



Original Article



Language Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Students in Understanding the English Curriculum at PNS LUMHS

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ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Challenges, Vocabulary, Curriculum, English Medium

How to Cite:

Iqra, ., Channar, H. B., Khowaja, S., Bhacho, A. H., Dean, R., & Haq, M. U. (2025). Language Difficulties and Challenges Faced by Students in Understanding the English Curriculum at PNS LUMHS: Difficulties and Challenges in Understanding English Curriculum. *Pakistan BioMedical Journal*, 8(1), 23-29. <https://doi.org/10.54393/pbmj.v8i1.1160>

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Received date: 12th November, 2024Revised date: 19th January, 2025Acceptance date: 22nd January, 2025Published date: 31st January, 2025

The English language is spoken all over the world nowadays. It is issued in various socio-economic settings such as tourism, travelling, business, commerce, communication, teaching, learning, international diplomacy, science and technology. **Objectives:** To describe the challenges that students experience because of the curriculum in English. To investigate how these challenges are overcome by students in their academic years, and to explore which strategies are used by students to overcome challenges faced because of the curriculum in English. **Methods:** A cross-sectional study was carried out at Peoples Nursing School, Liaquat University of Medical and Health Science, Jamshoro, to evaluate language difficulties and challenges faced by students in understanding the English curriculum at Peoples Nursing School, Liaquat University of Medical and Health Science. **Results:** According to this study, nearly 41% of students face difficulties when communicating in English. 41% of students have difficulty in grammar. The major problem faced by participants is that 57% of students feel shy, and because of that students don't communicate well in English. 53% of participants don't speak English or read in English because of shyness and 51% of participants haven't enough confidence to read in English in front of people. **Conclusions:** It was concluded that participants have major problems in English speaking because of again lack of confidence, shyness, lack of vocabulary, lack of fluency, and sentence-making problems.

INTRODUCTION

Learning English has become a dire need of students in different countries of the world especially where the medium of instruction in education settings is English [1]. The English language is spoken all over the world nowadays. It is issued in various socio-economic settings such as tourism, travelling, business, commerce, communication, teaching, learning, international diplomacy, science, and technology. English is a mandatory subject that is being taught from primary to university level in Pakistan [2]. English occupies a desirable and valued place as the international language, English is used as the principal means of communication all over the world. In addition, it is used for diplomatic, commercial, educational, engineering, legal, and medical purposes [3]. English is the communication medium in most schools, colleges, and

universities, especially for studying overseas. In Pakistan English is not the native language that's why most students face difficulties in higher education academic years, especially students from remote areas. It is observed that students have clear concepts but they do not have enough English language skills like poor grammar skills, and lack of vocabulary, because of that students don't correctly answer the questions in exams and ultimately it affects their education and their grades [4]. It aims to know how students cope with this situation where the whole curriculum is in English. English is a medium of instruction, and students must attempt exams in English medium. It is a very important aspect to know how university students face challenges during their academic years because of the curriculum in English medium. At the same time, they



have poor English proficiency. Although in 12 years of education, students study English they do not master's in English. Students didn't properly study the language. Mostly students get the language as a text and read about it but they are not driven to take part in daily life situations. This study aims to present the language difficulties of students by exploring the language-related trials that students face at Peoples Nursing School, Liaquat University of Medical & Health Science, Jamshoro. To distinguish the English medium instruction linguistic challenges in these four aspects of English academic skills like reading, writing, communication and listening. In the twenty-first century, English medium instruction (EMI) has appeared as a dominant educational phenomenon in the world. English is widely used to teach science subjects. English-as-a-second-language learners studying science in English are increasing because learning an additional language demands effort. EMI is defined as 'the use of the English language to explain academic subjects in a country where English is not the first language of the common population [5-7]. It is a renowned fact that learning academic content through a second/foreign language will bring many encounters where English is not the native language [8]. It is very crucial to understand first the language-related challenges that students face while learning via English to reduce the challenges of students. It is impossible to complete tasks and pass exams of university, without a grasp on these important aspects like reading writing communication and understanding. In higher education accomplished learning uniquely depends on the skill of reading and writing. Academic reading is challenging because it is longer than general reading, complicated paragraphs, and contains multifaceted sentences and challenging vocabulary [9]. This study explores challenges faced by students because of the curriculum in English. Most of the students come from non-English speaking backgrounds, they come from remote areas, and their level of English is below, in higher education medium of instruction is English, which is why they face many challenges in their academic years. Despite extensive emphasis on English as a medium of instruction, there is limited context-specific evidence from Pakistani nursing students regarding how linguistic barriers (e.g., vocabulary, confidence, and grammar) directly affect academic performance and learning outcomes. The problem lies in students' inability to effectively comprehend and express academic content in English, leading to reduced participation and lower GPA. Therefore, this study aims to identify key language-related challenges, explore their impact on students' academic performance, and examine coping strategies used by students to overcome difficulties in English-medium curricula.

