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University Students' Difficulties in Learning English Language Skills

Wajiha Kanwal, Ph.D. Research Scholar

Fauzia Khurshid, Ph.D.

Abstract

Present study was conducted to explore the university students' difficulties in learning English language skills. In order to highlight the language difficulties a 27 items questionnaire was developed through standardized procedure and the psychometric of this questionnaire was determined through statistical analysis on a sample of 30 students. After ensuring the reliability and validity of research instrument it was administered to 200 randomly selected students of department of English. Collected data was analyzed and percentages. Results showed that overall university students require extra help in improving their English listening, reading and writing skills. Moreover university

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students are not fully satisfied with their present course contents of English language and teaching methodologies.

Keywords: students' difficulties, English listening skills, English reading skills, English writing skills. Learning Difficulties.

When we study the history of English language we come to know that English plays a vital role in developing the status of a country. Besides its importance as an international language it is also called the major window on the world, which means that English gives us the view of the various progresses taking place in the world. It also provides us distilled essence of advance and up-to-date knowledge in all fields of human developments and activities (Yule, 1995).

We all know that when Pakistan came into being on 14 August, 1947, there was resistance to the study of English. Generally speaking, there were two groups of people - one was in favor of learning English language and the other was against it. The second group of people did not want to see English in their motherland. Although this resistance to learning and using English is now heavily subdued, mastery of the English language differs from region to region and from one socio-economic status to another.

Listening and reading are known as receptive skills while speaking and writing considered as a productive skills. These skills are better learned and mastered through actual practice. In order to become fluent in English language, learners must develop the habit of using the language frequently. Trudgill, 1992 suggests the following processes: (i) Collect ideas (ii) arrange them in the best sequence and (iii) choose the language in which he has to communicate with others. Learners apply these habits in the mother

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tongue and face their audience with confidence. These habits will also help them in the case of foreign language use.

In our educational institutions in Pakistan, at the elementary level teachers give some instruction in writing and reading skills but at the secondary level these skills are not taught in the same way. In many rural areas of Pakistan the primary education is provided through the native languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, etc., with not much emphasis on learning and using English.

There are several factors which affect students' performance in speaking English fluently. They are scared about committing mistakes while they speak. They cannot also express themselves well or adequately because they lack adequate and appropriate vocabulary. Another factor that makes students to hesitate to speak in English is that they are shy and nervous. They feel fearful to speak English in front of other people because they lack confidence about their own competence in English. So, it is important to help the learners overcome their anxiety, nervousness and fear with encouraging words. Good atmosphere and suitable environment can also help students to speak actively, correctly and fluently (Mueen, 1992).

The present study tries to uncover all perceived difficulties assumed in the learning English language skills among the university students.

Statement of the problem

Identify difficulties students face in learning English language skills.

Objectives of the study

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Following were the objectives:

- 1- To study the causes of student's hesitation in learning English.
- 2- The explore problems related to listening, reading and writing skills of the learners.

Research Questions

- 1- Do university students require help in improving English listening skills?
- 2- Do university students require help in improving English reading skills?
- 3- Do university students require help in improving English writing skills?
- 4- Are university students satisfied with their present course contents of English language and teaching methodologies?

Methodology

The study was descriptive in nature. After going through the relevant literature, a questionnaire was developed for the university level students. All the students of the NUML University in the English department FC/GS were considered as population of study. In order to check the reliability and validity of research 27 items questionnaire it was administered to 30 students from the population to check the reliability and validity of research questionnaire. Various statistical analyses were performed such as alpha coefficients and items total correlation. The Alpha coefficient yield .79 and correlation of entire 31 items ranged from .54 to .89 which means that all items have significant correlation to include in the questionnaire for present sample.

Sample

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A random sample 200 male and female students of department of English were collected. Among them 143 were male and 57 female, their age ranged from 20 to 28 years. All of them are studying at post graduate level.

Procedure

The respondents were contacted in their respective classrooms and information about the purpose of study was provided to them. After obtaining their consent, the research questionnaire was given to them with request to complete it in one sitting by selecting appropriate response category which they considered more appropriate regarding their learning difficulties in English language.

Result

The collected data was analyzed and interpreted with the help of percentages (%) with the help of SPSS.16. The data along with its analysis presented in the form of tables. Every item of the questionnaire was presented separately and simple percentage was used to analyze it.

Table 1

Percentages of students responses to the research questionnaire (n=200)

Sr. No.	Detail	Response (Yes)		Response (No)	
		Number of yes	Percentage of yes	Number of no	Percentage of no
1.	Can you speak English?	158	79%	42	21%
2.	Are you taught in class to speak English?	176	88%	24	12%
3.	Much time in English period you get chance for	100% 140 50% 154	70% 77%	60 46	30% 23%

