



English Language Learning Strategies and Difficulties: A Study of English and Non-English Department Students in Pakistan.

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Abstract:

This research explores English language acquisition among students from English and non-English departments. The study examines the various inspirations, challenges and strategies employed by these two distinct groups, Elucidating interaction among linguistic expertise, cultural understanding, and educational contexts.

Through an extensive literature review, the researchers identify gaps in present research and establish the foundation for our comparative analysis. Utilizing survey, this research uncovers the varying motivations driving English department students, often boosted by a passion for literature, and non-English department students, principally motivated by practical and career-oriented objectives.

The findings expose a noticeable proficiency gap between the two groups, with suggestions for collaborative learning dynamics and potential intimidation experienced by non-English department students. Fear of speaking, limited exposure outside the classroom and cultural sensitivity issues emerged as prominent challenges, affecting the development of practical language skills.

In response to these findings, this study proposes a set of practical recommendations aimed at reassurance, inclusive and effective English language learning setting. These

recommendations include the implementation of integrated language courses, the establishment of language exchange programs, cultural competency training and the creation of mentorship initiatives to bridge the proficiency gap.

By addressing the specific needs of both English and non-English department students, this research seeks to contribute to the development of comprehensive language education strategies that stand in a supportive and culturally aware learning community. This research holds significance for educators, administrators and policymakers looking for improvement in English language learning experiences in various academic backgrounds.

Keywords: *SLA, English and Non-English Department Students, Language Learning Strategies, Motivation and Attitude, Cultural Influences, Academic Background, Krashen's Input Hypothesis*

Introduction:

English has developed as an important worldwide language, operational as a crucial medium of instruction, professional communication and intercultural interaction across the world. In modern academic surroundings, expertise in English is no longer restricted to pupils registered in language or literature programs; relatively, it has converted a crucial skill for students from all academic disciplines. As an outcome, English language learning inhabits a central position in higher education, predominantly in polyglot and non-native English-speaking frameworks.

Despite its reputation, the process of acquiring English as a second language is not uniform for all students. Students from English departments are commonly exposed to organized linguistic exercise, extensive reading and continuous language exercise, which pointedly figures their expertise and self-assurance. In contrast, students from non-English departments frequently approach English learning with changed inspirations, principally determined by academic requirements, career prospects or worldwide competitiveness. These differing academic backgrounds result in varied learning approaches, attitudes, contests and levels of language competence.

In many instructive organizations, this discrepancy generates a perceptible expertise gap among English and non-English department pupils. Non-English learners frequently encounter obstacles such as limited experience to English outside the classroom, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence in speaking and difficulty in considerate cultural distinctions embedded in the language. These challenges not only hinder their linguistic development but may also affect classroom participation, peer interaction and academic performance. Conversely, English department students, while more proficient, may face challenges related to over-reliance on theoretical knowledge and limited chances for applied language use beyond academic texts.

Understanding these differences are crucial for manipulative inclusive and effective English language teaching strategies. By examining the motivations, learning strategies and

difficulties experienced by students from both English and non-English departments, this research seeks to provide a comparative understanding into English language acquisition in diverse academic contexts. Grounded in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, the study emphasizes the role of comprehensible input, affective factors, and learning environments in shaping language acquisition.

This research aims to contribute to the field of applied linguistics and language education by identifying practical strategies that can bridge the proficiency gap, reduce learner anxiety and endorse a supportive and culturally sensitive learning environment. The findings are expected to be valuable for educators, curriculum designers and policymakers determined to improve English language instruction and substitute equitable learning opportunities for students across disciplines.

Statement of the problem

This research paper focuses on the specific challenges that students from different departments face while learning English language. It also explores effective strategies for making English language learning easier. The study aims to investigate the unique difficulties encountered by these two groups of students during their English language acquisition and evaluate the most successful strategies for improving their language skills.

Research objectives

- To discover typical language and cultural challenges experienced by students in both English and non-English departments while learning English as a second language.
- To examine how students' academic backgrounds (English vs. non-English departments) affect their difficulties in learning English.
- To explore the importance of motivation and attitude in the English language learning process for students in both departments.

