
Enhancing FL Vocabulary Retention, Confidence and Engagement Through Movie Trailers

Trailers de Filmes para Melhorar a Retenção de Vocabulário, a Confiança e o Engajamento Acadêmico em Línguas Estrangeiras

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Abstract

Foreign language acquisition research has shown that spaced repetition and exposure to authentic materials can support vocabulary learning and retention and can reduce non-advanced learner's anxiety when working with authentic sources. However, there is limited research on this with high-school learners of Spanish as a foreign language. This study aims to replicate Johnson and Heffernan (2006) and examines whether a recycling methodology combining short readings and movie trailers improves engagement, vocabulary acquisition. Learners' confidence with authentic materials is also measured. This study utilized a pre/post-test design with 50 high-school students (Grades 9–12) at an international school in Qatar. Data were collected through a Spanish vocabulary performance test and a Likert-scale test for confidence before and after a two-week intervention. Paired-samples t-tests were used for data analysis, and a checklist was used for engagement. Results showed a significant improvement in vocabulary performance and in learner confidence. The findings suggest that integrating readings, movie trailers, and spaced repetition in language courses can enhance vocabulary learning and learner confidence with authentic materials. Despite limitations related to engagement and school constraints, the study supports recycling methodologies and calls for longer-term and curriculum-integrated research.

Keywords: vocabulary acquisition; spaced repetition; engagement; learner confidence; foreign language learning

Resumo

A investigação sobre a aquisição de línguas estrangeiras demonstrou que a repetição espaçada e a exposição a materiais autênticos podem reforçar a aprendizagem e a retenção de vocabulário, e podem reduzir a ansiedade de estudantes não avançados ao trabalhar com fontes autênticas. No entanto, a investigação neste tema com estudantes do ensino secundário de espanhol como língua estrangeira é limitada. Este trabalho tem como objetivo replicar Johnson e Heffernan (2006) e examina se uma metodologia de reciclagem que combina leituras curtas e trailers de filmes melhora o envolvimento e a aquisição de vocabulário. Mede-se também a confiança dos estudantes com materiais autênticos. O estudo utilizou um design de pré-teste e pós-teste com 50 estudantes do ensino secundário (9.º a 12.º ano) numa escola internacional no Qatar. Os dados foram recolhidos através de um teste de vocabulário em espanhol e de um questionário com escala de Likert para medir a confiança antes e depois de uma intervenção de duas semanas. Utilizou-se um teste t de pares para analisar os dados, e uma lista de verificação para medir o envolvimento. Os resultados

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mostraram uma melhoria significativa no teste de vocabulário e na confiança dos estudantes, sugerindo que integrar leituras, trailers de filmes e repetição espaçada nos cursos de línguas pode melhorar a aprendizagem de vocabulário e a confiança dos estudantes com materiais autênticos. Apesar de limitações relacionadas com o envolvimento dos estudantes e as restrições escolares, os resultados do estudo fornecem evidências que suportam o uso de metodologias de reciclagem e sustentam a importância de investigações de longo prazo e integradas no currículo.

Palavras-chave: aquisição de vocabulário, repetição espaçada, envolvimento, confiança do estudante, aprendizagem de línguas estrangeiras.

Introduction

Foreign language learners are taught, for the most part, using graded materials and are typically introduced to authentic resources only once they reach more advanced stages of proficiency (e.g., François & Gala, 2024; Luján Esposito & Andrea Feliú, 2024). When confronted with authentic materials, non-advanced learners often lack the linguistic skills, strategic competence, and vocabulary breadth required for successful comprehension. This persistent challenge has been shown to generate frustration and anxiety, which in turn negatively affects learner confidence, motivation, and willingness to continue studying the target language (Edrenius, 2018; Kalashnyk et al., 2023; Latifah et al., 2025). These affective and cognitive challenges are particularly problematic in instructional contexts where learners are expected to acquire and retain large amounts of vocabulary within a limited timeframe and where previously learned content may not be systematically revisited, making long-term retention a critical factor for success.

In response to similar concerns, Johnson and Heffernan (2006) developed the Short Readings Project, recognizing the pedagogical value of authentic materials in fostering learner confidence and sustaining motivation in foreign language (FL) learning. The project was designed as an enjoyable, confidence-building experience intended to support learners' transition from graded to authentic texts through repeated exposure and vocabulary recycling. Working with high-beginner to intermediate English FL learners at a Japanese university, the authors used authentic movie trailers as reading materials and implemented a recycling methodology grounded in principles of spaced repetition, retention intervals, and interstudy intervals. The study focused on teaching techniques that integrated reading strategies and contextualized vocabulary learning to promote long-term retention. While participants demonstrated measurable gains in comprehension and vocabulary knowledge, outcomes fell short of initial expectations, suggesting the need for further exploration of how authentic materials, repetition, and motivational factors interact in non-advanced language classrooms.

