

## Significance of Proficiency in the English Language within the Realm of Education in Pakistan

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### ABSTRACT

This paper underscores the pivotal role of English language proficiency in the educational domain, shedding light on the challenges students face when expressing themselves in English within classroom settings. It emphasizes the profound impact that English proficiency exerts on students' overall learning experiences and offers practical insights to enhance language skills. Recognizing effective communication as a cornerstone of success in contemporary society, the paper provides valuable tips for improving language skills, particularly in the context of spoken English. Mastering English is deemed essential for success in various professional fields, given its status as the global lingua franca. The article advocates for educational institutions to create conducive environments for developing students' speaking abilities, crucial not only for career advancement but also for societal integration. In today's interconnected world, English proficiency is a key asset for navigating the global landscape successfully. The ability to communicate effectively in English is not only a gateway to enhanced career opportunities but also facilitates integration into diverse societies. The paper concludes by reinforcing the fact that individuals with a strong command of the English language are warmly welcomed on a global scale, highlighting the enduring importance of English proficiency in our interconnected world.

**Keywords:** *education, proficiency, spoken English.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Language is the basic need and most dominant symbol of human behavior, as it helps to communicate and direct the expression of thoughts. It not only reflects and expresses facts but also influences attitudes because it is a vital component of social interaction. Language and society are mutually constitutive as they shape social interaction among individuals. According to Fishman (1996), society and language both have an impact on each other, and it is not possible to separate and understand the influences. Languages vary from society to society; in this regard, sociolinguistic aspects

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affect the way a language is viewed and spoken in a community. Education, which is an important sociolinguistic factor, affects an individual's language preferences as to where, which, when, and how to speak any language (Faizin, 2015). In the elite educational institutes of Pakistan, speaking English is a must for students because their native language is not English, and in today's world, learning English as a second language has become inevitable.

Sociolinguistics has a great and direct impact on language speaking. In educational institutes, all individuals have certain ways of speaking and communicating; therefore, speaking in one particular language enhances their language changes with time as they interact with many people. Sociolinguistics focuses on naturally occurring language use, due to this, experts in second languages turned to sociolinguistic research to create new teaching strategies for language speaking and broaden the goals of language instruction because English has now become a global language, and the knowledge of the world can be found through English (Faizin, 2015). Due to this regard, the most important function of sociolinguistics in language teaching is to provide the learners with appropriate rules of spoken English so that it enables the knowledge of the English language and also different varieties within this same language of people and their dialects as well, as the notion of variety in a language is complex and controversial because, according to Wolfram et al. (1999), a single language exists in different varieties.

The importance of English speaking in educational institutions not only benefits students in their careers but also aids them in societal integration (Shrishthy, 2022). As the English language continues to establish itself as an international medium, it paves the way for diverse career opportunities. Students who possess a strong grasp of English can find acceptance in multinational corporations. According to a recent study by White (2023), proficient English speakers are more likely to develop emotional intelligence, leading to improved life prospects and employment opportunities.

This study scrutinizes the social impact of using the English Language on students, exploring how proficiency aids adjustment in foreign countries and enhances confidence in educational settings. Employing a mixed methodology, it delves into sociolinguistic factors influencing English language acquisition in classrooms, identifying strategies for fostering spoken skills and promoting broader communication among students. Accordingly, the research questions for this research are:

1. What challenges do students encounter when using the English language to communicate verbally in a classroom setting?
2. What effects does the English language have on students' educational paths?
3. What techniques and strategies can be used to improve students' English?

This study looked into the significant influence of English language proficiency on students' education and societal integration. Centered on sociolinguistic factors, it examines challenges in verbal communication, educational effects, and effective strategies. It provides valuable insights to enhance linguistic competence in the globalized context of English as a universal language.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Language and Education**

Language is a crucial medium of communication that reflects the culture and society of its users. It shares a profound relationship with culture and society, as both the acquisition and utilization of language are embedded within social contexts. It is not only

languages that shape societies, but societies also influence the evolution of languages, given that spoken language is an integral part of any given community. As Gumperz (1971, p. 223) states, “sociolinguistics is an attempt to find correlations between social structure and linguistic structure” because sociolinguistics studies language concerning society.

Similarly, education serves as a critical force in promoting meaningful interaction among individuals from diverse societies. This is particularly vital for speakers of different languages who actively engage with one another to broaden their exposure to various linguistic expressions. Hence, when instructing English to students with diverse first languages, educators play a crucial role in implementing tailored pedagogical methods and strategies that facilitate effective language learning. As emphasized by researcher Mustaqim (2016), teaching the English language necessitates a focus on sociolinguistic features, encompassing aspects such as culture, language varieties, dialect, style, and code-switching. This comprehensive approach ensures a holistic understanding and application of the language, fostering a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

## **2.2 English in Education**

In a language teaching setting, the use of language varieties should cater to the educational needs of learners. According to Cheshire (2005), learning a language is more effective when conducted in a variety spoken by the students. Cheshire (2005) further emphasizes that valuing dialects in the classroom significantly impacts the educational achievements of speakers. Additionally, the use of dialects, both by students and teachers, may potentially lead to rewards based on the dialect through which communication takes place. Dialects are defined by Fromkin et al. (2013) as a systematic way in which one speaker or a group of speakers of a language differs from other speakers of the same language.

