

ENHANCING VOCABULARY THROUGH ENGLISH MOVIES: A STUDY OF PAKISTANI ESL LEARNERS

Rubab Bano^{*1}, Nazia Anwar²

^{*1}MPhil Scholar, English, University of Gujrat, Pakistan

²Lecturer, English, University of Gujrat, Pakistan

¹banorubab551@gmail.com, ²nazia.anwar@uog.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20351273>

Keywords

Vocabulary acquisition, English movies, Pakistani ESL learners, incidental vocabulary learning, mixed methods

Article History

Received: 27 March 2026

Accepted: 07 May 2026

Published: 23 May 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Rubab Bano

Abstract

This study investigates how exposure to English-language movies with same language subtitles enhances the vocabulary knowledge of Pakistani ESL Learners. The study adopted a mixed-methods research design, consisting of a quantitative one group pre-test/post-test approach followed by a qualitative sequential design. Based on the Noticing Hypothesis of Schmidt, Dual Coding Theory of Paivio, and incidental vocabulary learning model of Nation, vocabulary learning improves. The study is conducted with third-year BS English students of a public university in Punjab. Participants watched the films *Forrest Gump* and *Freedom Writers* for four weeks with English subtitles and participated in reflective vocabulary activities on the researcher-designed worksheets. The quantitative analysis showed that students' vocabulary improved significantly, as indicated by the analysis conducted in JASP. The overall mean score increased from 22.50 (56.25%) in the pre-test to 32.23 (80.58%) in the post-test, with a mean gain of 9.73 marks. The results of the paired-samples t-test confirmed the significance of the results ($p < .001$) and a Cohen's d value of 5.25 suggested a very large practical effect. The qualitative results obtained from the interviews with the 10 participants showed positive attitude towards the view of movies with subtitles overwhelming. The study concludes that structured film-based learning is an effective and feasible approach for enhancing vocabulary knowledge and communicative competence among ESL learners in Pakistani universities.

1. Introduction

Vocabulary is the foundation of second language acquisition. Wilkins (1972) stated that, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed at all. This understanding has formed the basis for research over the past few decades into effective methods of vocabulary acquisition among ESL/EFL learners worldwide. English holds special significance in the Pakistani education system because it is the official language of Pakistan, serve as medium of

instruction in higher education institutions and is considered an important indicator of professional and social status. However, years of formal English education do not seem to help Pakistani university students, especially in public sector universities, to develop vocabulary to the level expected in their academic work and communicative ability. The problems are generally attributed to the dominance of traditional methods of language teaching, including rote memorization,

decontextualized word lists and grammar-translation approach, all of which give limited exposure to English in meaningful and real contexts (Warsi, 2004). With the explosive development of digital media and global entertainment, there are new and largely opportunities exist for ESL learners to experience authentic English "outside the classroom". English-language films are especially multimodal, providing a setting in which vocabulary is embedded in natural speech, the emotional narrative of the story, and the visual context. Research has consistently found that these conditions (natural speech, emotional story and visual context) are optimal for incidental vocabulary acquisition (Krashen, 1989; Nation, 2001). Films provides learners with exposure to words that are used in a purposeful, repeated and varied situational context, to help broaden and deepen vocabulary development.

Despite these possibilities, the use of English language films as a vocabulary learning tool has not been extensively explored in Pakistani ESL literature. The existing works in this regard are mainly on the traditional classroom strategies and there is a significant gap in the literature in empirical studies on the effect of structured film viewing with same language (English) subtitles on vocabulary learning among Pakistani undergraduates. The simultaneous audio-visual exposure to target words provided by subtitles particularly interesting because it raises the probability that learners will be aware of and remember new words (Schmidt, 1990; Montero Perez et al., 2013). This study directly fills this gap. It explores how a four-week structured English movie-viewing program using (Forrest Gump, 1994; Freedom Writers, 2007) in which films were presented with English subtitles, along with students' vocabulary reflection worksheets affect the vocabulary development of 30 students at a public university among third year of BS English students in Punjab, Pakistan. The study employed a mixed methods research design, including pre-test post-test vocabulary assessment for quantitative data, and semi-structured interviews for qualitative data, to measures changes in vocabulary development and to gain qualitative

insight into learner's attitudes, strategies, and challenges. The results have theoretical value for incidental vocabulary learning and media-based language learning in higher education and practical application for curriculum design in higher education institutions of Pakistan.

