



Voices Unheard: Navigating Language Challenges Among Pharmacy Students in Pakistan

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Article Info

Article History:

Received 17 December 2023

Revised 29 December 2023

Accepted 01 January 2024

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Keywords:

Language shift,
societal bilingualism,
language preservation,
socio-cultural dynamics,
a gradual transformation,
language attitudes,
language policies.

Abstract

The English language holds a crucial role in the Pakistani education system, yet many Pakistani students encounter difficulties when it comes to speaking English in their classrooms. Therefore, there was a need to investigate the challenges these students face while attempting to speak English. This research draws upon a combination of Lev Vygotsky's social constructivism and constructivist theoretical frameworks to delve into the constructivist aspects that uncover the social realities and influences compelling students in Pakistan to switch to their local language, Urdu, instead of using English. Social constructivism emphasizes the role of culture and social context in the learning process, making it a suitable lens for this study. The study aims to achieve two main objectives: first, to identify the problem students encounter when using English in classrooms, and second, to gain insights into the perspectives of non-native English-speaking students. To achieve these goals, a quantitative research method was employed, utilizing an open-ended questionnaire designed to gather data from 100 students in the Pharmacy department at the University of Lahore. Among the participants, most have Urdu as their native language, while few were who use English as a foreign language, with varying levels of proficiency. The study's findings reveal that students generally appreciate the English learning environment as it motivates them to use English outside of their classrooms. However, they face reluctance to speak English due to social and psychological factors, including the fear of judgment and a lack of confidence. The study further demonstrates that students find it more convenient to communicate in their first language because it allows them to express their ideas more comfortably. In conclusion, this research contributes valuable insights to the broader discourse on language education, offering guidance for policymakers, educators, and researchers.

Introduction

English as a means of learning and communication is becoming a central pedagogy in many countries worldwide. However, it has been observed that students and teachers tend to communicate in their first language, particularly Urdu, within the classroom setting. This study aims to identify the factors that hinder students from using English as a communication tool. This study has been conducted to examine the factors that limit students from communicating in English. Important factors included linguistics, individual, social, psychological, and institutional, largely based on their beliefs, assumptions, needs, and desires. This study provides insights to the policymakers to work on this issue related to communications and the medium of instruction in Pakistan.

Currently, English is taken as the common language in all parts of the world. Asif, Bashir, and Zafar (2018) It may be a foreign language, but international in its significance. (Getie, 2020) The English language is spoken, read, and understood in most parts of the world. This language serves as a means for people all around the globe to

communicate and feel a sense of belonging to the world community. The emphasis of this study is on how and what factors influence students to use their mother tongue while sitting in an English language classroom.

According to (Getie, 2020) In Pakistan, students in the English language classroom tend to hold on to their first language, and most of the time they have been observed speaking Urdu even in their English language classroom. On the use of L1 in English classrooms most of the studies ignore the perspective of the students or focus only on the teacher's opinion about using their mother tongue while teaching students. This study tries to go deeper into this area to discover the reasons behind using native language in ESL settings and provide insights to policymakers to work on this issue.

Research Questions

1. What factors influence non-native English-speaking pharmacy students to prefer or resist using their first language over English during academic activities?
2. What is the perspective of non-native Pharmacy students about using their first language?

This study provides a new perspective on how policymakers should make policies to hinder the factors affecting the use of the English language in Pakistan. This study further benefits the students as its findings may encourage them to overcome the social factors that become a hurdle for them to speak English in classrooms.

This study aims to identify the various factors that influence the students' language choices in the classroom by exploring a range of research questions. Therefore, the quantitative framework has been used in the study. This study is conducted at the University of Lahore. The students, including males and females between the ages of 19-22, are the participants in this study. The purpose of this research is to provide an insight view into why Pakistani students only use their native language in English classes. Considering the perspective of non-English speaking students, this study attempts to explore the thoughts and possible reasons of students who speak their native language instead of English in an English-only classroom. The results of this study help students do their examinations and find better ideas and explanations for their attitudes toward learning English.

Pakistani society is a mixture of many languages and cultures with a range of dialectical variations in every single language; therefore, its map is complicated in terms of determining language boundaries. This study aims to explore factors affecting student language choices within the classroom. The decision to promote or enhance the use of the English language in Pakistan was politically motivated where the government guaranteed to cater to different arrangements at the institutional level but the implementation of it fell short due to an insufficient educational framework (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Therefore, the learning and teaching of English remained the major issue for every government in Pakistan (Shamim, 2008). In Pakistan, learners carry internal factors such as age, personality, motivation, experience, cognition, and mother tongue into specific learning contexts, influencing the learning of English as a second language. Meanwhile, external factors, including curriculum, instruction, culture, status, motivation, and access to native speakers, shape the language learning situation.