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	improving yours speaking skill.	25% 120 5% 110	60% 80 55% 90	40% 45%
4.	Do you like to speak English in your class?	169	85% 31	15%
5.	Do you feel hesitation in speaking?	110	55% 90	45%
6.	Do you read English in your class?	165	83% 35	17%
7.	Does your teacher teach you the rules of reading English?	163	81% 37	19%
8.	Can you read English news paper?	140	70% 60	30%
9.	Do you read other books in your class except your text books?	109	55% 91	45%
10.	Do you feel hesitation while reading in class?	125	63% 75	37%
11.	Do you practice writing in class?	130	65% 70	35%
12.	Can you write correct English?	102	51% 98	49%
13.	Does your teacher teach you rules of writing English?	135	68% 65	32%
14.	Do you learn English grammar in your class?	140	70% 60	30%
15.	In which language do you write much?			
(A)	English	120	60% 80	20%
(B)	Urdu	150	65% 50	25%
(C)	Punjabi	109	55% 91	45%
16.	Do you want to listen in English?	149	75% 51	25%
17.	Does your teacher speak English all the time in your class?	150	75% 50	25
18.	How much do you understand when your teacher speaks English?	100% 125 50% 150 25% 160 5% 110	62% 75 75% 50 80% 40 55% 20	38% 25% 20% 45%
19.	Can you understand English			

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	news channels?	125	63%	75	37%
20.	Do you face any difficulty in your technical field or in using the internet because of weak English?	129	65%	71	35%
21.	Is the English language where you are learning from your syllabus helpful in working on internet?	160	80%	40	20%
22.	What do you think your English syllabus should be related to?				
(a)	Literature and language	150	75%	50	25%
(b)	Only literature.	120	60%	80	40%
(c)	Only languages.	110	55%	90	45%
23.	Which kind of vocabulary you are being taught your best.				
(a)	Literary	125	63%	75	37%
(b)	Functional	129	65%	71	35%
24.	Do you feel that your English course forms a foundation of technological future oriented course of				

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	study?	129	65%	71	35%
25.	Do you think that present course is helping you in the following?				
(a)	Report Writing	120	60%	80	40%
(b)	Public speaking	125	63%	75	37%
(c)	Giving presentations	122	61%	78	39%
(d)	Official correspondence	130	65%	70	35%
26.	Are you satisfied with the present teaching methodology?	130	65%	70	35%
27.	Do you like to learn English through cassette players, television and computers?	153	77%	47	23%

The results presented in Table 1 relate to students' perceived learning difficulties, likeness of English language course content, 23 % of the respondents agreed that they can speak English well and 77% says yes that they were taught in class how to speak English well. Most of the students agree that they got opportunity to speak English in classroom. As for their response towards their willingness to speak in front of class, 85% says yes

that they like to speak in front of class while for the question whether they feel hesitation in speaking, 55 % says yes that they are hesitant to speak in front of class.

As far as students' reading skills are concerned, 83% says yes that they can read in front of their class, 81% agrees that their teachers teach them rules of reading English, 70% preferred to read English newspaper and 55% would like to read additional books in English and 63% are proficient in reading skills.

65% says yes that they practice writing, 51% says that they write correct English, 68% agree that their teachers teach them rules of writing well and 70% believe that in class they are taught grammatical rules. When asked students' languages preferences 65% reply that they write in Urdu more and the rest says that they write in English.

In response towards students likeness to listening in English 75% of the students say yes to listen in English, 75% confirm that the teachers communicated with them in English. However, only 62% of the students fully comprehend the teachers' lectures while 80% says that they comprehend only 25% of what their teachers say.

As far as the proficiency in the technical use of English language is concerned, 63% can comprehend English news channels; 65% still feel practical difficulties due to their weak English.

As far as the satisfaction of the students towards content of the course is concerned, 75% says that English course content should be based on literature and language.

As far as the English course evaluations are concerned, 60% says that their course helps them to improve their writing skill and 63% agree that the course improves their

speaking power, while 61% feel that this course improves their presentation skills and 56% feel that this course groom their correspondence skills.

Students' satisfaction regarding teaching methodologies was also identified and only 65% students were satisfied with exiting teaching methodologies and 77% of the students feel that with the use of AV aids they can further enhance their English learning skills.

Answer to Research Question

1. University students require extra help in improving their English listening and reading skills
2. University students also require help in improving their English writing skills.
3. At present university students are not fully satisfied with their present course contents of English language and teaching methodologies.

Conclusion & Recommendations

Students are not fully satisfied with the learning outcomes of this course. So teachers should work hard and try to improve students' writing as well as speaking skills through extra reading or computer assisted programs.

On the basis of the research findings, it is concluded that students are hesitant in speaking English and using reading skill. It is recommended that the exercise part should be improved and exercises should be added in order to improve the reading, writing and speaking skills of the students.

Findings show that many students still prefer to write in their native languages (Urdu, Punjabi) so in order to develop literary writing skills students can asked to for

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creative writing, may be ask to write poems or essays daily just to overcome hesitation of writing.

Finally it was concluded that students are not fully satisfied with existing teaching methodologies so methodology of teaching English should be revised and A.V aids should provide in all English teaching classroom.

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Cambridge, UK.

Wajiha Kanwal, Ph.D., Research Scholar
Department of Education
National University of Modern Languages Islamabad
Islamabad
Pakistan
syedatifshahzad@yahoo.com

Fauzia Khurshid
Associate Professor
Department Of Education
National University of Modern Languages Islamabad
Islamabad
Pakistan
dr_f_khurshid@yahoo.com
dr_f_khurshid@hotmail.com

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