Given that these challenges remain relevant in contemporary foreign language education (e.g., Ait Mechedal et al., 2025; Huang, 2025; Kitaoka, 2021; Namaziandost et al., 2022), the present study builds on and replicates the original investigation. This study then examines whether the systematic use of authentic movie trailers combined with vocabulary recycling and spaced repetition can enhance learning outcomes, retention, learner confidence, and engagement among non-advanced high-school learners taking Spanish FL. By incorporating engaging audiovisual materials, this intervention also seeks to address motivational factors that influence vocabulary acquisition and sustained engagement.

Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

This study is based on different theories in second language acquisition that help explain why recycling multimodal authentic vocabulary might be pedagogically important.

To start with, the concept of spaced repetition goes back to Ebbinghaus's (1885/1913) work on the forgetting curve, which showed that spreading out practice over time leads to better long-term retention than massed repetition. More recent vocabulary research reinforces this, finding that repeated retrieval and spaced exposure play a meaningful role in vocabulary acquisition (Garth, 2025; Nation, 2013; Saksittanupab, 2024; Schmitt, 2008; Varela, 2020).

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis argues that acquisition happens when learners encounter meaningful input that is just a step beyond their current level. More recent studies seem to agree with the Input Hypothesis notion (e.g., Li, 2025; Zhou, 2023). Authentic short readings and movie trailers can offer exactly this kind of contextualized exposure, potentially supporting incidental vocabulary learning in a natural way.

The multimodal dimension of this study also connects to Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning, which suggests that people tend to learn more effectively when information is presented through both words and images. This seems to be the case since, according to Mayer (2009), the brain appears to process verbal and visual information through separate channels, combining written texts with audio-visual trailers may lead to deeper encoding and more meaningful engagement with the material. This idea is further supported by more recent studies that highlight the potential of multimedia lessons to enhance teaching and learning (e.g., Cavanagh & Kiersch, 2023; Zhao & Mayer, 2025).

Finally, the affective side of language learning matters just as much as the cognitive one. Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis and Bandura's (1997) work on self-efficacy both point to the fact that anxiety and confidence play an important role in learning. Recent studies suggest that learning improves when students are more confident and at ease (e.g., Diasamidze & Samnidze, 2025; Narzillayevna, 2024). Therefore, when students are

gradually and systematically exposed to authentic materials, they may feel less intimidated and more capable when encountering authentic materials later.

The combination of these frameworks informs the design of this study, which considers a recycling methodology combining spaced repetition, short readings, and movie trailers as the key variable influencing vocabulary acquisition and learner confidence. This work also tracks engagement as it is considered an important factor influencing learner performance.

Vocabulary Acquisition

Vocabulary is one of the most important aspects of language learning, and scholars have stressed the fact that without grammar something can still be achieved, but nothing can be reached without vocabulary (Wilkins, 1972). Vocabulary acquisition has long been regarded as one of the fundamental pillars for learning a language. Several studies (e.g., Horst et al., 1998; Nation, 1990; Schmidt, 2010; Schmitt & Schmitt, 2020) have considered vocabulary acquisition as a crucial part of language. More recently, Sahnun and Daulay (2025) and Wang et al. (2025) regard vocabulary learning as one of the central components of developing successful communication and literacy skills. The magnitude of vocabulary is such that it seems to be that the major difference between native speakers and foreign language learners lies in the size of their mental lexicon itself (Laufer, 1998). Another striking fact showing the importance of vocabulary knowledge is that large amounts of it are supposed to be known to succeed in communication. For example, Laufer (1989) found that 95% of vocabulary needs to be known to comprehend written text successfully, and Hu and Nation (2000) claimed that 98% to 99% of the words in a text are needed to comprehend written discourse. Nation (2006) estimated that for the English language around 8000 to 9000 word families are needed to read authentic materials (e.g., novels, newspapers). The fact that such a large amount of words is needed for comprehension highlights the relevance of vocabulary acquisition in foreign language learning. This fact about vocabulary is particularly overwhelming for non-advanced language learners aiming to comprehend authentic texts, especially since it seems to be essential to learn vocabulary that is less frequent (Naina, 2025).

At the same time, there seems to be substantial correlation between vocabulary and reading comprehension skills, since strong vocabulary can lead to reading comprehension success. An extensive vocabulary is central to reading comprehension and improves writing skills. Basically, knowing more words will positively affect literacy skills (Allen, 2023; Newton et al., 2008).

