

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

GRAMMAR WITHOUT VOICE: UNPACKING THE PEDAGOGICAL
PARADOX OF GOVERNMENT SCHOOL STUDENTS' INABILITY
TO TRANSLATE GRAMMATICAL COMPETENCE INTO
PRAGMATIC FLUENCY IN ENGLISH



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Abstract

This study investigates the pedagogical paradox within Pakistani government schools where students demonstrate grammatical competence in English yet remain unable to translate that knowledge into pragmatic fluency. Despite English being a language of prestige and a requirement for the job market, public school students often reach only a basic level of spoken proficiency. To bridge this gap between having grammatical competency in English language and have no spoken fluency a mixed-methods approach, the research conducted a survey, written grammar tests, and interviews with 15 students of 8th class from Government Girls High School, Jamshoro. The data analysis reveals a significant gap between written and oral skills: out of the 15 students, 10 scored high on the written grammar test, while only 2 were able to speak English with low proficiency. This discrepancy is attributed to linguistic barriers such as limited vocabulary and L1 interference, as well as psychological factors including shyness and a fear of making mistakes. Furthermore, pedagogical issues—specifically the reliance on traditional grammar-translation methods (GTM) and a lack of classroom interaction—hinder communicative development. The study concludes that students are learning "about" the language rather than how to use it. To resolve this, it is recommended that schools implement interactive speaking activities, introduce technology, and create a supportive environment that encourages real-life English usage.

Key words

Pedagogical paradox: *The pedagogical paradox refers to the challenge of teaching and learning, where the more we try to formalize and systematize knowledge, the less effective it can be in promoting genuine understanding and practical application. In other words, there's a disconnect between knowing the rules and being able to apply them in real-life situations.*

Pragmatic Fluency: *Pragmatic fluency is the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in social contexts. It's about being able to navigate the nuances of language, such as tone, idioms, and implied meaning, to convey intended meaning and build relationships. Pragmatic fluency is essential for successful communication, as it helps individuals to adapt to different social situations and interact with people from diverse backgrounds.*

Grammatical Competence: *Grammatical competence refers to the ability to understand and use the rules of language, including syntax, morphology, and phonology. It's the foundation upon which effective communication is built, enabling individuals to express themselves clearly and accurately, and to comprehend the messages of others. Grammatical competence is a crucial aspect of language proficiency, as it provides the structural framework for meaningful communication.*

INTRODUCTION

English is an international code used by most of the people around the world for communication. In both education and the job market, English is dominantly used for interaction. In Pakistan, English is spoken as a second language and is often regarded as a language of prestige. Students, teachers, and professionals in higher positions are expected to speak English fluently.

Unfortunately, despite receiving English education, many individuals struggle to hold conversations in English and students in public schools often only reach a basic level of spoken English. There must be many reasons behind this inconsistency as Yasmin (2018), says that students often memorize English instead of truly learning it. The statement reflects most of the public school where students are only taught Grammar not speaking or use of English in practical life.

Literature review

Students face two main types of difficulties when speaking English: linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Doris and Jesica_ point out that language-related issues can significantly hinder students' ability to improve their language skills.

Linguistics Factors

One of the biggest challenges faced by students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is dealing with linguistic barriers. These barriers often include difficulties in grammar, pronunciation, vocabulary, fluency, and even understanding the materials used in the learning process (Chen, 1996; Huang, 1998). For many EFL learners, these problems make communication in English stressful and sometimes discouraging, and ultimately it hinders students' not only academic performance but also their confidence and willingness to communicate. Among these challenges, the lack of vocabulary stands out as one of the most significant obstacles. Savaşçı (2014) found that not having enough vocabulary was the main barrier that prevented learners from expressing themselves effectively. When learners don't know the right words to use, they struggle to convey their thoughts clearly, which can affect both their spoken and written communication. Even though English has a rich and diverse vocabulary, learners often feel overwhelmed or underprepared to use it correctly. As a result, their communication may become unclear or ineffective.

A limited vocabulary also lowers confidence. Many students hesitate to speak because they are afraid of making mistakes. Tatar (2005) observed that EFL students often stay silent in class, not because they don't have anything to say. They have a lot to say and share, but they lack the language skills or background knowledge to participate. This fear of speaking can lead to anxiety, loss of motivation, and reduced focus on communication. Over time, it can make learners less willing to take part in classroom activities or real-life conversations. Furthermore, vocabulary limitations affect both the ability to produce language (speaking and writing) and to understand it (listening and reading). When students can't understand or use words effectively, it becomes harder for them to share ideas, ask questions, or respond to others, which slows down their overall language development.

