage. Participant 7 explained, "When I discuss in groups, I try to use new words. It feels easier to remember them this way." This observation supports Nation's (2013) argument that vocabulary learning is more effective in social contexts, where students actively engage with language in real time.

Use of vocabulary retrieval exercises

Retrieval-based learning, such as using flashcards and spaced repetition apps, was another popular method. Participant 8 shared, "I use an app that reminds me of new words I learned last week. This makes it easier to remember them for longer." Barcroft (2007) supports this finding, highlighting that retrieval practice enhances long-term retention by reinforcing recall.

Personal vocabulary journals and daily practice

Some participants developed personalized approaches, such as keeping vocabulary journals and setting daily goals for word usage. Participant 9 reported, "I write down five new words every day and try to use them in sentences. This way, I remember them better." Schmitt and Schmitt (1995) found that such personalized strategies facilitate deeper cognitive processing, thereby improving both retention and practical application.

Feedback from instructors and peers

Receiving feedback on vocabulary usage during speaking activities, such as presentations and discussions, was also seen as effective. Participant 10 noted, "When my instructor or classmates correct me, I remember the right word and how to use it." Feedback provides learners with immediate guidance, allowing them to refine their vocabulary usage and increase accuracy, which aligns with Hattie and Timperley's (2007) research on the impact of timely feedback in language learning.

Table 1: Presentation of themes

Text	Codes	Categories	Sub-Themes	Themes
When I know more words, I don't hesitate as much. I can talk more freely without stopping to think about the right words.	Confidence in Expression	Vocabulary Confidence	Confidence in Expression	Impact of Vocabulary Knowledge on Speaking Proficiency
If I don't know enough words, I have to pause and think, and that makes me feel nervous.	Reduced Hesitation and Pauses	Fluency Support	Reduced Hesitation and Pauses	Impact of Vocabulary Knowledge on Speaking Proficiency
In presentations, vocabulary helps me sound professional and makes it easier to explain difficult concepts.	Enhanced Ability to Express Complex Ideas	Complex Expression	Enhanced Ability to Express Complex Ideas	Impact of Vocabulary Knowledge on Speaking Proficiency
We are taught lists of words to memorize, but we don't use them in class. So, I forget them quickly.	Rote Memorization Issues	Retention Difficulty	Rote Memorization and Lack of Contextual Learning	Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention
I learn new words, but outside of exams, I don't get to use them, so I forget them easily.	Application Limitations	Retention Difficulty	Lack of Real-Life Application	Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention
Academic words are hard to remember and use. They are different from everyday English, so I feel lost when I try to use them in presentations.	Advanced Vocabulary Challenges	Retention Difficulty	Difficulty with Complex Vocabulary	Challenges in Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention
When I discuss in groups, I try to use new words. It feels easier to remember them this way.	Peer Practice	Effective Practice	Peer Interaction and Group Discussions	Effective Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention
I use an app that reminds me of new words I learned last week. This makes it easier to remember them for longer.	Retrieval Practice	Effective Practice	Use of Vocabulary Retrieval Exercises	Effective Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention
I write down five new words every day and try to use them in sentences. This way, I remember them better.	Personal Vocabulary Strategy	Effective Practice	Personal Vocabulary Journals and Daily Practice	Effective Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition

				and Retention
When my instructor or classmates correct me, I remember the right word and how to use it.	Instructor and Peer Feedback	Effective Practice	Feedback from Instructors and Peers	Effective Strategies for Vocabulary Acquisition and Retention

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the critical role that vocabulary knowledge plays in enhancing the speaking skills of English language undergraduates in Pakistan. Vocabulary knowledge significantly influences students' abilities to express ideas, communicate confidently, and maintain fluency in speech. This discussion synthesizes the research questions and findings, highlighting the impact of vocabulary knowledge on speaking proficiency, the challenges students face in vocabulary acquisition, and effective strategies for vocabulary retention and usage.

Influence of vocabulary knowledge on speaking proficiency

The research reveals that a strong vocabulary foundation is directly linked to students' speaking proficiency. Participants noted that having a broader vocabulary increases confidence and reduces hesitation during conversations, aligning with Schmitt's (2008) findings on vocabulary and fluency. For instance, participants shared that knowing more words helped them communicate "without stopping to think about the right words," illustrating how vocabulary depth enhances verbal confidence. Additionally, the ability to swiftly access and retrieve vocabulary minimizes disruptions, promoting a smoother conversational flow—a key indicator of fluent speech (Thornbury, 2005).

The study also emphasizes that an extensive vocabulary aids in conveying complex ideas, particularly in academic settings. Some participants mentioned that a richer vocabulary allowed them to "sound professional and explain difficult concepts" during presentations, underscoring the functional importance of vocabulary in structured, formal communication. This finding corroborates Crossley and Salsbury's (2011) argument that a robust vocabulary supports nuanced communication, enabling students to articulate their ideas more effectively.

