English Vocabulary Enhancement Strategies for ESL Learners: A Survey-Based Analysis

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Students often spend hours studying through textbooks, practicing grammatical exercises, and maybe even viewing the occasional streaming series in the target language in order to acquire proficiency in it. Many individuals, however, are unaware that working on vocabulary is just as crucial, if not more so, than working on grammar when it comes to learning a target language. By learning new words, language learners can expand their vocabularies and improve their ability to speak clearly and efficiently. However, those who do understand the need to learn vocabulary often come across numerous challenges in learning it. The main aim of this study was to examine the effective ways of learning and enhancing vocabulary through surveys and interviews with postgraduate students at Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad, India. This study employed a quantitative methodology to explain problems using numerical data. The sample group 33 participants were selected at random, and the questionnaire was constructed in Google Docs with multiple types of questions based on their subjective choice(s) of vocabulary learning or enhancing methods. A Google Docs summary of all scaled answers was used to figure out the rate of vocabulary-learning problems. An interview was based on organized and appropriate open-ended questions. The most effective ways of learning vocabulary were by reading extensively, using context clues, and practicing with flashcards. Additionally, the students reported that learning vocabulary in context and using technology-based tools also helped enhance their vocabulary skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

Strong communication abilities are more important than ever in today's challenging, rapidly developing world. To attain this objective, one must comprehend the vital role vocabulary plays in effective communication in our everyday lives. Vocabulary is essential for English competency, as it serves as the basis for all communication. It is essential for us to communicate our views and ideas, share knowledge, better understand others, and create

personal connections. It is essential for us to communicate our views and ideas, share knowledge, better understand others, and create personal connections. Effective communication not only helps us express ourselves but also enables us to build strong relationships, resolve conflicts, and achieve our goals with the support of others. Therefore, it is crucial to develop good communication skills to succeed in both personal and professional life. Wilkins (1972) has observed the importance of vocabulary by stating that "while without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (pp. 111–112). English language instructors and researchers have experienced a difficult time helping students who are learning English as a Second Language (ESL) to become proficient in the language. Vocabulary knowledge is an essential aspect of learning the English language while studying a second language. Read (2000) believed that vocabulary knowledge is essential for effective language acquisition as it improves language learners' understanding of complex structures. To enhance students' language proficiency, effective vocabulary learning strategies must encourage vocabulary learning. This is because language learners are more at ease using a target language when they are comfortable with a large portion of its vocabulary. Effective vocabulary learning strategies include using context clues, making connections between words, and practicing regularly. These strategies can help students expand their vocabulary and feel more confident in using the target language. According to Schmitt (1997), vocabulary learning strategies are methods or actions that aid language learners in picking up and remembering vocabulary. Language learning requires effective vocabulary learning techniques because they promote vocabulary growth and English language proficiency. When given the option to choose from a variety of instructional strategies, students can adapt their approach to the circumstances and may decide to use a particular strategy if it is appropriate, practical, and useful (Nation, 2001). This study concentrates on techniques to enhance the effectiveness of the language-learning process by accelerating vocabulary acquisition and includes potential methods for assisting those who want to learn vocabulary but are unable to do so and whose efforts are futile due to a lack of knowledge about effective vocabulary learning techniques. Some potential methods for assisting those struggling with vocabulary acquisition include the use of mnemonic devices, context-based learning, and spaced repetition. Additionally, incorporating multimedia resources such as videos, podcasts, and interactive quizzes can also aid in the language-learning process. It is important to note that different individuals may have varying preferences and learning styles, so it is crucial to offer a variety of methods to cater to diverse needs. Moreover, regular practice and exposure to the language through reading, writing, speaking, and listening can also enhance vocabulary acquisition.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Richards (2000), the direct approach was the most popular of numerous "natural" methods launched towards the end of the nineteenth century. Its name is derived from the priority of immediately associating meaning to the target language without the step of translation. The use of the target language exclusively in the classroom, the teaching of ordinary vocabulary by example and abstract vocabulary association of ideas, and the emphasis on pronunciation are the main characteristics of this method's vocabulary teaching. This method is known as the Direct Method or Natural Method and it was developed in the

late 19th century as a response to the grammar-translation method that was dominant at the time. Before developing this paper, Nie and Zhou (2017) carried out a research titled, "A study of vocabulary learning strategies used by excellent English learners". The purpose of this study was to uncover common vocabulary learning tactics employed by good English vocabulary learners for the benefit of people who want to enhance their vocabulary abilities, so that they may be substantially enlightened to achieve double the result with half the work while learning vocabulary. Furthermore, the study sought to analyze and discover a link between vocabulary learning approaches and vocabulary level. The research was an attempt to find a range of vocabulary acquisition techniques utilized by various English learners during the lengthy process of vocabulary learning and consolidation. The study began with a theoretical assessment of vocabulary learning techniques employed by academics in relevant disciplines, followed by an experiment demonstrating some typical tactics employed by three postgraduates. It also sought to study the relationship between the number of vocabulary learning strategies and vocabulary level. Finally, the study made recommendations for vocabulary learning, including the use of various vocabulary learning strategies such as contextual guessing, word association, and using dictionaries. Regular vocabulary practice and exposure to a wide range of vocabulary in different contexts were also emphasized. Moreover, the study suggested that learners should focus on learning high-frequency words first and then gradually move on to less common words. Additionally, it was recommended that learners engage in meaningful and authentic communication to enhance their vocabulary acquisition.

