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**CAUSES OF PASSIVITY AND RELUCTANCE IN SPEAKING
ENGLISH AT THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL IN
BALOCHISTAN**



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Abstract

This study analyzes the reasons of reluctantance and passivity while using English in undergraduate classrooms and discusses the appropriate approaches to ensure a high level of participation by the passive learners. The sample consisted of 70 individuals (35 males and 35 females) enrolled in 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters students. A mixed-method approach was chosen in which quantitative data were analyzed using structured questionnaires and qualitative data were analyzed using semi-structured interviews. The quantitative findings demonstrated that low self-confidence, fear of mistakes, pronunciation problems, and peer judgment pressure were the psychological factors that significantly influenced the willingness of students to speak English. Moreover, environmental factors such as lack of speaking chances, lecture-based teaching strategies, and unsupportive classroom environment also discouraged participation. The qualitative thematic analysis helped to make these findings, and it also showed that students liked interactive teaching methods, group discussions, pronunciation workshops, and constructive feedback. These findings are beneficial to both students and policy makers seeking to improve the English language proficiency and academic engagement in non-native settings.

Keywords: *English language proficiency, classroom participation, student reluctance, language anxiety, active learning strategies.*

Introduction

The English language has emerged as the most significant instrument of communication, transcending geographical, cultural, and political borders in the contemporary world due to globalization. English is spoken in business, science, education, and technology, hence it plays a vital to access to higher education, employment, and research. English is spoken in Pakistani universities, especially in fields like law, science, medicine, and engineering (Manan, 2014).

Nevertheless, in areas like Balochistan, which is the largest province in Pakistan with minimal resources, students encounter serious barriers to learning English. These factors are the lack of educational infrastructure, inadequately trained teachers, low socioeconomic status, and weak language environment (Zubairi et al., 2021). The majority of schools in rural regions do not have qualified English teachers, and other socioeconomic factors make the process of language acquisition quite complicated because most families can barely afford to meet their basic needs (Ahmed et al., 2023). As a consequence, despite most of the undergraduate students in Balochistan having sufficient writing skills, they are found to be hesitant and passive when they are expected to speak English in the classroom. This lack of oral activity is harmful to the process of learning and limits the holistic language acquisition of students.

English is the medium of instruction in universities in Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, which offers students access to global knowledge networks (Marginson, 2010). English is used to learn

business, tertiary education, and international relations in Asian nations like China, India, Japan, and South Korea (McPherron, 2016; Sah, 2018). Although such trends are evident all over the world, there is a significant gap between policy and student performance in Pakistani higher education. Conventional instructional approaches have prioritized grammar and memorization over speaking and listening skills, which makes students incapable of using the language in practice (Ali et al., 2020; Asghar and Butt, 2018).

Balochi, Pashto, and Brahui are the predominant spoken languages, and English is usually seen as a foreign language that does not have any connection to the lived experiences of students (Rabbani et al., 2021). The teaching approaches are mainly teacher-centered, with a focus on grammar and writing over communicative competence (Bazai et al., 2023). In addition, students experience intense psychological problems, such as language anxiety, which can be explained by the fear of errors, peer mockery, or failure to convey his/her ideas (Hasnae and Adiba, 2021). This fear is a major impediment to the language learning process.

There is a gap in research; the literature is mostly based on reading and writing issues of Pakistani higher education, and there is a scarcity of studies related to speaking and listening skills. Moreover, there are minimal studies that have sufficiently explored the kind of pedagogical strategies that can build speaking skills among university students in Balochistan. To fill this gap, the current research seeks to (1) understand the underlying factors behind the resistance and the passivity of students regarding speaking English in the classroom, and (2) come up with strategies on how to deal with passivity and encourage active involvement among students.