In an educational institute, besides learning written English, spoken English is equally important because learning written English is rich in exemplification, and while acquiring written models of language, the pedagogy must bring the students to practice the art of producing sentences of a particular language. To have effective spoken skills in English, students must immerse themselves first in the pronunciation of the sounds of English. According to Brown et al. (1983), students of spoken language spend many hours learning to pronounce the sounds of English, first in isolation, then in short isolated words, and after that in short isolated sentences. To teach English as a spoken language to non-native speakers, students must speak the written language together with having characteristics of spoken phrases, and most English speakers produce phrases that are syntactically simpler than written language (Setiyadi et al., 2018).

In many educational systems worldwide, using English as the instructional language is a defining feature. Phillipson (1992), who emphasizes how English is used as a tool to access global knowledge and engage in the worldwide academic debate, supports this approach. Graddol (2006) emphasizes the link between proficiency in the English language and future employment opportunities, particularly in industries like business, research, and technology. Many academic and professional possibilities require English fluency as a prerequisite. English’s dominance in academic journals, conferences, and research papers is evidence of its status as the lingua franca of academia. Crystal (2003) underlines the necessity of fluency for effective participation in these sectors due to the prevalence of English as the language of science and technology.

## **2.3 The Importance of English**

Language and culture go hand in hand, and students who are proficient in English can interact with and understand the subtleties of cultures from English-speaking countries. This is essential for students who want to become global citizens, as suggested by Byram (1997), who emphasizes how studying English helps develop intercultural competence. The ability to communicate and collaborate effectively in English promotes research and creativity among academics from various linguistic backgrounds. Jenkins (2006) made the case that English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) research shows how proficiency in the language makes it possible for foreign researchers to exchange ideas and work together on ground-breaking research.

English also assumes a significant position as the main language of online learning and communication in the Internet era. English is crucial for online cooperation since it enables students to interact with people around the world and access a plethora of materials (Warschauer & Healey, 1998). English language ability opens the door to a wealth of cultural and leisure content. According to Crystal (2003), English is a crucial language for gaining access to other cultures since it dominates the global entertainment sector, from television and film to literature and video games.

English is useful in the travel and tourism industries. Cameron (2003) underlines how communication with English-speaking people and the availability of English-language resources in hotels and tourist attractions are made easier by English's status as the world's unifying language. Furthermore, as discussed by Snow and Hoefnagel-Höhle (1978), parents who speak English can actively assist their children in their language learning while they are in an educational setting. Speaking and mastering English also boosts self-assurance and empowerment. Crystal (2003) contends that learning a language helps one develop personally and feel more confident.

The literature's conclusion highlights the unquestionable significance of English literacy within the context of education. It goes beyond only developing linguistic proficiency to give students access to knowledge, job opportunities, cultural awareness, communication, and involvement in a globalized society. This in-depth analysis highlights the importance of English language competency in education on a variety of levels.

## **3. RESEARCH METHODS**

This study adopted a mixed-method approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative research methods, to gather comprehensive insights from participants. Questionnaires and interviews were utilized to collect data from a diverse group of participants, including students, educators, and professionals. To ensure representation across various socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, a purposive sampling method was employed.

In the quantitative segment, a targeted sample of 40 Master's candidates from the English Department at the University of Education was selected. Participants were administered a concise questionnaire through Google Forms to assess their current proficiency levels and identify any challenges they might be encountering.

For the qualitative aspect, in-depth interviews were conducted with the selected students to delve into their experiences and perspectives. Thematic analysis was applied to scrutinize and interpret qualitative data, offering a nuanced understanding of participants' viewpoints (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Simultaneously, statistical analysis

was employed to analyze the quantitative data, ensuring a comprehensive examination of both numerical and qualitative aspects (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This dual-method approach enhances the robustness and depth of the study, providing a well-rounded exploration of the research objectives.

#### **4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis focused on the quantitative and qualitative data collected from Masters candidates from the English Department at the University of Education using a Google Form questionnaire. 40 responses were received for the survey. The study's findings were carefully examined, highlighting the participants' consensus. Specifically, 68.8% strongly agreed while only 18.8% disagreed that learning English is easier than learning other languages. The next sub-sections elaborate the findings from the data.

##### **4.1 Challenges Students Encounter in Learning English**

Upon an extensive analysis of the research findings, the researchers have gained substantial insights into the challenges encountered by the students in this study in their day-to-day English language communication. These challenges encompass a myriad of issues, prominently featuring the tendency for learners to revert to their native language, the apprehension of making mistakes, suboptimal pronunciation, restricted vocabulary knowledge, and limited practice opportunities. Furthermore, it is evident that psychological factors such as the fear of making mistakes, shyness, a profound lack of confidence, and diminished motivation significantly contribute to these linguistic barriers. These findings are similar to the research by Juhana (2012) on EFL students in Indonesia.

