

EXPLORING PROBLEMS FACED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the multifaceted challenges faced by secondary school students in learning English as a second language (ESL). It identifies key issues such as linguistic complexities, psychological barriers, and cultural influences that hinder language acquisition. English's irregular spelling and complex grammar pose significant hurdles, while psychological factors such as language anxiety and fossilization affect students' confidence and motivation. Additionally, cultural differences and limited exposure to authentic English-speaking environments contribute to learning difficulties. The article emphasizes the need for a reevaluation of teaching methodologies to address these challenges effectively. Recommendations include enhancing teacher training programs, incorporating multimodal learning resources, promoting collaborative learning activities, implementing regular feedback mechanisms, fostering a positive learning environment, and integrating cultural contexts into lessons. By adopting these strategies, educators can better support students' language learning journeys and help them overcome barriers to English proficiency. This study underscores the importance of developing holistic, inclusive, and culturally responsive teaching practices to improve ESL education and empower students in a globalized world.

Keywords: English as a Second Language (ESL), Secondary School Students, Language Learning Challenges, Psychological Barriers

INTRODUCTION

Being a worldwide language, English is in more demand than ever. People from different communities use different languages to share their ideas and feelings. Through these interactions, the majority of the world nations become bilingual and sometimes multilingual. Smith (1994) pointed out that in this globe, the majority of the people call themselves speakers of two languages. Brown (2000) claimed that bilingualism is a way of life. In the present-day context, now it is difficult for the nations to live and grow in isolation. And only rely on its domestic knowledge alone. As the world has become a global village, and the English language is the only medium that crosses all the hindrances and breaks all the geographical and linguistic barriers. It helps people in communication and, they consider themselves as one citizen of the same world irrespective of their racial and national prejudices.

As Lyytinen (1985, p.61) stated that through language one can express their attitudes and feelings to establish, coordinate relationships with each other. However, the distinction between second and foreign language in the countries exist everywhere but the English language always enjoys its prestige in different government and public sectors and most importantly in the educational field of every state. Pakistan has made great efforts to provide the English language a prominent and rightful place in society in line with the global issues of today. Mueen (1992) claimed that the English language essentially meets the test of practical value. It is used in all fields of hard sciences, social sciences, arts.

International relations, trading, and commerce are also conducted in English.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language is a mode of communication in human development. Learning a language is a process of constant struggle. As the world has become a global village, so the learning of international language rises much more than in past. Sarwar (2002) added that English is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistani institutes. It is the medium of instruction as well as the source of teaching science and other subjects at all levels. Nunan (1999) stated that to attain linguistic competency one should have adequate mastery of syntax and vocabulary profile to speak in another language because students' communicative competence is an essential component in a language class to gain maximum linguistic input. It is difficult for the students to have a positive attitude while learning second language learning. Resultantly, they face problems in learning second language learning especially in the application of language skills. So, the difficulty in second language learning is more attached to teachers' teaching strategies that ultimately affect students' learning strategies.

Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

Class Size

Class size is considered as one of the educational tools that can be defined as the average number of students in one class and measure the educational performance of the system. The conducive or unconducive environment of the classroom will always be a key factor that affects the teacher's teaching style and learners' interest in learning. Yusuf, Onifade, and Bello (2016) found the significant impact of class size on students' motivation and attention. Jacob, Olawuyi, and Jacob, (2016) findings confirmed that large class sizes challenge class discipline during teaching courses. On the contrary, Owoeye and Yara (2011) reported that in both rural and urban schools, the small size classroom did not do well as compared to the large size classroom. Nwanneka and Amaechi, (2012) stated that educational quality can be improved by lowering the class size. If the nature of the subject is theoretical then thirty students can be considered ideal but if the subject demands both theory and practical then ten students may be considered ideal (Duflo, Dupas and Kremer, 2007). However, it is a fact that both at primary and secondary levels, the learner demand more individual attention. Blatchford Bassett and Brown (2011) stressed the same point that in lower classes, learners need much attention to the classroom should be decreased in size. In this way, teachers and students have more active interaction for healthy academic performance. Similar results were reported by some scholars. Ngoboka and Schultz (2002) supported the view that students in small class sizes performed favorably in academics rather than those who were enrolled in large sections.

