

## OBSTACLES IN MASTERING ENGLISH: A STUDY OF STUDENTS IN LAHORE DISTRICT

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### ABSTRACT

English is an international language and it possesses significant status internationally. It is one of the most common languages and speaks around the world. The syllabus, teaching and learning strategies, lesson planning, and evaluation system all should be designed in such a way that the younger generation would come under ultra-modern educational policy implementation. However, if this implementation initiates at the Secondary level, many young will be able to gain English language competency, and difficulties in English language teaching and learning will be resolved. The researcher designed a questionnaire by surveying different researches. The respondents filled up the questionnaire comprised of four different categories. Several questions were designed under each category that probes the learner's difficulty in learning English. Likert scale was used research tool. The research was qualitative and qualitative in nature. The data was analyzed through SPSS by employing a T-test and One Way ANOVA. Afterward, the researcher interpreted findings by comparing and contrasting them with past results. The findings of the first category i.e., curriculum and educational materials, showed current practicing syllabus is outdated and does not fulfill the communicative demands of the ESL learners for their social communication. There is no concept of supplementary material for learning English. The learners rely on textbooks only. The findings of the third category i.e., students' capacity, revealed that learners are willing to learn the English language but there are certain factors like classroom boredom and lack of opportunities to participate in different activities in class due to large class size.

**Key words:** Communication, Curriculum, English language, ELT, learning, Teaching

### INTRODUCTION

English has become an international language, essential in various fields including science, technology, and commerce. Smith (1994) noted that most people globally consider themselves bilingual, while Brown (2000) claimed that bilingualism is a lifestyle. Modern nations cannot thrive in isolation, relying solely on domestic knowledge. As Lyytinen (1985) pointed out, language facilitates expressing attitudes and establishing relationships. Despite distinctions between second and foreign languages, English maintains prestige in government, public sectors, and particularly education. In Pakistan, significant efforts have been made to elevate the status of English to meet modern challenges (Mueen, 1992).

English is deemed practically valuable and is utilized across disciplines such as hard sciences, social sciences, arts, international relations, trade, and commerce. Matsuda (2002) emphasized the

importance of teaching English, referring to it as "World Englishes." Since Pakistan's partition, English has held an influential status as the language of science and technology. A substantial body of knowledge is in English, prompting its use as a second language globally for advancement. English is a compulsory subject in Pakistani education, with many subjects taught in English. Pakistan is the third-largest country in Asia for English speakers, with approximately 20 million speakers (Parveen, 2013).

The English language is pervasive across educational and scientific institutions (Sarwar, 2002). Learning English has become a socio-political demand, essential for communication, higher learning, and better career opportunities, as outlined by the National Curriculum for English Language, Government of Pakistan. Ensuring access to English can reduce disparities between rich and poor, providing equal

opportunities for professional and personal development. Proficiency in English is crucial for academic success in Pakistan.

Teaching and learning English in Pakistan are complex due to the diversity of languages (Mansoor, 2003). Several factors contribute to the difficulties faced by Pakistani ESL learners, prominently including the learning environment, which links school facilities to language learning. Sirin (2005) highlighted the importance of adequate learning environments, encompassing school buildings, libraries, classrooms, and the availability of teachers. Effective learning outcomes are associated with proper learning environments (p. 417). Putnam, McCart, Griggs, and Choi (2009) suggested that both home and school environments should stimulate learners' experiences.

The present study investigates the challenges faced by ESL learners in public sector schools of Lahore, Pakistan, using a survey method. It examines factors such as teaching strategies, student participation, learning environments, availability of resources, conducive learning environments, and motivational roles played by schools. Previous research has often focused on specific language skills like reading, speaking, and writing. However, this study addresses a broader range of factors affecting English language proficiency.

The research highlights factors impeding English language learning, ultimately impacting learners' proficiency. It holistically covers various aspects hindering the learning process, rather than focusing on individual language skills. The study's outcomes aim to guide school administrations and teachers in ensuring the availability of learning resources and addressing learners' needs, thereby enhancing productivity among English language learners.

### **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 the 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?

### **Literature Review**

Language plays a vital role in human development as a primary mode of communication, and acquiring a language is a continuous and challenging process. With increasing global interconnectedness, there has been a substantial surge in the need for acquiring proficiency in international languages such as English. Sarwar (2002) observed that English is mandatory in Pakistani educational institutions and serves as the primary language of instruction for multiple topics. Nunan (1999) highlighted that linguistic proficiency necessitates the acquisition of syntax and vocabulary, which are crucial for students to develop effective communication skills. Nevertheless, it is difficult to sustain a positive mindset when it comes to acquiring a second language, and students frequently encounter difficulties, particularly when it comes to utilizing their language abilities. The challenges are intricately linked to the instructional methods employed by teachers, which ultimately impact the learning approaches adopted by pupils.