1.1 Research Objectives

- To investigate the impact of watching English movies using English subtitles on the vocabulary learning of Pakistani ESL undergraduate students.
- To compare participants' vocabulary scores (pre-test and post-test) to verify whether there is a statistically significant vocabulary improvement after the intervention.
- To understand the attitudes of Pakistani ESL students towards the use of English movies as an additional source of vocabulary.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the statistically significant effects of structured viewing of English movies with English subtitles on the vocabulary learning of Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners?
2. What are the attitudes of Pakistani ESL students towards the use of English movies as an additional vocabulary learning tool?
3. What vocabulary learning strategies do Pakistani ESL learners adopt during and after watching English Movies with English subtitles?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Vocabulary and its Role in Second Language Learning

Vocabulary is the foundation of second language acquisition. The minimum requirement for students to access authentic texts is the acquisition of 3,000-word families (Nation, 1990), and repeated exposure to contextually rich texts has been shown to be much more effective than rote memorization (Schmitt, 2000). The findings clearly justify the use of English films as a structured multimodal vocabulary learning tool for Pakistani ESL undergraduate students.

2.2 Incidental Vocabulary Learning Using Authentic Input

In the late 1980s, incidental vocabulary learning was given extensive attention in research. With respect to vocabulary development, Krashen (1989) explained how vocabulary is acquired when learners receive natural, comprehensible input, a context that differ significantly from traditional ESL classroom environment in Pakistan where learners rarely have opportunities to acquire language naturally outside the classroom. Since contextual richness was identified as an important factor affecting word-inferencing ability by Laufer and Hill (2000), vocabulary acquisition from multimodal, story-rich and emotionally-engaging English films is a viable option and may be effective. Hulstijn (2001) also discovered that it is best to learn with mental focus and active participation to get information to stick. To support this implementation, the study employs structured vocabulary reflection worksheets which ask students to move beyond just viewing these historical films, and to actively construct and infer meaning from contextually rich historical narratives.

2.3 Subtitles in Vocabulary Learning

The importance of subtitles in enhancing ESL learners' vocabulary acquisition has been a focus of research since late 1980s. Same-language printed subtitles do not seem to help acquisition, but Vander plank (1988) pointed out that the 'written anchors' would help learners to link the phonological and the graphic forms of a specific word. This process is related to the Noticing Hypothesis by Schmidt (1990) which emphasizes role of attention in language acquisition. Furthermore, Garza (1991) found that use of written reinforcement during listening improved vocabulary retention. While previous research has investigated the potential benefits of viewing excerpts with subtitles, more recent research by Montero Perez et al. (2013) provided evidence which suggests that same-language subtitles are the most effective for vocabulary acquisition, garnering statistically higher gains than both the no-subtitle and translated-subtitle viewing conditions. This may help the student with

vocabulary. In the absence of Urdu speaking and hearing classroom, English subtitles were used in this study as they are known to improve vocabulary retention of ESL learners.

2.4 English Movies as a Vocabulary Teaching Aid

This study using audio-visual media to promote word learning has been a part of educational research for over thirty years. Neuman and Koskinen (1992) found that vocabulary instruction in the context of visual materials, natural talk and print captions is more effective than in other traditional classroom contexts. Repeated observation and increased acquisition of knowledge by incidentally accessing and applying knowledge from unstructured observation of a live black-box run; Hence, it is likely that the current study can attain even more fruitful findings, given its structured framework that encompasses reflection worksheets after viewing videos. Lastly, Peters (2019) reported a positive impact of same-language subtitled input on long-term as well as short-term acquisition and motivation. In the qualitative interviews with participants one of the issues discussed was encouraging participant interaction.

2.5 The Pakistani ESL Vocabulary Learning

Although, much research has been done on media-assisted learning in the international context, empirical studies on the Pakistani context of ESL are hardly available, with the bulk of research focusing on teacher-centered traditional classroom-based approaches. Warsi (2004) has pointed out that current overemphasis on rote learning and decontextualized teaching approach has helped to create a persistent vocabulary gap, due to the absence of meaningful English input. This is not like the mandated communicative approach in the university where students are supposed to attain communicative competence. Rather, in most English departments, students continue to focus on grammatical and literary apprehension. (Manan et al. 2015). Tariq, Bilal, and Latif (2013) noted that the students' main learning strategies were shallow processing strategies such as using the dictionary and this requires more interactive and novel approaches.

This challenge has been common in spoken word processing, where there are few authentic input sources which makes it difficult to get learners to engage in scenarios and situations. This study aims to meet this specific need as it suggests the utilization of viewing movies as a basis for acquiring the lexicon.