Jabeen and Akhtar (2013) point out that languages cannot be learned remotely. Rather, it is a social experiment in his psyche. It is interesting to examine, at least in part, all these factors for research, as a large proportion of Pakistan's population is educated in anti-educational environments. Younger people are better at learning second and foreign languages. This widespread belief is partly what many English teachers and experts around the world claim. Evidence for this comes from the school's multilingual children who started learning English very early at KSA's Dawadmi. Internationally observed research shows that people who start learning a foreign language very early in life generally achieve higher levels of proficiency than those who start later (Penfield, 1967; Taylor and Taylor, 1990; and Snow, 1993). However, other studies have shown that age of onset has the same effect on foreign language learners when only the foreign language speaker (usually a non-native speaker teacher) is seen in only one environment (the classroom) and only for a very limited time. Students and teachers differ from the public in their use of language. They acquire language skills for academic and educational purposes, knowledge, research, and teaching, etc.

Mastering English as a second or foreign language can greatly expand your opportunities and open doors to new experiences. With English being the most widely spoken language in the world, knowing how to effectively communicate in it can give you a competitive edge in both personal and professional life. Language instruction for English learners is sometimes referred to as English as a Second Language (ESL). The need for second language learning is increasing, especially in countries where English is a second language. In addition to being a status symbol, it is also a clear source of career advancement and employment opportunities (Cook, 2001). As in other countries, students in Pakistan learn to read, write, speak, and listen. They also need to acquire two language skills of the four language skills, writing, unlike the other three language learning skills, is not a natural activity that requires specific treatment and training to acquire (Aronoff & Rees Miller, 2007). Although the importance of English in Pakistan is well known at all levels, education in rural areas is still considered a difficult subject. Learning English has become more challenging due to various factors, such as significant obstacles and the absence of an appropriate learning environment, which can seriously impede learners' progress. As a result, rural students are less proficient in

English than urban students. A lot of research has been done to find out why these areas affect English learning. Nariswariatmojo (2011) found that several external factors have a strong influence on the English learning process. According to Farooq, Chaudhry, and Shafique (2011), students, families, schools, and peer groups are major factors that directly influence English language learning.

According to Kachru (1985), the spread of English was described using the three concentric circles model, which included the expanding circle, outer circle, and Kachru says that the countries in the inner circle are those with native English speakers, like the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand. In regions like India, which have experienced extended periods of colonization, institutionalized non-native varieties (ESL) represent the Outer Circle. The countries where English is spoken as a second language (EFL) are included in the Expanding Circle. In Pakistan, English is not only taught as a compulsory language in schools but also holds the status of an official language alongside Urdu. This places Pakistan among the countries where English is given significant importance and is widely spoken and understood. Because it is required at the undergraduate level, English becomes the more powerful language. In addition, it serves as the only medium of instruction for both undergraduate and graduate students. After students pass an English language test, they are awarded degrees in all fields of science, humanities, and the social sciences. According to Rahman (1997), English is a very important language that reaches a distinct status in the economic and social spheres, even more so than Urdu due to the political, economic, cultural, and social importance given to it by the country's ruling elite. According to Rahman (2004), the ruling elites have supported Urdu because of its symbolic integration with Pakistani ideology, gaining the support of the urban middle class and enabling them to maintain power in the provinces. English serves the job of a watchman in the section of a youthful world-class age into leader positions and expands the chance of tip-top youth to enter the global work market (in the same place). However, this support is hidden. As a result, while elites send their children to expensive English-speaking schools, the common people's children attend government-funded schools that teach Urdu. English dominates almost every aspect of daily life in Pakistan, including higher education, media, industries, science and technology, and youth culture. According to Ashraf (2007) study in Karachi (Pakistan), English is linked to power and status in Pakistan. Mansoor (2002) also talks about how learning English in Pakistan is often seen to move up socially, which affects students' identities.

Methodology

This study employs quantitative research methodology to investigate the factors influencing students' language preferences within the classroom setting. By utilizing quantitative methods, the study aims to systematically analyze and quantify the relationships between various variables and students' language choices. This approach allows for the collection of numerical data that can be statistically analyzed, providing objective insights into the determinants of language selection among students. Through the rigorous application of quantitative techniques, the study endeavors to contribute to a deeper understanding of the dynamics shaping language usage in educational environments.

