



## FROM HEADLINES TO WORD POWER: NEWSPAPER READING AND VOCABULARY DEVELOPMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATE ESL LEARNERS IN PAKISTAN

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### **Abstract**

*The purpose of this research is to examine how reading newspapers affects the vocabulary development of undergraduate English as a second language (ESL) students in universities in Pakistan. Thirty students participated in structured newspaper reading exercises during a six-week intervention. Pre- and post-tests, as well as a Likert-scale questionnaire, were used to gather the data. With mean scores increasing from 25.13 on the pre-test to 54.93 on the post-test ( $t(29) = 66.11, p < .001$ ), the results demonstrated a significant improvement in vocabulary knowledge, indicating a large effect size (Cohen's  $d = 12.07$ ). The positive attitudes of Students toward newspapers as a resource for vocabulary expansion were seen in their survey responses. Students generally felt that reading newspapers improved their ability to put new words and concepts into context, as well as their confidence in applying what they had learned. Newspapers can be a good tool for English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers looking to inspire their pupils to think critically and independently while also expanding their vocabulary. Newspapers seem to be effective here, according to these findings.*

**Keywords:** *ESL, vocabulary acquisition, newspapers, authentic materials, motivation, second language learning*

### **Introduction**

Based on the findings of Nation (2001), the most important aspect of learning a second language is developing one's vocabulary collection. In terms of language acquisition, it is the most important component. If students do not have a sufficient vocabulary, it is difficult for them to comprehend what they read, to write fluently, and to communicate effectively. Students of English as a second language (ESL) may have a more difficult time acquiring new terms since they do not have the opportunity to hear or see English outside of the classroom very often.

It is for this reason that it is a good idea to use real materials in the teaching and learning process.

Due to the fact that they provide students with examples of how language is used in real-world situations, newspapers are an excellent tool for improving vocabulary. According to Al-Homoud



and Schmitt (2009), textbooks frequently present vocabulary in a manner that is either separated or reduced, but newspapers present students with a significant number of words, idioms, and collocations in the context of meaningful interactions. In addition to this, they encourage repeated exposure to high-frequency phrases while simultaneously teaching vocabulary that is less common and more subject-specific. Additionally, newspapers cover a wide variety of subjects, such as politics, culture, sports, science, and social issues, among other things. Because of this, students are able to interact with a variety of English registers, which helps them strengthen their language skills as well as their cultural abilities.

According to research conducted by Chung (2015), reading a significant amount of newspapers and other actual materials regularly significantly improves both vocabulary retention and reading comprehension. Reading headlines in particular encourages students to pay attention to brief forms of language that are full of originality, wordplay, and lexical complexity. This is especially beneficial for students who are learning English. Not only can reading newspapers assist children in acquiring new vocabulary, but it also encourages them to become self-directed learners by encouraging them to search for language outside of the context of official school instruction. The purpose of this research is to investigate how consistent interaction with newspapers can improve vocabulary acquisition among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The study highlights the educational and motivational benefits that come with authentic reading materials.

**Research Objectives:**

- to look into how reading newspapers affects undergraduate ESL students' vocabulary development.
- to investigate how students view and feel about using newspapers as a vocabulary-building tool.
- to assess how well reading newspapers improves vocabulary by comparing the outcomes of the pre-test and post-test.
- to investigate how, in an ESL context, reading newspapers affects students' motivation, self-assurance, and independent learning.

**Research Questions:**

- Do ESL students' vocabulary skills increase noticeably when they regularly read newspapers?
- How do students feel about using newspapers as a vocabulary-learning resource?
- Does reading newspapers affect vocabulary scores before and after tests in a statistically significant way?
- What effects does reading newspapers have on students' confidence and motivation while utilizing new words?

**Literature Review:**

Vocabulary is widely acknowledged as essential to second language success; without a sufficient vocabulary, learners encounter difficulties in comprehending, speaking, and writing (Nation, 2001). Nation contends that vocabulary acquisition is cumulative and necessitates repeated, spaced exposure to words in diverse settings to transition from recognition to productive application.



Extensive reading, or reading a lot of literature for general understanding, is one of the most popular ways to encourage incidental vocabulary learning in the classroom. Day and Bamford (1998) define extensive reading as the exposure of learners to a wide array of authentic language, which enhances vocabulary acquisition, fluency, and motivation, as learners encounter words organically and regularly within meaningful settings. Newspapers are real texts that cover a wide range of themes and styles, making them a good fit for the extensive-reading model.