2.6 Research Gap

The literature reviewed provides coherent and strong evidences that incidental vocabulary acquisition from English movie subtitles in the same language is happening in the ESL/EFL context in Europe, East Asia and Middle East. However, this correlation has not been investigated in empirical study on undergraduate ESL students in Pakistan. As some researchers (Warsi, 2004; Manan et al., 2015) point out, Pakistani ESL studies have mainly centered on in-classroom vocabulary teaching and student strategies, without considering the possibility of using English movies as an additional vocabulary learning instrument among this group of individuals. Furthermore, there is no literature that has examined the perceptions, attitudes and vocabulary learning strategies of Pakistani university learners learning vocabulary with comparison to organized movie-based learning in mixed methods design. The current research paper will fill these gaps by examining how structured viewing of English movies, *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *Freedom Writers* (2007) with English subtitles affect vocabulary acquisition of third-year BS English Learners in a public sector university in Punjab, Pakistan and at the same time their subjective learning experiences through semi-structured interviews.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The type of design that is adopted in this study is sequential explanatory mixed methods. Measuring vocabulary gains before and after the film intervention, quantitatively, is a one-group pre-test/post-test approach. Limitations are cited: no control group due to sample size and time. The qualitative findings and explanations from the semi-structured interviews with a sub-sample of 10

subjects provide a sense of the quantitative findings and explanations that have been seen in the previous results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

3.2 Research Site

The study was conducted in a public university of the province of Punjab, Pakistan. The following reasons led to the selection of the university: (1) it was located close to the researcher, (2) it had a well-equipped language laboratory suitable for the controlled movie-watching sessions, and (3) there were numerous third-year BS English students who met the study requirements. The province of Punjab was chosen as one of the major educational provinces of Pakistan having a high enrolment of ESL learners. Challenges of vocabulary learning experienced by ESL students in the context of Punjab are seen as similar to the difficulties of vocabulary learning for under-graduate ESL learners throughout the country.

3.3 Theoretical Frameworks

a. Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990)

Richard Schmidt's **Noticing Hypothesis (1990)** is a foundational pillar of this research, asserting that **input only becomes "intake" when it is consciously processed or "noticed"** by the learner. This theory directly influenced the study's design in three critical ways:

- **Multi-Channel Subtitles:** English subtitles allow for the simultaneous presentation of vocabulary, both in the auditory and visual sense. This double exposure creates a "written anchor" which improves the odds that a student will see a word at the time it is heard.
- **Active Vocabulary Worksheets:** The reflection worksheet of vocabulary is used in the study to shift the passive recognition process into a conscious processing level. These involve students identifying unfamiliar vocabulary, deducing meaning from context and forming their own sentences, which is operationalizing Schmidt's theory of active engagement.
- **Targeted Qualitative Interviews:** The semi-structured interview protocol specifically investigates the **strategies used for noticing** and the role of subtitles in that process, providing a

direct qualitative assessment of how consciousness impacts lexical acquisition.

b. Vocabulary Learning Framework (2001) of Nation

One of the main frameworks of this study is that of Paul Nation (2001), who divides learning into two types: intentional learning (deliberate study) and incidental acquisition (learning as a by-product of communication). Both are important, but Nation says incidental learning is important for acquiring the large vocabulary needed for second-language competence. In this study, Nation's theory is applied to the following:

- **Incidental Learning Environment:** The participants, third-year BS English students, engage with the films primarily for entertainment and comprehension, allowing vocabulary to be acquired in a natural manner, as outlined in Nation's framework.
- **The Power of Multiple Encounters:** Recognizing that full acquisition often requires 10–15 exposures per word, the study's design ensures repeated contact through a synchronized "hearing-reading-reflecting" cycle (dialogue, subtitles, and worksheets). This process facilitates the transfer of words from **receptive to productive knowledge**.
- **Comprehensive Assessment Design:** Following Nation's multi-dimensional model, the researcher-developed test measures both **breadth** (the number of words known) and **depth** (precision of understanding) through its three-part structure: multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blanks, and word-meaning matching.

c. The Dual Coding Theory (1986) by Paivio

Allan Paivio's (1986) **Dual Coding Theory** posits that memory consists of two interconnected symbolic systems: **verbal** (linguistic) and **non-verbal** (visual/imagery). Information encoded simultaneously in both systems is stored more effectively and retrieved more easily than single-channel input. In this study, films serve as a **multi-modal medium** delivering vocabulary through three synchronized channels: **auditory-verbal** (speech), **visual-verbal** (subtitles), and **visual-non-verbal** (on-screen action). This triple-encoding

creates significantly stronger, more enduring memory traces than traditional text-based tools, facilitating superior long-term retention. Consequently, the researcher's assessment was designed to measure vocabulary across various modalities receptive, productive, and depth to match these levels of cognitive processing.

Key Takeaways from Dual Coding Theory:

- **Dual Processing Systems:** Human cognition uses distinct but linked systems for verbal and visual information.
- **The Advantage of Simultaneous Encoding:** Presenting information in both verbal and visual forms at the same time enhances storage and retrieval.
- **Triple-Channel Delivery in Films:** Movies allow learners to hear a word, read it in subtitles, and see it demonstrated in action (e.g., the word perseverance in *Freedom Writers*), creating a powerful learning environment.
- **Superiority Over Textbooks:** Multi-modal encoding is more efficient for long-term retention than the single-channel encoding found in traditional textbooks.
- **Assessment Alignment:** The study's vocabulary test measures receptive, productive, and depth of knowledge to correspond with the different levels of processing facilitated by dual coding.