Acquiring vocabulary is crucial for learning a new language; however, which lexical items to learn and when to learn them is also vital for success. For example, Nation (1990), and Zakar et al. (2001) concentrated on acquisition of high frequency lexical items, suggesting that those items are the ones that are first acquired. As learners make progress, become more language knowledgeable, and advance to upper-beginner levels, they are confronted

with less frequent words. Parry (1991) tackled the problem of non-advanced learners acquiring less frequent items; and refers to the 'snowball effect' by suggesting that students need to receive language instruction that builds upon their current lexicon. This way they would progressively be able to comprehend words they could not understand before. The use of incidental vocabulary learning and guided vocabulary learning strategies seemed to enhance vocabulary acquisition also (Ayana et al., 2024; Hakobyan, 2023). These could be ideal academic vocabulary acquisition strategies, however, there seem to be other aspects in play as well. Learning vocabulary appears to be not enough as many of those words are forgotten quickly, and when non-advanced learners are suddenly confronted with authentic materials, they seem to be confused and anxiety sets in. Therefore, remembering previously learned items plays also a crucial role (Victoria & Muodumogu, 2025).

Learning Strategies and Repeated Exposures

Extensive research has established that multiple encounters with linguistic material facilitate language acquisition and promote retention of knowledge. Classical studies in memory demonstrate that the forgetting curve is steepest immediately following initial exposure, though the rate of decline moderates over time. Anderson and Jordan (1928) observed that memory loss is most pronounced during early stages but attenuates progressively, thereby stressing the importance of item repetition shortly after initial learning, followed by strategically spaced retrieval intervals.

In line with Carpenter et al. (2022), rehearsal of recently acquired lexical items should occur promptly after first exposure, with subsequent distributed practice sessions scheduled at increasing temporal intervals. Based on Bahrick's (1979) notion of repeated exposures, Higham et al. (2023) and Murray et al. (2025) extend this theoretical framework by focusing on the dynamic process requiring systematic reinforcement. Initially acquired information undergoes partial decay, necessitating periodic relearning cycles to ensure stable neural encoding. Once knowledge achieves consolidation in memory, regular retrieval practice remains essential to prevent deterioration and maintain accessibility.

Various scholars (e.g., Gu, 2003; Saksittanupab, 2024; Varela, 2020) have documented the advantages of iterative exposure for enhancing knowledge retention across time in language instruction contexts. Gu additionally recognized the variability in the number of encounters required for lexical learning and retention, concluding that mastery thresholds depend on multiple factors: contextual prominence of target items, depth of contextual support, learner motivation, and both the breadth and quality of existing vocabulary knowledge. Varela (2020) alternatively emphasized systematic vocabulary recycling through monthly review cycles to strengthen retention.

In a related empirical study, Fitzpatrick et al. (2008) established that, given specific experimental parameters, participants could successfully acquire a minimum of 15 novel lexical items daily across 20 consecutive sessions. The implementation of bilingual

flashcards in the study, combined with explicit vocabulary instruction proved highly effective for rapid and efficient acquisition, corroborating established research findings (e.g., Nakata, 2017; Nation, 2007; Schmitt, 2008; Thorndike, 1908; Wijaya et al., 2025). Significantly, integrating new vocabulary learning with systematic rehearsal of previously acquired items within individual sessions appeared to optimize learning outcomes, validating the assertion that distributed practice should commence during the initial acquisition phase (Carpenter et al., 2022). A crucial distinction emerging from Fitzpatrick et al. (2008) concerns the non-equivalence of successful initial learning and sustained long-term retention. Long-term retention requires both effective initial acquisition and optimal spacing of review intervals calibrated to the desired retention period.

Bloom and Shuell (1981) identified a notable gap in spaced repetition research, specifically the lack of authentic classroom-based investigations. Their analysis further noted that existing studies typically employed excessively brief intervals between practice sessions or recruited predominantly adult and young adult participants. Decades later, researchers continued identifying identical limitations (e.g., Cepeda et al., 2006; Goossens et al., 2012) with most studies being short in duration or implemented in a lab context rather than in actual classrooms (Cadavid et al., 2025; Namaziandost et al., 2023; Zhai, 2022). This persistent pattern underscores the ongoing necessity for ecologically valid spaced repetition studies that could elucidate actual retention mechanisms and identify optimal implementation strategies for authentic educational environments.