Research Framework

This research consists of a combination of social constructivism and constructivist theoretical frameworks. Social constructivism, a social learning theory developed by Russian psychologist Lev Vygotsky, posits that individuals are active participants in the creation of their knowledge (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). This study explores constructivist dimensions to identify social realities that hinder the learning process and what factors drive students to switch to a local language like Urdu if they need to speak English. This study discusses and extracts the personal opinions of students who have contrary views on English in the classroom. In Social Constructivism, the focus is on the role that culture and social reality can play in the learning process and it also shapes the factors that influence the student's acceptance of English as a medium of instruction and what prevents them from using English in the classroom.

The participants in this study comprised 100 undergraduate students enrolled at the University of Lahore. The sample includes both male and female individuals aged between 19 and 22 years. These participants exhibit diverse linguistic backgrounds, representing various native languages.

To acquire the objectives of the research questionnaire is prepared. The questionnaire is prepared to meet the needs of the study. This questionnaire helps find out how these English-only policies in classrooms are viewed. The study collects data through a questionnaire, gathering responses in raw form for subsequent analysis of students' attitudes and opinions. Participants' responses are manually recorded. The study focuses on the participants' perceptions of an English-only policy and their apprehensions about speaking English in classrooms. Data collection relies on questionnaires, with subsequent analysis of the responses provided by participants.

Results and Discussion

In this study, we enrolled a total of 100 participants all of whom responded to the questionnaire. The participants involved in the study are mostly Urdu speakers and few of the respondents are speakers of the English language as shown in (Figure 1).

Figure 1

Percentage of English and first language speakers.

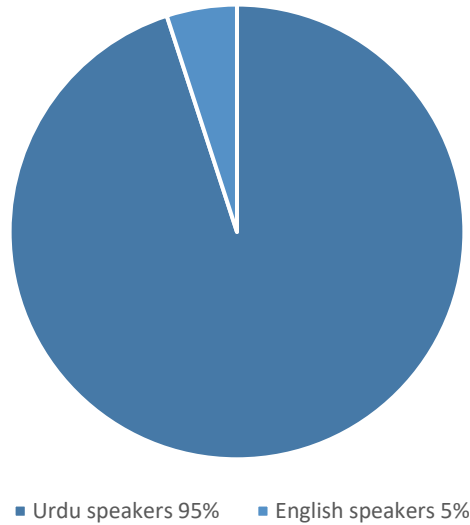
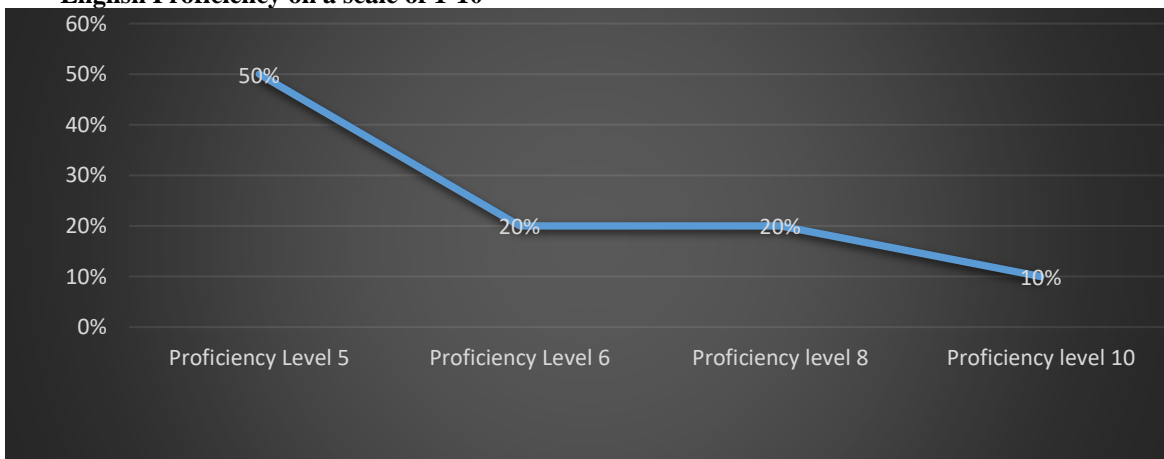


Figure (2) shows the rating of English proficiency of all participants. They were asked on a scale of 0-10 how they rate their proficiency in the English language. English proficiency of the majority of students is at level 5 (40%) followed by levels 6 and 8 (20%) and out of 20 participants only a participant rated his proficiency of the English language at level 10.

