

# Challenges of Vocabulary Retention among ESL Learners in India

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## **Abstract**

Retention of vocabulary is one of the hurdles that ESL learners in India experience since the students usually have problems in retaining and using new words properly. The study aims at determining the strategies that can lead to the enhancement of vocabulary retention through the comparison of the traditional and non-traditional teaching methods. The qualitative approach is used, secondary data, i.e. the available literature and reports, is examined to study the reasons of vocabulary acquisition and retention. The findings show that the very idea of rote memorization used in the Indian educational systems can hardly be considered effective in the aspects of long-term memorizing since the idea cannot encourage serious thinking. On the contrary, context-based learning, collaborative dialogue and multimedia tools are some of the strategies that have demonstrated themselves to enhance retention by involving students in more meaningful and interactive learning experiences. The study indicates the necessity of the integrated approach, which entails the combination of conventional methods and ground breaking approaches to the needs of different learners. It emphasizes the need to offer practical language application and integrate technology to enhance retention of vocabulary. Further studies are needed to determine the effectiveness of these strategies in the long run and to find out the contribution of socio-cultural variables & technology to the improvement of vocabulary learning in ESL.

**Keywords:** *Vocabulary retention, ESL learners, language acquisition, teaching strategies, education in India.*

## **1. Introduction**

Retention of vocabulary is also a major problem among English as Second Language (ESL) students in India whereby most of them have problems retaining and using new words despite their efforts to learn the vocabulary. A number of reasons explain this issue, such as the fact that the target language is not taught beyond the classroom, there are few chances to practice the language in a meaningful manner, and there is so much information that students should memorize. The fact that some learners find it hard to remember vocabulary is because of poor reinforcement and, therefore, they cannot remember and apply the words in a real life. Also, the rote memorization methodologies that are used in the Indian education systems do not always encourage the long-term retention of the vocabulary, and hence shallow learning (Vasu, and Dhanavel., 218-226).

The way of overcoming these problems is through strategies that enable teachers to develop more profound learning and vocabulary retention. Techniques such as contextual learning where students are exposed to new words in context are one of the ways of solidifying the understanding. Other methods that can be used to improve retention are spaced repetition, interactive activities, and vocabulary games, which offer constant and sustained practice and involvement. In addition, the use of real-life language use including peer discussion or exposure to the English media can be used to support vocabulary retention and help learners use the newly acquired words in their daily speech (Kaphle, 31-43).

## 2. Literature review

**Dhuli, R., & Guduru, R. (2025)** examined vocabulary activation strategies that enhanced ESL speaking skills in rural India. 520 students of Khurdha district underwent pre-testing and post-testing. The experimental group of students who applied high-frequency vocabulary strategies was found to be better than the control group, which provided evidence of the effectiveness of these techniques in rural ESL education.

**Kaphle, K. R. (2024)** revealed that students faced a problem in their ability to learn vocabulary, including pronunciation, spelling, and memorisation. Nevertheless, there were students who made an efficient use of various resources. Teacher support and peer support were needed. The study found that promoting collaborative learning and customised instruction was essential when it came to enhancing language proficiency.

**Vasu, S., & Dhanavel, S. P. (2023)** examined the perceptions of 730 first-year engineering students of Anna University regarding their vocabulary learning and their choice of available sources to learn new words. It was found that students had been aware of the significance of vocabulary in understanding text, and their preferences for learning resources had depended on gender and medium of education.

**Kottacheruvu, N. (2023)** studied the preference of postgraduate students in Maulana Azad National Urdu University regarding the use of extensive reading, context clues, and flashcards to learn vocabulary. Students appreciated vocabulary learning in the context and the use of technology-based tools. The study concluded that the contextual and technological ways of teaching vocabulary were more effective than the latter.

**Ahmadian, M., & Tajabadi, A. (2020)** studied the effects of collaborative conversation on vocabulary learning and retention in 18 learners of English as a Foreign Language. The results indicated that accurate resolution of lexical related episodes positively impacted vocabulary learning and retention, while unresolved LREs and incorrectly resolved LREs inhibited accurate learning. The paper emphasised the significance of the collaborative discussion in the language instruction as the means of productive vocabulary acquisition.

Although there is an increasing amount of study on vocabulary learning strategies, a number of gaps exist. In the majority of the studies, a particular educational context, such as rural schools or a post-graduate environment, is involved without considering how the socio-cultural factor influences vocabulary learning. The effectiveness of vocabulary strategies and their influence by contextual factors and the differences in individual

learners is a topic requiring further investigation. The studies comparing the long-term retention of vocabulary using these different methods are also lacking.