While existing evidence indicates that spaced repetition strategies can be incorporated into traditional classroom environments with minimal disruption, other pedagogical elements should be considered (Mawson & Kang, 2025). Specifically, contemporary innovative instructional approaches aim to optimize learning outcomes while simultaneously enhancing student motivation and active participation. Novel pedagogical methods designed to strengthen information retention can be successfully implemented in authentic classroom contexts, though several critical factors require advance consideration. As Erbes et al. (2010) illustrated, meticulous experimental design is necessary to prevent confounding variables (e.g., instructor-student rapport, intrinsic motivation) from compromising research validity. Additionally, integrating conventional teaching practices with digital learning platforms for explicit vocabulary instruction has demonstrated efficacy across diverse age cohorts in promoting efficient acquisition and retention, as evidenced in several studies (Gryzelius, 2016; Huang, 2025; McLean et al., 2013; Milliner, 2013). Furthermore, incorporating standardized summative assessments (e.g., TOEIC examination in Milliner, 2013) appeared to enhance learner motivation and likely contributed substantively to favorable study outcomes.

Student engagement deserves particular attention given that there seems to be a strong correlation between learner's engagement and academic achievement (e.g., Lee, 2014; Wong et al., 2024). Also, several researchers have documented insufficient engagement and inconsistent participant commitment highlighting the need for buy-in from participants

(e.g., Arndt & Rose, 2023; Erbes et al., 2010; Goossens et al., 2012; Gryzelius, 2016). Johnson and Heffernan (2006) used movie trailers as motivational stimuli for participants. This approach appears pedagogically sound given that audiovisual materials have been widely recognized as valuable sources of authentic input and as highly effective tools for stimulating learner interest and sustaining engagement (e.g., Cavanagh & Kiersch, 2023; King, 2002; Sherman, 2003; Zanón, 2006).

Videos in Language Instruction

In recent years, due to several video streaming and editing websites as well as mobile devices, the number of video files watched, shared, and downloaded by high-school and university students has increased drastically. For several years researchers have been revealing an increase in the trend towards time spent watching videos (e.g., Chinnery, 2006; Kukulska-Hulme & Shield, 2007), and others have referred to the benefits of watching videos towards language learning (Sinyashina, 2022; Zhao & Mayer, 2025).

In contrast with printed materials and still pictures, videos provide other features to the language classroom, which can be of great help for boosting language acquisition. Historically, several scholars have focused on the benefits of videos for language teaching. For example, Swaffar and Vlatten (1997) suggested that videos contributed to the overall student involvement in the learning process. In a wider view Dubreil (2004) made connections between the classroom and the world outside through videos. More recently, Gesa and Miralpeix (2022), Sinyashina (2022), and Zayraey (2025) referred to the correlation between videos and vocabulary uptake, stating that language learners of all levels can benefit from watching videos in the target language. Finally, movie trailers represent an effective pedagogical tool for enhancing second language learner motivation in educational contexts. The incorporation of authentic audiovisual materials, particularly movie previews, has demonstrated significant potential to engage students and sustain their interest throughout the learning process. Research by Luckel-Semoto and Sugiura (2024) supports the motivational benefits of integrating movie trailers into language instruction, highlighting their capacity to improve student engagement and foster active participation in learning activities.

Therefore, since these pedagogical concerns continue to be pertinent in current foreign language instruction contexts, this investigation expands upon and duplicates the initial research study. Specifically, it explores whether the structured implementation of authentic movie previews, integrated with systematic vocabulary recycling, can improve acquisition outcomes, long-term retention, student confidence levels, and learner motivation among intermediate-level secondary school students of Spanish as a foreign language.

Method

Research Design

This study replicated previous research and was grounded in the assumption that learners can develop greater confidence when engaging with authentic language materials while simultaneously acquiring vocabulary through systematic repetition and review practices. Like the initial investigation, this replication employed a single-subject design incorporating pre-test and post-test measures. To evaluate acquisition of novel vocabulary items, participants completed an initial assessment measuring their existing knowledge of designated target words before beginning the intervention. An identical assessment was administered immediately following the completion of the instructional intervention, serving as a post-test to measure vocabulary learning gains and retention of the target items introduced during the study period. However, this replication differed from the original work by collecting data on students' confidence to work with authentic materials: a Likert scale survey administered to students and the teacher perceptions obtained through a classroom observation checklist. The Likert scale survey was administered both before and after the instructional intervention to assess potential changes in student confidence levels regarding their ability to work with authentic materials. This additional instrument provided quantitative data on affective outcomes that the original study did not capture. The observation checklist was completed by the usual classroom teachers at the end of each of the four sessions and served to gain insight regarding student engagement.