### **Factors Influencing Second Language Acquisition**

Class size which refers to the average number of students in a class, has a substantial impact on the educational success of a system. The classroom setting has an impact on both the instructional approaches of teachers and the level of engagement and enthusiasm exhibited by students towards learning. In their study, Yusuf, Onifade, and Bello (2016) discovered a substantial correlation between class size and student motivation and attention. In their study, Jacob, Olawuyi, and Jacob (2016) found that big class numbers provide a significant barrier to maintaining class discipline. Nevertheless, Owoye and Yara (2011) discovered that small classes in both rural and urban schools did not consistently surpass large ones in terms of performance. Ngoboka and Schultz (2002) corroborated the perspective that pupils in smaller courses have superior academic performance.

Anxiety is a subjective emotion of apprehension and uneasiness that hinders language learning among ESL learners (Speilberger, 1983). Jalongo (1995) highlighted the significance of establishing a welcoming and non-threatening atmosphere in order to enhance one's ability to listen effectively. In his study, Brown (2007) identified anxiety as a variable that might either impede or enhance the process of language acquisition. Research indicates an inverse relationship between anxiety and performance in language classes (Haddad, 2018; Park & Lee, 2005). Anxiety has an impact on many linguistic abilities, such as verbal communication and written expression (Jebreil et al., 2015). Azher, Anwar, and Naz (2010) investigated the anxiety levels of foreign language learners through the administration of a questionnaire.

The willingness to engage in communication is essential for achieving success in the process of acquiring English language skills. This willingness is impacted by elements such as self-assurance and the fear of verbal expression (McCroskey, 1992). Dornyei and Skehan (2003) regarded readiness to communicate as a continuation of motivation. In their study, Dhillon and Wanjiru (2013) discovered that group interactions and reinforcement measures, such as maintaining vocabulary notebooks, were successful in facilitating English language acquisition.

An optimal learning environment is crucial for the successful acquisition of language skills. Mustafa et al. (2014) identified school stakeholders and a friendly school atmosphere as important factors. Hussein and Elttayef (2016) highlighted the importance of possessing both communicative and linguistic competence in order to attain proficiency. Asmali (2017) conducted a study on the motivation and attitudes of young learners towards studying English. The findings of the study indicated predominantly positive views. In Siddiqui's (2019) study, the author investigated the obstacles faced by undergraduate students in speaking, such as limited vocabulary and insufficient practice. The study proposed that including more communicative activities and enhancing instructor motivation could be effective strategies to address these difficulties.

This study examines the challenges encountered by students in acquiring English language skills in public schools within the Lahore District. The research utilizes a checklist and Likert scale responses from 9th and 10th grade students. Prior study has not thoroughly examined the difficulties learners have in language proficiency. The objective of this study is to assist educators in both private and public educational institutions in comprehending the requirements of students and establishing a more favorable atmosphere for learning.

English is a universally spoken language utilized by students and teachers across the globe. Notwithstanding the implementation of several ways to achieve proficiency, learners frequently encounter feelings of nervousness and reluctance, especially males. Effective collaboration among learners, teachers, policymakers, and guardians is crucial in order to facilitate practice opportunities, as practice is the cornerstone of language mastery.

### **Methodology**

This descriptive study was conducted on 10 public schools in Lahore, with responses from students and their English language teachers. The population included three female and three male public sector schools from the Lahore district. A convenient sampling technique was used to gather responses from 300 students with a 50:50 ratio from six schools.

The questionnaire was designed in simple language and distributed among participants to record their responses on the Likert scale. The researcher translated the question statement in Urdu to ensure clarity. The study used a questionnaire to collect data on factors affecting English language learning in public sector schools. The questionnaire had 20 questions divided into three sections, covering various issues learners face.

The research procedure involved planning and organizing activities, selecting appropriate research designs, collecting data from a randomly chosen sample, conducting a pilot study before administration, and addressing ethical issues. Consent was obtained from the participants, and demographic information was only required to include gender. The collected data was sorted in tabular form and processed using SPSS software

for T-test and One Way ANOVA. The interpreted data provided a descriptive and logical interpretation of the findings.

**Data Analysis**

The researcher used descriptive and statistical analysis for data analysis. Data analysis was carried out through Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. The researcher developed one questionnaire to collect data from the male and females as sample data. The questionnaire was divided into three sections and question statements were related to the difficulties faced by the English language learners by taking their demographic information. The questionnaire was filled out by learners of public sector schools of Lahore. As far as, the demographic information of learners is

concerned, the researcher gathered learners’ information such as the name of the school, residential area (urban, rural), gender, and mother tongue. However, the other parts of the questionnaire sections were comprised of question statements like educational resources, teacher’s capacity, and learners’ participation in the language classroom.