Another barrier students face is their L1. Students whose L1 is any regional language create interference while constructing sentences in English. They translate the sentence and then try to utter it. This interference of L1 and translation leads to pronunciation, vocabulary, and accent errors,

making students feel insecure and exacerbating the sense of inferiority about their language ability. Concerns about how they sound affect their willingness to speak. Brown states that, due to low vocabulary, they struggle to express themselves even if they understand grammatical rules.

Teaching methods are wrong as they teach grammar in isolation of contexts, and they use only sentences to teach grammar and then language.

Thornbury (2005) proposes explicit teaching of grammar at word, sentence and text levels. Along the same vein Gerngross, Puchta, and Thornbury (2006), Thornbury (2004), and Jones and Lock (2011), Richards and Rappen (2014) has written practical accounts regarding grammar teaching up to the text level suggesting that grammar is not simply a body of knowledge students need to have but also grammar as a resource for making meanings in real communication with various purposes. Thus, the unit of focus in grammar teaching is text. As the reader's responsive theory suggests that a student must know to create a personal response on a text after reading it, he shouldn't only know what the teacher said but also what he understood. As Nolte (2012) said it one text many stories.

Non-Linguistic Factors

Socio-Cultural Barriers to English Language Learning

Culture has a substantial impact on how people think, act, and learn. House (2007) says that language and culture are closely connected; we don't just learn a language, we also learn the culture that comes with it. Language can't exist without culture (Adeeb, Arshad, Aman & Najam, 2010). Every society has its own traditions, values, and ways of doing things (Oxford Dictionary), and these deeply shape how students learn and what attitudes they bring to education. Socio-cultural factors are the customs, traditions, values, and social habits that people grow up with. These factors affect how learners see themselves, how they behave, and how motivated they feel to learn. As Schumann pointed out, learning a language isn't just about knowing grammar and words; it's also about understanding the social and cultural world behind the language. The environment around us plays a huge role in motivating us. It affects how much we can guide ourselves, push ourselves, and stay focused on learning (Burnet, 2000). When students feel supported and accepted by those around them, they are more excited to learn. But when they feel left out or judged, they often lose motivation and may even fail. Students' beliefs about themselves, shaped by their society, have a strong influence on their academic success. Researchers like Faisal Irfan, Aziz ur Rehman Khan, and Malik Muhammad Saleem found that a student's background, including where they live and how much money their family has, has a big impact on how well they learn. Studies by Brogan and the OECD also show that it's not just what happens inside the classroom that matters; students' social and economic situations at home play a big role too. Rothman found that kids from poorer families often don't have a good place to study at home, which makes learning a second language (L2) much harder. Similarly, Croll said that students with more chances and better support at home usually do better in exams and go on to higher education. In countries like Pakistan, socio-cultural barriers are very noticeable. Muhammad Arshad (2014) points out that many children don't have much exposure to English, especially in poor or traditional communities. Without enough chances to practice, it becomes harder for them to develop important skills like independent thinking and learning (Xue-wel, Ying-jun, 2001). Girls often face even more challenges, as traditional views sometimes limit their educational opportunities (Gene; Erdogan, 2005). Similar challenges can be seen in Saudi Arabia. Strong traditional and religious values there can make people less enthusiastic about learning English. Bryan Greenberg (2016) found that many Saudi students aren't confident in

everyday English conversations because they don't get enough practice. Oanh (2021) also mentioned that students often stay quiet in class out of respect for their teachers, missing out on chances to speak and practice English naturally. These examples show how powerful socio-cultural barriers can be when it comes to learning a second language. To understand this better, it's helpful to look at what learning theories say about the connection between society and learning. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory explains that our social environment and traditions have a big impact on how we learn and grow mentally. He believed that learning happens best when we are part of an encouraging and active social environment. When learners are exposed to supportive, motivating, and open communities, they develop strong inner motivation and a positive attitude toward learning English. But when they grow up in strict or limiting environments, it becomes much harder for them to succeed in learning another language.

Psychological Factors:

The ability of students to participate actively in speaking lessons is strongly influenced by psychological and cognitive factors. These two aspects are closely linked, shaping students' confidence, motivation, and language performance.

Cognitive Factors

Cognitive factors relate to students' prior learning experiences, learning styles, preparation for classes, subject knowledge, and enthusiasm for participating in discussions (Liu, 2001). According to Truong and Wang (2019), students who possess sufficient background knowledge and positive learning experiences tend to demonstrate greater competence in English communication. In contrast, students lacking in these areas often struggle to express themselves effectively.