According to Afzal (2019), proficiency in the English language depends on the knowledge of its vocabulary possessed by the second and foreign language learners and even the native speakers. Though developing the vocabulary is vital, it poses several problems, especially for non-native English speakers. Students with low vocabulary knowledge show weak academic performance in different courses related to language skills, linguistics, literature, and translation at the university level of education. His research aimed to better understand the difficulties faced by English majors at Prince Stattam bin Abdul-Aziz University (PSAU) in Saudi Arabia. It also provides advice on how to improve your vocabulary and avoid any pitfalls. One hundred postgraduate students from levels four through eight of PSAU's BA English course were randomly selected to participate in the survey. This quantitative study used an online survey to collect its data. According to the findings, students majoring in English at PSAU encountered several difficulties while trying to expand their vocabularies, including difficulties with pronunciation, memorization, and spelling. The research made a difference by drawing students' attention to the significance of acquiring English vocabulary, highlighting the challenges they face, and increasing their vocabulary sensitivity. In future research, it would be interesting to find out more about how English teachers perceive vocabulary problems among their students and the methods they use to help them learn it. This could potentially lead to the development of more effective teaching strategies and materials for vocabulary acquisition in English language classrooms. Additionally, investigating the relationship between vocabulary knowledge and overall language proficiency could also be a valuable area of exploration for future research.

3. METHODOLOGY

This investigation employed a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods by means of an online questionnaire and an interview to identify postgraduate students' standard vocabulary for better understanding the factors that affect their vocabulary acquisition. This study includes 33 participants who were selected at random. During the piloting phase, it was assured that the participants were competent enough to interpret the questionnaire. This study employed the Google Docs platform, which allows for real-time collaboration and communication, to create and administer the online questionnaire, resulting in increased efficiency and more accurate data handling via a unique URL. A questionnaire was constructed with multiple types of questions based on the students' subjective choice(s) of vocabulary learning or enhancing methods and applied vocabulary to assess the students' vocabulary-learning concerns. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: part I consisted of three (3) questions that were based on the individual's experience with vocabulary learning, while part II consisted of seventeen (17) questions that were used to test the participant's vocabulary. After the questionnaire was filled out, a Google Docs summary of all the scaled answers was used to figure out the rate of vocabulary-learning problems, which was then explained in the results part. The study used mixed methods; quantitative and qualitative to collect data. The interview was based on a set of organised and appropriate open-ended questions. Participants were invited to talk to in person with the researcher, and their answers were taken into account to help figure out what was going on. The researcher ensured that the questions were relevant to the research topic and allowed for detailed responses from the participants. The information gathered from the interviews was analyzed to gain insights into the research problem.

3.1 Problem Statement

By learning new words, language learners can expand their vocabularies and improve their ability to speak clearly and efficiently. However, acquiring the meaning, spelling, and grammar of a new word can be difficult for those whose first language is not English. Pronunciation, using words correctly, figuring out what they mean from the situation, and other things can be problems from many sides. Therefore, it is critical to identify the reasons behind students' difficulties in learning new words, propose techniques to help them better learn the target words, and provide opportunities for learning new words. By addressing these issues, students can improve their vocabulary, which is essential for effective communication and academic success. Additionally, incorporating fun and engaging activities can make the learning process more enjoyable and effective. Some effective strategies for improving vocabulary include reading extensively, using flashcards, and practicing with word games. By implementing these methods in a fun and engaging way, students can not only expand their vocabulary but also develop a love for learning new words. It is important to note that building vocabulary is a continuous process that requires consistent effort and practice. Students should also aim to use newly learned words in their writing and speech to reinforce their understanding and retention of the words.

3.2 Sample and Setting

The study sample was composed of thirty-three (33) ESL students, whose mother tongue and medium of instruction were Urdu, ranging in age from 21 to 23 years, postgraduate students of Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU), Hyderabad, Telangana, India. They all had at least twelve (12) years of experience learning English because they had all studied English as a second language since elementary school. Regarding their academic and professional learning experiences, it was assumed that all participants had similar backgrounds in learning the English language. The participants in this study also attended compulsory education, which offered comparable subjects and content, for the entire twelve years that they spent learning English. However, it is important to note that the participants may have had different exposures to English outside of their formal education, such as through media or social interactions. Additionally, their individual motivation and learning strategies may have varied. Therefore, it is difficult to determine the exact influence of formal education on their English proficiency. Future studies could explore these factors in more detail to gain a better understanding of the relationship between formal education and language proficiency.

3.3. Tools

Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies served as the basis for the 20-item questionnaire used in this study. The items were divided into five categories: willpower, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive. The participant's use of overall vocabulary learning strategies and a one-on-one interview were the two sections of the questionnaire. The determination category included items related to goal setting and motivation, while the social category focused on strategies involving interaction with others. The memory category covered techniques for memorising vocabulary; the cognitive category addressed strategies for understanding word meanings; and the metacognitive category included items related to self-evaluation and monitoring of vocabulary learning progress. Overall, the categorization of vocabulary learning strategies provides a comprehensive framework for language learners to improve their vocabulary acquisition skills. By identifying the specific strategies that work best for them, learners can tailor their approach to vocabulary learning and achieve greater success in language acquisition.

3.4. Participants' Interview

A semi-structured interview allows individuals to demonstrate their independent thinking without being confronted by peers in a focus group and allows the participants' responses to be explored. In the current study, general questions were asked at the start of the interview to establish a positive relationship between the interviewer and the interviewees. The interview questions focused on the strategies that students used to learn the meaning of unknown words and to remember the meaning of newly learned words. The students' motivation for employing these strategies was also investigated. In order to ensure the reliability and validity of the interview questions, they were translated into Urdu by two certified English-Urdu

translators and evaluated by English language teaching experts. The responses of the students were examined using statistical analysis to identify any patterns or trends in their answers, which were then used to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the interview questions in eliciting the desired information from the participants.

3.5. Procedure

The main study was conducted with a group of participants who exhibited similar traits. A 30-minute questionnaire was used to gather information on vocabulary learning techniques, and a semi-structured interview was conducted with 33 students in Urdu. The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to tabulate the filled out questionnaires and count the responses. The interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The results were then examined using qualitative and quantitative techniques, yielding insightful information about the perspectives and experiences of the participants. This information can be used to guide future research and enhance comprehension of the subject. Furthermore, the findings of this study could also inform policy and practice, as they shed light on the needs and challenges faced by individuals in this particular context. Therefore, it is important to consider these results when developing interventions or programmers aimed at improving outcomes for this population.