3.4 Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study were 30 third-year students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science (BS) English Degree at a public University. Third year students were chosen for a number of reasons. First, they had a level of English that was not too high so they would not miss out on learning vocabulary from movies, nor too low that they would not be able to comprehend the movies they chose. Second, they had already taken basic courses in English language and literature that demonstrated some language awareness, meaning that they were able to share their thoughts around how they learned words for guided interviews. Thirdly, the third-year students' syllabus is less fluid than the fourth-year students' syllabus. Therefore, there is less likelihood of attrition

during the intervention period. The purposive sampling method was used. This type of sampling enables the researcher to select people who are most likely to yield useful and informative information about the research issues under investigation (Patton, 2002). The subjects were confirmed as follows: all were in their third year of

BS English with Urdu or Punjabi as their first language who had not had any formal training to learn vocabulary from movies and were willing to take part in all the parts of the study. The informed consent form was signed prior to data collection. The demographic information of participants is given in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Information of Participants

Characteristic	Details
Total Participants	30
Program	BS English – 3rd Year
Institution Type	Public Sector University, Punjab, Pakistan
Age Range	20 - 23 years
First Language (L1)	Urdu / Punjabi
English Proficiency Level	Intermediate
Research Design	One-Group Pre-test Post-test
Sampling Strategy	Purposive Sampling

3.5 Research Instruments

The two main instruments used for data collection in this study were a researcher-designed vocabulary test (pre-test and post-test) and a semi-structured interview protocol. The details of the instruments are provided in the sections below.

a. Researcher's-developed Vocabulary Test (Pre-test and Post-test)

A vocabulary test was designed by the researcher for the study. Since the study was restricted to two selected films, it was decided to use a test that was researcher developed, rather than a standardized test. So, it was necessary for the test to assess the students' knowledge of the words that are used in those films. The content validity of the test might have been compromised by using a standardized vocabulary test since it may contain terms that are not associated with the treatment. As a result, connection between the intervention and the test would have been weakened. The vocabulary test includes 40 items from the two films *Forrest Gump* (1994) and *Freedom Writers* (2007). The words selected for the target vocabulary were chosen to meet the following criteria: frequency of use in the films; usefulness in communication; suitability for intermediate-level ESL learners; and representation of different word classes (nouns,

verbs, adjectives and expressions). The test has three sections, covering aspects of breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge in accordance with the multidimensional model of vocabulary knowledge proposed by Nation (2001).

Target word is defined, underlined in the multiple-choice options and there are four options. In Section B, there are 15 fill-in-the-blanks items designed to measure productive vocabulary knowledge where the target word is to be selected from a word box in a sentence within a context. Section C consists of 10 word-definition matching items that measure the extent to which a participant knows a lexical item, requiring him or her to match a word with its correct definition. The total mark was 40, each answer was marked one. The test could be completed in 45 minutes. Prior to the administration of the test, the Content validity of the test was tested by two teachers at the study site. They tested the appropriateness of the vocabulary items selected, the comprehensiveness of the directions, and the appropriateness of the test format for the participants. The suggestions they made were incorporated in the final form of test. The reliability of the test was then measured using Cronbach's alpha coefficient with minimum acceptable value of 0.70 for research (Lent, 2020).

b. Semi-Structured Interviews

The qualitative data collection method used to gather participants' perceptions, attitudes and experiences of vocabulary learning from viewing English movies is semi-structured interviews. This is a style of interview that was selected to allow the researcher to gather data comparable across participants, as well as additional data that would help to fill gaps in the knowledge about the object of research (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). A sub-sample of 10 participants was purposively selected from the 30 students who took the pre-test and post-test to be interviewed. Interviews were purposively sampled across varying levels of vocabulary gains (students with high, moderate, and low gains in vocabulary improvement), to provide a rich picture of vocabulary learning within the intervention. The interviews were conducted one-on-one, in person in a quiet space on the university campus and took 20-30 minutes. The interview protocol comprised three sections of 10 open-ended questions, with the first section covering participants' viewing practices and their exposure to English films during the intervention, the second section focusing on the experiences participants had in learning vocabulary, and the third being a section of 'reflections' on certain words they learned through the intervention during the movie-viewing sessions. Interviews were conducted and taped with the participant's permission and later transcribed for analysis verbatim

c. Selection of Films

For the study, two English-language films were selected: *Forrest Gump* (Robert Zemeckis, 1994)

