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TOPIC: INVESTIGATING LEARNER PERCEPTIONS OF ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN NAWABSHAH, PAKISTAN: A CHALLENGE-BASED APPROACH

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Abstract: English has become the most important language for people to learn, and accordingly, it is above politics. Many people have learned it as a second/foreign language in Nawabshah, Pakistan. It is also heard in business speak across international companies with English having developed this role over time due to the Anglicization of other cultures. Many students find learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) difficult because of the few similar characteristics it shares with their native tongue. The present research intends to investigate the problems

EFL learners encounter and attribute those against them. To accomplish this aim, a survey was carried out with EFL learners in Pakistan to gauge what they find difficult about learning English and the elements that impact their learning. English language learners face many obstacles and visible issues. The results of the study can inform language teaching practices and policies to better support EFL learners in overcoming their difficulties and achieving their language learning goals.

Keywords: Learner perceptions, Challenge-based learning, English as a Foreign language, Native language.

INTRODUCTION

English as a foreign language (EFL) is spoken by millions of people around the world and is often used as a global language of communication in various fields, including business, education, and tourism. Language is employed as a communication method to relate to one another's sentiments, opinions, and identification, language is employed as a method of communication (Yufrizal et al. (2020). The fact that most individuals can speak many languages is becoming more and more obvious in today's culture. In this century of globalization, English has firmly established itself as a language for intercultural communication, a language for cross-border business transactions, and a language for international study (Yufrizal et al. 2020). The majority of people on earth speak English, with an estimated 400 million doing so as their first speech and a plus two billion doing so as a foreign or second speech (Mahiques and Díaz 2024). Anyone who wishes to interact with people from throughout the world should learn English. Since English is not our nation's primary language as a civilization, learning English is essential if you want to communicate with people outside the world (Parmankulova and Kizdarbekova 2023). Despite its widespread use, learning English as a foreign language can be a challenging and complex process, as it involves acquiring a new set of grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation (Ahmed, N., et al. 2017). There is a range of both linguistic and cognitive grasp, involving factors with affective implications that make the lives hell for EFL learners in their language learning achievements as well as motivation. To gain a deeper perception of these issues and how learners adapt, researchers have sought out different types of research on EFL learner beliefs about language learning (Horwitz 1988; Lee et al. The results of these studies contribute to an understanding of different factors that affect the learning process language proficiency, cultural background, and context in which language is learned. English, at the same time when it does not let their confidence level soar while speaking in the language (Rasheed, S.,

et al. 2017). The problem was that the learners were faced with speaking and they were afraid of making errors when conversing in English. A need for improvement in language learning has been given this low rating by learners Poor relative evaluation of acquisition occurs selected Index full text. However, language learners also go through anxiety when learning a new language. Language fear is sometimes known as "xenoglossophobia". It's a feeling of apprehension and worry brought on by using or studying a second or foreign language (Gallagher, S. E., & Savage, T. 2023). Foreign language anxiety, however, can also impact persons who do not generally experience fear in other circumstances since it is situation-specific. Language acquisition problems, self-related cognitive problems, social positional differences between speakers, and a fear of identity loss can all contribute to language anxiety. When learning to speak a second language, learners frequently experience feelings of worry, uneasiness, and trepidation. These emotions are thought to represent a damaging outcome of communication in the target language. According to Oda (2011), linguistic aptitude and motivation are the main determinants at this stage, which means that fear and anxiety have little to do with the learner's initial interactions with the foreign or offshore language. Later, several levels of anxiety began to emerge, the diversity of which is greatly influenced by the character of events. One type of anxiety is a person's propensity for tension and unease, while the other type is the condition of anxiousness, which is described as the trepidation experienced at a particular moment in time, such as having to speak in a foreign or second language in front of peers Elaldi (2016). To get accurate responses, it is necessary to address some newly developing challenges that influence English language learners in today's society. The researcher posed the queries to support his claim on the root cause of these problems.

Research Questions

This study will serve to investigate the challenges encountered by EFL learners, as well as their views about how they can resolve these difficulties. Here are the research questions.

1. What problems do English language learners face while trying to speak it?
2. What are the psychological barriers that prevent English language learners from speaking confidently?
3. What are the most effective strategies for tackling this problem?