4. DATA INTERPRETATION:

A total of thirty-three participants participated in the virtual survey that was conducted for this study. The main goal of this study was to identify postgraduate university students with a common vocabulary so that those looking to expand their vocabulary could use their learning strategies and recommendations. The survey results showed that the majority of the participants had a good command of standard vocabulary, and their learning strategies included reading books, watching movies, and using flashcards. Based on these findings, recommendations were made for effective vocabulary improvement techniques for university postgraduate students. The recommendations included incorporating more reading materials and movies into the curriculum, providing access to vocabulary-building apps and games, and encouraging students to use flashcards regularly. Additionally, the study suggested that teachers should provide feedback on students' written work to help them improve their use of standard vocabulary. The implementation of these recommendations can enhance students' vocabulary acquisition and improve their writing skills. It is important for teachers to actively engage in these practices to ensure the success of their students. By providing students with a variety of reading materials and encouraging them to write frequently, teachers can create a language-rich environment that fosters learning. Additionally, incorporating vocabulary-building activities and strategies into daily lessons can further support students' language development.

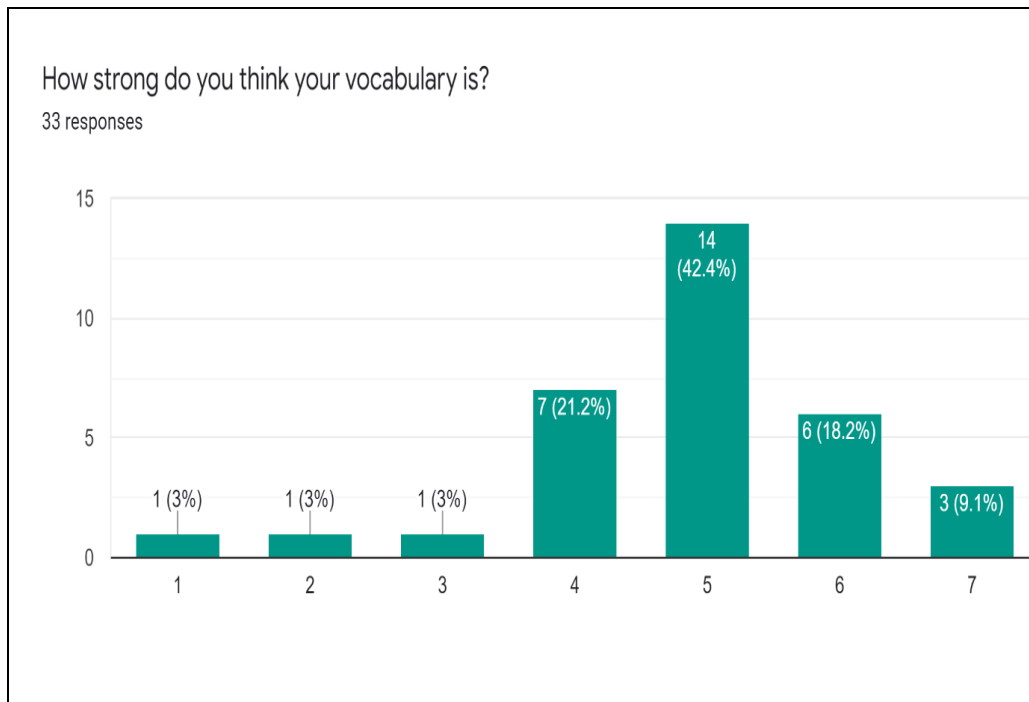*Part 1: A Survey on Vocabulary Learning Strategies:*
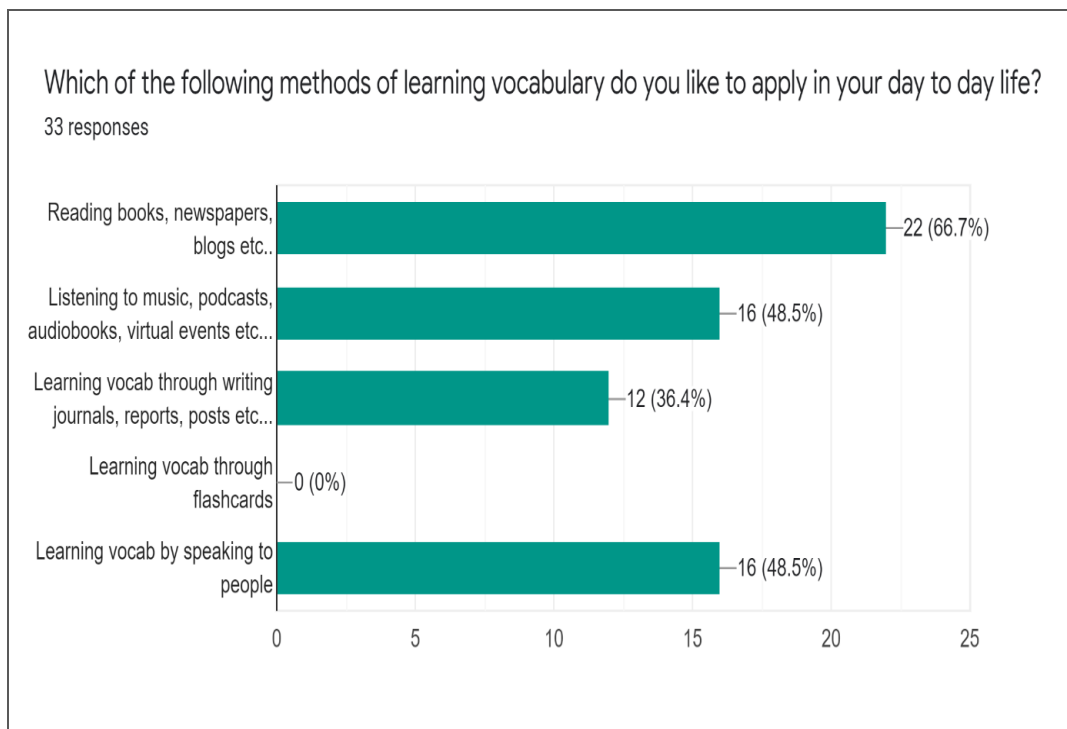