Studies on incidental and purposeful language acquisition indicate that both methods possess merit. Hulstijn (2001) reevaluates the interaction between incidental exposures (such as reading) and intentional study: incidental learning tends to be gradual and depends on repeated encounters and a deepening context, whereas intentional study (for instance, explicit vocabulary exercises) can accelerate the initial mapping of form to meaning. In practical terms, newspapers provide numerous incidental learning opportunities; however, combining reading with exercises that highlight new information (noticing) improves retention.

Empirical research substantiates that engaging with authentic materials, such as graded readers and newspapers, leads to quantifiable improvements in vocabulary acquisition. Elgort (2011) and other experimental research have demonstrated that reading tasks can enhance both receptive and productive knowledge; however, the extent of improvement is contingent upon variables such as the frequency of encounters, the learner's ability, and the implementation of subsequent activities (e.g., tasks requiring output). This indicates that newspapers are efficacious, particularly when incorporated into an educational framework that encompasses pre-reading activation and post-reading consolidation.

Two good things about newspapers are that they have a lot of context and a lot of different words. Al-Homoud and Schmitt (2009), in a study contrasting extensive and intensive reading methodologies in a demanding EFL context, found that extensive reading enhanced learners' reading attitudes and exposure to diverse vocabulary, hence facilitating incidental vocabulary acquisition. The wide range of topics covered in newspapers (news, editorials, features, adverts) gives learners both high-frequency generic terms and lower-frequency, topic-specific items.

But newspapers can also be hard to read. For students with lower levels of proficiency, lexical density, idiomatic idioms, and references that are specific to a culture might make understanding challenging. Research indicates that in the absence of sufficient support—such as pre-teaching essential vocabulary, providing glosses, or implementing guided reading tasks—students may encounter numerous unfamiliar words within an article, hence hindering understanding and memory. This tension highlights the significance of task design: while basic exposure is beneficial, customized pedagogical scaffolding optimizes vocabulary acquisition via newspapers.

The importance of the mother tongue in acquiring a second language has been extensively studied. Abbas (2025), for instance, emphasizes how L1 both facilitates vocabulary growth and interferes, especially when it comes to things like pronunciation and translation. This implies that while reading newspapers in their first language (L1) may help Pakistani ESL learners comprehend vocabulary, it can also result in mistakes if straight translation techniques are used excessively.

Lastly, the literature talks about how these ideas might be used in the classroom. An effective way to integrate newspapers is to combine a lot of exposure (such reading them for fun and information) with planned exercises like vocabulary notebooks, targeted lookups, meaning-negotiation

assignments, and using the same terms in different classes. Nation's (2001) model—integrating exposure, purposeful practice, and spaced repetition—serves as a theoretical foundation for these designs, while empirical studies (e.g., Elgort; Webb) underscore the significance of repeated encounters and diverse activities in reinforcing vocabulary acquisition

**Synthesis and Gap:** Although substantial data indicate that authentic reading helps vocabulary development, the majority of studies concentrate on graded readers or regulated extensive-reading programs. There is a lack of research focusing on newspapers in university ESL environments in Pakistan, where learners' access to English outside the classroom, their topical interests, and media genres vary. This research can address this deficiency by examining the impact of regular newspaper reading (including frequency, article kinds, and scaffolding tactics) on vocabulary breadth, depth, and retention among Pakistani undergraduates.

### Theoretical Framework

This research is based on a number of different hypotheses that are interconnected with one another about the acquisition of a second language and vocabulary.