Intervention

Considering the investigation took place in an actual school setting, the dates and times of the intervention had to be adjusted to agree with the times and days of the regular lessons. So, the study was divided into two parts. Part one consisted of a pre-confidence test, followed by a pre-test, and four readings with their corresponding set of ten questions and trailers each. Part two consisted of three final readings with questions and trailers, and a post-test, plus a post-confidence test. The intervention occurred in four lessons over a period of two weeks. During the first lesson students received instructions in English, and then proceeded to take the pre-tests, and then started the first part of the intervention. Participants finished part one during lesson two, and part two during lesson three. In lesson four participants took both post-tests. After the tests there was an open discussion, and reflection session on activities, tests, and trailers. The seven teachers in charge of each one of the classes involved in the study were always present during each session and completed the observation checklist at the end of the session to assess overall student engagement during each one of the sessions.

Participants

Participants used in this study consisted of a convenience sample of fifty students from ninth through twelfth grade Spanish B (Spanish as a Foreign Language within the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program) of mixed gender from seven different classes. Each class had an average of seven students and consisted of learners of similar Spanish abilities. Participant age range was 14-18. Each class that participated in the study received instructions in English, remained in their usual classroom and in the presence of their usual teacher. Each participant worked on their own laptop computer and used headphones. Participants were not allowed to use paper or online dictionaries or digital translators. All students in this study attended an international school in Qatar.

Instruments and Data Collection

Movie trailers for the intervention were chosen based on participant age appropriateness, cultural relevance, and audio quality. Trailers were downloaded directly from official movie promotional websites in Spanish and integrated into custom-designed web pages developed specifically for this investigation. Segments of trailers included in assessments were modified and incorporated using the YouTube.com platform. All selected trailers featured moderate-paced narration with distinct audio and vocabulary suited to participants' proficiency levels. To maintain linguistic consistency, Latin American Spanish variants were exclusively used, reflecting the instructor's dialectal variety in classroom instruction. This decision also helped ensure participants encountered familiar pronunciation patterns and lexical choices throughout the study materials. Each trailer contained approximately ten lexical items designated as target vocabulary. These target items consisted of words that were considered challenging for comprehension without the teacher's help.

Reading passages were specifically designed for this investigation. Individual texts averaged 150 words and thematically corresponded to the trailer displayed beneath them on each webpage. Most lexical items in the passages were drawn from the Real Academia Española's (2014) corpus of the 5,000 most frequently used words, ensuring developmental appropriateness for participants' Spanish proficiency. Each reading incorporated approximately ten target vocabulary items with interactive mouse-over functionality revealing English definitions. All designated target words appeared in bold and underlined formatting within the passages. Through custom-programmed script functions created for this project, hovering the mouse cursor over target items triggered display of corresponding English definitions. For clarity, target vocabulary definitions were restricted to meanings contextually relevant within the trailers. Every target item appeared at least once across a reading passage, assessment section, and promotional clip. Items received at least three repetitions throughout the complete intervention to facilitate retention. Surrounding linguistic context provided interpretive support for target vocabulary comprehension.

The pre-test consisted of a multiple-choice activity where students had to listen to the portion of the trailer where one of the target vocabulary items appeared and then choose the correct option in the test. Figure 1 below shows a portion of the test.

Figure 1
Portion of the pre-test



Source: Data and image created by the author

During the intervention, after the pre-test, students were directed to the study's web site. All web pages were organized to work on a trailer at a time, the title of the page, the reading, the quiz, and the trailer all shared the same topic and the same target vocabulary items ensuring topic relevance and vocabulary recycling. Each page students landed on consisted of a reading activity with the target vocabulary highlighted in bold type. Below the reading there was a self-graded multiple-choice quiz that tested reading understanding and used all the target vocabulary items. Only after students had answered all ten questions correctly in the quiz, the trailer appeared on the screen and students could watch it. After watching the trailer, participants could move on to the next page. Figure 2 below shows a sample of one of the pages participants had to work on. The figure shows the reading at the top with the highlighted target items, the reading comprehension quiz on the left, the responses to the right, and the movie trailer at the bottom.

Figure 2
Sample of a page with activities

Caminando con dinosaurios

Patchi es simpático y le gustan las bromas. El es el **más** pequeño de la **manada** de paquirinosaurios. Los paquirinosaurios eran animales antiguos **enormes** en un mundo con animales **gigantes**. Patchi tiene un hermano más grande llamado Scowler. Su padre se llama Bulldust y es el líder de la manada. En un **viaje épico**, un dinosaurio llamado Gorgon ataca a la manada, y Bulldust muere. Los hermanos son **supervivientes**, y abandonan la manada. Años después, Patchi y Scowler regresan al grupo. Scowler es el líder y Patchi abandona la manada. Al final de la película Patchi es muy **valiente**, regresa para proteger y salvar a su familia y se **convierte** en **héroe**.