Literature Review

English language proficiency is an important skill in higher education, and it has been found to have a significant influence on academic performance and career opportunities. Most teaching, research, and professional communication takes place in English as the global lingua franca across different disciplines (Luczaj et al., 2022). In other countries, such as Pakistan, where English is the predominant medium of instruction, the level of students speaking the language directly influences their level of understanding the curriculum, their academic involvement, and written materials (Afridi et al., 2024). Haidar (2019) reports that there are high disparities in the English ability of students with various socioeconomic backgrounds: urban students have access to good-quality English materials, and rural students cannot cope with academic requirements.

A mixed-method study by Ansari (2024) of 392 students and 13 faculty members showed that English proficiency was a significant factor in academic success and career progression. On the same note, Bango et al. (2023) noted that there was a positive association between English language proficiency and undergraduate CGPA in Mehran University. These results highlight the importance of institutions of higher learning to adopt holistic language studies that can equip students with academic and international professional settings.

Although English is important, learners in Pakistan experience various challenges. Limited exposure to the language, not enough teaching strategies, and the absence of resources obstruct the process of proficiency acquisition (Rashid et al., 2016). These issues are further increased in Balochistan by geographical isolation and cultural characteristics. According to Ahmed et al. (2023), the majority of Balochistan schools do not have qualified English teachers, and the instructional strategies used in the country are based more on rote learning and memorization, rather than speaking and listening (Bazai et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the fact that there are no English-speaking communities beyond the classroom implies that students do not use the language in their informal contexts (Aziz and Kashinathan, 2021). The English language is considered a prestigious language, linked with the social status that, on the contrary, makes students less willing to speak it due to their fear of mistakes (Ashraf et al., 2021). The presence of language anxiety is widespread; students do not speak because they fear that they will be negatively judged by colleagues or teachers (Hasnae and Adiba, 2021). These mental obstacles are especially acute in the case of female students, as they might have other cultural pressures about modesty and talking in public.

The classroom atmosphere is a decisive factor in determining the willingness of students to speak English. The common Balochistani universities have a traditional and teacher-centered approach to instruction, which emphasizes grammar and written tests, with minimal oral interaction (Zahid et al., 2024). Students turn into passive receivers of knowledge, but not active users of language. Studies of effective ESL instruction have shown that speaking confidence and fluency are greatly enhanced by communicative language teaching and group activities, and task-based learning (Canale and Swain, 1980; Gutiérrez, 2024). Debates, role plays, and group discussions are examples of interactive strategies that provide low-anxiety practice opportunities, which enable scholars to overcome their anxiety of making mistakes (Aydemir, 2019; Koç, 2018).

There are also good prospects of learning a language via technology. Digital tools and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) are proven to increase the level of student engagement and allow them to practice and have flexibility beyond the classroom (Ahmadi, 2018; Khalitova and Gimaletdinova, 2016). Nonetheless, in resource-deficient environments such as Balochistan, such technologies cannot be easily accessed.

Language anxiety and involvement of gender differences have been recorded in different settings. Female students tend to express greater communication anxiety and fear of negative appraisal than male students (Su, 2021; Kimura, 2021). In Balochistan, female students might also have limited access to speaking English in the open or co-educational environment due to traditional gender norms. Students may also be discouraged from using English because of cultural attitudes that regard speaking English as pretentious or a form of westernization (Shier, 2016; Kanwal, 2016).

Although there is a lot of literature on English language issues in Pakistan, there are limited studies that have investigated the particular causes of speaking reluctance among undergraduate students in Balochistan in both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. In addition, the literature has seldom used a quantitative analysis of the psychological and environmental factors, along with a qualitative investigation into what students themselves would recommend to improve the situation. The current research fills this gap by offering empirical evidence from two universities and practical suggestions on pedagogy and policy.

Research Methodology

This research used a mixed-methods research approach, which is exploratory and combines both qualitative and quantitative research. The quantitative aspect employed a structured questionnaire to estimate the attitude of students and their level of confidence and perceived barriers to using the English language. The qualitative aspect employed semi-structured interviews to get in-depth perspectives about the understandings and recommendations of the students.