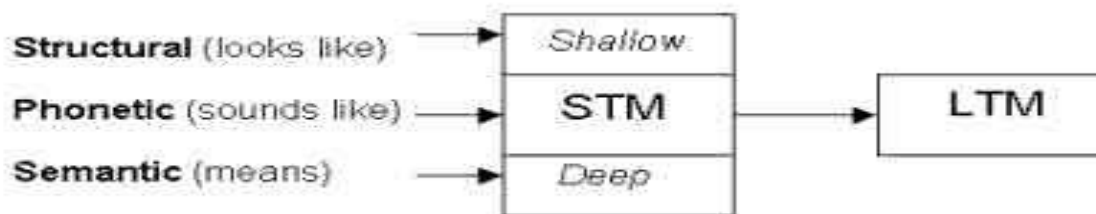
#### *Krashen's Input Hypothesis:*

The significant one Comprehensible input facilitates language acquisition. This represents Krashen's most significant hypothesis. The hypothesis posits that linguistic competence evolves through the understanding of communications in the target language

'Comprehensible input' (C.I.) denotes messages in the target language that the learner can understand. C.I. represents the optimal input level, slightly exceeding the present acquisition level. Krashen designates this level as  $i + 1$ , where "i" signifies the current learner and "+1" denotes their preparedness for language processing and comprehension, informed by context and prior knowledge. Second language acquisition is not facilitated by basic or previously mastered input (i level) or by complex input ( $i + x$ ).

#### *Depth of Processing Hypothesis (Craik & Lockhart, 1972):*

Craik and Lockhart (1972) established several foundational theoretical assumptions, which are enumerated here for your convenience. A significant correlation exists between the extent of processing applied to a stimulus and the quantity of information effectively preserved in memory.



#### *Socio-cultural Theory (Vygotsky, 1978):*

Internalization, mediation, the zone of proximal development, and scaffolding are essential elements in Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which is based on Piaget's cognitive psychology. Vygotsky believes that a thorough explanation of cognition needs an investigation of cultural and social characteristics such as language, interaction, and conduct. Furthermore, he contends that individuals cannot achieve this goal by their own efforts. The social connections and relationships that an individual forms and absorbs during life have a substantial impact on cognitive development outcomes.



### Methodology

This research used a quantitative survey approach integrated with an experimental element to examine the influence of structured newspaper reading on vocabulary acquisition among college ESL learners. The study employs a pre-test/post-test experimental framework. Over the course of six weeks, an intervention group takes part in planned newspaper-reading activities. The Researcher uses pre- and post-tests, as well as self-report questionnaires on reading habits, to quantify vocabulary improvement.

The study will comprise around 30 undergraduate ESL students, aged 18–24, from designated universities in Pakistan. We will use purposive sampling to make sure that the people we choose have an intermediate level of English ability.

### Data Collection Tools

**Vocabulary Tests:** A standardized pre-test and post-test will be given to see how wide and deep the participants' vocabulary is. The assessments will have both receptive and productive questions.

**Questionnaire:** A Likert-scale questionnaire will be utilized to collect participants' perceptions concerning the impact of newspaper reading on their vocabulary acquisition, motivation, and reading comprehension.

### Data Analysis:

*Table 1. Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Scores of 30 ESL Learners*

Student	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
1	25	55	30
2	28	53	25
3	27	52	25
4	29	58	29
5	26	54	28
6	24	50	26
7	22	51	29
8	20	53	33
9	23	55	32



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<b>Student</b>	<b>Pre-test</b>	<b>Post-test</b>	<b>Difference</b>
10	25	57	32
11	28	59	31
12	21	50	29
13	26	56	30
14	27	54	27
15	24	53	29
16	23	52	29
17	22	55	33
18	25	58	33
19	28	60	32
20	29	59	30
21	27	55	28
22	24	52	28
23	22	54	32
24	21	53	32
25	23	56	33

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Student	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
26	26	57	31
27	25	58	33
28	29	60	31
29	28	55	27
30	27	54	27

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**Summary Statistics**

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*Pre-test and Post-test Vocabulary Scores (n = 30)*

Measure	Mean	S.D
Pre-test Vocabulary Score	25.13	2.64
Post-test Vocabulary Score	54.93	2.83
Difference (Post–Pre)	29.80	2.47

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Pre-test and Post-test  
Vocabulary Scores (n = 30)

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**Table 2.0** Pre-test and Post-test Scores

**Paired-Samples t-test results**

Test	t (29)	p	Cohen's d	Interpretation
Pre vs. Post	66.11	< .001	12.07	Extremely large effect size

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**Table 3.0** Paired-Samples t-test results



### Assessment

The result shows an enormous improvement in vocabulary scores after the newspaper-reading intervention. The average scores of students went up from about 25 on the pre-test to about 55 on the post-test. The effect size was very large, which means that reading newspapers had a big impact on how learners learned new words.