Figure 1 Overall Vocabulary Learning Levels

Figure 2 Overall of Learning Strategies

Part-2

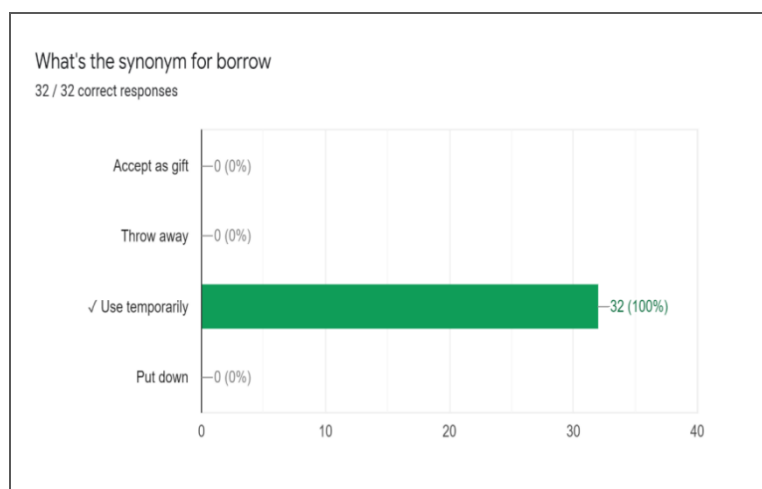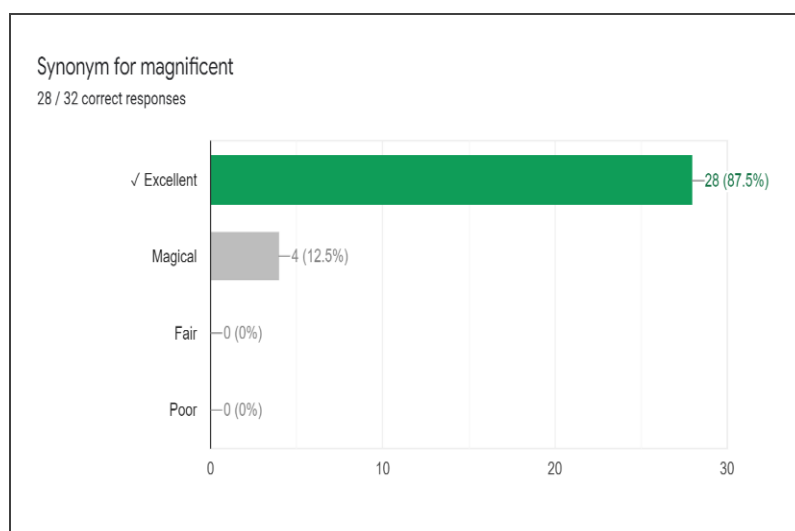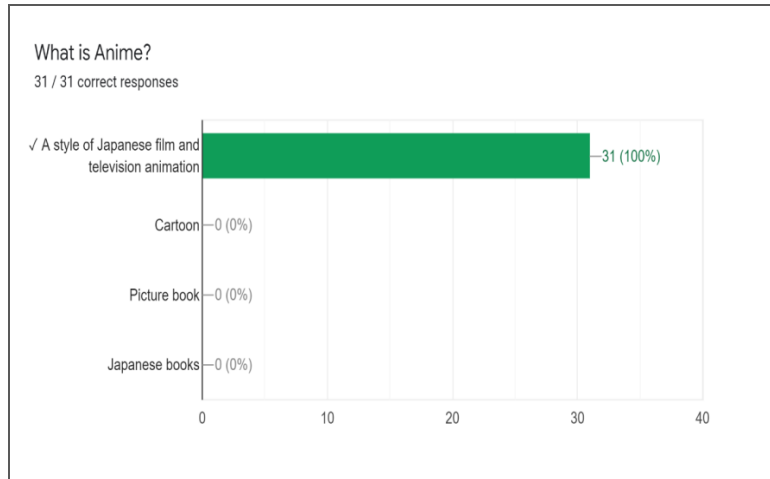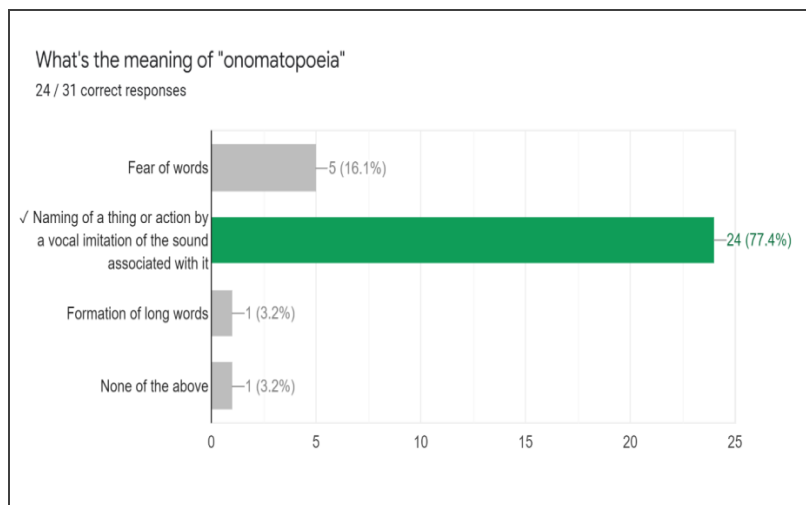| Average	Median	Range
27.12	27/35	4-35 points