Research Objectives

The purpose of this study is to provide accurate information that will be useful for ESL/EFL students. The purpose of this research is to investigate the challenges ESL students encounter in their learning and how these students perceive and strategize those hurdles. We therefore undertook this study to,

1. To Recognize the Psychological Barriers to Speaking English Fluently and Confidently.
2. Understanding the efficacy of these strategies and recognizing emerging patterns or trends in their English language learning challenges the perception & approach of learners.

Recommendations that intentionally arise from the results of this research will be developed for language learners and educators to support more effective, efficient ways in which English as a foreign learner can overcome challenges.

Significance of the study

This research's relevance is its help in understanding and addressing the issues encountered in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This paper explores the psychological factors inhibiting learners from speaking English and potential ways to overcome these barriers. It can be useful for educators, language learners, and researchers working to enhance learning outcomes in this context and promote better language-learning strategies. In terms of academia, this study adds to the burgeoning field of applied linguistics by examining language learning more intricately at a learner-centric level. In addition, this research may carry conceptual consequences that language learners and educators can use for designing well-structured academy teaching models as an intervention. Because English as a foreign language (EFL) learners have different ways to overcome learning activities and also perceive these tasks differently from EFL teachers' perspectives, it benefits teacher educators or rather will allow them to identify how best they can teach their students in using the materials that are suitable to help them reach their intended goals. The research may also help to uncover the psychological and cognitive processes behind language learning, contributing towards better practices that can improve how a person learns another human or machine language. In general, this study can add to TEFL/ELT academia and practice by providing some practical ideas for learners/educators.

Literature review

The difficulties experienced by English language learners are rarely mentioned in the research that is currently accessible. When learning a new language, a student would reportedly experience anxiety and apprehension frequently, as per Hashemi (2011), a person's self-consciousness, self-related cognitions that make learning a certain language challenging, variances between each learner, and goal language cultures can all contribute to anxiety (Butt, 2013). The interviewer, the learner, and the learner's anxiety about losing one's own identity are all influenced by the speaker's unequal social status. It is believed that to inspire language learners to meet deliberate performance goals in the target language, one must consider their anxiety emotions as seen by a language instructor. Tanveer (2007) asserts that most second language learners find it difficult to learn, acquire, and analyze the language; as a result, they worry about how other people will perceive them (Channa, 2019). Language instructors thought it was essential to support and encourage people who were just beginning to speak a second language for them to benefit and get extra comprehension as well as to complete the main task in the chosen language.

Learning to communicate in a second or foreign language typically causes worry, trepidation, and uneasiness among second-language learners. Speaking is the intentional use of words to convey meaning, according to Al Hosni (2014). In order to encounter, comprehend, practice, and acquire a new language, young learners use spoken language as their main tool. Oral proficiency is one part of language acquisition, and young students' spoken language in the classroom is thought to be the main source of language learning. The ability to learn and communicate in a foreign language effectively can, however, be seriously hampered by speaking issues (Saeed, n.d). Despite how much they may already know about the English language, English as a foreign language (EFL) learners still struggle with speaking. Numerous studies show that oral language development in the classroom has largely been overlooked, and also that instructors often use linguistic competence more frequently than pupils do. However, the teacher's speech language rarely serves as a vehicle for pupils to learn new information and explore new concepts (Baksh, I., et al. 2018). To effectively address oral communication issues in an EFL setting, researchers must have a clear understanding of the conditions and the nature of the issues.

There are some unexplored areas in the corpus of research that have previously been done because the majority of studies hardly cover how to handle the challenges that English as a foreign language learners face. Instead, Labadidi (2016) notes that there are several difficulties that both students and instructors must overcome while studying English as a second language. These difficulties are brought on by a range of fundamental causes for learners that have their roots in the particular psychosocial and educational environment of the learner (Saeed, n.d). The learner's affective and cognitive predispositions are taken into account when learning a foreign language. It is believed that the feelings of concern, anxiety, and dread that L2 learners typically encounter when learning to speak a second language inhibit confidence and have a poor and detrimental impact on target language contact (Panhwar, 2017). In this context, my research mainly focuses on the psychological factors of students that hinder their English language acquisition and also analyzes new challenges that today's students are facing while learning English and gives the possible ways to cope and learn English effectively.

Study approach

To understand and appreciate the issues faced by high school students learning English as a second language. A descriptive-exploratory methodology was chosen. The choice of descriptive research was made because it is designed to define the traits and processes that go along with a particular subject or event - for example, for instance, the difficulties encountered by students in high school learning English to be a second language. The exploratory approach was chosen because its goal is to examine subjects deeper and uncover the patterns or trends that may not have been apparent with descriptive techniques only. Because English as a foreign language learning difficulties are so multidimensional and dynamic, a descriptive-exploratory approach was chosen because this would best encompass high school students' experiences and difficulties in this regard. The deliberate use of the exploratory and descriptive methods gave a greater understanding of the topic. It allowed for gathering specific information regarding it and discovering the general trends or patterns in the field.