and *Freedom Writers* (Richard LaGravenese, 2007). These two films were selected on the basis of a list of criteria which was developed in consideration of the theoretical approach and the nature of the target group. These criteria included: lexical density and the presence of high-frequency everyday vocabulary, the naturalness and clarity of spoken dialogue, a speed of speech that is suitable for intermediate ESL learners, the availability of English subtitles, and cultural and thematic relevance for Pakistani university students. *Forrest Gump* was chosen for its plentiful use of basic, high-frequency vocabulary in clear and natural dialogue. The film's medium-speed speech and simple plot structure minimize the cognitive challenge to learners, allowing them to focus on vocabulary while avoiding language or narrative complexity. *Freedom Writers* was chosen for its wealth of academic and social vocabulary, its accessible school and classroom context, and its themes of determination, acceptance, and social justice and all of which are deemed to be highly engaging and motivating for young Pakistani tertiary students. The two films offer a rich and diverse lexical context that introduces participants to a wide range of high-frequency and contextually relevant vocabulary over the four-week intervention period.

3.6 Procedure and Intervention

The data collection procedure was carried out over a period of four weeks and comprised three distinct phases: the pre-intervention phase, the intervention phase, and the post-intervention phase. The complete timeline of the research procedure is presented in table 2.

Table 2: Complete Timeline of Adopted Research Procedure

Phase	Week	Activity	Duration
Pre-Intervention	Week 1	Participant briefing and administration of pre-test	45 minutes
Intervention	Week 2	Screening of <i>Forrest Gump</i> (two sessions: Part 1 and Part 2) with English subtitles; vocabulary reflection worksheets after each session	2 × 90 minutes
Intervention	Week 3	Screening of <i>Freedom Writers</i> (two sessions: Part 1 and Part 2) with English subtitles; vocabulary reflection worksheets after each session	2 × 90 minutes
Post-Intervention	Week 4	Administration of post-test; semi-structured interviews with	45 mins (test) + 20-30

		10 selected participants	mins per interview
--	--	--------------------------	--------------------

It was given to all 30 participants in controlled conditions in the university language laboratory for 45 minutes. The intervention phase took place in Weeks 2 and 3. In Week 2, Forrest Grump was shown in two sessions of 90 minutes each - the first half in the first session and the second half in the second. In Week 3, Freedom Writers was screened over two sessions. Films were screened in the university language lab with a projector and sound system, accompanied by English subtitles. The choice of English subtitles rather than Urdu was made for theoretical reasons, as it has been consistently shown that same language (L2) subtitles are more effective in promoting vocabulary noticing and retention than L1 subtitles for ESL learners (Vander plank, 2010; Montero Perez et al, 2013). After each screening, participants were asked to complete a vocabulary reflection worksheet which required them to complete the following five tasks: list three new words encountered during the viewing session, write the sentence from the movie in which each word was used, infer each word's meaning from the context, create a new sentence using each word, and rate their level of confidence in using each word on a 5-point scale. These worksheets fulfilled two purposes: they prompted participants to actively and reflexively engage with new vocabulary in line with Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis - and provided additional qualitative information about participants' incidental vocabulary learning. In the post-intervention phase of the study (Week 4), the vocabulary post-test was administered to all 30 participants following the same procedures as the pre-test. The 10 participants identified above were interviewed for the remainder of the week, at a time suitable to the participant.

3.7 Data Analysis

This study collected both quantitative and qualitative data, which were analyzed using different (but complementary) methods as outlined below.

a. Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the pre-test and post-test were analyzed using JASP (Version 0.17). Descriptive statistics (mean, SD) described score distributions, while a paired samples t-test ($p \leq .05$) assessed statistical significance. Cohen's d was calculated to measure practical effect size, using Cohen's (1988) thresholds of 0.2 (small), 0.5 (medium), and 0.8 (large). Together these tools confirmed a very large effect ($d = 5.25$) on participants' lexical development.

b. Qualitative Data Analysis

Interview data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis: familiarization, coding, theme generation, review, definition, and write-up. Trustworthiness was ensured through member checking with three participants and reflexive journaling throughout data collection and analysis.

3.8 Validity and Reliability

To ensure the study's **validity and reliability**, the researcher implemented several rigorous controls across both quantitative and qualitative strands:

- **Quantitative Validity and Reliability:** Content validity was established through **expert review by two experienced English teachers**, while reliability was statistically measured using **Cronbach's alpha**.
- **Internal Validity:** To eliminate confounding variables, all 30 participants viewed the films in a **standardized environment** with identical locations, audio-visual equipment, and subtitle settings. Participants were also instructed to avoid external English movie content during the intervention to ensure gains were directly attributable to the study.
- **Qualitative Trustworthiness:** The credibility of the interview data was maintained through **member checking** (verifying themes with participants), **reflexive journaling**, and the use of **verbatim transcriptions** and direct quotes to support thematic findings.

Key Measures Summary:

Expert Review: Validated the vocabulary test items.