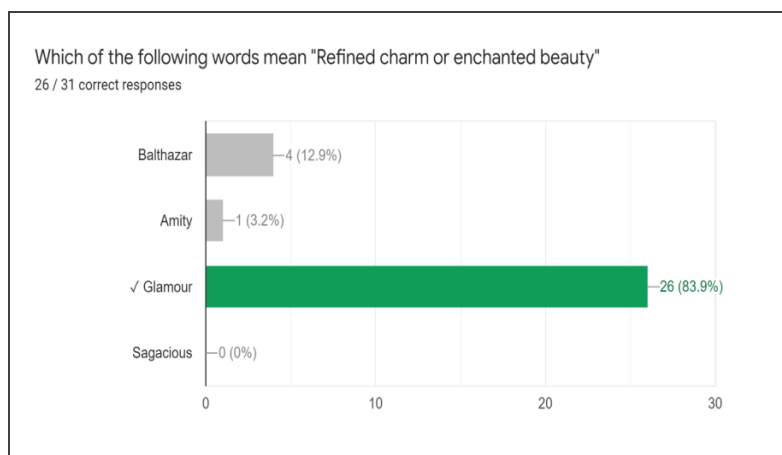Table 1

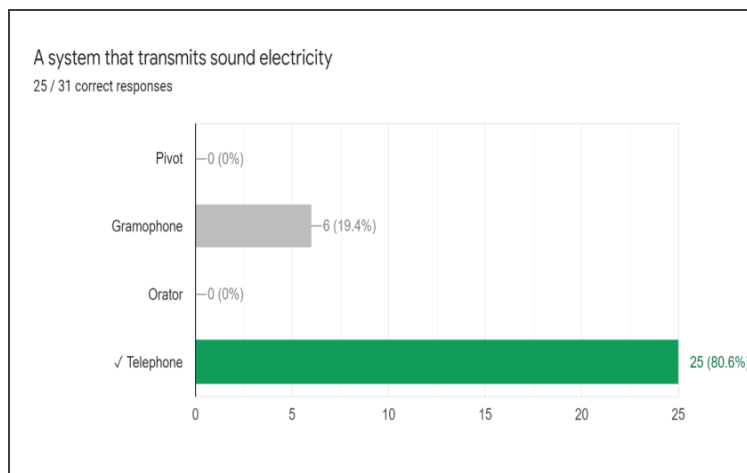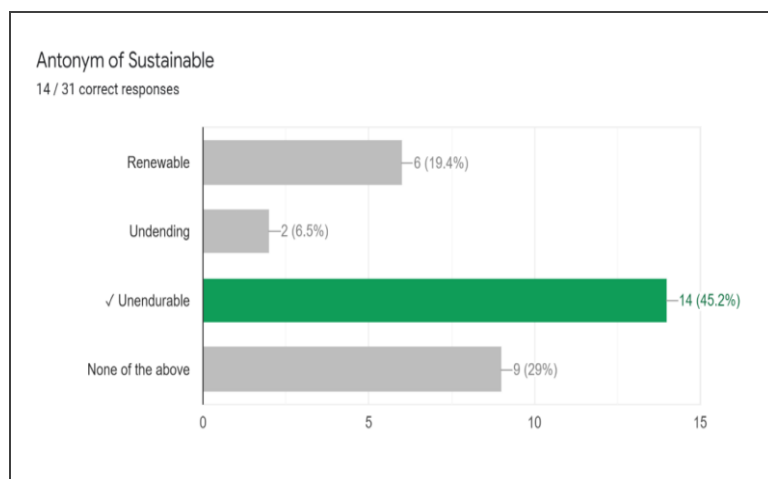*Insights:*
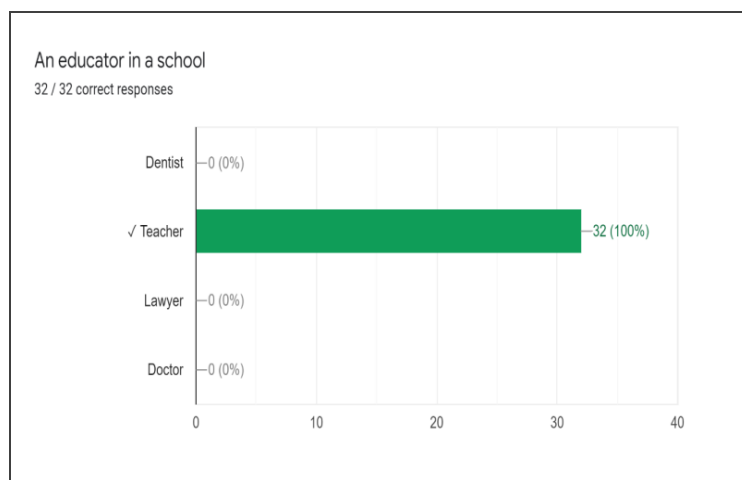

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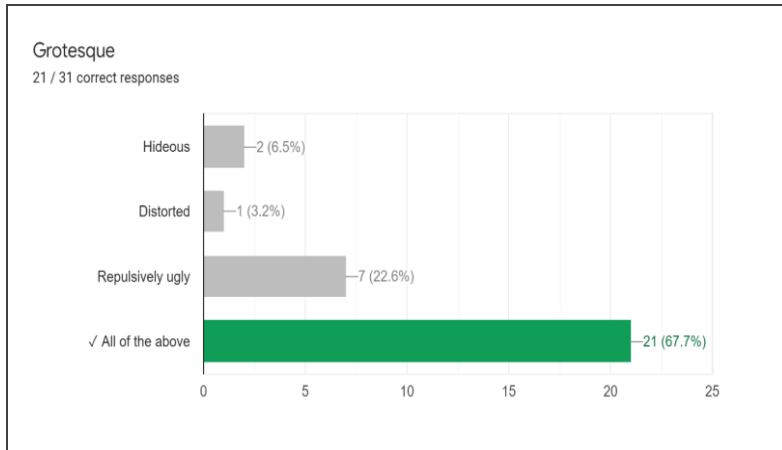