Responder las preguntas

1. El capitán hizo un ----- muy largo en el océano.
 robot broma viaje
2. Los dinosaurios son -----.
 pequeños gigantes escondidos
3. Los ----- no están muertos.
 manada muertos supervivientes
4. Grandioso es un sinónimo de -----.
 épico malo viajes
5. El sinónimo de grande es -----.
 enorme pequeño malo
6. Los niños se ----- en hombres.
 duermes convierten aprender
7. Superman es un -----.
 gigante héroe maníaco
8. El dinosaurio es ----- grande que un perro.
 más pequeño gigante
9. Un ----- no tiene miedo.
 enorme elegante valiente
10. Hay muchos animales en una -----.
 enorme viaje manada

Respuestas:

Respuesta: 1: **viaje** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 2: **gigantes** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 3: **supervivientes** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 4: **épico** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 5: **enorme** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 6: **convierten** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 7: **héroe** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 8: **más** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 9: **valiente** es Correcta.
 Respuesta: 10: **manada** es Correcta.

Total respuestas correctas: 10



Source: Data and image created by the author

Finally, to measure student motivation and engagement, a 7-point scale rating sheet was used to capture teachers' perception based on Lee and Reeve's (2012) framework. This was based on the fact that teachers seem to estimate accurately their own students' classroom motivation and engagement (Givvin et al., 2001; Skinner et al., 2009). Each of the seven teachers that would regularly teach the students were asked to complete the sheet at the end of each one of the four lessons. Teachers were asked to tick boxes as a general class report overview based on the overall engagement and motivation shown by the students as they worked on the research project. The rating sheet consisted of a scale from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (7) based on seven statements referring to student

engagement and motivation during the intervention. Figure 3 below shows a sample of checklist teachers worked on to provide feedback.

Figure 3
Sample of teacher’s rating sheet

Item	Statement	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
M1	Students appear to feel autonomous, competent, and socially connected in class.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
M2	Students appear confident in their ability to do well in classroom activities.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Source: Data and image created by the author

Threats to Validity

An important threat to validity in this study was maturation since some participants at times seemed bored, not willing to participate or collaborate with the project itself or did not seem to take matters seriously. This was observed by the researcher and documented by the class teachers.

Another threat to validity was testing, as some participants revealed signs of stress when confronted with the questions as they thought they had not been given time to prepare for the project in advance. Participants also showed signs that they were afraid of obtaining low grades in the intervention that could affect their school GPA.

Results

Vocabulary knowledge

In order to compare results of pre- and post-test, just like in the original study, a paired *t*-test was run (Table 1). There was a significant difference in mean scores between both tests (pre-test *M*= 12.60, and post-test *M*= 15). *SD* showed that post-test scores were more homogeneous than pre-test results (pre-test *SD*= 3.64, *SD* post-test *SD*=3.04). This revealed that participants most probably had different language levels prior to the study. A lower post-test *SD* showed that knowledge of target vocabulary among participants was more leveled after the intervention. The two-tailed *p* value of .0001 obtained from intervention scores was considered to be extremely statistically significant, and there seemed to be a 95% chance that the score of -2.40 (resulting from the subtraction of both means above) fell into the 95% confidence interval range.

Table 1
Paired *t*-test of performance scores (*n*=50)

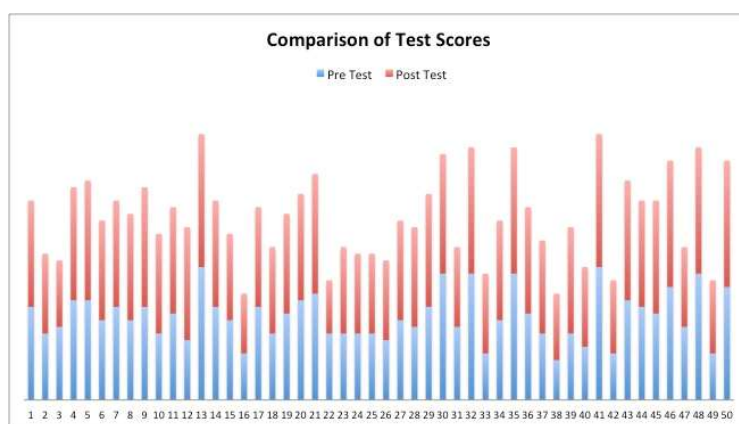
	m	sd	t	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval	
			.0001***	-2.40	-1.87	-2.93
Pre-test	12.60	3.64				
Post-test	15.00	3.04				

*** *p*<.001

Source: Data collected and table created by the author

Figure 4 below shows total intervention scores of pre- and post-test scores. The scores show a significant improvement in performance in the post-test.