### 3. Research methodology

The study takes a qualitative method of study to uncover the issue facing vocabulary retention among ESL students in India. A descriptive and analytical research design is used to give a detailed explanation of the factors affecting the vocabulary retention. The study mainly uses secondary data, the available literature, reports, and the past study on vocabulary learning and retaining in ESL. Through such secondary sources, the study expects to know the major issues, as well as get an idea of the possible effective measures of enhancing vocabulary retention among ESL students in India.

### 4. Descriptive analysis based on objectives

**Objective 1:** To examine the effectiveness of various vocabulary learning strategies in enhancing the vocabulary acquisition and language proficiency of ESL learners.

English language educators and researchers have encountered challenges in assisting students learning ESL to achieve proficiency. Vocabulary proficiency is a crucial component in acquiring the English language as a second language. To improve students' language competency, effective vocabulary acquisition programs must promote vocabulary learning. Language learners exhibit more ease in utilising a target language when they possess familiarity with a substantial piece of its vocabulary. Efficient vocabulary acquisition techniques encompass utilising contextual hints, establishing associations among terms, and engaging in consistent practice. These tactics can assist pupils in augmenting their vocabulary and enhancing their confidence in utilising the target language (Patil, 51).

Effective vocabulary acquisition approaches are essential for language learning as they enhance vocabulary development and competency in English. Potential strategies for aiding individuals with vocabulary acquisition encompass mnemonic devices, context-based learning, and spaced repetition. Furthermore, integrating multimedia materials like movies, podcasts, and interactive quizzes might enhance the language acquisition process. It is essential to recognise that individuals possess distinct preferences and learning styles, necessitating the provision of diverse techniques to accommodate varying needs. Furthermore, consistent practice and exposure to the language via reading, writing, speaking, and listening can augment vocabulary acquisition (Kottacheruvu, 37-60).

**Objective 2:** To investigate the factors that hinder effective vocabulary retention.

The different support and reasons why ESL learners fail to retain new vocabulary. The main issue is the fact that out-of-class exposure to the target language is also minimal and thus, learners have fewer opportunities to rehearse and strengthen the new words. Rote memorization is also used by a lot of learners and it might work in

the short run, but this technique does not tend to guarantee long-term retention. Furthermore, cognitive aspects like the working memory capacity and motivation are also a key factor with some learners having a problem retaining new words because of the lack of processing in the mind or low interest (Boonkongsaen, 45-53).

Moreover, teaching strategies are able to improve or be a hindrance to vocabulary acquisition. Conventional instruction methods where emphasis is put on repetitive exercises might not promote in-depth learning, whereas more interactive and context-driven methods of learning might promote retention. The contribution of technology and multimedia tools to the learning of vocabulary is discussed because the tools may offer more participatory and interactive means of reviewing the vocabulary. The study explores the interaction effects of various teaching strategies, learners and external influences on vocabulary retention (Rahmat, & Mohandas, 2).

## 5. Discussion

The vocabulary retention of ESL learners in India is a complicated question, and it is predetermined by a complex of pedagogical strategies, socio-cultural factors and a system of personal characteristics of a learner (Singh, 39-45). In Indian education system, rote methods of memorizing are prevalent, yet it has been identified to have low rates of vocabulary retention in the long term, as there is no in-depth and contextual processing and learning (Patil, 51). Nevertheless, the latter strategy is more active, when it comes to context-based learning, multimedia, and collaborative conversations; the latter strategies have been shown to be more efficient in terms of enhancing retention (Tutal, 1-16). It is found out that one of the key determinants of poor vocabulary retention is non-classroom exposure to the language of interest, which as a rule in rural communities is limited (Maftuh, et al., 54-65).

## 6. Conclusion

Marginal vocabulary retention among ESL learners in India unleashes issues surrounding vocabulary retention among ESL learners whereby the major allure is the conventional rote learning which does not give the students any vocabulary retention. The findings suggest that the retention of vocabulary can be significantly promoted with the aid of more active measures such as the context-based learning, interactive dialogue, and multimedia-based tools. However, the lack of exposure to the target language outside of the classroom environment and the absence of the practice opportunities are also key impediments, particularly in the rural context. The implication is that more comprehensive approach, a blend of the old and new ways of learning should be used in an attempt to enhance retention. Study needs to be done on long-term effectiveness of these strategies and how such can be enhanced by socio-cultural aspects and technology towards assisting in the retention of vocabulary in a number of learning contexts.

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