Figure 4

Figure 5

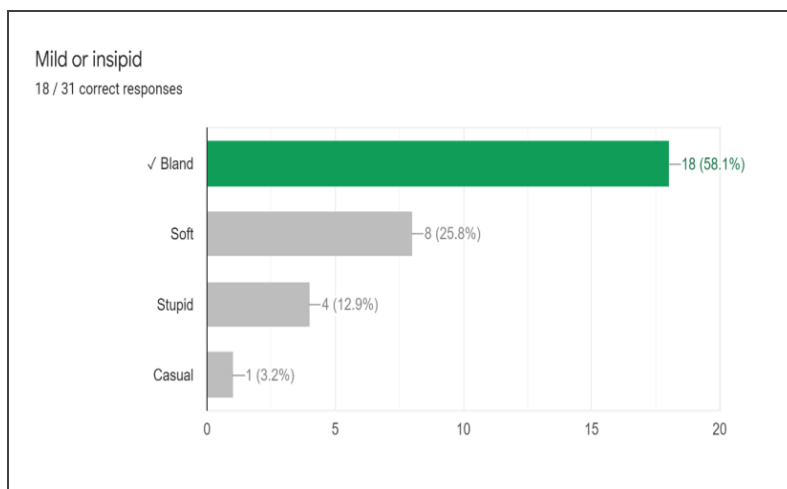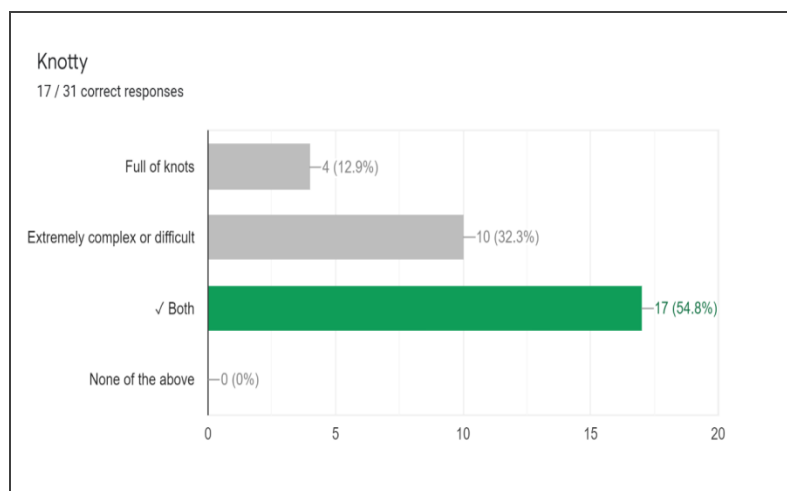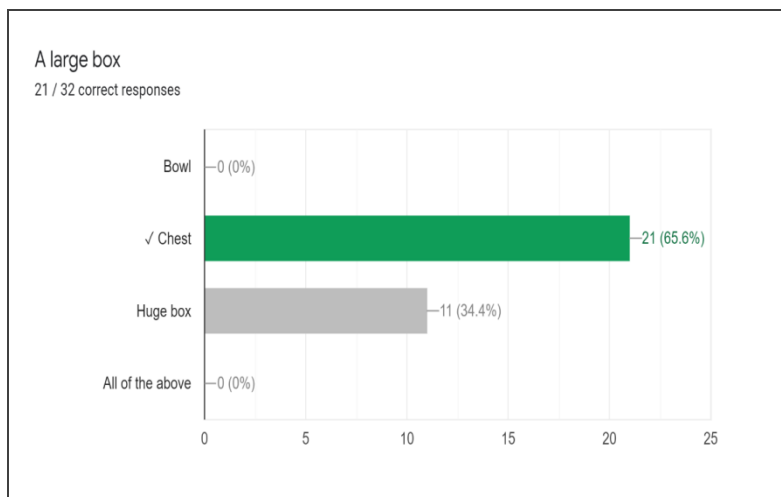Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figure 9

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figure 12

Figure 13

Figure 14

Figure 15

Figure 16

What is something "free from moisture or liquid" called?
30 / 31 correct responses