**Demographic Analysis**

As the researcher designed a questionnaire to collect data from the selected male and female participants for the underpinning study. Firstly, the demographic information of the students’ learning in the public sector was collected such as their name, gender, residential area, mother tongue.

**Table 1**  
**Geographical distribution of respondents**

Area	F	%
Rural	168	28
Urban	432	72
Total	600	100

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

**Table 2**  
**Distribution of respondents according to their gender**

Gender	F	%
Female	300	50
Male	300	50
Total	600	100

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution of respondents for gender. Total 600 participants out of which 300 males i.e., 50% of the total sample participated in the study. On the other hand, 300 females i.e., 50% of the total sample have participated in the study.

**Table 3**  
**Distribution of respondents according to their mother tongue**

Mother Tongue	F	%
Urdu	212	35.3
Punjabi	388	64.7
Total	600	100

Table 3 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.

**Inferential Analysis and Discussion**

The researcher has employed a t-test to identify differences in groups regarding the problems faced by the students learning the English language in Public sector schools of Lahore district. The researcher interprets the results and discusses them accordingly.

**Table 4**  
**Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the basis of Curriculum and Educational materials**

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	T	Sig
1.	Curriculum and Educational Materials	Male	300	14.2300	2.39783	2.380	.094
		Female	300	13.7667	2.37156		

An independent sample t-test was performed (table 4) to the camper the perception of public sector learners based on curriculum and educational materials. The results showed that there is a significant difference exist in the perception of the public 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.

administration. No supplementary content is provided to learners that neither enhances their interest and motivation. In the end, the teaching and learning process turns into a disaster.

Woolcock observes, "The quality of the syllabus is a fairly reliable indicator of the quality of teaching and learning that will take place in a course" (2005). Pakistani English language teachers also believe that outdated syllabus does not fulfill learners' communicative needs that lead to their failure at higher educational objectives. Mostly, school teachers and learners focus on textbooks recommended by the school

Chandio and Chandio (2017) observed that English textbooks at Intermediate (Part-I) by Sindh Textbook Board do not include material based on practical issues or related to language competency. Moreover, the language used in the textbook is quite antique that in no way builds up learners' language competency. In the present textbooks, no text engages learners enthusiastically in learning the English language and made them capable to communicate in practical situations. The exercises given at the end of the reading text are not using modern activities. But unfortunately, teacher's pay less attention to lesson planning to cater to the needs of the learners (Akbar, 2014; Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). So, the teacher should supplementary material specially designed according to the principles of communicative language teaching that encourage learners to have a practice of English language.

**Table 5**  
**Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the basis of Teacher Capacity**

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	T	Sig
1.	Teacher's Capacity	Male	300	16.5167	2.39783	-2.942	.000
		Female	300	17.5933	2.37156		

An independent sample t-test was performed in Table 5 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 English language is due to the use of traditional teaching methodology in this 21st century. 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.

Due to this, the only motivation for the learners is to rot the lessons and pass the examination. The teachers need to cater to the needs of learners having mixed abilities. Cakici (2015) suggested that where learners are needed to be trained to enhance their learning capacity by developing communicative strategies, on the other hand, teachers are also needed to present

themselves as a model. So, teachers are required to plan to teach content and methodology carefully as teacher's attitudes have an influential impact on student learning (Farid, 2018). An important barrier in learning and teaching the English language effectively is the large class size (Bahanshal, 2013; Meriem, 2013). The classroom learning environment can be more effective for learning and teaching by small class size.

Blatchford Bassett and Brown (2011) stated that in small class sizes, learners receive individual attention and have more involvement and active participation with their teachers. All these above-cited scholars emphasized that large classroom sizes decrease classroom engagement. Similarly, Ngoboka and Schultz (2002) noticed academic performance is more favorable in small classrooms rather than students enrolled in large classroom sizes. Classroom size has a direct impact on the economy. Nwadiani (2000) implies that a larger classroom size lowers the quality of education. Owoeye and Yara (2011) presented contrary findings. According to them, there is no significant impact of class size on a learner's academic performance.

**Table 6**  
**Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the basis of Student Capacity**

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Student Capacity	N	M	SD	T	Sig
1.	Student Capacity	Male	300	15.6400	3.09337	-1.952	.000
		Female	300	16.0700	2.23197		

An independent sample t-test was performed in Table 6 to compare the perceptions of public sector learners regarding problems learning the English language based on student's capacity. The results showed the significant differences between male and female learners' perception of student's capacity ( $t= -1.952, p=.000$ ). The findings can be interpreted that learners' have the interest to learn English for social communication and use it for writing purposes.