Affective (Psychological) Factors

Affective factors involve emotional states such as motivation, attitude, anxiety, and willingness to take risks (Liu, 2001). Le (2019) emphasizes that personal characteristics such as temperament, fear of negative evaluation, and anxiety can significantly inhibit students' participation in speaking activities. Students who fear making mistakes or facing ridicule from peers are more likely to avoid speaking, leading to reduced language practice and a decline in their communicative competence. The classroom environment also plays a crucial role in either supporting or hindering student participation. In public-sector schools, the classroom culture often does not actively encourage English communication, making students feel reluctant to speak. According to Le (2019), peer attitudes and behaviors can heavily influence an individual student's willingness to participate. Fear of criticism or laughter from classmates discourages many students from engaging in speaking tasks, reinforcing their anxiety and hesitation.

Teachers' behavior also significantly affects students' motivation and self-confidence. Studies (Le Xuan Mai, Le Khanh Ngoc, & Le Thanh Thao, n.d.) have noted that in some public schools, teachers may resort to taunting, insulting, or punishing students for errors. Such negative treatment discourages students from speaking English, even when they have sufficient knowledge. A lack of encouragement and a punitive classroom atmosphere diminish students' willingness to take risks in speaking and inhibit their language development. Supportive and respectful teacher-student relationships are, therefore, crucial for fostering a safe and motivating learning environment.

Pedagogical Factors.

Many schools and colleges have accepted English as a medium of instruction in nations where English is used as a second or foreign language, but many still utilize English as a teaching language in their curricula. Students perceive learning English to be challenging (Akbari, 2015; Phyak, 2016). Halliday's statement that "a language is more complex than a nuclear science" illustrates how difficult it is to teach and master a language and how it necessitates a proper planning and environment.

The size of the class is one of the reasons why students in Pakistan fail to learn a language, according to Celce-Murcia (2001), who noted that large classes are common in many Asian nations and present several difficulties, ranging from difficulties with classroom management to a lack of opportunities for student interaction. Teachers grow habitually to traditional teaching methods and students become passive, acquire the language passively, and focus more over grammar rules.

Teachers' attitude and competence is another reason and play a crucial role in learning of a language as Sokip, 2020 said that the role of a teacher in a classroom as a facilitator may increase the learning proficiency of learners but if the teacher is authoritarian in the classroom then learners are just passive learners and do not get opportunities for language practice. So, learning is not totally dependent on learners but also teachers' behavior, philosophy and competence is important. If a teacher themselves is not sure about the appropriate theories of teaching a language and they themselves are not proficient, how can they produce successful learners? Raja & Selvi (2011) found that teachers' attitude and competence is the major factor of learning difficulties. It is duty of teachers to draw a positive image of English in students' minds and make sure to create a positive environment and space for learners as Chand, G.B (2021) has also emphasized on positive attitudes of teacher towards English, but still there are teachers who are promoting traditional method of teaching, as Chand, G.B (2021) mentioned an statement of a student who said that "we never talked to our teacher in English in the school level, and even did not go in front of the class. Our schoolteacher was very strict and did not allow us to speak in the class, so we used to be silent".

Methodology

This study utilized a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between grammar knowledge and speaking skills. Fifteen students participated in a grammar test, followed by interviews where verbal questions related to the test were asked to assess their speaking skills. The study compared students' performance on the grammar test with their spoken language proficiency during the interviews, providing insight into the relationship between grammatical knowledge and speaking skills.

Data Analysis

This study employed a mixed method approach to assess the English language (EL) skills of 8th -grade students. We conducted a survey with 15 students from Government Girls High School, Jamshoro. The survey included a written test to evaluate grammatical skills and an interview to assess their speaking abilities. When we compared the results of the written test with the interview scores, we found that out of the 15 students, 10 scored highest on the written test. However, the results were quite different in the speaking test, where only 2 students were able to speak English, and even they demonstrated low proficiency. This indicates that while students in public sector schools may have good grammatical knowledge, they are not proficient in speaking English.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Moreover, the interviews were conducted in three languages; English, Urdu, and Sindhi to encourage students to share the difficulties they face while speaking in English and suggest potential solutions for improving their speaking skills. During the discussions, the students highlighted several reasons for their struggles, including fear of speaking, shyness, and the societal status of the English language.