Anxiety Among ESL Learners

The construct anxiety is a psychological domain and can be defined in a psychological context as it is a subjective anxiety, tension, uneasiness, and trepidation linked to an increase in the autonomic nervous system (Speilberger, 1983). It can be called a "mental block" in learning the language.

Learning English has always been a challenging task for Pakistani learners. In turn, it

impedes their learning English language due to their inability to communicate in the English language. This thing results in the feeling of nervousness, anxiety, uneasiness, and most of the time their fear of being negatively evaluated. So, the anxiety factor can be called a “mental block” in learning the language (Hashemi, 2011).

Language anxiety is one the most influential factor that influences foreign language learning (Oxford, 1999). Past studies explored the causes of foreign language anxiety. Since language anxiety is a psychological concept, it originates with the learner and how they approach their work. as an intrinsic motivator (Scovel, 1978). Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) found that two basic language skills in foreign language learning are centered on feelings of nervousness or tension because these two skills cannot be separated in interaction. Researchers Al Sawalha and Foo (2012) looked into the reasons behind writing anxiety among 24 third-year BA English language students at Jordan's Yarmouk University. The results reveal that the student's mother tongue does not help them in learning the English language. That is why the students face problems and are more hesitant while learning the English language. Harmer (2007) illustrated that receptive skills mean how learners understand the message while hearing and seeing. People reactive as they observe or as they see other people or learners. Rababa'h (2005) propounds a study on the difficulties facing the EFL while learning English. According to the researcher, there are many problems like lack of vocabulary, problems in strategies, curriculum, and the environment, all these problems affect a lot.

Jalongo (1995, p.13) conducted research, he claimed that if we want to improve the listening skills of the learner. We have to make them active learners. This needs appreciation and a friendly environment where learners may learn without fear and hesitation. Brown (2007) took a research study. In his view, anxiety can either help or hinder the process of learning a second or foreign language. This kind of negative worry has an impact on students' performance. Anxiety among language learners is negatively correlated with language proficiency, according to a number of studies. Haddad (2018) investigated the relationship between EFL students' writing anxiety and the complex grammar in their written works in Jordan. 87 first-year and senior BA English literature students from Jordan's Al-Balqa Applied University made up the study's sample. Writing anxiety also affects their grammatical competence.

Willingness to Communicate

Willingness has an effective factor for success in learning the English language. an important role in every walk of life. However, there are many factors like lack of self-confidence, fear of speaking, and issues regarding extroversion and introversion (McCroskey, 1992). The paper showed that all problems may be solved if learners are willing to learn something because willingness and learning are both interlinked with each other. Dornyei and Skehan (2003) viewed second The motivation concept is extended by language learners' willingness to communicate in English. This interest and their willingness to learn something make them successful in every field.

Contextual Factors

The absence of an appropriate learning environment makes foreign language learning difficulties. There are three identified elements that learners are faced i.e., school stakeholders (teachers and students), congenial school environment, and difficulties Mustafa, Celik, Yildiz and Mart (2014) investigated the skills involved in language

acquisition and learning. According to the researchers, all skills are interlinked and two skills are independent and two skills are dependent. Listening skills is playing an important role because if the listening skill is not much so good then how can learners improve their productive skills. If listening skill is good then definitely grammar and vocabulary are also getting good. The report also makes it clear that there isn't a single perfect approach that works for every type of class. However, we can analyze our pupils' abilities, provide them a better atmosphere that fits their limits, and identify potential influences on their listening comprehension. and in the last a good friendly environment that is appropriate for learning English as second language learning. The following paper has revealed the significant problem and their solutions that all problems may be shortened and even completely solved with the collaborations of learners and policymakers.