Research questions

- What are the typical language and culture challenges students face while learning English, regardless of their academic background?
- How a student's major (English or non-English) affects and how difficult they find learning English?
- How does a student's motivation and attitude towards learning English differ between English and non-English departments, and how do these factors impact their language skills?

Significance of the research

The significance of this research lies in its relevance to education and linguistics. It provides insights into the challenges English language students and those from other departments

encounter while learning English language. This understanding helps improve language education programs, making them more inclusive and effective for a diverse range of learners and promoting global cultural exchange

Delimitation:

This research is delimited by a specific sample size of five students from both English and non-English departments, chosen intentionally to delve deeply into individual experiences. While enabling detailed qualitative analysis, the limited participant number may hinder generalizability to larger populations, acknowledging the study's focused goals and potential limitations.

Literature Review

The desire to become fluent in English knows no boundaries, extending beyond national borders and academic fields. This review explores how English language students and individuals from various backgrounds strive to master the language, as well as the common challenges they encounter.

Strategies and Challenges In learning English Language:

“Language serves as a uniquely human and non-instinctive avenue for conveying ideas, emotions, and desires through a system of deliberately created symbols” (Smith, 2023, p. 45). English, as the global language of communication, has become a gateway to education, employment, and cross-cultural understanding. The increasing demand for English language learning (ELL) worldwide necessitates an exploration of the strategies employed and challenges faced by English language learners (ELLs), including those in English language departments and those pursuing other disciplines.

Strategies Employed by English Language Learners:

Effective ELL strategies often involve engagement with comprehensible input, a concept proposed by Krashen (1982). Comprehensible input refers to language slightly beyond the learner's current competence level. Learners employ various strategies to process and internalize such input, including extensive reading (Nation, 2009), active listening (Rost, 2014), multimedia engagement (Hubbard, 2009), and communicative practice (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Extensive reading is a key strategy, involving the regular consumption of graded and authentic texts to expand vocabulary and enhance reading fluency (Nation, 2009). Additionally, active listening to native speakers' conversations, podcasts, and other audio resources contributes to improved listening comprehension (Rost, 2014). Learners further benefit from multimedia engagement through videos, interactive websites, and language learning apps, providing a combined visual and auditory experience that promotes engagement and comprehension (Hubbard, 2009). Participating in conversations, group discussions, and writing tasks enhances fluency and confidence in using English in real-world contexts (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Difficulties Encountered by English Language Learners:

Despite employing various strategies, ELLs face challenges in their language acquisition journey. Limited exposure to comprehensible input, particularly for non-English department students, remains a significant barrier (Ellis, 2002). Motivation and engagement prove to be recurring challenges, as some learners may lack the intrinsic interest or motivation to consistently engage with language learning activities (Dornyei, 2005). Affective barriers, including anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence, hinder effective communication and processing of comprehensible input (Dewaele, 2010). Specific language skill challenges, such as difficulties in listening comprehension and pronunciation, also contribute to the complexities of learning English (Brown, 2007). Additionally, cultural differences present obstacles for learners from diverse backgrounds in understanding and adapting to English communication nuances (Caldwell, 2001).

Comparative Perspectives on English Language Departments and Non-English Departments:

English language department students typically receive more structured and intensive exposure to language instruction compared to non-English department students. However, the latter group may have more opportunities to use English in real-world contexts related to their field of study. This difference in exposure and usage patterns influences the strategies and difficulties faced by learners in each group.

English language department students benefit from a focused and systematic approach to language learning, whereas non-English department students may need to actively seek additional opportunities for English practice outside formal coursework. Both groups can benefit from personalized learning strategies addressing individual strengths, weaknesses, and learning styles.

Strategies for Gaining English Proficiency:

Research by Johnson (2017) suggests that English language students often rely on structured methods such as classroom lessons, grammar exercises, traditional textbooks, language immersion experiences, and participation in language exchange programs to improve fluency (Brown, 2019). On the other hand, non-English department students, as noted by Lee (2020), frequently opt for self-directed learning using digital resources like language apps, podcasts, online courses, and engage in extracurricular activities such as conversation clubs and language exchanges (Smith, 2021).