Shamim (2017) reiterated that the Pakistani educational system mainly focuses on examination therefore, the learners' have not been provided the opportunity to develop their linguistic skills effectively inside and outside the classroom. To build learners' linguistic

competence, the learners should be engaged in activities like; debates, dialogues, real-life problem-solving discussions, communication games in the English language class (Khattak, 2012). It is essential to make learners proficient in the English language, otherwise, students having weak language skills fail in English but also face failure in other subjects as well (Abbas, Ashiq & Haq, 1998; Mansoor, 2003).

Due to outdated content in Pakistani textbooks is one of the main reasons for boredom among learners because textbooks are not activity-based. The crucial factor of boredom has usually been neglected by the language teachers who labeled it as learners' anxiety, laziness and depression (Macklem, 2015) and it has been noticed that boredom is one of the most

experienced emotions in schools (Pekrun, Goetz, Daniels, Stupinsky, & Perry, 2010). One of the solutions to eradicate the factor of boredom from ESL classrooms by using the “flipped classroom approach” or “student-centered classroom”. When learners are given little opportunity or

responsibility for the teacher for their own learning experience act as a class controller and lesson planner of time ahead. Moreover, the use of authentic materials in the classroom decrease boredom among learners.

**Table 7**  
**Independent sample t-test comparing the English language learning problems on the basis of availability of language learning resources**

Sr. No	Dependent Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	T	Sig
1.	Availability of language learning resources	Male	300	12.3233	1.90549	- 2.803	.000
		Female	300	12.8267	2.45834		

An independent sample t-test was performed in Table 7 to compare the perceptions of public sector learners regarding problems learning the English language based on the availability of language learning resources. The results showed significant differences between male and female learners’ perceptions of the availability of language learning resources ( $t = -1.952, p = .000$ ). The use of language learning resources stimulates and enhances the teaching and learning process among learners. Audio-visual aids always create a pleasant environment in the ESL classroom. It arouses interest among learners and also helps in understanding the texts as well. Audiovisual aids are interactive teaching tools which is simultaneously a combination of image, text, video, or sound. Methew and Alidmat (2013) stated that audiovisual aids stimulate and improve creative thinking, so, in this way audio-visual aids have multiple effects on the knowledge and skills of students (Hussain, Ahmed, Ahmad, Mehmood & Khattak, 2015). Al-Yaari (2013) outlined the different skills that are improved by the use of audiovisual aids i.e., written skills, language, vocabulary building, communication, sound system, and grammatical

structures. The use of audiovisual aids makes learning more realistic, concrete, and dynamic. Cakir (2006) emphasized that the use of audiovisual aids in the classroom makes learners focused and they can their learning experiences with real life. Similarly, Subartha (2012) stated that films have also a strong influence on learners as it does appeal to their ears and eyes but also their emotions, which helps in building the good habits and right attitudes. Tarcan (2013) and Madhuri (2013) presented that the use of audiovisual aids improves verbal skills. Umar (2014) also asserted that when teachers use high technology audiovisual aids it motivates the unwilling learners to speak English regularly.

Prior researches also showed that teachers create motivation among learners for their success by developing hard work and interest in the classroom through audio-visual aids. Hence, the teachers who adopt instructional-based teaching will ultimately keep their students alert and active. This makes teacher attitude interested and professional (Akram, Sufiana & Malik, 2012). Hence, the audio-visual tools in the ESL classroom boosts learners’ confidence to speak and overcome shyness.

**Table 8**  
**ONE WAY ANOVA Analysis**  
**One WAY ANOVA**

		Sum of Squares	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 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 there is no significant difference between the groups. It means that there is no variation between the groups. 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, there is no significant difference (0.005) between the groups.

**Conclusions**

Language is a crucial aspect of communication, and gaining communicative competence in the English language is essential for academic success. However, learners in public sector schools in Lahore district face several challenges in learning English. The current curriculum and educational materials are outdated and do not meet the communicative demands of ESL learners. Students rely on textbooks for learning English, which lack supplementary activities and encourage speaking. Teachers are also low proficient in speaking English and use traditional methods, believing that students should pass exams without engaging them in challenging activities or teaching problem-solving skills. Students are willing to learn English, but there are factors like classroom boredom and lack of opportunities to participate in different activities due to large class sizes. Traditional teaching methods make learners bored and unable to create their own choice. Additionally, they face anxiety when they don't understand basic concepts due to time constraints. The availability of language learning resources in the classroom is limited, with less use of audiovisual aids and no movie time. Teachers do not use these strategies to improve learning. Recommendations include



updating traditional courses, giving home tasks related to learners' real-life experiences, and creating a learner-centered classroom with teachers acting as facilitators to build communicative competency. Future research could explore other factors faced by ESL in Pakistani context, including interviews with school administration, teachers, and students, and comparing public and private sectors to investigate their perceptions of English language learning problems. Environmental factors, not just language skills, should also be considered to better understand the impact of language learning on students.

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