Challenges in vocabulary acquisition and retention

The study identifies several key challenges that hinder vocabulary acquisition, notably the reliance on rote memorization and the lack of contextual learning opportunities. Participants expressed frustration with traditional vocabulary learning methods, which often emphasize memorizing word lists without practical applications. One participant noted, "We are taught lists of words to memorize, but we don't use them in class," reflecting a common sentiment that vocabulary is treated as an isolated element rather than an integrated part of language practice. This issue is echoed in Ali and Mahmood's (2014) study, which found that rote memorization limits retention, as it fails to engage students in meaningful language use.

Furthermore, the lack of real-life application opportunities emerged as a significant barrier. Participants noted that without applying newly learned vocabulary outside of exam contexts, they tended to forget it quickly. Research supports this view, suggesting that vocabulary retention is more successful when learners have opportunities to use words in authentic, interactive contexts (Brown & Perry, 1991). Specialized vocabulary, particularly academic or professional terminology, also presents challenges. Some participants pointed out that words used in formal settings are often distinct from everyday vocabulary, making them harder to internalize and apply. This aligns with Folse's (2004) assertion that advanced vocabulary requires tailored instructional methods due to its limited exposure in casual interactions.

Effective strategies for vocabulary acquisition and retention

To address these challenges, participants shared various strategies that helped them retain and use vocabulary effectively, with a focus on interactive, retrieval-based, and personal engagement methods. Peer interaction and group discussions were highlighted as valuable, providing low-

pressure environments where students could apply new vocabulary in real time. One participant observed that discussing in groups helped them remember and use new words more confidently. Nation (2013) similarly emphasizes that vocabulary learning is enhanced in social contexts, where language use is dynamic and contextually relevant.

The use of retrieval exercises, such as flashcards and spaced repetition apps, also proved beneficial. One participant described their experience with a vocabulary app that prompts recall, illustrating the effectiveness of retrieval practice, which has been shown to reinforce memory and strengthen long-term retention (Barcroft, 2007). Additionally, personal strategies like maintaining vocabulary journals and setting daily goals for word usage were popular among students. One participant, for instance, mentioned setting a goal of using five new words daily, reflecting Schmitt and Schmitt's (1995) findings that regular engagement fosters deeper cognitive processing.

Feedback from instructors and peers emerged as an essential component for vocabulary development. Participants noted that receiving feedback on vocabulary usage during activities such as presentations and discussions helped refine their vocabulary, as immediate correction aids in understanding appropriate contexts and usage. Hattie and Timperley (2007) similarly note that constructive feedback fosters improvement in language acquisition, especially when it is context-specific and timely.

Implications for pedagogical practice

The study's findings suggest that traditional vocabulary learning methods in Pakistani universities may benefit from incorporating more interactive and retrieval-based strategies that align with students' needs for contextual and practical language use. Shifting from rote memorization to communicative and socially engaged learning approaches could improve vocabulary retention and application, ultimately enhancing speaking proficiency. Curriculum reforms that emphasize real-world vocabulary practice and provide students with tools like vocabulary journals, retrieval applications, and interactive group activities could foster greater confidence, fluency, and expressive capability in English-speaking contexts.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of vocabulary in communicative competence and underscores the need for targeted instructional practices that support vocabulary acquisition in meaningful, practical ways. Embracing these strategies may help equip English language undergraduates with the linguistic skills necessary for academic and professional success in a globalized context.

CONCLUSION

This study underscores the critical importance of vocabulary knowledge in enhancing the speaking proficiency of English language undergraduates at a public university in Pakistan. The findings indicate that a robust vocabulary base directly influences students' confidence, fluency, and ability to articulate complex ideas, highlighting vocabulary as a foundational element of communicative competence. However, traditional rote memorization practices limit students' ability to retain and use vocabulary effectively, as they often fail to contextualize or apply new words outside of memorization-based assessments.

To address these challenges, students expressed a need for interactive and context-based vocabulary learning strategies. Effective methods identified in this study include peer discussions, retrieval exercises, and personal engagement practices like vocabulary journals and feedback from instructors. These strategies align with research advocating active vocabulary engagement, suggesting that social and retrieval-based practices improve both retention and practical usage, making vocabulary a more integral part of students' communicative abilities.

In conclusion, the study points to a need for curriculum reform that emphasizes vocabulary acquisition methods tailored to real-world communication. Implementing interactive, retrieval-based, and contextually grounded vocabulary exercises can greatly enhance students' speaking skills, equipping them with the linguistic tools necessary for academic and professional success in an English-speaking global context.

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