Figure 2
English Proficiency on a scale of 1-10



When participants were asked whether they liked the English-only policy in classrooms, the majority (60%) answered in favor of it, while 40% of participants expressed dislike for the policy, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Do you like English only policy in classrooms?

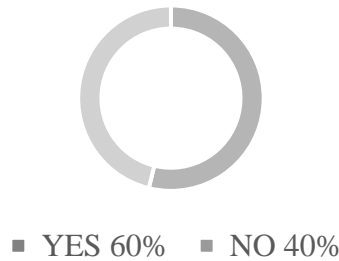
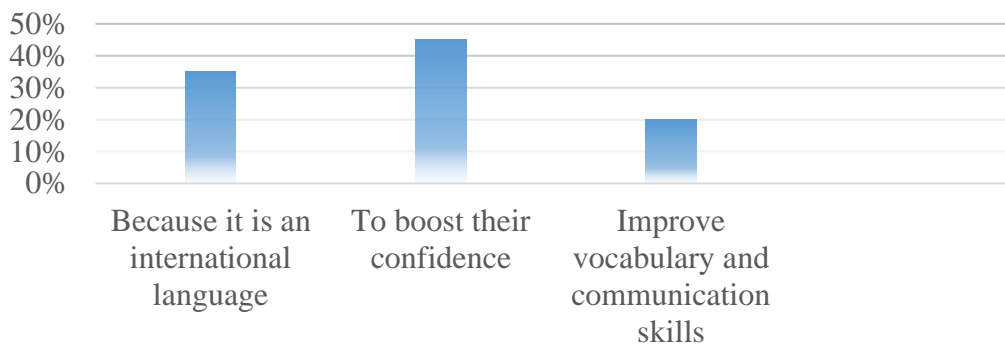


Figure-3

Then, the participants were asked about what they think about having English-only policy in classrooms and why they have it 35% of them answered to learn English because it is an international language they want to learn and be fluent in, 45% of the participants answered that to give them confidence to speak in front of others to speak English and 20% were those participants who answered that they have English only policy in their classrooms to help them improve their communication skills and vocabulary as shown in the Figure (4) below.

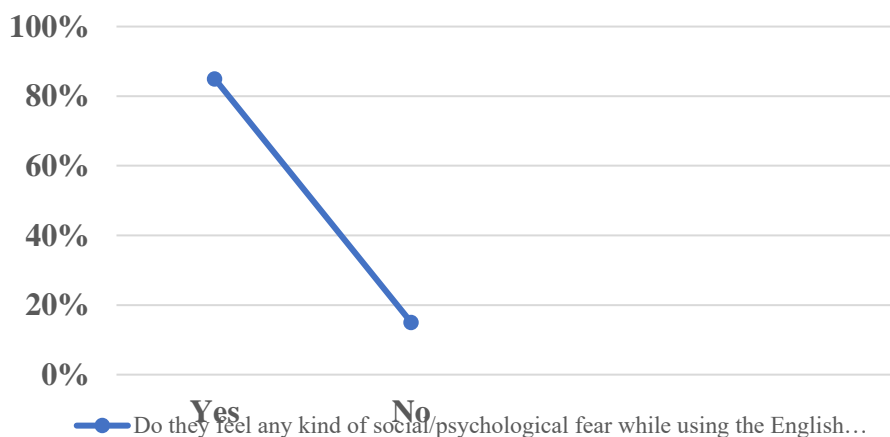
Figure 4



Why do they think they have English only policy in a classroom

In Figure (5) below, students were asked whether they have any social/psychological fear while speaking the English language in front of others in response to this 85% of participants answered that they do have a social fear while, speaking English that they might get judged for their fluency or if they are pronouncing the right way or not. On the other hand, 15% were the respondents who do not have any social fear while they speak English.

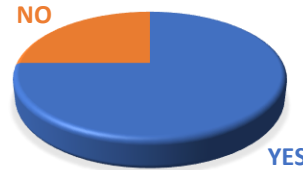
Figure 5



Afterwards, participants were asked about are they motivated enough to talk in English outside their classrooms response to which 75% were motivated to speak English outside the classrooms and the other 25% were not motivated to speak English outside their classrooms as shown in Figure (6) below.

Figure 6

ARE THEY MOTIVATED ENOUGH TO SPEAK ENGLISH OUTSIDE THEIR CLASSROOMS?



Participants were then asked about why they think students use their first language in classrooms. In response, to which 35% of participants answered that it is easy for the students to communicate in their first language compared to communicating in English that is the reason they prefer speaking their first language in their classrooms on the other hand, 65% of the participants responded that they feel more comfortable and confident while sharing their ideas in their first language that is why they prefer using first language. The most common answers to the question are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1. Why do they think students use their first language in classrooms?

