

## Vocabulary Improving Through Reading Short Stories: A Quantitative Study at QUEST, Pakistan

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### Abstract

*This research investigates vocabulary improving through short stories at QUEST, Nawabshah. The main objective of this research is to know how the vocabulary improving strategies affect the language development through short stories to order to improve English language. Data was collected through a questionnaire distributed among 105 students selected using simple random sampling. The data was analyzed through SPSS software. The results were described by means of percentage, mean score and SD. The findings revealed that students can improve reading skills through short stories to expand their vocabulary through regular English reading, correct pronunciation, and perfect accent, practice consistent spelling, master prepositions, conjunctions, and punctuation rules, and focus on tense consistency and conditional sentence construction. The results also revealed that vocabulary improving strategies can significantly enhance English skills, benefiting academic performance and professional communication in literature as well as in language. This study gave important suggestions and recommendations to improve vocabulary.*

**Key words:** Vocabulary improving, reading skills, story strategies, English skills

### INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary improvement has been considered the most important part of learning the English language. The English vocabulary enables students to improve their English language. Richard and Rodgers (2001) state that improving vocabulary means developing one's language proficiency. Poor vocabulary may dishearten learners when using language inside and outside of classroom activities. The method for learning vocabulary attracts learners' interest. The literature helps students learn a new language. The short stories enhanced the learners' language and vocabulary skills. Literary works reflect cultural detail and social elements that can help learn a language in multiple ways. Literature is taken as a tool for learners in reading or listening to new words, grammar, conversational purposes, and sentence structures in terms of fictitious contents (Stan, 2015).

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Literary texts help to improve learners' language skills in different ways; for instance, learners can understand the text that they are reading because it takes learners attention. Through literary texts, learners can enhance their writing skills to a significant extent, as the captivating plots of stories capture their attention. According to Thornbury (2005), terminology holds a fundamental place in language learning. According to Merriam (2003), vocabulary is "a list or collection of words and phrases usually alphabetically arranged and explained or defined." Hornby (2000) defined lexis as the central feature of lingo applied to notify, convey thoughts, disclose need and emotion, and converse with other people. Hammer (2002) underlined and stated, "Without grammar, very little can be conveyed; without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed."

Improving vocabulary is considered a vital component of communication and English language learning. If the learners lack a rich vocabulary, they cannot communicate in and out of the classroom with each other. According to Wallace (2007), vocabulary plays an important role in learning a language. According to Thornbury (2004), learning vocabulary can transfer innovative information into the prior knowledge of the word list. According to Mccarthy and O'Dell (2002), the magnitude of vocabulary in language learning can facilitate students gaining a broad variety of vocabulary, but it is well thought out as the most difficult job for English language learners. According to Thornbury (2004), vocabulary must be considered an element of language learning. The majority of students lack adequate vocabulary and get upset and uneasy about conveying their thoughts, and thus they suffer from not being familiar with the exact meaning of the items in a piece of composition. As a result, they find speaking, writing, listening, and reading tasks so irritating, and as a result, they either give up to complete them or escape from them. Nunan (2003) recommended four principles for improving the vocabulary of students.

Firstly, the teachers must give priority to a good number of useful vocabularies based on the large range of situations.

Secondly, the teacher should select appropriate vocabulary for the students to learn, from high-frequency words to low-frequency words, for classroom activities.

Thirdly, teachers ought to capture the concentration of students on the new words related to the prescribed courses of language.

Finally, students should be encouraged to imitate and get the opportunity to learn.

A short story is regarded as a fictional work typically written in prose; the format is narrative, which is shorter in length as compared to a novel. Wright (2002) stated that stories

“range from full stories in a book to snippets of behavior.” A short story typically has a single essential theme, a single plot of the story based on a single main character, and a small number of characters with minor roles. However, a novel contains a range of plots, themes, and some well-known characters. Short stories are attention-grabbing for people for reading and talking by developing mental occurrences and the vocabulary of students within four language skills through classroom practices (Pardede, 2011). According to Blachowicz and Fisher (2004), using short stories is a constructive skill to develop a capable vocabulary in one's own language. Stories encourage the person who reads to apply mind, thoughts, and imagination to probably stimulate new choices and confidently precede with his or her prudence.