Research area

The research area of this study comprised hundred students from higher secondary school students who were all learning English as the language of their choice at the same time. They were selected by convenience sampling: In convenience sampling, components of a sample are chosen only for their proximity to the researcher. Since there are no additional

selection criteria involved, those samples are selected quickly and easily. The students were chosen because their experience and level of English competence varied between the different linguistic and cultural groups, in addition, they included the female and male participants aged 16-18 years.

METHODOLOGY

The research was intended to explore and record the experiences of 100 Students in Higher Secondary Schools at Nawabshah Pakistan. And learning English as their first foreign language in higher secondary schools. The survey was conducted through google forms. Twenty interviewers from each school were answered provided on each school's students by friends in their study groups. In order to get a particular information about their experiences and challenges learning English as a second language. This questionnaire asked about their learning history and motivations for studying English; their learning experiences and their motivations to pursue English studying; methods that they used to improve their English proficiency and their experiences with any hurdles or obstacles that they encountered on their learning journey. For our investigation, we conducted online interviews additionally carried out with the five students to collect knowledge of their experience as well as their challenges.

We can observe that the duration of attendance for students varies across the five different schools (Figure 1). In general, the majority of students at each school have been attending for 1-2 years or 3-4 years. Schools 2, 4, and 5 have a higher percentage of students who have been attending for 3-4 years compared to other durations. School 1 has a more balanced distribution across the different durations, while School 3 has the lowest percentage of students who have been attending for 1-2 years. Overall, it appears that most students across the schools have been attending for a moderate duration, with fewer students at the extremes of less than 1 year or more than 4 years.

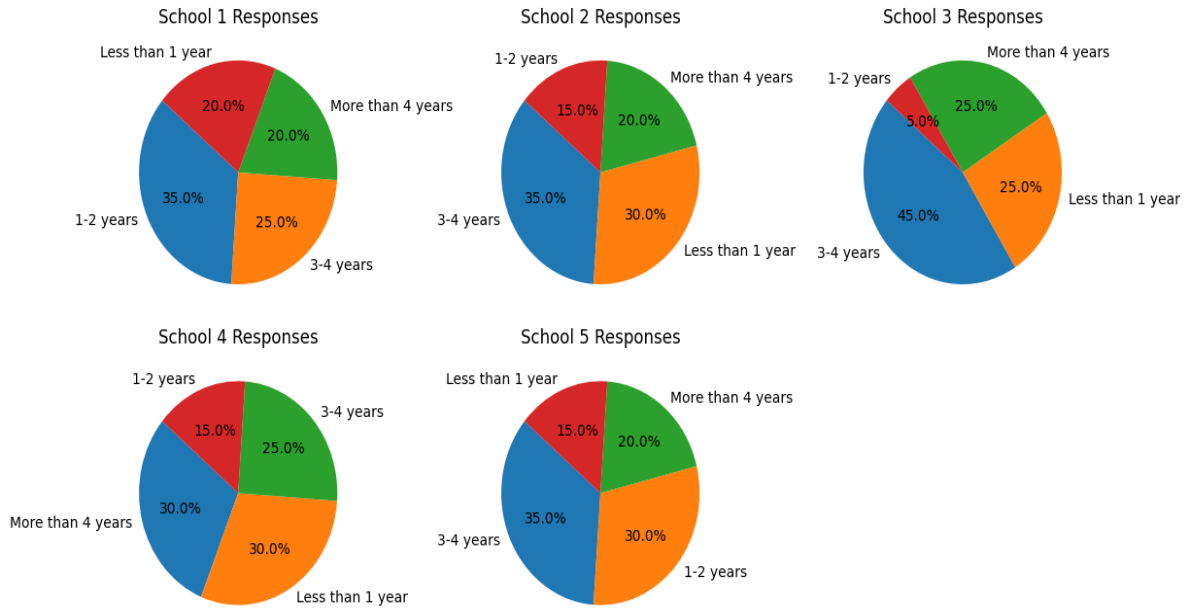


Figure 1: Duration of Attendance at Five Higher Secondary Schools in Nawabshah, Pakistan.