Naseer (2015) researched second language learning. It is shown that English is the only language that is being used by all foreign learners and in every walk of life, science, technology, and business, etc. This paper examines the situation facing by Arab learners. The paper focused on teaching methodologies and the learning atmosphere rampant in Arab. The findings showed that all shortcomings may be reduced with the help of policymaking and with the cooperation of teachers and learners.

Hussein and Elttayef (2016) say that learners may get perfection not only when they have communicative as well as linguistic competence but also when they have discourse competence how to understand the hidden ideology and how they restructure words and convey the message easily that is understandable for everyone. The following study sheds light on the parent's attitude towards their children's learning. If parents are cooperative this affects the learners in a better to learn or to do everything without fear.

Motivation

Asmali (2017) took a research paper on the difficulties faced by second learners. The basic purpose is to examining the attitudes and motivations of young learners for learning English. In order to acquire qualitative data, the study used a questionnaire, three in-person semi-structured interviews, and a focus group discussion with second graders to express their opinions on motivation and attitudes toward learning English. Three distinct primary schools in the western region of Turkey hosted the mixed-method study. Through the use of descriptive statistics, data were examined. The findings showed that most pupils had positive opinions regarding studying English. Every student chose English as their preferred subject for both focus groups and one-on-one interviews. It has also been demonstrated that one of the key elements influencing children's desire to study a foreign language is their parents' attitude toward it. All learners want to use English and get perfection in it also it is cleared that learners may achieve their targets with the help of their teachers and parents because learners imitate everything they are seeing.

Boredom

The goal of the current study is to examine the challenges that students in the public sector schools in the Lahore District encounter when learning the English language by using researchers' proposed checklist and responses that have been taken through the Likert scale from the learners of 9th and 10th classes. Up till now, no research has been conducted that wholly investigates the learners' problems while learning language skills. The current research will be fruitful for the private and public sector school teachers to

analyze learners' needs at various levels and adopt teaching methodology to make the learning environment more conducive.

The English language is playing a role of a more modern language in the world. This is the language used by all learners, people, and educators; whether English is playing the role for them as a second language or third language. People use different strategies and techniques for the sake to get perfection in it. Many learners feel hesitations while using this language. Male learners become more anxious when they have to talk in the English language. In short, all problems, issues would be solved with the collaboration of learners, teachers, and policymakers as well as guardians to provide opportunities to do practice because practice makes a man perfect.

Research Questions

The present research investigated the following questions:

1. What are the problems faced by the students in learning the English Language in public sector schools of Lahore district?
2. What are the suggestions to the authorities for conducting teachers training programs to the demand and requirements of school students about English language learning?

Research Methodology

Mainly the current research is descriptive in nature but for data collection, the researcher adopted survey-based research (questionnaire). The population was to conduct the research is from the 10 different public schools of Lahore. The responses have been taken from students and their English language teachers. The reachable population was three female public sector schools and three male public sector schools from the Lahore district. 300 students with the ratio of 50 students from six different public sector schools were randomly chosen. The questionnaire was designed in simple language and distributed among chosen participants to record their responses on the Likert scale. A questionnaire was employed in this investigation to collect data from the students regarding the factors that affect the learning of the English language. A pilot study was carried out with the research participants prior to the administration of the main study. The ethical issues while taking data from the respondents were catered. The collected data was sorted in tabular form and processed in SPSS software for One Way ANOVA with the T-test. The processed data was interpreted descriptively and give a logical interpretation of the findings.

Results

Table 4.1
Geographical distribution of respondents

Area	<i>f</i>	%
Rural	168	28
Urban	432	72
Total	600	100
Gender		
Female	300	50
Male	300	50
Total	600	100
Mother Tongue		
Urdu	212	35.3
Punjabi	388	64.7
Total	600	100

Table 1 shows that 432 participants belonged to the urban areas i.e. 72% of the entire sample took part in the research. Whereas 168 participants belonged to the rural areas i.e., 28% were the participants of the study.