Figure 4
Pre- and post-test scores



Source: Data collected and image created by the author

Confidence

To measure the confidence levels of the participants a pre- and a post Likert scale test was used. Results from both tests were compared by means of a paired *t*-test (Table 2). There was a significance difference in mean scores between both tests (pre-test *M*= 13.18, and post-test *M*= 14.40). *SD* showed that post-test scores were slightly more homogeneous than pre-test results (pre-test *SD*= 2.78, *SD* post-test *SD*=2.70). This revealed that participants had levels of confidence slightly more towards both ends of the scale prior to the intervention. A lower *SD* in the post confidence test proved that participants showed levels of confidence slightly more oriented towards the mean and center of the scale after the replication study. The two-tailed *p* value of .0001 obtained from confidence tests scores is considered to be extremely statistically significant, and we are confident that there is a 95%

chance that the score of -1.22 (resulting from the subtraction of both means above) falls into the 95% confidence interval range.

Table 2
Paired t-test for confidence (n=50)

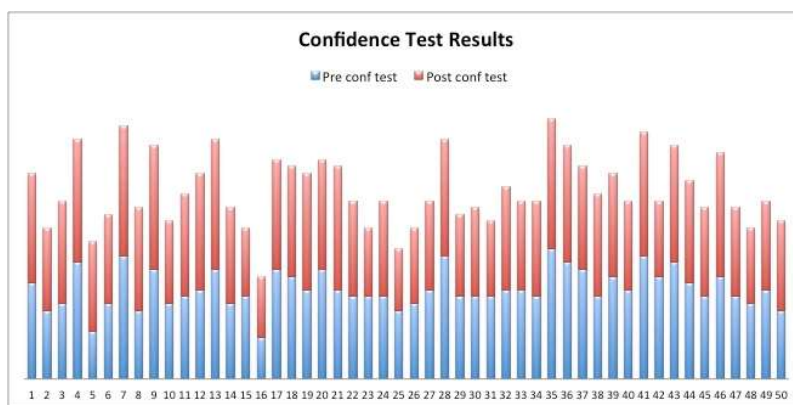
	m	sd	t	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval
			.0001***	-1.22	-1.87 - .66
Pre-test	13.18	2.78			
Post-test	14.40	2.70			

*** p<.001

Source: Data collected and table created by the author

Figure 5 below shows scores of pre- and post-Confidence Tests with significantly higher values after the intervention.

Figure 5
Pre- and post-confidence scores



Source: Data collected and image created by the author

Findings showed a consistent increase in confidence scores across all 50 participants, indicating that the intervention positively influenced confidence in language skills.

Engagement and Motivation

Based on the four scoring sheets completed by all seven teachers, the results indicate that students appeared to have low levels of motivation and engagement across all four lessons. Overall mean scores for motivation (M = 2.42, SD = 0.53) and engagement (M = 2.68, SD = 0.61) showed no statistically significant change over time, suggesting that low engagement and motivation levels were observed across all four sessions.

Discussion

This study focused on two primary aims. First, it sought to enhance learners' acquisition and long-term retention of selected vocabulary through systematic recycling and spaced repetition, with the main goal of supporting comprehension of authentic texts. Second, the study aimed to increase participants' confidence when engaging with authentic materials and increase engagement levels. Comparisons between pre- and post-test results indicate that learners experienced increased confidence following the intervention and successfully acquired the target lexical items presented in both the reading passages and video trailers. Despite improved language and confidence levels, participants showed poor engagement.

Findings from both the original study and its replication indicate comparable outcomes. In the original study, learners demonstrated a 16.0% increase in vocabulary knowledge in Section 1, which focused on context-based questions, and an 8.1% increase in Section 2, which included video-based questions, resulting in an overall mean gain of 12.05%. The replication study yielded a 12.0% improvement in vocabulary retention when contextual and video-based items were combined within a single assessment. Overall, performance gains across both studies were broadly consistent.

Despite alignment between the replication results and the initial hypotheses, the observed improvements in both achievement and confidence were more modest than anticipated. In the original study, Johnson and Heffernan (2006) suggested that some participants' level of engagement with the activities may have been limited. A similar pattern emerged in the present replication, as students overall showed rather low levels of engagement and motivation, potentially constraining the overall outcomes. Additionally, the relatively low gains may be partially attributed to the practical challenges of conducting research within the context of regular school schedules and routines. Finally, although movie trailers seemed to entertain students, the sought motivational academic effect was not as strong as intended.

Consistent with the findings of Erbes et al. (2010), this replication highlights that positive research outcomes do not automatically translate into equivalent success in real classroom contexts. The study encountered multiple logistical difficulties that complicated implementation. Although the intervention was initially designed to span one month, it required adjustment due to contextual limitations. While collaborating teachers were generally supportive, some reported disruptions to their time, classroom space, and curricular planning, and expressed a desire to return to their usual instructional practices once the intervention concluded. Further challenges included unstable internet access, student absences due to illness or school activities, malfunctioning laptops, insufficient availability of headphones, fire drills, and unanticipated interruptions from unexpected visitors.