Figure 17

An established way of doing something
26 / 32 correct responses
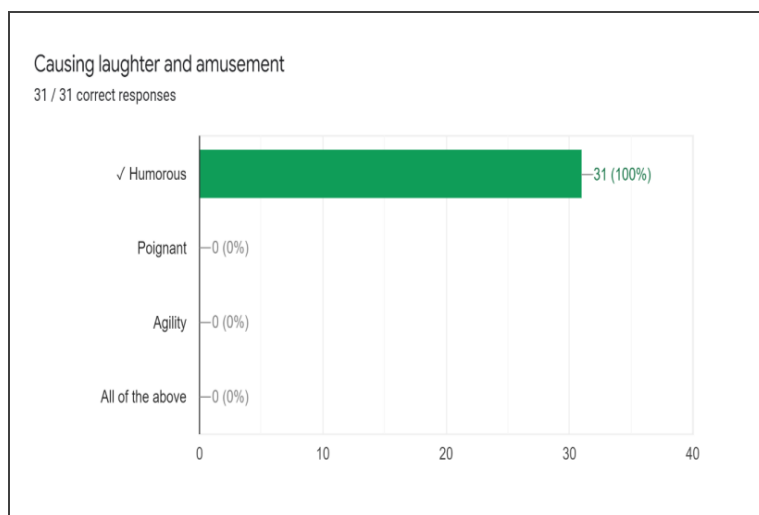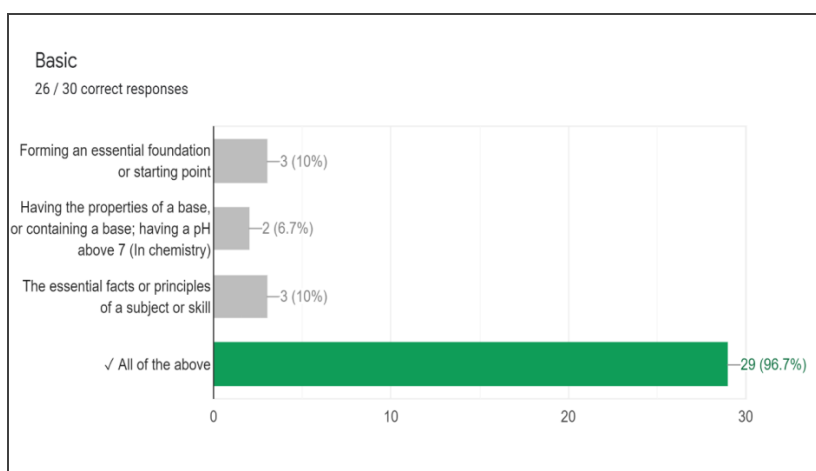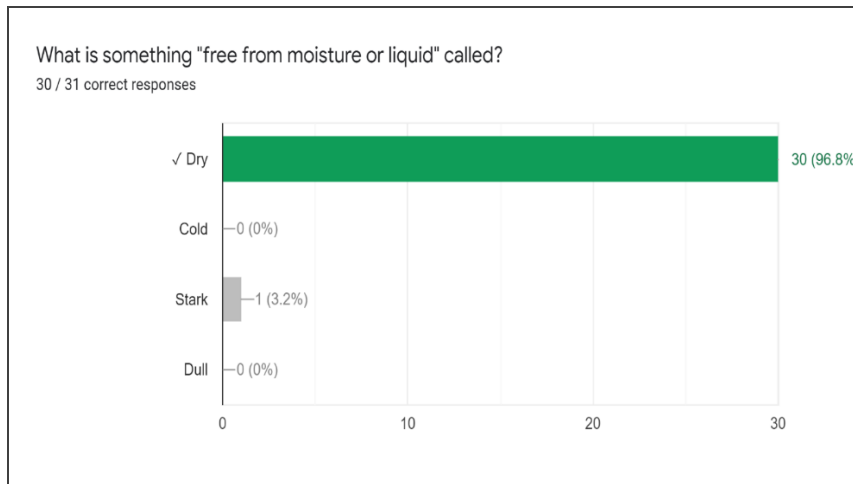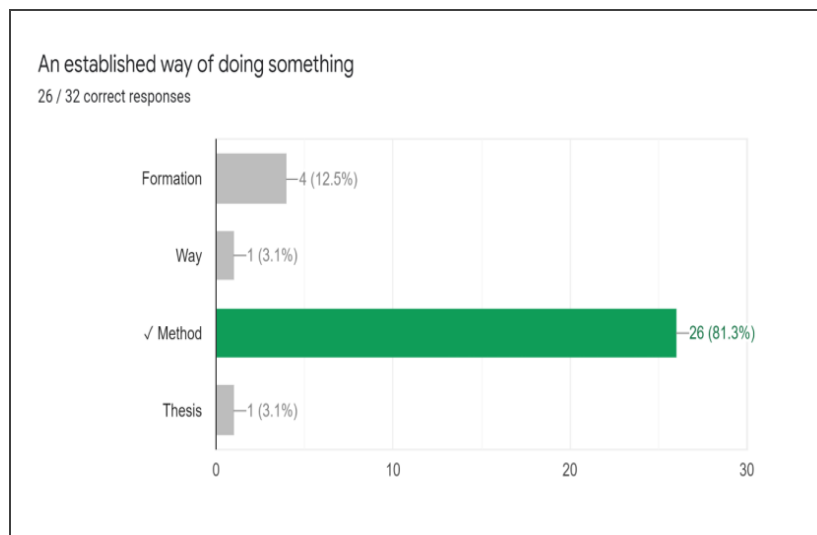
Figure 18

S. No.	Questionnaire	Responses	Percentage	Mean
Q-1	How strong do you think your vocabulary is?	14/33	42.4 %	57.57
Q-2	Which of the following methods learning vocabulary do you like to apply in day to day live?	22/33	66.7%	33.33
Q-3	What is the synonym for 'borrow'?	32/32	100%	0
Q-4	Synonym for 'magnificent'	28/32	87.5%	15.15
Q-5	What is 'Anime'	31	100%	0
Q-6	What is the meaning of 'Onomatopoeia'?	24/31	77.4%	21.21

Q-7	Which of the following words mean 'refined charm or enchanted beauty'?	26/31	83.9%	15.15
Q-8	A system that transmits sounds electricity	25/31	80.6%	18.18
Q-9	Antonym for 'sustainable'	14/31	45.2%	51.51
Q-10	An educator in a school	32/32	100%	0
Q-11	Grotesque	21/31	67.7%	32.25
Q-12	Mild or insipid	18/31	58.1%	39.39
Q-13	Knotty	17/31	54.8%	42.42
Q-14	A large box	21/32	65.6%	34.37
Q-15	Causing laughter and amusement	31/31	100%	0
Q-16	What is something without any error called?	30/32	93.8%	3.12
Q-17	What is the meaning of 'Basic'?	26/30	96.7%	13.33
Q-18	What is something 'free from moisture or liquid'?	30/31	96.8%	3.12
Q-19	An established way of doing something	26/32	81.3%	18.18