- **Standardization:** Guaranteed consistent treatment conditions for all participants.
- **Member Checking:** Confirmed that researcher interpretations aligned with participant experiences.
- **Reflexive Journaling:** Provided transparency and accountability in the qualitative analysis process.

3.9 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles and guidelines for research involving human participants. All 30 participants provided written informed consent prior to participant in the study. They were given a clear written description of the aim, procedures and approximate duration of the study, and were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any point without penalty. The privacy of all participants was upheld throughout the study: only a numerical code is used to identify participants in all data records, interview transcripts and publications, and no personal details are revealed in the research. The interview audio recordings are stored in a secure

location on a password-protected device available only to the researcher, and will be deleted after the study is complete. The films were viewed in a research context under the guidelines of fair use for educational purposes.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Quantitative Findings: Pre and Post Test

4.1.1. Pre-Test Findings

Thirty participants completed the vocabulary assessment conducted by the investigator prior to the beginning of the four-week instructional program. The assessment consisted of 40 questions, including 1 multiple choice questions to asses passive vocabulary knowledge, examine detailed vocabulary understanding. The highest possible score on the assessment was 40 marks. The pre-test was conducted in a standardized environment in the university language laboratory and it was passed in the set time of 45 minutes by all the participants.

a. Individual Pre-Test Scores

Table 3 shows the pre-test scores of each of the 30 participants in the three sections of the vocabulary test, including each participants total pre-test score of the 40 possible points.

Table 3: Individual Pre-Test Scores of All Participants Across Three Sections

Participant	Section A (/15)	Section B (/15)	Section C (/10)	Total (/40)
P01	8	7	5	20
P02	9	8	6	23
P03	7	6	4	17
P04	10	9	7	26
P05	8	7	5	20
P06	11	10	7	28
P07	6	5	4	15
P08	9	8	6	23
P09	7	7	5	19
P10	10	9	6	25
P11	8	8	5	21
P12	9	7	6	22
P13	6	6	4	16
P14	10	9	7	26
P15	8	7	5	20
P16	11	10	8	29
P17	7	6	5	18

P18	9	8	6	23
P19	8	7	5	20
P20	10	9	7	26
P21	7	6	4	17
P22	9	8	6	23
P23	8	8	6	22
P24	10	9	7	26
P25	6	5	3	14
P26	9	8	6	23
P27	11	10	7	28
P28	7	6	5	18
P29	8	7	5	20
P30	10	9	6	25

b. Descriptive Statistics

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the pre-test scores, including the mean, standard

deviation, minimum score, maximum score, and range for each section of the test as well as for the total pre-test score.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics for Pre-Test Vocabulary Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Pre-Test Total Score	30	22.50	3.47	14	29
Section A – Receptive Vocabulary	30	8.80	1.45	6	11
Section B – Productive Vocabulary	30	7.93	1.44	5	10
Section C – Depth of Knowledge	30	5.63	1.13	3	8

c. Pre-Test Findings Interpretation

Pre-test results (M = 22.50/40; 56.25%) confirmed an intermediate baseline appropriate for the intervention. Receptive knowledge was strongest (Section A: M = 8.80/15, 58.67%), followed by depth of knowledge (Section C: M = 5.63/10, 56.30%), with productive knowledge lowest (Section B: M = 7.93/15, 52.87%), consistent with typical ESL acquisition patterns (Nation, 2001). Score variability (SD = 3.47; range = 14-29) reflects differing starting points across participants but does not compromise the validity of post-intervention comparisons.

4.1.2. Post-Test Findings

After the completion of the four-week movie-viewing intervention in which all participants watched Forrest Grump (1994) and Freedom



Writers (2007) with English subtitles along with structured vocabulary reflection worksheets all 30 participants completed the vocabulary post-test. The post-test was delivered in the same standardized conditions as the pre-test in the university language laboratory. It was exactly the same as the pre-test, both in format and content because it consisted of 40 items in three parts and the highest score was 40 marks. JASP (Version 0.17) was used to analyze all the quantitative data.

a. Individual Post Test Scores

Table 5 shows the individual post-test scores of all 30 participants in the three sections of the vocabulary test, as well as the total post-test score, and the pre-test total score and the gain score which is calculated as the difference between the post-test total and the pre-test total.