Special Considerations

One notable distinction between participants in the original and replication studies concerns the degree of exposure to the target language. Although in both cases students were taking the target language as a foreign language, the fact that in the original study participants were learning English, this could have had implications regarding exposure outside of the classroom, comparable to a second language (L2) learning environment (Collentine, 2004; Håkansson & Norrby, 2010; Tarp, 2025). As a result, participants in the original study could be expected to possess larger vocabularies and to experience fewer difficulties when engaging with authentic materials than FL learners at comparable proficiency levels (Scherer et al., 2024).

A further difference between the two studies relates to learner motivation toward the target languages. In principle, students studying English as a FL may demonstrate higher motivational levels, given the current global role of English as a lingua franca in domains such as commerce, tourism, and international communication. While Spanish has gained prominence in recent years, it may not be perceived as equally essential by learners. Differences in perceived need, combined with unequal exposure to the target language through digital media, online resources, and popular culture, predominantly available in English, may therefore influence vocabulary development and overall language acquisition. In English FL contexts, as the one in the original study having English as a lingua franca (ELF), learners typically encounter the target language both during formal instruction and in everyday interactions outside the classroom (Taguchi & Ishihara, 2018; Tarp, 2025). In Spanish FL settings, such as the one examined in this study, on the other hand, exposure is largely confined to instructional time within the classroom.

Conclusion

This work examined the effects of vocabulary recycling and spaced repetition on lexical retention, comprehension of authentic materials, learner confidence and engagement through an original and a replication design. Across both contexts, the intervention resulted in consistent gains in vocabulary knowledge and self-reported confidence, suggesting that systematic and distributed lexical reinforcement can support learners' confidence with authentic sources, although actual engagement was low. However, differences between the original and the replication study must be interpreted in light of contextual factors, particularly the degree of exposure to the target language. Learners in the original study operated in an environment with more frequent and varied contact with the target language (English), whereas participants in the replication were situated in a foreign language (Spanish) context with exposure largely restricted to classroom instruction. These differences likely influenced baseline vocabulary knowledge and ease of comprehension, helping to explain variation in learning gains despite comparable proficiency levels.

In addition to exposure, learner motivation may have played a significant role in shaping the outcomes. English, as a global lingua franca, may be perceived as more immediately necessary than Spanish, potentially fostering higher motivational levels among FL learners in the original study. In contrast, reduced perceived need and more limited contact with the target language in the foreign language context may have constrained engagement and performance in the replication. To conclude, these findings highlight the importance of situating vocabulary learning interventions within their broader sociolinguistic and instructional contexts. Future research should account more explicitly for differences in exposure and motivational orientation, refine implementation conditions to mitigate classroom constraints, and explore instructional designs that combine explicit vocabulary teaching with sustained opportunities for implicit reinforcement. Longitudinal investigations embedding such approaches within the regular curriculum would further clarify their long-term effectiveness and pedagogical value.

Recommendations

Overall, the study can be considered effective, as its central objectives were met, students managed to acquire target vocabulary items that served to understand movie trailers avoiding feelings of anxiety through an entertaining practice. To streamline future implementations, the replication could be organized as a voluntary after-school program. Such an arrangement would likely address issues related to limited student engagement, reduce concerns among language teachers about loss of instructional time, and provide a calmer and more focused environment for participants. In addition, conducting the intervention outside regular school hours could minimize external disruptions such as bell schedules, fire drills, and unplanned classroom interruptions.

Both the original and the replication studies demonstrated that learners across different educational stages can benefit from this instructional approach. Although the outcomes in both cases fell short of initial expectations, the findings nonetheless confirm the effectiveness of the method. With minor refinements, it has the potential to be implemented more broadly in authentic language-learning contexts. Future research could explore the impact of embedding this approach directly into the foreign language curriculum as a dedicated learning strategy and examine its effects over an extended period.

Given that learner engagement was lower than anticipated in both studies, it appears advisable to incorporate alternative or complementary pedagogical strategies to sustain student engagement throughout the intervention. Subsequent research should also take into account the logistical challenges identified and adapt instructional sessions accordingly to prevent adverse effects on outcomes. Furthermore, to achieve stronger learning gains, future studies might investigate the benefits of incorporating more explicit instructional phases, rather than relying primarily on incidental exposure. For example, introducing target vocabulary through direct techniques such as flashcards, followed by reinforcement through

increased exposure in meaningful contexts, may enhance retention and overall performance.

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