According to Pardede (2021) and Senturk and Kahraman (2020), students and teachers find difficulties in terms of learning and using new vocabulary correctly. Teachers struggle with managing, motivating students, and improving their ability to teach English, whereas learners struggle with learning new vocabulary, accurately pronouncing words, recognizing different parts of speech, and comprehending the meaning of words in texts. These learners' issues demonstrate that their language mastery is still lacking. According to Bhatti, Arshad, and Mukhtar (2020), learners' vocabulary is taught through the use of short tales, and they may become more motivated to study vocabulary in English as a result. The main goal of this study is to understand how vocabulary is improving. Strategies affect the language development of students through reading short stories.

### **Using short stories in English language classes**

For vocabulary growth and language development, literature is a useful source of data. Still, selecting the appropriate short stories is crucial if you want the desired educational effects. To maximize the benefits of a chosen narrative for pupils, it should be either slightly above or in line with their current level of language competence (Pardede, 2021). Character, location, and storyline are examples of basic aspects that can be taught at the beginning and intermediate levels. Advanced stages can incorporate more complicated aspects like conflict, climax, resolution, etc. (Bhatti, Arshad, & Mukhtar, 2020). A literature text can be introduced in the classroom quite successfully through reading exercises. Additionally, the content ought to match the pupils' level. In order to foster genuine appreciation in learners, Arjmandi and Aladini (2020) emphasize that the materials should be chosen based on the students' skill levels, the text's language and stylistic complexity, and the quantity of underlying knowledge. When learners are bored, they will stop learning the language. Because of this, it's important to use educational resources that don't agitate kids and enable accurate assessment of their

comprehension. Grammar, spelling, and vocabulary are essential components of learning a language, and literature can help integrate these components, according to Arjmandi and Aladini (2020). Short stories can be used in a similar way for adults and young learners. All language levels can use digital short stories. Additionally, stories ought to align thematically with the interests of the students. The length of the story is another factor. Short stories allow pupils to finish reading assignments quickly and with a sense of achievement.

For learners, short stories also offer opportunities for interpretation, visualization, and sound. When learners read stories, they can interpret the narrative and use language more creatively, claims Bhatti, Arshad, and Mukhtar (2020). Ahmed (2017) asserts that kids are capable of deciphering the text's vocabulary and coming up with their own solutions. This helps them expand their vocabulary. Students' vocabulary, analysis, capacity for self-reflection, and linguistic proficiency all significantly increase as a result of their literature involvement.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) called research design 'strategies of inquiry'. Creswell and Creswell (2018) defined research designs as the "types of inquiry within qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches that provide specific direction for procedures in a research study" (p. 53). The current study employed a questionnaire to gather quantitative data on students' perceptions of vocabulary improvement through short stories. The quantitative results were described with the help of descriptive statistics (like percentage, mean, and standard deviation). This design began with the data collection and then the analysis of quantitative data.

## **DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS**

For the data collection, one research instrument based on the VLSQ questionnaire by Schmitt (1997) was used as the primary source of data collection. For the present study, researchers collected the data by using a simple random sampling technique to choose the required sample size for the research. The researchers selected almost 105 students (both male and female) and collected data. For data analysis, SPSS software was used for finding the percentage, arithmean (M), and standard deviation (SD).

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS**

This part of the research questionnaire indicates vocabulary improvement through short stories, including eight subsets of questions or variables. Each of these is answered according

to five Likert scales and is interpreted based on deviation. Channa, E, Koondher, M, Bughio, I & Laghari, A

### Guessing meaning from context

Table 1: Guessing meaning from context

<b>When I find a new English word that I do not know, I guess its meaning from its context.</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	27	25.7	3.6095	1.07860
	Often	29	27.6		
	Sometimes	32	30.5		
	Seldom	15	14.3		
	Never	2	1.9		
	Total	105	100.0		

Analyzing Table 1, researchers see that among first and second-year learners, the most prevalent strategy for determining word meaning was **sometimes guessing it from context** (at 30%). This was followed by **often guessing from context** (27%). However, a significant portion of students (25%) reported **always guessing from context**, which might be an overreliance on this strategy. On the other hand, a smaller group of learners indicated using this strategy less frequently: **seldom** (14%) and **never** (1.9%). The overall mean score was 3.6.