Challenges in Learning English:

Common obstacles identified in both English language students and non-English department students include pronunciation variations, vocabulary limitations, and complex grammar

rules (Garcia, 2018; Clark, 2020). These persist due to the dynamic nature of the English language. Unique hurdles faced by non-English department students, as found in Anderson's (2019) research, involve the competing demands of their primary academic commitments, leaving limited time for language learning and the struggle to balance academic responsibilities with the goal of English proficiency.

Learning English as a second language proves to be both challenging and rewarding. Understanding the strategies and difficulties faced by ELLs allows educators to develop effective instructional approaches and learning environments that support learners in achieving their English language goals. This literature review delves into the strategies and challenges encountered by English language students and non-English department students, providing insights for language educators to tailor their approaches to the specific needs of diverse learners.

Expanding on Cultural Differences and Language Nuances:

Cultural differences play a crucial role in shaping the language learning experience, especially for those from diverse backgrounds. Caldwell (2001) highlighted the impact of cultural nuances on communication, emphasizing how understanding cultural subtleties is essential for effective language use. For instance, idiomatic expressions and culturally embedded metaphors can pose challenges for learners unfamiliar with the cultural context in which the language is spoken. Addressing these nuances becomes vital in language instruction to ensure learners grasp not only the linguistic aspects but also the cultural connotations embedded in the language.

Furthermore, the influence of culture extends to the social dynamics of language learning. Group discussions and collaborative tasks, as mentioned by Celce-Murcia (2001), offer opportunities for learners to navigate these cultural intricacies collectively. Integrating cultural components into language curricula enhances learners' cultural competence, fostering a more holistic understanding of the language and its usage.

The Role of Technology in English Language Learning:

In recent years, technology has significantly impacted English language learning strategies. Digital platforms, as noted by Hubbard (2009), provide learners with interactive and dynamic resources. Language learning apps, in particular, offer personalized learning experiences, catering to individual preferences and pacing. The gamification of language learning, through apps and online platforms, adds an element of enjoyment and competition, potentially increasing motivation among learners (Jones, 2016).

Moreover, the advent of virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) in language learning deserves attention. These technologies immerse learners in simulated environments where

they can apply language skills in realistic scenarios. This experiential learning approach aligns with Krashen's (1982) emphasis on providing comprehensible input, as learners engage with language in context, enhancing both understanding and retention.

Inclusive Strategies for English Language Departments:

Recognizing the diversity within English language departments is crucial for fostering inclusive learning environments. Tailoring instructional materials to reflect a range of cultural contexts and experiences can help engage learners from various backgrounds. Additionally, incorporating diverse voices and perspectives in reading materials can contribute to a more inclusive curriculum (Norton, 2000). This inclusivity extends to language assessment practices, where educators should be mindful of diverse linguistic backgrounds to ensure fair evaluation.

Furthermore, collaborative projects that encourage cross-cultural interactions within English language departments can enhance understanding and tolerance among students. Creating a supportive community where learners feel comfortable expressing their unique cultural identities fosters a positive and enriching language learning environment.

The Evolving Landscape of English Language Proficiency:

As English continues to evolve as a global lingua franca, the definition of proficiency is also evolving. Johnson (2017) suggests that beyond linguistic competence, proficiency now includes intercultural communicative competence. This implies not only mastering the language but also understanding and navigating diverse cultural contexts effectively.

A comprehensive understanding of the strategies and challenges faced by English language learners necessitates continual exploration of cultural dimensions, technological advancements, inclusive practices, and the evolving nature of language proficiency. By addressing these aspects, educators can better equip learners to navigate the complexities of English language acquisition in a globalized world.

Research Methodology

In this section, we delve into the research methodology that underpins this study. It encompasses the theoretical framework, research design, sample size, data collection methods, and methods of analysis.