Based on the data presented in Figure 2, we can observe variations in the reasons why students choose to learn English as a foreign language across the five different schools. According to the graph, School 5 has the highest number of students who chose “To travel abroad” that indicates their strong interest in international experiences. On the other hand, School 4 stands out with the highest number of students selecting "To excel in academics," which suggests a focus on educational achievement. Additionally, School 3 has the highest number of students who chose "To improve job opportunities," It highlights the practical motivation for learning English. Lastly, School 1 has the highest number of students who selected "To communicate with friends," that emphasizes the social aspect of language learning.

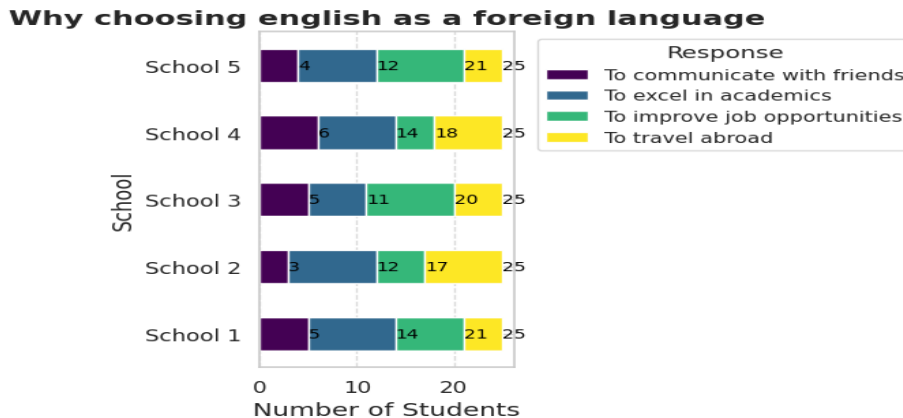


Figure 2: Reasons for Learning English as a Foreign Language Across Five Schools.

Figure 3 shows the distribution of challenges faced by students across five schools in four key areas: grammar, listening, speaking, and writing. The most significant challenges are found in Schools 1 and 5, with School 3 is showing a notable portion of students struggling. In listening, the difficulties are more evenly spread, particularly affecting Schools 2 and 3, followed by School 4. Speaking challenges are predominantly concentrated in School 3, with Schools 1 and 4 also experiencing some difficulties. Writing poses the greatest challenge for students in School 4, followed by Schools 3 and 1. The variation in challenges across different schools is showing that each school has unique areas where students require targeted support to improve their English language skills.

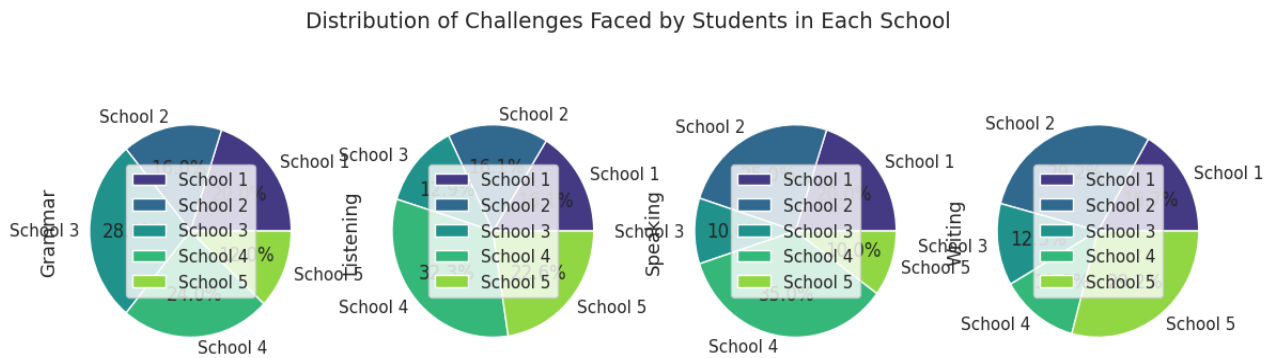


Figure 3: Distribution of English Language Challenges Across Five Schools.

Anxiety is a significant factor across all schools, with School 5 experiencing the highest levels, followed by Schools 3 and 4. as shown in Figure 4. Decreased confidence is particularly prominent in Schools 1, 4, and 5, while School 2 shows the least impact in this area. Frustration is another common response, notably affecting students in Schools 1 and 3 more than in Schools 2 and 4. Stress is prevalent, especially in Schools 1 and 3, while School 2 students seem to experience the least stress. The data reveals that learning English is associated with considerable emotional challenges, particularly anxiety and frustration, suggesting that students in these schools may require additional support to mitigate these negative impacts and enhance their learning experience.