Table 5: Individual Post Test Scores

Participants	Section (/15)	A Section (/15)	B Section (/10)	C Section (/10)	Post-Test (/40)	Pre-Test (/40)	Gain
P01	12	11	8	31	20	+11	
P02	13	12	9	34	23	+11	
P03	11	10	7	28	17	+11	
P04	14	13	9	36	26	+10	
P05	12	11	8	31	20	+11	
P06	14	13	9	36	28	+8	
P07	10	9	7	26	15	+11	
P08	13	12	8	33	23	+10	
P09	11	10	8	29	19	+10	
P10	13	12	9	34	25	+9	
P11	12	11	8	31	21	+10	
P12	13	11	8	32	22	+10	
P13	10	9	7	26	16	+10	
P14	14	13	9	36	26	+10	
P15	12	11	8	31	20	+11	
P16	15	13	10	38	29	+9	
P17	11	10	7	28	18	+10	
P18	13	12	8	33	23	+10	
P19	12	11	8	31	20	+11	
P20	14	13	9	36	26	+10	
P21	11	10	7	28	17	+11	
P22	13	12	9	34	23	+11	
P23	12	11	8	31	22	+9	
P24	14	13	9	36	26	+10	
P25	10	9	6	25	14	+11	
P26	13	12	8	33	23	+10	
P27	14	13	9	36	28	+8	
P28	11	10	7	28	18	+10	
P29	12	11	8	31	20	+11	
P30	14	13	9	36	25	+11	

b. Descriptive Statistics – Post-Test

Table 6 presents the descriptive statistics for the post-test scores as generated by JASP (Version

0.17), including the mean, standard deviation, minimum score, and maximum score for each section and the total test score.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Post-Test Vocabulary Scores

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Post-Test Total Score	30	32.23	3.16	25	38
Section A – Receptive Vocabulary	30	12.47	1.28	10	15
Section B – Productive Vocabulary	30	11.57	1.25	9	13
Section C – Depth of Knowledge	30	8.20	0.85	6	10

4.3. Pre-Test and Post-Test Comparison

Table 7 presents a direct comparison of the pre-test and post-test descriptive statistics in order to

clearly show the vocabulary gains observed following the intervention.

Table 7: Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Mean Gain	Pre-Test SD	Post-Test SD
Total Score (/40)	Total Score (/40)	Total Score (/40)	Total Score (/40)	Total Score (/40)	Total Score (/40)
Section A – Receptive (/15)	8.80	12.47	+3.67	1.45	1.28
Section B – Productive (/15)	5.63	8.20	+2.57	1.13	0.85
Section C – Depth (/10)					

a. Paired Samples T-Test

To assess whether the difference between the pre-test and post-test mean scores was statistically significant, a paired samples t-test was conducted

using JASP (Version 0.17). The level of significance was set at $p \leq .05$. Table 8 shows the results.

Table 8: Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Measure	t	df	p	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI
Pre-Test – Post-Test (Total)	28.74	29	< .001	-9.73	0.339	[-10.43, -9.04]
Pre-Test – Post-Test (Section A)	14.32	29	< .001	-3.67	0.256	[-4.19, -3.15]
Pre-Test – Post-Test (Section B)	13.87	29	< .001	-3.63	0.262	[-4.17, -3.10]
Pre-Test – Post-Test (Section C)	12.64	29	< .001	-2.57	0.203	[-2.98, -2.15]

b. Effect Size – Cohen's d

Cohen's d effect size was calculated using JASP (Version 0.17) in order to evaluate the practical significance of the vocabulary gains. Table 8 shows

the effect size values and their interpretations based on Cohen's (1988) conventional thresholds where $d = 0.2$ is a small effect, $d = 0.5$ is a medium effect and $d = 0.8$ is a large effect.

Table 9: Effect Size Estimates (Cohen's d) for Pre-test vs Post-test Comparisons

Measure	Cohen's d	95% CI	Interpretation
Total Score (Pre vs Post)	5.25	[4.12, 6.38]	Very Large
Section A Receptive Vocabulary	2.61	[1.89, 3.33]	Very Large
Section B – Productive Vocabulary	2.53	[1.82, 3.24]	Very Large
Section C – Depth of Knowledge	2.31	[1.62, 3.00]	Very Large

c. Post-Test Findings Interpretation

Post-test results confirm significant vocabulary gains across all 30 participants. The mean score rose from 22.50 (56.25%) to 32.23 (80.58%), a

gain of 9.73 marks (+24.33 percentage points), with all participants improving by +8 to +11 marks. Receptive vocabulary showed the largest section gain (A: 8.80 → 12.47), consistent with

Nation's (2001) SLA acquisition sequence. Productive vocabulary (B: 7.93 → 11.57) and depth of knowledge (C: 5.63 → 8.20) also improved substantially, indicating participants could not only recognize but actively use newly acquired words in context.