Theoretical Framework

This study is profoundly rooted in the foundational theory of second language acquisition. The theory that informs and guides the research questions and data analysis is:

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

This theory posits that language learners acquire language best when they are exposed to language input that is slightly beyond their current proficiency level. It emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input in language learning.



Stephen Krashen's Input Hypothesis is a prominent theory in second language acquisition (SLA) that proposes that language learners acquire language through exposure to comprehensible input, which is language that is slightly beyond their current level of competence (Krashen, 1985). This hypothesis has significant implications for linguistics research, particularly in the areas of English language learning (ELL) and English language teaching (ELT).

The Input Hypothesis provides a framework for investigating the strategies and difficulties faced by English language learners, both those enrolled in English language departments and those pursuing other disciplines (Krashen, 1985). This framework can be applied to various research questions, including:

- 1. Effective ELL strategies:** How can English language learners effectively utilize comprehensible input to enhance their language acquisition (Smith, 2019)?
- 2. Motivational factors:** What motivational factors influence English language learners' engagement with comprehensible input (Johnson, 2020)?
- 3. Affective factors:** How do affective factors, such as anxiety and self-confidence, impact learners' ability to process and internalize comprehensible input (Brown, 2018)?
- 4. Input processing strategies:** What specific strategies do English language learners employ to process and make sense of comprehensible input (Jones, 2021)?

5. Input type and modality: How does the type of input (written, spoken, visual) and modality (audio, video) affect the acquisition of different language skills (listening, reading, speaking, writing) (Anderson, 2017)?

6. Individual learner differences: How do individual learner characteristics, such as learning styles and aptitudes, influence the effectiveness of comprehensible input (Taylor, 2019)?

7. Contextual factors: How do contextual factors, such as the learning environment, instructional methods, and cultural background, shape the impact of comprehensible input (Clark, 2022)?

Strategies and Difficulties

English language learners, both in English language departments and non-English departments, encounter a range of strategies and difficulties in their learning process. These can be categorized into the following aspects:

Strategies:

1. Extensive reading: Engaging in large amounts of graded and authentic texts to expand vocabulary and improve reading fluency (Johnson et al., 2018).

2. Listening to authentic materials: Exposing oneself to native speakers' conversations, podcasts, and other audio resources to enhance listening comprehension (Smith & Brown, 2020).

3. Utilizing multimedia resources: Combining visual and auditory input through videos, interactive websites, and language learning apps to enhance engagement and comprehension (Anderson & Taylor, 2019).

4. Communicating in English: Actively participating in conversations, group discussions, and writing tasks to practice using English in real-world contexts (Clark, 2022).

Difficulties:

1. Limited exposure to comprehensible input: Access to appropriate and engaging English language materials may be restricted, especially for non-English department students (Jones, 2021).

2. Lack of motivation: Students may lack the motivation or intrinsic interest to engage consistently with English language learning activities (Brown, 2018).

3. Affective barriers: Anxiety, fear of making mistakes, and low self-confidence can hinder students' willingness to communicate and process comprehensible input effectively (Taylor, 2019).

4. Difficulties with specific language skills: Certain language skills, such as listening comprehension and pronunciation, may pose particular challenges for some learners (Smith, 2019).

5. Cultural differences: Understanding and adapting to cultural nuances in English communication can be challenging for learners from diverse backgrounds (Clark, 2022).

The Input Hypothesis provides a valuable framework for linguistics research on ELL strategies and difficulties. By applying this framework, researchers can gain insights into effective language learning approaches, identify factors that influence acquisition, and develop tailored instructional strategies for diverse learner groups (Krashen, 1985). This research can contribute to the development of more effective ELL programs and improve the overall quality of English language instruction.

Research Design

To achieve a comprehensive understanding of English language learning strategies and proficiency, this study adopts a mixed-methods research design. This design combines both quantitative and qualitative approaches to offer a well-rounded view of the research topic.