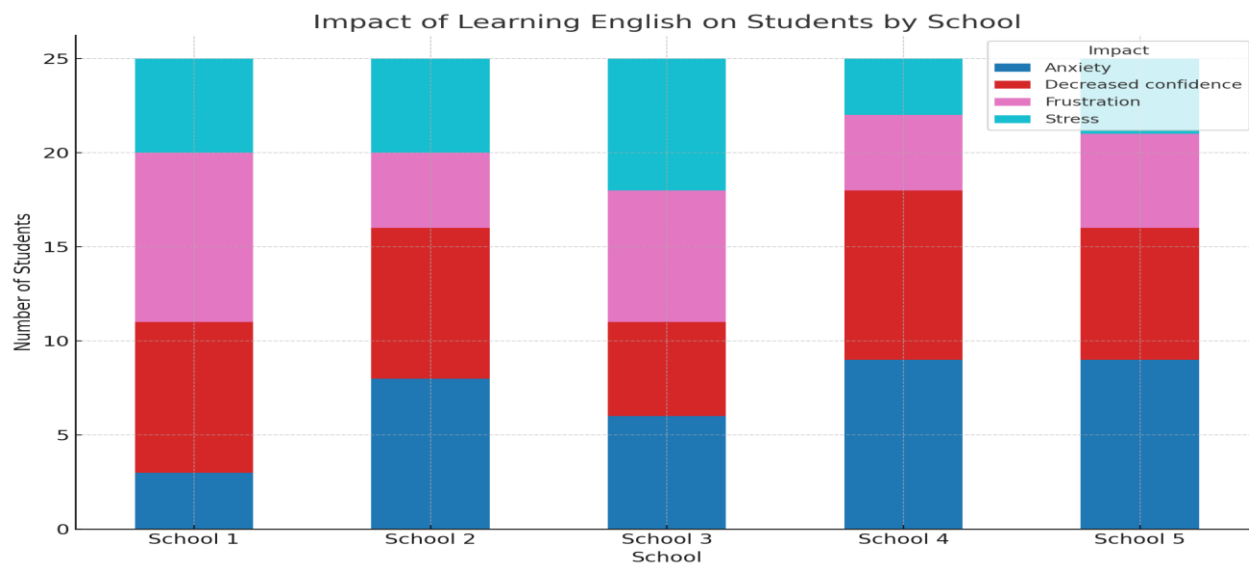


Figure 4: Emotional Challenges in Learning English Across Five Schools.

The results show that School 1 has the highest number of satisfied students, while School 5 has the lowest, as detailed in Figure 5. School 2 and School 3 have a mix of satisfied and dissatisfied students. School 4 has a similar number of students in each group. Overall, the chart (Figure 5) shows that most students are satisfied with their English classes, but there are some differences between schools.

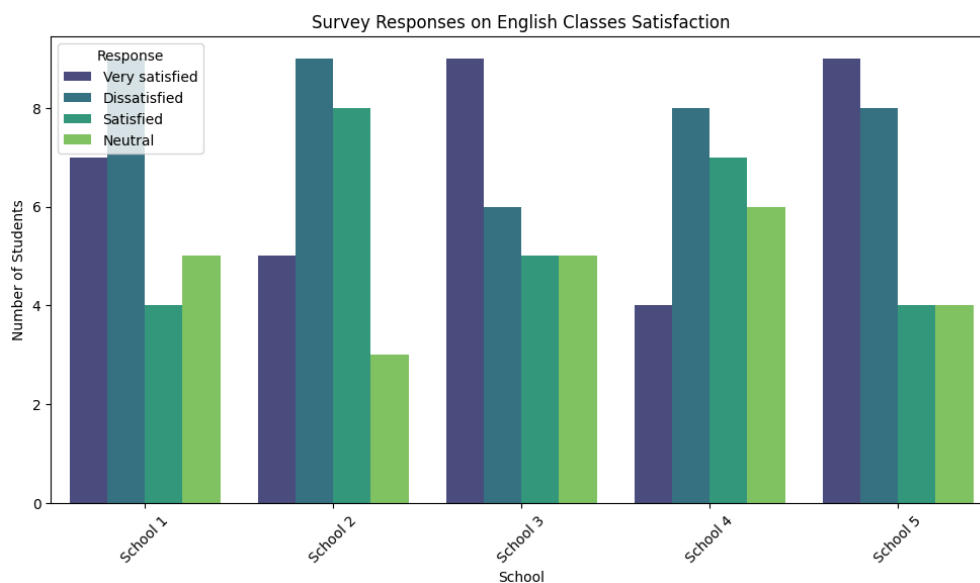


Figure 5: Student Satisfaction with English Classes Across Five Schools.