Findings

This study revealed a notable disparity between students' grammar competence and their speaking skills. While they demonstrated a good understanding of grammatical concepts, their speaking skills fell below average. Through interviews, and tests, the study identified several reasons contributing to this discrepancy, including Lack of vocabulary, Fear of mistakes and shyness.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Skill Tested	Number of Students (out of 15)
High score in the written test	10 students
Could speak English	2 students
Could not speak English	13 students

The findings from the written test and speaking interviews highlight a clear gap between grammatical knowledge and spoken English proficiency among 8th-grade students from Government Girls High School, Jamshoro. Out of the 15 students assessed, only 10 scored well in the written test. This suggests that their classroom instruction emphasizes grammar and written English, a common feature of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) used in many public schools in Pakistan. According to Shamim (2008), the focus on rote grammar drills in Pakistani classrooms results in students performing better in written English but struggling with real-life language use.

However, a very different picture emerged in the speaking assessment. Only 2 students could speak in English, and even they showed limited vocabulary, low fluency, and a lack of confidence. The remaining 13 students could not speak English at all, which indicates a serious lack of speaking practice and exposure. This aligns with Mahboob (2009), who explains that while English is taught as a subject in Pakistan, it is rarely taught as a language meant for communication. This disparity shows that while students may “know” English grammatically, they are not functionally proficient in using it. Kumaravadivelu (2006) also highlights that in South Asian contexts, traditional teaching methods often neglect oral skills, creating a gap between "learning about the language" and "using the language." The results from this study reflect this issue. Therefore, the data confirms that although students in public schools may appear competent in written tasks, they often lack the practical communication skills necessary for spoken English, largely due to limited classroom speaking opportunities, confidence-building activities, fear of making mistakes, and shyness

Discussion

Reason for the discrepancy between grammar competence and English speaking.

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

1) Lack of vocabulary

According to the text inspector vocabulary is the foundation of language but still many learners lack it and face difficulty to speak, as the participants of this data respond, S1 _I face problems with vocabulary while speaking English. Sometimes I know what I want to say, but I don't know the right words to use. Similarly, S3 responded that My problem is that I don't know many words in English. When I speak, I stop because I don't know the right words to say....

One of the students said that my vocabulary is not good and mentioned the reason like; _Vocabulary is a big challenge for me in English. I wish I knew more words so I

can speak confidently without stress or difficulty but our teachers are the reason we cannot speak well, they themselves don't know the good vocabulary and they don't appreciate using good vocabulary.

S5 responded that I struggle to memorize the words I learn new words and then forget.

2) Fear of mistakes and shyness

Juhana said that feeling shy and afraid of making mistakes always hinders students from participating in speaking activities. As S1 said, honestly, I'm always worried that I'll say something wrong or use the wrong words. I don't want to sound silly or make others laugh at me.

According to the Oxford language club, making mistakes while speaking feels like failure and seems like the 'end of the world '. S2 stated: I've had experiences where my classmates laughed at my mistakes. Now, I'm hesitant to speak up because I don't want to feel embarrassed.

Another student S4 shared that usually my teacher corrects me when I make a mistake and I feel ashamed of speaking and that's why I don't speak in class.

As the same case is represented by Chand,G.B.(2021) where he quoted a student's statement "Our teacher makes corrections in front of the class so that I feel ashamed among other friends".

Conclusion

This study reveals a gap in English language proficiency among government school students. They grasp grammatical rules but lack speaking fluency. To address this, incorporating interactive activities (debate, role-plays, group discussions) and creating a supportive environment can help. Technology, like language apps and online partners, can supplement practice. Encouraging parental involvement and community engagement can also boost confidence. Intensive spoken English classes are recommended for public sector students.

» Potential Solutions

1) In public schools, more interactive speaking activities, such as debates, role-plays, and group discussions, to build confidence and fluency should be employed.

2) Creating a Supportive Environment in classroom culture where making mistakes is seen as a part of learning. This can help reduce fear of anxiety and mistakes and encourage students to practice speaking with confidence.

3) Students, during our survey, emphasized implementing vocabulary-building exercises and real-life contexts where they can learn and practice new words.

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- 4) In public schools, there is no use of technology. Students there are digitally uneducated. Language learning apps, online conversation partners, or videos should be introduced and provided for additional speaking practice.
- 5) Parental involvement should be encouraged through resources and guidance to help support their children's language learning at home.
- 6) To promote Real-Life English Usage, engage students in community activities or clubs where they can practice English in authentic contexts so that they can enhance both their confidence and practical skills.
- 7) Students currently studying in the public sector should have intensive and additional spoken English language classes.

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Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

Socio-Cultural Variation and its effects on Learning English in Pakistan:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/284005822_Socio-

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