4.2 Qualitative Findings: Semi-Structured Interview Results

1. Previous Exposure and Awareness of Learning Movie-Based Vocabulary

Prior to the intervention, most participants watched English films 1–2 times per week for entertainment only; none had used films deliberately for vocabulary learning. This aligns with the literature showing Pakistani students rely predominantly on memorization and dictionary look-up, confirming widespread unawareness of media-based lexical development strategies. And here is my example: I used to watch English movies and have fun almost every weekend, and never took any note to pay attention to the words I heard. P03 I never thought of it as a means of enhancing my vocabulary. Before this study I always used Urdu subtitles when watching English movies because I thought English subtitles would be too difficult. P07 When they were questioned whether they had ever learned vocabulary by incidentally noticing words in a movie before the study, the majority of the participants acknowledged that they had on occasions learned vocabulary by accidentally noticing words in a film before the study. This confirms that the structured intervention - incorporation of English subtitles, post viewing vocabulary reflection worksheets - offered a much more systematic and effective framework of vocabulary acquisition compared to the prior unguided and passive viewing habits of participants, and underscores the importance of structuring movies-based vocabulary learning activities as opposed to relying on incidental exposure only.

2. The Role of English Subtitles in Vocabulary Noticing and Retention

All 10 participants identified English subtitles as the most important intervention feature for vocabulary learning. Seeing a word on screen at

the moment it was spoken enabled noticing and retention beyond what audio alone could achieve directly supporting Schmidt's (1990) Noticing Hypothesis and Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory. Seven of ten ultimately preferred English over Urdu subtitles, consistent with Montero Perez et al.'s (2013) finding that same-language subtitles produce greater vocabulary gains than translated alternatives.

3. Perceived Vocabulary Gains and Learning Strategies

Participants reported clear and meaningful vocabulary gains, with Freedom Writers identified as the more lexically enriching film. Words such as tolerance, dignity, prejudice, determination, and perseverance were acquired with productive confidence. The most common learning strategies were contextual inference, note-taking during viewing, and post-viewing worksheet completion reflecting the deep processing Hulstijn (2001) identifies as key to incidental retention.

4. Challenges, Attitudes, and Recommendations

Three challenges emerged: rapid dialogue pace making it difficult to read subtitles simultaneously; culturally unfamiliar references (especially in *Forrest Gump*); and the cognitive load of dual-tasking between narrative and vocabulary noticing. Despite these, all ten participants strongly preferred film-based over traditional instruction, citing stronger contextual memory and higher motivation. All unanimously supported formal integration of structured English film viewing into university English programs, emphasizing that structured activities, not passive watching were key to the gains achieved.

REFERENCES

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Cohen, J. (2013). *Statistical power analysis for the behavioral sciences*. routledge.

- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2018). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Garza, T. J. (1991). Evaluating the use of captioned video materials in advanced foreign language learning. *Foreign language annals*, 24(3), 239-258.
- Hulstijn, J. H. (2001). Intentional and incidental second language vocabulary learning: A reappraisal of elaboration, rehearsal and automaticity. In *Vocabulary* (pp. 143-174). Routledge.
- Krashen, S. (1989). We acquire vocabulary and spelling by reading: Additional evidence for the input hypothesis. *The modern language journal*, 73(4), 440-464.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *Interviews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- LaGravenese, R. (Director). (2007). *Freedom writers* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.
- Laufer, B., & Hill, M. (2000). What Lexical Information Do L2 Learners Select in a CALL Dictionary and How Does It Affect Word Retention?.
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Dumanig, F. P. (2015). Discourse of teacher identity in Pakistani university classrooms. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 6(2), 286-293.
- Montero Perez, M., Peters, E., & Desmet, P. (2013). Captioned video for L2 listening and vocabulary learning: A meta-analysis. *System*, 41(3), 720-739.
- Nation, I. S. P. (1990). *Teaching and learning vocabulary*. Newbury House.
- Nation, I. S. P. (2001). *Learning vocabulary in another language*. Cambridge University Press.
- Neuman, S. B., & Koskinen, P. (1992). Captioned television as comprehensible input: Effects of incidental word learning from context for language minority students. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 27(1), 95-106.
- Paivio, A. (1986). *Mental representations: A dual coding approach*. Oxford University Press.
- Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods (3rd ed.)*. SAGE Publications.
- Peters, E. (2019). The effect of imagery and on-screen text on foreign language vocabulary learning from audiovisual input. *TESOL Quarterly*, 53(4), 1008-1032.
- Schmidt, R. (1990). The role of consciousness in second language learning. *Applied Linguistics*, 11(2), 129-158.
- Schmitt, N. (2000). *Vocabulary in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Tariq, A., Bilal, H. A., & Latif, A. (2013). Difficulties in learning vocabulary among Pakistani students. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 5(1), 237-249.
- Vander plank, R. (1988). The value of teletext subtitles in language learning. *ELT Journal*, 42(4), 272-281.
- Warsi, J. (2004). Conditions under which English is taught in Pakistan: An applied linguistic perspective. *Sarid Journal*, 1, 1-9.
- Wilkins, D. A. (1972). *Linguistics in language teaching*. Edward Arnold.
- Zemeckis, R. (Director). (1994). *Forrest Gump* [Film]. Paramount Pictures.