The first part of the Figure 6 shows how many students think each teaching method is useful. Many students find group work, studying alone, and interactive lessons helpful. Specifically, 28% of students think group work is useful, and 20% of students like studying

alone or interactive lessons. Teacher feedback isn't as popular but is still appreciated by 24% of students. The second part of the chart looks at how students from different schools prefer these teaching methods. It shows the number of students from each school who think each method is "very helpful" or "somewhat helpful." We see that students from School 3 and School 5 really value teacher feedback, while students from School 2 and School 4 prefer group work and studying alone.

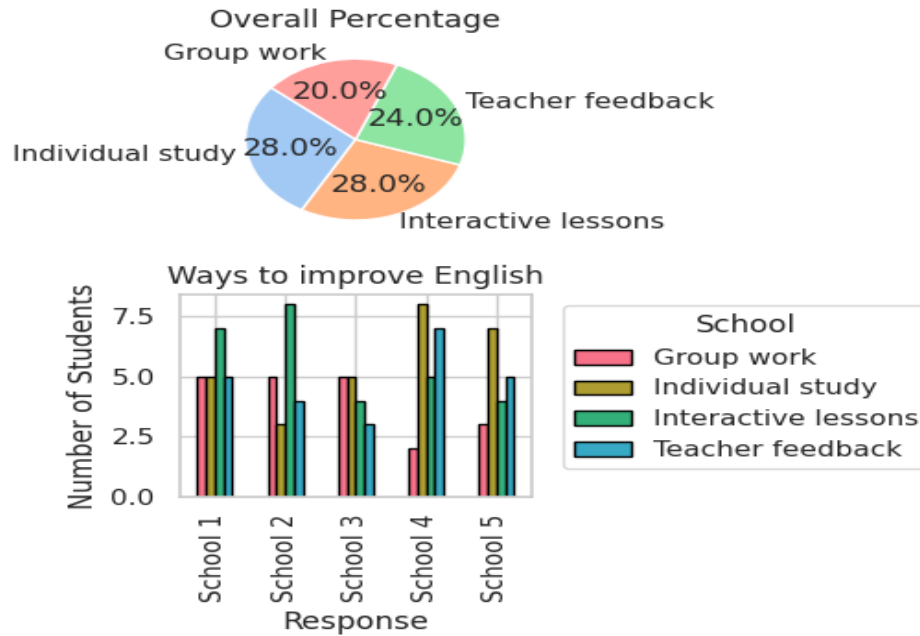


Figure 6: Student Perceptions of Teaching Methods Across Five Schools.

Figure 7 shows how often students struggle to learn a foreign language. Most students assume that they sometimes or rarely face challenges. Only 30% of students never face any trouble. However, 20% of students often find it difficult.

Frequency of challenges in learning as a foreign language

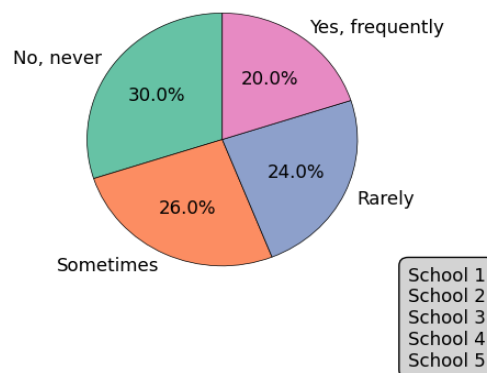


Figure 7: Frequency of Challenges in Learning a Foreign Language.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

FINDINGS

Lack of opportunities to practice speaking English regularly

One of the main obstacles to English as a language that foreign users face is the lack of opportunities to learn how to speak the language regularly. The most common theme among the participants of the study was the difficulty in finding enough time or resources for routine conversations, a problem that was identified as one of the biggest challenges. Insufficient practice can be damaging to the process of language learning by exposing the language to a repetition of language by itself, individuals can increase the fluency as well as the accuracy of speech. There are many motives for people learning English in the context of a second language to find it difficult to regularly practice their English. The lack of native English speakers or learning sources could pose a challenge to some people; while others are likely to be restricted by time constraints from work or other obligations. Social and cultural expectations can also influence the way people behave, leading to certain people feeling uncomfortable or anxious in English at social gatherings. Although English as a language that is not native to us presents many challenges to daily practice, using it regularly on a regular schedule is vital to developing language knowledge and expressing oneself definitely across all aspects of everyday life, like work, education as well as social interactions. The ability to overcome obstacles by regularly practicing is crucial for those who want to achieve excellent results while learning a third or even a foreign language.