### Using an English-English dictionary

Table 2: Using an English-English dictionary

<b>When I find a new English word that I do not know, I use an English-English dictionary.</b>					
		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	32	30.5	3.4476	1.38662
	Often	23	21.9		
	Sometimes	25	23.8		
	Seldom	10	9.5		
	Never	15	14.3		
	Total	105	100.0		

Among first and second-year learners, the greatest percentage (30%) reported always using an English-English dictionary. This is a positive finding, indicating a strong foundation for vocabulary development. In second place, with a slightly lower percentage (23%), students claimed they often used an English-English dictionary, suggesting a regular habit of using this resource. However, there is also a significant portion (21%) that only sometimes uses this tool. Finally, the data reveals a concerning trend with 14% of learners never using an English-

English dictionary and an additional 9% seldom using it. This highlights a need to address potential gaps in students' dictionary usage strategies. The overall mean score of 3.4 suggests there's room to encourage more consistent use of this valuable resource.

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### Asking teachers for help

Table 3: Asking my teacher for definition

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I ask the teacher to give me the definition or an explanation in the form of an example sentence.**

	Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Valid	Always	27	25.7	3.2857	
	Often	22	21.0		
	Sometimes	27	25.7		1.39169
	Seldom	12	11.4		
	Never	17	16.2		
	Total	105	100.0		

Table 3 reveals interesting patterns in how first and second-year learners seek clarification from teachers. A quarter (25%) of students reported always asking the teacher for definitions or explanations with example sentences. This is an encouraging finding, suggesting they actively seek to understand new concepts. However, an equally large portion (25%) only sometimes asks for clarification. While not always negative, this could indicate missed opportunities for deeper learning. In second place, with a slightly lower percentage (21%), students claimed they often ask the teacher, suggesting a somewhat regular habit of seeking explanations. On the other hand, the data also identifies a concerning trend with nearly one-sixth (16%) of learners never asking for clarification and an additional 11% seldom doing so. This highlights a need to explore potential reasons behind this behavior and encourage more frequent interaction for improved comprehension. The overall mean score of 3.2 suggests there's room to further promote a culture of active questioning in the classroom.

### Asking classmates for support

Table 4: Asking my classmates for definition

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I ask my classmates for the meaning/definition.**

	Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Valid	Always	22	21.0	3.1905	
	Often	21	20.0		1.31628
	Sometimes	32	30.5		
	Seldom	15	14.3		
	Never	15	14.3		
	Total	105	100.0		

The table 4 indicated the First and second-year learners exhibited varied tendencies in seeking meaning clarification from classmates. Interestingly, the largest portion (30%) reported **sometimes** asking classmates for definitions. This is followed by 21% who **always**

ask their classmates, which is a positive finding indicating proactive behavior. **Often** seeking clarification from classmates was reported by 20% of the learners, suggesting a somewhat regular habit. However, it's concerning that nearly equal percentages of students (14% each) **seldom** or **never** ask classmates for definitions. The room to encourage more frequent interaction among students to improve comprehension.

### Discovering new meanings through group work activity

Table 5 discovering new meanings through group work activity

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I discover new meanings through group work activity.**

		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	17	16.2	3.0095	1.31920
	Often	19	18.1		
	Sometimes	38	36.2		
	Seldom	10	9.5		
	Never	21	20.0		
	Total	105	100.0		

Table 5 reveals mixed experiences among first and second-year learners regarding discovering new meanings through group work activities. The largest portion (36%) reported **sometimes** discovering new meanings, suggesting that group work activities could be optimized for more consistent learning gains. However, a positive aspect is that 18% of students **often** discovered new meanings, indicating this strategy benefits a significant portion of the class.

On the other hand, the data also identifies a concerning trend. Nearly a quarter (20%) of learners reported **never** discovering new meanings through group work, and an additional 9.5% **seldom** did so. This highlights the need to explore why some students struggle in these activities and ensure all students can benefit from collaborative learning. The overall mean score of 3.0 reinforces the potential to improve the effectiveness of group work for meaning discovery.