Table 1

Students	Replies
1.	When we are not using tough vocabulary, it's okay to use English but when we use tough vocabulary it's difficult to understand in English, so we prefer the first language.
2.	We feel shy to speak English and we are not confident.
3.	It is easy to communicate in a first language as compared to English.
4.	We can convey our message more clearly and proficiently in our native language.
5.	It is our mother tongue, only a few people understand English.
6.	Most of the students cannot express their ideas in English so they use Urdu.

At last, participants were asked what kind of policies should be made to overcome the factors that limit students to speak English in classrooms. Most of them responded to making it compulsory to speak in English, by conducting presentations, and boosting their confidence and the communication between teacher and student must be in English as most of the answers were the same as shown below in Table 2.

Table 2. What policies should be made to overcome the factors that hinder students from using the English language in English-only classrooms?

Table 2

Students	Replies
1.	Make it compulsory to use the English language in classrooms.
2.	By conducting presentations in only English Language.
3.	Boosting their confidence.
4.	Any communication between a teacher and a student must be in English.

Discussion

In the study, we enrolled 100 participants who responded to the questionnaire. The participants involved in this study are mostly Urdu speakers (95%) and few of them are English speakers (5%) as mentioned in Figure (1).

The English proficiency level of students as shown in Figure (2) is mostly at level 5 (50%), followed by levels 6 and 7 (20%) and level 10 (10%). When students were asked about their likeness towards English-only policy in classrooms 60% of them answered in favor and 40% voted against English-only policy in classrooms. The participants were further asked about why they have an English-only policy in classrooms 35% of them answered to learn English because it is an international language and to be fluent in it, 45% of participants answered that gives them confidence, and 20% of those who answered to improve their communication skill and vocabulary as shown in Figure (4). Then, the students were asked whether they feel any kind of fear (psychological/social) while using the English language in front of others to which 85% answered they fear being judged, on the other hand, 15% are the participants who did not have any kind of fear (Figure 5). When students were asked about why they use their first language in classrooms 35% of them responded it is easy to communicate in their first language as compared to English and 65% of them think that they are more confident and comfortable while expressing their ideas in first language (Table 1). In response to the question about what kind of policies should be implemented to overcome the factors hindering students from using English in classrooms, most participants suggested making it compulsory to speak in English, conducting presentations to boost their confidence, and ensuring that classroom communication is in English (Table 2). According to our results, most of the students like to communicate in English and want to be a part of an English-only environment. However, they acknowledged some key factors that prevented them from using the English language in classrooms. The psychological factors include a lack of confidence while speaking the English language and making mistakes because of the thought of being judged. In the next chapter, the conclusion and recommendations will be discussed.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this research conducted at the University of Lahore Department of Pharmacy sought to explore the determinants influencing students' language preferences within the classroom environment. The data gathered via a questionnaire revealed a distinct preference for an English-exclusive atmosphere, fostering motivation among students to extend their English language usage beyond the classroom. Nonetheless, the reluctance to speak English stemmed from psychological factors, primarily concerns related to judgmental perspectives and a lack of self-assuredness. The study highlighted that student gravitated towards their native language due to its ease of communication and the convenience it offered in expressing their ideas. However, the imposition of societal norms and constraints acted as significant barriers to embracing English within the classroom setting. In summary, the findings underscore the importance of a judicious blend of both English and the student's first language to facilitate better comprehension and fluency in a second language. This suggests that students should adopt a selective approach to language use, promoting a balanced and effective learning experience.

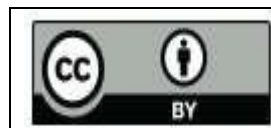
Based on the insights gleaned from this study, the researcher has formulated recommendations for educators. These recommendations serve as valuable guidelines to enhance the language learning process in the classroom:

1. Encourage student participation in the second language, even if they make mistakes, to instill confidence. Teachers should provide opportunities for students to speak and subsequently offer corrective feedback.
2. Foster awareness among educators regarding the challenges that students encounter while utilizing the English language, enabling them to provide appropriate support and assistance.
3. Ensure that classroom conversations initiated by the teacher are tailored to the comprehension level of the students. Teachers should gauge the proficiency of their students and adapt their language accordingly.
4. Keep in mind the skill level of the students and incorporate regular student presentations to bolster their confidence in using the second language.
5. These recommendations, drawn from the research findings, aim to create a more conducive and effective learning environment that empowers students to overcome language-related hurdles and improve their language proficiency.

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