Anxiety and self-perception can hinder fluency and confidence in learning English as a foreign language.

A subtheme of my research about the difficulties related to English as a second language is the impact it has on self-perception and anxiety, limiting confidence and fluency levels. In interviews and surveys by five students from high school pupils learning English in the context of a second language, our study revealed that the majority of participants felt awkward when speaking in English when speaking in front of other people which can result in a decrease in the level of confidence and fluency when speaking in this language that is not their own. A 16-year-old female student expressed having a difficult time speaking English in the classroom: she said "When speaking out loud in front of others I often get so overwhelmed and freeze up; forgetting everything I planned to say". The fear of speaking English is evident from our responses to the survey and nearly half of respondents reported feeling anxious or uncomfortable talking in English. The anxiety was also related to the perception of self; many respondents reported being worried concerning their grammar and accent in speaking English. One of the participants, a 17-year-old male student, said that they felt embarrassed regarding their grammar and accent while speaking English, feeling like there was a judgment on me and I was not able to speak with confidence as I would have liked. This sentiment was confirmed by surveys, with 3 of the five participants saying they were embarrassed while speaking English.

The findings suggest that anxiety and self-perception play a major aspect in keeping the language-learning process of communicating in English easily and with confidence and

definitely, preventing effective communication in English. The psychological influences could lower confidence levels and hinder the capability to efficiently make use of this language to make communication more effective. Overall, my findings suggest that speakers of English as a foreign language face several challenges when it comes to learning the language. While some strategies, such as speaking the language regularly, may be less effective than others, it is clear that a combination of approaches and resources is likely to be the most successful in helping speakers overcome these difficulties.

DISCUSSION

Being able to communicate effectively in English is essential for being competitive, especially in the current generation when English is the primary business language. Being able to speak the language gives one the advantage of working in a firm that offers a better income as most employers expect candidates to be thorough and fluent in English to work in a legitimate organization. People should learn English as a foreign language since it is now a universal language and the language of communication that connects us to the progress of the outside world. Our ability to travel to more locations throughout the world without encountering language hurdles grows as a result of learning English. In Table 1, the effective ways to deal with the difficulties that English language learners encounter are listed, including practicing pronunciation, reading grammar books, enhancing listening capability, practicing private speaking, being optimistic, and speaking the language regularly.

Table 1: Affective reasons that prevent English language learners from speaking the language.

EFFECTIVE WAYS	DESCRIPTION
Overused of Mother Tongue	Highly Effective
Hesitation in Speaking	Neutral
Grammar Consciousness	Effective
Lack of Vocabulary	Less Effective
Unqualified Teacher to Teach	Effective
Lack of Motivation	Least Effective

In Table 2, the effective ways to prevent the difficulties that English language learners encounter are listed, including excessive use of the mother tongue, hesitation in speaking, grammar consciousness, lack of vocabulary, an unqualified teacher to teach, and lack of motivation. In the accompanying text, you have provided more detailed information on these