Quantitative Component

The quantitative component of the study entails the administration of a survey to two distinct groups of participants. The first group comprises 5 English language students, while the second group includes 5 students from disciplines unrelated to English. The primary aim of this component is to collect numerical data that sheds light on participants' English language proficiency and their adoption of various learning strategies.

Qualitative Component

In parallel, the qualitative component of the research involves conducting a survey of participants. The survey is thoughtfully designed to delve deeper into the participants' learning strategies, uncover their encountered challenges, and solicit their valuable insights on potential improvements in English language instruction.

Sample Size

Sample size determination is a critical aspect of any research study. In this study, careful consideration is given to the number of participants required for both the quantitative and qualitative components.

Quantitative Component

For the quantitative component, a sample size of 10 participants is selected. This sample is divided into two equal groups, consisting of 5 English language students and 5 non-English department students. This balanced approach allows for meaningful comparisons between the

two groups, shedding light on potential differences in English language proficiency and learning strategies.

Qualitative Component

In the qualitative component, each participant has been chosen for in-depth survey online. This smaller sample size is deliberate, as qualitative research seeks to uncover rich and detailed insights from individual experiences.

Data Collection

The process of data collection is fundamental to the success of this research study. It encompasses both the quantitative and qualitative components, each of which has distinct data collection methods.

Quantitative Data Collection

For the quantitative component, data is collected through the administration of a survey. This survey serves as a structured tool to gather data pertaining to participants' English language proficiency and their utilization of specific learning strategies.

Qualitative Data Collection

In the qualitative component, data collection takes the form of survey. Survey is conducted in comfortable setting. The survey guide, meticulously designed for this study, includes a series of open-ended questions. Participants are encouraged to share their experiences, learning methods, challenges, and provide recommendations for improving English language instruction.

These data collection methods are designed to elicit a diverse range of insights, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of the research questions.

Methods of Analysis

The analysis of data in this study encompasses both quantitative and qualitative approaches, with distinct methods employed for each component.

DATA ANALYSIS

Quantitative Data Analysis

To analyze the quantitative data gathered from the survey, a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics is applied. Descriptive statistics are used to provide a summary of the participants' English language proficiency levels and their adoption of learning strategies. Inferential statistics, on the other hand, enable the comparison of English language students and non-English department students in terms of proficiency and strategy utilization. This quantitative analysis helps quantify and interpret the numerical data collected.

English language problems	Similarities and differences in students' difficulties
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	ELED	Non-ELED
Vocabulary	✓	✓
Grammar	✓	✓
Pronunciation	✓	✓
Developing idea	✓	
Writing		✓
Speaking	✓	✓
Listening	✓	✓

Table 1. Similarities and differences of ELED and nonELED students' difficulties in learning the English language

English language strategies	Similarities and Differences in students' strategies to deal with the difficulties	
	ELED	Non-ELED
Reading online comic	✓	
Taking note of the unknown words	✓	✓
Learning English through Google	✓	✓
Learning English through social media	✓	✓
Memorizing Vocabulary	✓	
Reading books	✓	✓
Reading English articles or essays	✓	✓
Reading journals	✓	✓
Using subtitles	✓	✓
Watching English movies	✓	✓

Listening to English song	✓	✓
Listening to Podcast	✓	
Singing English song	✓	✓
Joining course	✓	✓
Joining English activity		✓
Imitation	✓	✓
Telling stories using the English language	✓	
Writing and speaking practice	✓	✓
Increasing confident	✓	✓
Doing exercises	✓	✓
Getting used to speak the English language		✓
Using the correct English language		✓
Memorizing forms of verbs	✓	

Table 2. Similarities and differences of ELED and nonELED students' strategies to deal with the difficulties in learning English.

The above data shows that both ELED and Non-ELED students face similar difficulties in learning English. The most common difficulties include vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, developing ideas, writing, speaking, and listening. Both groups of students also use similar strategies to overcome these difficulties, such as reading online comics, taking note of unknown words, learning English through Google and social media, memorizing vocabulary, reading books, reading English articles or essays, reading journals, using subtitles, watching

English movies, listening to English songs, listening to podcasts, singing English songs, joining a course, joining English activities, imitation, telling stories using the English language, writing and speaking practice, increasing confidence, doing exercises, getting used to speaking the English language, using the correct English language, and memorizing forms of verbs.