The sample included 70 undergraduate students (35 males, 35 females) aged 18-24 years, and were studying the 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters at two universities in Balochistan: Lasbela University of

Agriculture, Water and Marine Sciences (LUAWMS), and Balochistan University of Engineering and Technology (BUETK), Khuzdar. Purposive sampling was used to draw a sample of those students who self-reported that they were reluctant to speak English in the classroom.

The primary tool was a structured questionnaire that included 5-point Likert scale questions (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire is made up of two parts: (a) questions about root causes of reluctance and passivity (8 items), and (b) questions about strategies to improve active participation (6 items). The tool was tested and validated by expert evaluation and pilot testing. The analysis of reliability provided a Cronbach alpha of .991 in the first section and .994 in the second section, which depicts the excellent internal consistency. Ten individuals were interviewed using semi-structured methods (5 from each university) to gather qualitative data. Interviews centered on the perceived barriers, emotional experiences, and suggestions on how to improve.

Quantitative analysis was done using self-administered questionnaires (60 respondents) and audio-recorded interviews (10 participants). SPSS (version 26) was used to examine quantitative data using descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, standard deviations) and independent samples t-tests to compare the male and female responses. Qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis and were transcribed, and followed the six stages of analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). All participants gave informed consent. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured, and participants were informed that they might withdraw at any time without any consequence.

Findings and Analysis

The sample consisted of 50% male (n=35) and 50% female (n=35) students. The majority (58.3%) were aged 21–23 years, followed by 18–20 years (25%) and 24 years and above (16.7%). Students were equally distributed across the 4th, 6th, and 8th semesters (33.3% each). Fifty percent of the participants (50) had attended extra courses in English outside their formal curriculum, whereas the other half had not. Table 1 shows the average scores and independent t-test outcomes of the main factors of psychology and environment, without gender disaggregation.

Table 1: Gender Differences in Perceived Barriers to Speaking English

Item	Male (n=35) Mean (SD)	Female (n=35) Mean (SD)	t (df=68)	p- value
I feel confident when speaking English in class	3.58 (1.14)	2.81 (1.23)	3.015	.004**
I fear making mistakes when speaking English	3.41 (1.03)	2.79 (1.28)	2.984	.004**
My pronunciation is not good enough to speak confidently	3.27 (1.18)	2.68 (1.01)	1.285	.203
I am afraid of being laughed at or judged by my peers	3.22 (1.11)	2.91 (1.21)	1.022	.310
I have insufficient opportunities to practice speaking	3.34 (1.32)	2.96 (1.29)	1.285	.203
The classroom environment does not encourage active participation	3.31 (1.25)	3.07 (1.18)	0.812	.419

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Cultural/societal norms discourage me from speaking English	2.78 (1.26)	2.39 (1.32)	1.265	.210
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Note: * $p < .01$ (statistically significant)

Findings indicate that the male students were much more confident ($M=3.58$) in comparison to female students ($M=2.81$, $p=.004$). Likewise, male students used a much lower level of fear of making mistakes ($M=3.41$) than female students ($M=2.79$, $p=.004$). Such results suggest that female students are more likely to experience language anxiety and self-doubt that prevents oral participation.

Male students were less likely to mention the significantly lower scores in the pronunciation confidence, peer judgment resilience and perceived practice opportunities, but they still indicated a consistently lower score on those issues. Both sexes found the classroom environment to be not sufficiently supportive (means approximately 3.1-3.3). The cultural and societal norms overall scored lower (means 2.39-2.78), implying that these norms have a certain effect, but the psychological and pedagogical elements have a stronger impact. Table 2 is a summary of the ratings of six strategies suggested to encourage English speaking in the classroom by students.

Table 2: Students' Endorsement of Strategies for Active Participation

Strategy	Mean	SD
Interactive teaching methods (e.g., debates, role-plays)	3.60	0.907
Receiving constructive feedback from instructors	3.51	0.959
Group activities and discussions	3.49	0.944
Workshops focusing on pronunciation and speaking skills	3.49	0.944
A supportive and non-judgmental classroom atmosphere	3.41	0.825
Additional institutional measures (e.g., more speaking opportunities, language programs)	3.30	0.890

Mean scores of all strategies were above the neutral point of 3.00, showing a general agreement. The highest rating was on interactive teaching methods ($M=3.60$), closely followed by constructive feedback ($M=3.51$) and group activities/workshops (both $M=3.49$). Even the worst-rated strategy (institutional measures, $M=3.30$) was a positive endorsement.