Addressing these identified challenges necessitates a multifaceted approach to enhance students' English-speaking proficiency. Various speaking activities, including interactive, responsive, extended, and intensive methods, can be employed to foster improvement in language communication skills (Dewi et al., 2017). Moreover, integrating instructional approaches such as the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) and Direct Method (DM) has shown promise in developing students' adeptness in English language communication (Shawana et al., 2016). This comprehensive strategy aims to tackle both the linguistic and psychological aspects, providing a holistic framework for improving students' overall language proficiency and communication abilities.

##### **4.2 English on Students' Educational Paths**

It is impossible to exaggerate the value of English in education for students. English has established itself as the major language of education in the modern world, cutting across national and cultural barriers. The students in this study said that given that English is used as the major language of instruction in almost all global educational systems, English is undeniably the most commonly studied language in the world. It is now necessary for students to be proficient in English to successfully navigate the educational setting. They reiterated that the predominance of English in schools, colleges, and universities, which makes it essential for understanding texts, lectures, and assignments and serves as an academic cornerstone, corroborates this. In their investigation about the influence of English competence on overseas students' academic performance, Martirosyan et al. (2015) came to the same conclusions.

The pervasive influence of the English language extends beyond academic boundaries and significantly impacts job opportunities. English proficiency opens up a

diverse array of potential careers. For instance, those fluent in English may choose to work as teachers in various educational settings, including colleges, universities, and schools. Additionally, the field of written expression offers a variety of job prospects, including roles in newspapers and magazines, for individuals who are adept in English (Crystal, 2003).

The students also believed that beyond the realms of education and professional opportunities, English serves as the global language that facilitates communication, rendering it essential for comprehension and acquisition. With approximately 400 million proficient speakers worldwide, it has become the common means of communication and connection for individuals from diverse linguistic backgrounds. Consequently, it serves as a fundamental tool for international communication, making its acquisition not only essential but also advantageous (White, 2023).

Furthermore, language emerges as the fundamental form of communication, allowing people to successfully share, convey, and express themselves. The students justified that the ability to communicate in English provides an opportunity to converse with others from different linguistic origins, facilitating relationships and interactions. English is the dominant digital language in an era where the internet reigns supreme. Individuals fluent in English have better access to online resources and knowledge. Since the majority of the top search engines, including Google, Bing, and Yahoo, operate in English, it is the common language of the internet. An estimated 570 million people use the internet every day, with the majority favoring content in the English language. Thus, knowing English well improves one's ability to take advantage of the vast web resources (Crystal, 2003).

### **4.3 Techniques and Strategies to Improve Students' English**

Succinctly, it is impossible to emphasize the multifarious value of the English language to students in the context of school and beyond (Martirosyan et al., 2015). The students agreed that English impacts employment possibilities, international communication, entertainment, travel, and online involvement outside the walls of the classroom. Therefore, being proficient in English is more than just a talent; it is a transforming asset that enables people to move confidently and effectively across a globalized society (Faizin, 2015).

The analysis also looked at the challenges the students encountered while speaking English regularly, including their usage of their native language, fear of making mistakes, poor pronunciation, limited vocabulary acquisition, restricted opportunities, and lack of enthusiasm. Speaking difficulties have been linked to psychological issues like a lack of motivation and confidence, shyness, and fear (Al Hosni, 2014). Speaking exercises like those that are thorough, responsive, imitative, and interactive, combined with pedagogical approaches like the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Direct Method (DM) (Shawana et al., 2016), according to the students, can help them achieve proficiency in English speaking.

## **5. CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

In conclusion, the examination of the multifaceted value of the English language underscores its indispensable role for students both within the educational sphere and beyond. Proficiency in English transcends being a mere skill; it emerges as a transformative asset facilitating confident and effective navigation across the globalized

landscape of society. The identified challenges students face in regular English communication, encompassing native language interference, fear of errors, pronunciation difficulties, limited vocabulary acquisition, and constrained opportunities, are intricately linked to psychological factors like a lack of motivation and confidence, shyness, and fear. Mitigating these challenges requires a holistic approach involving thorough, responsive, imitative, and interactive speaking exercises, complemented by pedagogical methods such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and the Direct Method (DM). The findings affirm that proficiency in English not only influences educational and career prospects but extends to global communication, entertainment, travel, and online engagement beyond the classroom walls. Thus, cultivating a mastery of the English language emerges as a pivotal and empowering asset for individuals navigating a diverse and interconnected global society.

The research primarily focused on Master's candidates from the English Department at a specific university, limiting the generalizability of findings to a broader population. Future research should encompass a more diverse participant pool, including students from various disciplines and educational levels. Additionally, exploring additional factors influencing language acquisition, such as socioeconomic backgrounds, could provide a more comprehensive understanding. Moreover, employing a longitudinal approach to assess the long-term impact of language interventions on students' proficiency and sociolinguistic competence would enhance the study's significance.

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