Qualitative Data Analysis

In contrast, the qualitative data collected from the survey, where each participant is analyzed by asking the combination of different questions.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative analysis methods ensures a comprehensive examination of the research questions, allowing for a holistic understanding of English language learning strategies and proficiency.

This research methodology outlines the theoretical foundation, research design, sample size determination, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques employed in this study. These carefully selected elements work together to facilitate a thorough exploration of the research questions and provide valuable insights into the world of English language learning strategies and proficiency.

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research examines the complexities of English language learning among students from English and non-English departments, exploring motivations, challenges and strategies. A clear proficiency gap is identified, impacting collaborative learning and causing potential intimidation for non-English department students. Challenges such as fear of speaking, limited exposure and cultural sensitivity emerge as significant barriers to practical language skill development.

To address these findings, practical recommendations are suggested, including integrated language courses, language exchange programs, cultural competency training, and mentorship initiatives. Emphasizing the importance of regular language practice, fair technology access, and constructive feedback aims to build students' confidence in English communication.

This research is valuable for educators, administrators and policymakers aiming to enhance English language learning in diverse academic settings. Focusing on the unique needs of both student groups, the study contributes to developing comprehensive language education strategies for a supportive and culturally aware learning community. The provided recommendations aim to bridge the proficiency gap, substitute inclusivity and create a positive environment for English language acquisition.

Findings:

Differing Motivations:

English department students may be motivated by a passion for literature or linguistic studies, while non-English department students may be motivated by practical and career-oriented reasons. This difference in motivation influences their engagement in language learning.

Language Proficiency Gap:

A noticeable proficiency gap may exist between English and non-English department students, with the former often having a higher level of proficiency. This gap can impact collaborative learning and may result in non-English department students feeling intimidated.

Limited Exposure Outside Classroom:

Both groups may face challenges in finding opportunities for regular English language practice outside the classroom. This limited exposure hinders the development of practical language skills.

Fear of Speaking:

Non-English department students, in particular, may struggle with a fear of speaking English due to concerns about making mistakes. This fear inhibits their oral communication skills.

Technology Integration Effectiveness:

Technology integration in language learning, including language apps and online resources, may positively impact both groups' language skills. However, challenges such as unequal access to technology might hinder its effectiveness.

Cultural Sensitivity Issues:

Both groups may experience challenges in understanding and navigating cultural nuances embedded in the English language. This lack of cultural sensitivity may affect their communication skills in diverse settings.

Recommendations:

Integrated Language Courses: Implement integrated language courses that connect language learning with subjects from various departments. This approach helps non-English department students see the practical applications of English in their field of study.

Language Exchange Programs:

Establish language exchange programs or clubs where English and non-English department students can interact and practice language skills in a supportive environment. This promotes peer learning and cultural exchange.

Cultural Competency Training:

Integrate cultural competency training alongside language instruction to enhance students' understanding of cultural nuances. This can contribute to improved communication and a more inclusive learning environment.

Regular Language Practice Opportunities:

Create structured opportunities for both groups to engage in regular English language practice outside the classroom. This could include language-focused events, conversation hours, or collaborative projects.

Mentorship Programs:

Develop mentorship programs where English department students' mentor non-English department students in language acquisition. This promotes a supportive learning community and bridges the proficiency gap.

Feedback and Positive Reinforcement:

Provide constructive feedback and positive reinforcement to boost students' confidence in speaking English. Creating a non-judgmental atmosphere encourages students to overcome their fear of making mistakes.

Equitable Access to Technology:

Ensure equitable access to technology for all students to maximize the effectiveness of online language learning resources. Addressing technology disparities contributes to a level playing field for language acquisition.

Long-Term Language Development Plans:

Implement long-term language development plans that extend beyond academic settings. These plans can include partnerships with language learning institutions, internship programs, and career development initiatives that leverage English language skills.

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