Table 2 Overall of Vocabulary Learning Strategies

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

The results of this study showed that reading books, newspapers, blogs, etc. is the most popular and successful way to learn vocabulary, with 66.7% (22) of participants favouring this method. This method, followed by listening to music, podcasts, audiobooks, virtual events, etc., and learning vocabulary by speaking to people, had the same percentage, i.e., 48.5%. (16 participants). While none of the participants chose to learn vocabulary through flashcards, 36.4% (12 participants) thought that learning vocabulary through journals, reports, posts, etc. was effective. The study suggests that there is a need to explore different methods of vocabulary learning to cater to the diverse preferences of learners. Additionally, it would be beneficial to investigate the reasons behind the participants' preference for learning vocabulary through journals, reports, posts, etc. This is mostly due to the fact that, although the idea of using flashcards might be intriguing, the students feel it is time-consuming to make flashcards for the sole purpose of learning vocabulary. Although the participants were able to answer the questions that were posed to them, it was clear that the most commonly confused answers were those with polysemous words. Through this study, the significant difference between the students who read and those who do not was pretty evident. The participants accustomed to reading did significantly better than those who applied different types of vocabulary learning strategies (*determination, social, memory, cognitive, and metacognitive*) other than reading. Lack of vocabulary knowledge hinders students'

ability to comprehend literature since it involves more than simply knowing words, such as the ability to utilise words in a natural way within a context. When asked why students found reading effective, the following answers were recorded: The most important details in this text are that reading books and journals is an important step to increasing one's knowledge of words. It is an important step because they are learning the words contextually, which helps a lot in memorising the words. The participants also extended their feedback on why they found other ways of learning vocabulary effective, such as speaking to other people, listening to music, imitating and repeating, and watching movies and anime. Practical application makes everything perfect in this case. They emphasised that by applying these methods in real-life situations, they were able to retain the vocabulary better and use it more confidently. They also suggested that incorporating these activities into language classes could make the learning process more engaging and effective. Students' responses to interview questions concerning the difficulties they have encountered when acquiring vocabulary and the reasons for these difficulties were as follows:

- Though the individuals were trying to absorb new terms on a regular basis, they were susceptible to forgetting them. The most common reason is a lack of practise and repetition.
- Students found memorising words in order to enhance their vocabulary boring due to a lack of creative ways of learning vocabulary.
- Disciplines other than English do not quite focus on building vocabulary.
- I am postponing looking up new words in dictionaries and different sources in order to find out the meaning of new words if I come across any.
- Some participants admitted to being unable to perceive and memorise words with the same pronunciation but distinct spellings and meanings.
- Another very common problem faced by the students while learning new vocabulary was that it was and is intimidating for them, and so it is understandable that they get embarrassed and nervous when practising in front of others, especially if they're proficient in the target language.
- Lack of motivation to learn new words was one of the reasons listed; a few participants were satisfied with the length of their vocabulary and weren't motivated to enhance it as it got them through just fine.
- A great many participants were not acknowledged for their efforts as kids by their teachers, which affected their interest.

However, some participants expressed a desire to improve their vocabulary but did not know how to go about it. They felt that they needed guidance and support from their teachers or peers to develop their language skills.

6. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION:

The maximum number of students faced difficulty using the newly acquired vocabulary in speaking or writing. Difficulty in pronouncing new vocabulary was among the vocal problems observed. This was mostly due to the mother tongue's influence on the language of the individuals. Self-assurance and motivation are frequently linked. Regardless of how much of the vocabulary they have grasped, confident learners exhibit a readiness to communicate.

To encourage students to develop self-confidence by praising their efforts and results on a regular basis and to reduce their language anxiety. Students are more interested and driven to participate when they believe they can keep their dignity. For that reason, learners are urged to be active learners while acquiring vocabulary or any other branch of language. As passive learning tends to kill the zeal, monotony should be kept as far as possible from one another. According to Lawson & Hogben (1996), language learners can actively learn new word meanings by using deliberate vocabulary acquisition strategies and by inferring new word meanings from context. Goundar (2016) stated that the learners may use activation strategies that involve various techniques, such as practising the new words in various contexts. Along with other crucial learning techniques, such as metacognitive, cognitive, memory, and other techniques, these strategies can be effective. Other strategies include inferring meaning from context, frequently consulting dictionaries, remembering words based on their definitions when reading again, connecting new words to the students' native tongue, repeating words, and practising. Teachers should use a range of strategies to help students understand meaning through context, linking new information with previous knowledge. It is important for teachers to also encourage students to use these strategies independently, as this will help them become more confident and proficient in their language learning. Additionally, providing opportunities for students to use new vocabulary in context and in authentic situations can further enhance their understanding and retention of new words. This isn't an easy method, though, because the strategies that work for one student may not work for another. Constant acknowledgement, feedback, and occasional assessments could be provided to the pupils, as they have a significant impact on them. This aids in the development of an approach for fulfilling the requirements, and if they can see that the criteria are fair and valid, as well as clearly linked to the taught curriculum, they are more engrossed in class. Not merely a measure of their current level of skill but also effort and progress should be acknowledged in assessments. Throughout the journey, conduct periodic formative assessments to help students measure their progress and receive feedback. A room for constructive feedback can be made; through positive reinforcements, the teacher is more likely to create a learner-friendly environment. Additionally, incorporating student self-assessments can help them take ownership of their learning and identify areas where they need to improve.

This survey-based study found that reading books, newspapers, blogs, listening to music, podcasts, audiobooks, virtual events, and speaking to people are the most popular and effective methods for learning vocabulary. 36.4% of participants believed that learning vocabulary through journaling, reports, posts, etc. was effective, while no participants voted for flashcards. This can lead to increased motivation and engagement in the learning process. It is important to note that the effectiveness of a learning method can vary from person to person, and what works for one may not work for another. Therefore, it is crucial to experiment with different methods and find what works best for each individual. This is primarily because, although the concept of using flashcards may be intriguing, students believe that creating flashcards for the sole purpose of learning vocabulary is time-consuming. Although the participants were able to answer the questions, it was evident that answers containing polysemous words were the most frequently confused. Through this

study, the distinction between students who read and those who do not was fairly clear. The participants who were accustomed to reading performed significantly better than those who employed other metacognitive strategies for vocabulary acquisition. Students' inability to comprehend literature is hindered by a lack of vocabulary because comprehension requires more than simply knowing words, such as the ability to use words in context naturally. Educators must therefore emphasize the significance of reading as a means of enhancing vocabulary acquisition and encourage students to read frequently. In addition, teachers can provide students with opportunities to practice using new vocabulary words in context through writing exercises and discussions. By doing so, students will not only improve their vocabulary but also develop their reading and writing skills. This will ultimately benefit them in their academic and professional lives.

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