Thematic Analysis of Qualitative Interviews

Five major themes were identified by semi-structured interviewing of 10 participants. The main obstacle mentioned by all interviewees was low self-confidence. One of the male students at LUAWMS said: I am never confident enough to talk; I fear that I will not pronounce something correctly and all people will notice me. One of the female students at BUETK said: I do not speak out in the classroom as I am afraid that my errors will embarrass me. These quotes affirm that fear of adverse assessment is a strong deterrent.

Many students were embarrassed about their accent or pronunciation. As an example, one student commented: "My accent is embarrassing, and I'm afraid that my peers will make fun of me." Another student remarked: "I don't think I can speak well enough, and so I prefer to remain silent." This shows the social dimension of speaking anxiety.

All the students pointed out that there was less time for interaction in their classes, and their English classes were mainly lectures. According to one student of BUETK, the class is largely lecture-based,

and we are not allowed to speak much, which does not improve my level of confidence. While another LUAWMS student commented, "This course should be more interactive."

A few students observed that there is some negativity associated with speaking English in their local environment. One of the male said, "Speaking English in formal places can make you feel weird in our society, so I usually keep silent." Another female stated, "Social pressure of cultural behavior makes it difficult for me to speak English comfortably."

Despite the challenges, however, constructive suggestions were made by the students. They suggested the use of debates, role plays, discussions in groups, and pronunciation classes. One student suggested, "Debates and role plays will make it more engaging and non-threatening." Another suggestion was that "group activities frequently and speech skill workshops would increase our participation." It is important to note that constructive criticism from the teacher and an encouraging environment were also stressed by the participants.

Conclusion

This research proves that the unwillingness and lack of initiative of undergraduates to speak English in Balochistan are due to various psychological, educational, and socio-cultural factors. It was revealed through this research that the psychological impediments, such as fear of making mistakes, lack of self-confidence, and fear of pronunciation and peers, are among the most powerful obstacles to active engagement in conversation. The female participants proved to be more reluctant and fearful compared to the male ones.

Moreover, there are limitations associated with the teaching approach, which further exacerbate the issue. As far as the existing teaching approach, where dominance is exhibited by the teacher along with the lecture method, there is an extremely restricted scope for communication. In fact, as the students observed, grammar and writing were the most common subjects in their classes, thus making them inactive receivers of information instead of being the speakers of the language. The findings are in line with the results of prior studies (Bazai et al., 2023; Zahid et al., 2024).

The socio-cultural attitudes were not so firmly supported in the quantitative data as the psychological factors, but they were observed in the qualitative interviews. There are those students who said that the ability to speak English is viewed as pretentious or culturally unacceptable in their communities, which adds another element of inhibition. This implies that community awareness programs that legitimize oral practice as a valid and worthwhile learning activity should be supported by institutional efforts to promote English speaking.

More importantly, clear and practical improvement strategies were expressed by students themselves. Interactive teaching strategies (debates, role plays, group discussions), positive feedback, pronunciation workshops, and a non-judgmental and constructive classroom environment were all highly rated. These recommendations were prepared by students in compliance with the known principles of communicative language education and task-based instruction (Gutiérrez, 2024; Aydemir, 2019), and they offer a direction for curriculum redesign and teacher development as professionals.

The mixed methods design of the article provides a thorough picture of the problem, yet there are a number of limitations that need to be considered. The sample size ($n=70$) and the focus on two universities in Balochistan restrict the ability to generalize. Social desirability bias might affect self-reported statistics. Further investigation ought to use larger and more varied samples, include observational measures of classroom engagement, and test the efficacy of particular interventions

(e.g., debate clubs, pronunciation workshops) with the help of an experimental or quasi-experimental study.

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