### Making a mental image of the words' meaning

Table 6 making a mental image of the words' meaning

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I make a mental image of the words' meaning.**

		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	32	30.5	3.5333	1.32336
	Often	25	23.8		
	Sometimes	28	26.7		
	Seldom	7	6.7		
	Never	13	12.4		
	Total	105	100.0		

Analyzing Table 6, researchers see a positive trend in how first and second-year learners utilize mental imagery for memorization. The largest percentage (30%) reported always creating mental images of words' meanings, indicating this strategy is effective for many learners. This is further supported by 23% of students who often use this technique. While some students leverage this strategy less frequently, 26% reported sometimes creating mental images. However, there is a minority (almost 12%) who never use this method, and an additional 6% seldom do. This highlights an area for potential improvement, as mental imagery can be a valuable memory aid. The overall mean score of 3.5 reinforces the positive use of this strategy for memorization.

### Connecting the word to a personal experience

Table 7: Connecting the word to a personal experience

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I connect the word to a personal experience.**

		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	26	24.8	3.4762	1.22549
	Often	27	25.7		
	Sometimes	33	31.4		
	Seldom	9	8.6		
	Never	10	9.5		
	Total	105	100.0		

Table 7 reveals a positive trend in how first and second-year learners connect new words to personal experiences to aid memorization. A significant portion (31%) reported sometimes making these connections, indicating this strategy is partially adopted by many learners. However, it's encouraging that an even larger portion (24% always and 25% often) connects new words to personal experiences, highlighting its effectiveness for a majority of students. On the other hand, the data also shows a minority (almost 9% never and almost 8% seldom) who don't utilize this strategy as frequently. Encouraging these students to connect words to personal experiences could significantly improve their memorization. The overall mean score of 3.4 further emphasizes the potential of this strategy for improved learning.

### Writing paragraphs using several new words

Table 8 writing paragraphs using several new words

**When I find a new English word that I do not know, I write paragraphs using several new words.**

		Frequency	Percent	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Valid	Always	35	33.3	3.6190	1.20401
	Often	15	14.3		
	Sometimes	43	41.0		
	Seldom	4	3.8		
	Never	8	7.6		



Total	105	100.0
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Table 8 reveals a mix of strategies used by first and second-year learners when incorporating new words into paragraphs. While a positive aspect is that a significant portion (33%) reported always writing paragraphs using several new words, there's also a substantial group (41%) who only do so sometimes. This suggests there might be room for improvement in encouraging consistent practice. Another positive takeaway is that 14% of students often use new words in paragraphs, indicating this strategy benefits a portion of the class. However, the data also identifies a concerning trend with nearly 10% of learners (almost 7% never and almost 3% seldom) who rarely integrate new vocabulary into their writing. This highlights a need to explore potential reasons and encourage all students to practice using new words in context. The overall mean score of 3.6 suggests there's room to emphasize the importance of incorporating new vocabulary into writing.

### **Discussions and Conclusions**

The majority of the results showed that, while all students' vocabulary knowledge was initially the same, those who read short stories significantly increased their vocabulary. The results align with earlier studies (Senturk & Kahraman, 2020; Parvareshbar & Ghoorchaei, 2016) that demonstrated the beneficial impact of short story usage on vocabulary growth. Students' vocabulary could be improved by being exposed to a wider variety of words that were included in the short stories. As Zahra and Farrah (2016) point out, telling short stories in the classroom can actually help students learn a language and inspire them to do so. The results overall indicated that the students had the same level of vocabulary knowledge at the beginning of the study; the students who read short stories made significant gains. As a result, it's critical that educators provide learners with fresh, more potent approaches to improve vocabulary growth and foster greater group dynamics. When learning the language, learners can assess their vocabulary knowledge, try to pick up new words by listening to people talk in English, and become comfortable with reading short stories.

To conclude, we can say that the goal of the current study was to find out how short stories affect vocabulary learning in BS English students at QUEST, Nawabshah, as well as various ways for vocabulary improvement. Overall, the findings indicated that vocabulary acquisition is positively impacted by exposure to short stories. The results of the current study showed that short story exposure benefits the vocabulary development of Pakistani language learners. It was discovered that the Pakistani language and literature students in this study had

a medium level of vocabulary learning methods, indicating that they require instruction to acquire more vocabulary learning strategies, such as social skills that aid in vocabulary development.

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