findings and how they were arrived at through interviews with participants. Notably, the outcome results from the experience and opinions of the participants in the research study. These findings could not be universally applicable to English language students. These research findings illustrate the way that diverse elements contribute to students struggling to speak English. The majority of participants have identified "Excessive Use of Mother Tongue" as having a detrimental influence on their abilities to communicate in English well; however, their home languages' syntax and grammar may serve greater flexibility and ease in comparison to English in interaction. Language learners who are learning English have a variety of challenges to overcome in trying to increase their proficiency in the English language. They face issues with inadequate exposure to English at home, low high-quality language classes in schools as well as a lack of resources and material accessibility and motivation problems. Strategies for improving English speaking capabilities included constant training and exposure to various ways, like listening to native English speakers and asking for benefits from your teachers or exchange partners, as well as with internet-based sources. In contrast, talking frequently in the English language was shown to be the most ineffective method. Furthermore, the research confirms studies that have shown the fact that regular exposure and practice are vital to improving English ability to communicate. This study, however, illuminates the issues learners face in accessing the right resources as well as materials and coping with a subpar level of English language teaching. The issues were not extensively studied in the past and could be an area for further investigation in research studies. Moving forward, a bigger-scale research project could prove beneficial to confirm the payoff and identify any more problems or efficient ways to increase English proficiency. Also, consideration should be given to the specific situations and personal experiences of every learner along with their personal ethnic or linguistic background as well as the way they may affect or facilitate learning and communicating in English. It should however be considered that these payoffs may not apply to every English learner since the study sample may not be representative of a wider number of people. It is necessary to conduct further research to confirm the outcome and identify extra issues and methods for developing English skills. The study offered insights into the issues English Language learners encounter and the methods they use to enhance their abilities in speaking. Regular practice and exposure to the language can be crucial in enhancing English proficiency skills but other aspects could hinder the ability of a learner to efficiently use the English language. Future research needs to examine

these elements to determine any obstacles or efficient solutions for improving English talent.

Future research could take a variety of directions on this issue. One area of research could be studying how exposure to and education affects English-speaking talent and developing effective methods to enhance these skills. Investigate the role of motivation in the process of learning a language, as well as its impact on learners' English capabilities. In the end, this study suggests the need for consistent access to English in a variety of forms in addition to accessing top-quality instruction in language and other sources is crucial to improving the learners' English spoken ability. Policymakers and educators should consider these considerations in the design of language learning applications and systems of support as well as the learners themselves. They can improve their English ability to communicate through opportunities to connect with native English speakers with websites or software for learning languages and practicing speaking English frequently themselves.

Table 2: How to deal with the difficulties that speakers of English as a foreign language encounter.

EFFECTIVE WAYS	DESCRIPTION
Practice the Pronunciation	Highly Effective
Reading Grammar Books	Effective
Enhance Listening Capability	Effective
Practice Private speaking	Neutral
Be Optimistic	Less effective
Speak the Language Regularly	Least Effective

CONCLUSION

The most effective strategies to improve English abilities included consistent practice and exposure in various ways including watching native English speakers and doing pronunciation exercises; getting benefits from teachers and tutors, as well as with internet-based tools (podcasts/language learning apps). Insufficient motivation and lack of opportunities to learn English often were described as unproductive methods for improving language skills and making English an essential foreign language for today's increasingly worldwide era. English can be used as a platform for communication across cultures as well as collaboration between companies and science, thus enhancing its importance for anyone studying this language in the

context of a different one. In contrast, it's estimated that 400 million people speak English as their first language and that approximately two billion people speak it as a second or foreign language. Learning English is vital to staying up with the outside world's rapid advancement. The greatest approach to learning English is to practice speaking, listening, reading, and writing in English regularly. To do this, study English from diverse media and sources and put it to use in daily situations. Language learners need to have consistent practice and exposure to English to improve their skills and overcome the challenges they face in learning the language. However, each person handles these aspects differently, which makes it difficult for them to speak the language. Some of the aforementioned suggestions may or may not benefit the majority, but they were quite useful nonetheless. The researcher listed factors, which may be ordered from highest to lowest, are highly beneficial to someone looking to become a proficient English speaker. If someone desired to speak English effectively and fluently and had the confidence and bravery to participate in any public speaking, they might utilize these criteria as a guide.

Recommendations

The research is on the challenges that speakers of English as a foreign language face when learning the language. My research highlights the importance of routine practicing, self-perception, and anxiety as the most significant factors hindering learning a new language. Finding ways to eliminate those obstacles to practice regularly and ensure consistent progress for English as an international language learner is crucial to the success of the development of a second language. Methods you could use to help learners overcome this challenge include providing chances to regularly practice their language. This could include seeking out language exchange partners, enrolling in an educational group that offers regular practice in speaking in its classes as well as enrolling in courses with regular practice courses. In helping learners gain confidence and reduce anxiety it could include providing support and guidance, helping students to identify their anxiety triggers, as well as providing strategies to manage anxiety when speaking. Insisting on self-awareness: Help learners understand that it's common to stumble in learning an unfamiliar language, and also that everybody speaks using an accent while speaking it. One of the techniques could be to help them build confidence and strategies to take use of their skills. Learning a new language takes time and patience, and progress is frequently made gradually. Learning English as a global language has a number of problems, but you can greatly ease learners' progress toward

conquering these obstacles by supporting and guiding them along the way.

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