Questionnaire Statements	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Newspapers help me learn new vocabulary in context.	60%	23%	10%	7%	0%
2. Newspaper reading improved my overall English comprehension.	53%	27%	10%	10%	0%
3. I feel more confident using new words after reading newspapers.	47%	30%	13%	10%	0%
4. Newspapers provide more useful vocabulary than textbooks.	50%	27%	13%	10%	0%
5. Regular reading of newspapers motivates me to learn English.	57%	20%	13%	10%	0%
6. I can guess word meanings more easily using newspaper context.	50%	27%	13%	10%	0%
7. Newspaper headlines helped me notice new words.	53%	30%	7%	10%	0%
8. Reading newspapers has improved my writing vocabulary.	47%	33%	10%	10%	0%
9. Newspapers expose me to different topics and registers of English.	63%	20%	10%	7%	0%
10. I would continue reading newspapers to improve my English vocabulary.	67%	23%	7%	3%	0%

### Discussion

The questionnaire responses strongly supported our test results and helped us understand how kids felt about utilizing newspapers to learn new words. A large majority of the people who took part—83%—strongly felt that newspapers helped them acquire vocabulary better by putting words in context. This is exactly what linguist Paul Nation said about how crucial it is to hear new words in a meaningful way over and over again to actually remember them.

But it's not just about words. The pupils also thought that reading newspapers helped them get better at other things. Eighty percent thought it helped them understand things better overall. This means that this strategy does more than simply help with vocabulary; it also helps with reading fluency and understanding out what things mean from the context. This backs up what other studies have found: reading real things improves with both vocabulary and understanding at the same time.

Another huge lesson was how much more confident I felt. After reading the news, almost 77% of students claimed they felt more sure of themselves when using new words, and 70% said it even



helped their writing vocabulary. This illustrates that the benefits go beyond just being able to read words and include being able to use them in writing and speech. This is wonderful news because it signifies that the new words aren't just things kids know; they're becoming part of their vocabulary.

Another big thing was motivation. A whopping 76% of students claimed that reading newspapers helped them want to learn English more. This is crucial since Stephen Krashen's hypothesis says that being motivated and not worried are two big factors in learning a second language. What is the best part? An impressive 90% of the students claimed they would keep reading newspapers to learn English even after the study was over. This suggests that they perceive it as a worthwhile and long-lasting habit.

Interestingly, half of the students strongly agreed that newspapers have more helpful vocabulary than the textbooks they use in class. This makes a lot of sense since newspapers provide students with actual, up-to-date language that they can't necessarily acquire from a controlled, formal textbook.

In short, the poll showed that students think newspapers are a useful, all-in-one instrument for learning a language. They do more than just help kids learn new words; they also help them understand what they read better, give them more confidence, make them more motivated, and encourage them to take care of their own learning. When you add this good feedback to the fact that their test results went up, it's evident that reading the newspaper is both a good and a very important approach for ESL learners to learn new words.

**RQ1: Yes.** *The vocabulary exam showed a considerable increase in average score, going from 25.13 before the test to 54.93 after it, a gain of about 30 points ( $p < .001$ ).*

**RQ2:** *The majority of students (83%) felt that newspapers were useful for learning new vocabulary in context, and a majority (90%) said they would continue to use newspapers for this purpose.*

**RQ3:** *Press coverage had a significant impact on students' test scores, as confirmed by a paired-samples  $t$ -test ( $t(29) = 66.11, p < .001$ ).*

**RQ4:** *Reading the newspaper piqued 76% of people's interest in improving their English, and 77% said they felt more comfortable using new vocabulary.*

**Conclusion:**

The findings of this study strongly support previous research: regular newspaper reading is an effective way to improve the vocabulary of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The significant improvement observed in test scores suggests that a consistent habit of reading the news is a superior strategy for vocabulary expansion compared to relying solely on traditional classroom materials. Beyond the test results, students themselves had a positive outlook on the use of newspapers. Their feedback indicates that this method fosters curiosity, self-confidence, and a desire for independent learning. This student-centered perspective, combined with the clear evidence from the research data, shows that newspapers can be a valuable tool for ESL educators.

Therefore, incorporating newspaper reading into the curriculum is a practical way to not only increase students' vocabulary but also to make them more engaged and active participants in their own language learning journey.



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