The frequency distribution of respondents by gender is displayed in Table 1. Out of the 600 total participants, 300 men, or 50% of the sample as a whole, took part in the research. However, 300 women, or 50% of the sample as a whole, took part in the research..

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution of the sample of the participants' mother tongue. Out of 600 participants, 212 participants i.e., 35.3% have the Urdu language as their mother tongue. Other 388 participants i.e., 64.7% of the total sample have Punjabi as their mother tongue.

Table 2
Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the basis of Curriculum and Educational materials

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Curriculum and Educational Materials	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig</i>
1.	Problems faced by the Public sector students	Male	300	14.2300	2.39783	2.380	.094
		Female	300	13.7667	2.37156		

To test the camper's independent sample, a t-test was run perception of public sector learners based on curriculum and educational materials. The findings demonstrated that there is a notable variation in the public's perspective sector learners that current teaching or supplementary material through which learners can practice English language skills to communicate fluently and accurately in their real lives. This means that learners have more interest in achieving communicative competence in the English language.

Also, the students believe that how important is English speaking environment in and out of the classroom settings.

Table 3

Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Teacher Capacity	N	M	SD	T	Sig
1.	Problems faced by the Public sector students	Male	300	16.5167	2.39783	-2.942	.000
		Female	300	17.5933	2.37156		

basis of Teacher Capacity

Table 3 used an independent sample t-test to compare the perceptions of public sector learners regarding problems learning the English language based on teacher capacity. The results showed significant differences between male and female learners' perception of the teacher's teaching capacity ($t=-2.942$, $p=.000$). In the Pakistani educational system where learners face hindrance in learning The 21st century's usage of traditional educational methods is to blame for the English language. It has been observed that teachers frequently use the Urdu language to teach basic grammatical concepts. This methodology can be named as Grammar translation method. To some extent, the use of mother tongue in English language classroom is facilitative but it excessive deprive learners to attain success in the English language. The use of GTM or the Direct method of English language teaching leads to a low success rate among learners.

Table 4

ONE WAY ANOVA Analysis

One WAY ANOVA						
		Sum Squares	of df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
CEM	Between Groups	32.202	1	32.202	5.662	.018
	Within Groups	3400.797	598	5.687		
	Total	3432.998	599			
TC	Between Groups	173.882	1	173.882	8.653	.003
	Within Groups	12017.303	598	20.096		
	Total	12191.185	599			
SP	Between Groups	27.735	1	27.735	3.812	.051
	Within Groups	4350.650	598	7.275		
	Total	4378.385	599			
ALLR	Between Groups	38.002	1	38.002	7.856	.005
	Within Groups	2892.623	598	4.837		
	Total	2930.625	599			

The above table 4.8 shows how there is a significant difference are found between groups and within groups of public-sector learners facing problems in learning the English language of Lahore. The problems have been categorized in the questionnaire that is faced by the students of the public sector. The first section regarding the curriculum and educational materials provided by the teacher have a significant difference of (0.18) between the groups. Secondly, the significance difference value between the groups regarding teacher's capacity is (0.003) which does not show a significant difference. From these findings, we can say that both the groups showed equally that teacher's low proficiency creates a hindrance in learning the English language and The groups don't differ in any appreciable way. It indicates that there are no differences amongst the groupings. The learners; believe that the teacher speaks Urdu frequently and has low proficiency in the English language. In the third section regarding student capacity. No significant difference has been observed between the groups (0.51). The learners are eager to learn the English language with their willingness and try to make them able to communicate socially in the English language. In the fourth section between the groups, there isn't a significant difference (0.005).

Discussion

Learning English as a second language (ESL) presents numerous challenges for secondary school students. These challenges are multifaceted, stemming from linguistic, psychological, and contextual factors that significantly impact students' language acquisition process. This discussion aims to delve into these problems and offer insights into their implications for both learners and educators.

Linguistic Challenges

One of the primary challenges faced by secondary school students is the linguistic complexity of English. English, with its irregular spelling, extensive vocabulary, and complex grammatical structures, can be particularly daunting for non-native speakers (Jia & Aaronson, 2003). For instance, the pronunciation of words like "though," "thought," and "through" poses significant hurdles due to their similar spelling but different sounds. This inconsistency often leads to confusion and discouragement among students (Derwing & Munro, 2005).

Moreover, students often struggle with syntax and sentence construction, as English differs greatly from their native languages. Languages such as Chinese and Arabic, which follow different grammatical rules and structures, make it challenging for students to adapt to the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) order of English (Wang & Fan, 2020). This linguistic barrier not only hinders their ability to construct grammatically correct sentences but also affects their overall comprehension and fluency (Ellis, 1997).

Psychological Barriers

Psychological factors also play a critical role in ESL learning. Many students experience anxiety and lack confidence when speaking English, fearing judgment or ridicule from peers and teachers (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1991). This fear often stems from past negative experiences or a perceived gap in their language proficiency. The pressure to perform well in exams further exacerbates this anxiety, making students reluctant to actively participate in classroom activities (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986).

Additionally, the phenomenon of "language fossilization"—where students cease to progress despite continuous exposure and learning—is a significant concern. This occurs when students reach a plateau in their learning journey, primarily due to ingrained errors that become habitual over time (Selinker, 1972). Such psychological barriers not only hinder students' ability to communicate effectively but also reduce their motivation to learn (Dörnyei, 2005).

Cultural and Contextual Factors

Cultural differences significantly influence the way students approach English learning. In many cultures, rote learning is emphasized over interactive and communicative methods, which are essential for acquiring language proficiency (Li, 2010). As a result, students may excel in written exams but struggle with spoken English and real-life communication. This disconnect highlights the need for culturally responsive teaching strategies that align with students' learning styles and cultural backgrounds (Ladson-Billings, 1995).

Moreover, the lack of exposure to native English speakers and authentic language environments presents a substantial challenge. In many regions, English is primarily taught as a subject rather than used as a medium of communication (Krashen, 1982). This limited exposure inhibits students from developing practical language skills, such as listening and speaking, which are crucial for effective communication (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

Recommendations

The challenges faced by secondary school students in learning English necessitate a reevaluation of teaching methodologies. Educators must adopt a more holistic approach, integrating linguistic, psychological, and cultural considerations into their teaching practices (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). This can be achieved by:

1. **Emphasizing Communicative Competence:** Teachers should focus on developing students' ability to use English in real-life situations rather than solely preparing them for exams. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and

interactive games can create a more engaging and supportive learning environment (Savignon, 2002).

2. **Fostering a Positive Learning Environment:** It is crucial to create a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and reduces anxiety. Teachers can achieve this by providing positive feedback, celebrating small achievements, and fostering an inclusive environment where mistakes are viewed as learning opportunities (Tsui, 1996).
3. **Incorporating Cultural Contexts:** Understanding students' cultural backgrounds can help tailor lessons that resonate with their experiences and interests. By incorporating culturally relevant materials and examples, teachers can make learning more relatable and meaningful (Gay, 2002).
4. **Utilizing Technology:** Technological tools and resources, such as language learning apps, online platforms, and multimedia content, can provide students with additional exposure to English outside the classroom. These resources can cater to different learning styles and offer interactive and immersive experiences that traditional methods may lack (Stockwell, 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the challenges faced by secondary school students in learning English as a second language are complex and multifaceted. By acknowledging and addressing these linguistic, psychological, and cultural barriers, educators can better support students in their language learning journey. A shift towards more communicative, inclusive, and culturally responsive teaching practices will not only enhance students' language proficiency but also empower them to confidently navigate the global landscape where English serves as a vital tool for communication (Brown, 2007).

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