METHODS

A cross-sectional study was carried out after obtaining ethical approval from Peoples Nursing School (PSN) Liaquat University of Medical and Health Science (LUMHS), Jamshoro, to evaluate language difficulties and challenges faced by students in understanding the English curriculum at PNS LUMHS. This study was done from December 2023 to March 2024. The sample for the study was calculated using Rao software, chosen from Students of Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) Generic first, second, third and fourth year, based on their availability and willingness to participate, unwilling participants were excluded, using simple random sampling. A self-constructed, structured questionnaire assessed research participants about language difficulties and challenges faced by students in understanding the English curriculum. The pre-structured questionnaire was divided into six sections. The first component included sociodemographic data of the research participants, like age, gender, and occupation. Section numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 consist of open-ended questions and the last part of the questionnaire consists of descriptive questions. Section two consists of 09 questions regarding difficulties in communication in the English language, section three consists of 6 questions regarding understanding, section four consists of three questions regarding writing difficulties, fifth section consists of five questions regarding reading difficulties faced by students of BSN Generic. The last part of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended descriptive questions regarding strategies used by students to solve these difficulties. Informed consent was signed by every research participant. The identity of the research participants was kept confidential. Data were checked for uniformity and accuracy before being entered into a system and kept in Excel datasheets. For data analysis, SPSS version 22.0 (SPSS) was utilized.

RESULTS

Data gathered in this research revealed that students have challenges in communication, writing, reading and understanding, these categories are assessed by asking different questions through a self-constructed questionnaire. This study also focuses on strategies used by students to overcome challenges they faced because of the curriculum in English and English Medium Instruction (EMI). Participants respond through both open and close-ended questions. Responses of Communication, writing, reading and understanding, were measured through percentages and frequencies separately and represented in the form of tables, which are given below with descriptions. The result shows that they have difficulties in vocabulary, reading, communication and understanding,

these challenges affect their GPA. Result of descriptive questions shows that respondents have major problems in speaking because of lack of confidence, shyness, lack of vocabulary and fear of making mistakes in front of people. The major findings of the study were that participants had major problems in vocabulary, speaking, reading, and lack of confidence while communicating due to lack of English proficiency. Ultimately, because of deficient English proficiency, students face many challenges during their academic years, affecting their GPA. This pie chart shows the percentages of participants from all years of BSN Generic students, 24% participants from the first year, 25% students from the second year, 27% students from 3rd and 24% participants from 4th year BSN Generic (Figure 1).

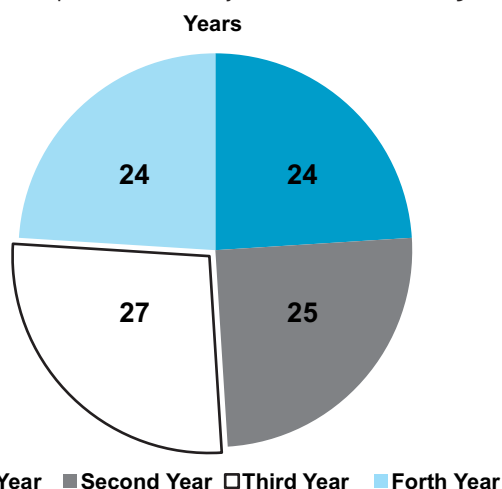


Figure 1: Percentage of Selected Participants from All Batches of BSN Generic

In this study participants belong to five different backgrounds, (59.00%) were Sindhi in this study, 17.00%. Contributors were Urdu speaking, 14.00% of the participant's mother tongue was Pashto, 4.00% were Punjabi speaking and 6.00% of the participant's mother tongue was Balochi in the study. 52.00% of participants were female and 48% of participants were male, in this study (Figure 2).

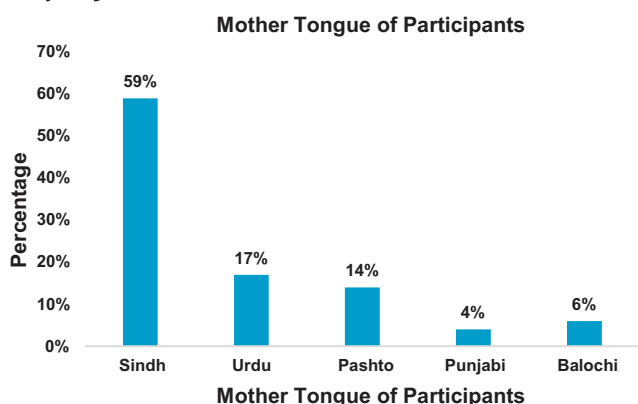


Figure 2: Mother Tongue Categories of Selected Students from Four Batches of BSN Generic

A total of 100 students of BSN Generic. The majority of the participants were female (52.0%), and male (48.0%) (Figure 3).

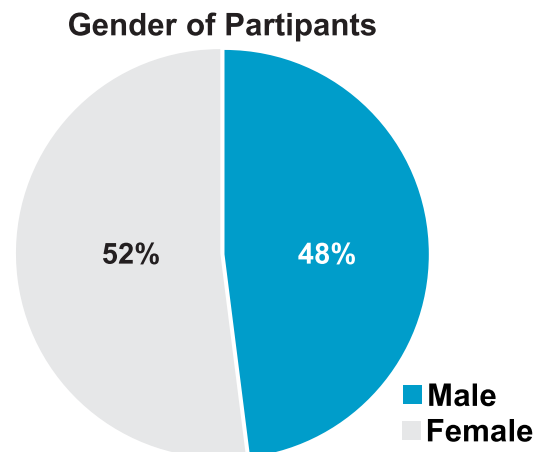


Figure 3: Percentage of Selected Gender from All Batches of BSN Generic

In this study, the first category consisted of 9 questions about communication skills, difficulties and challenges faced by students, this study's outcome showed that 86 % of students like English, and 41% of students had difficulty talking in English. 41% of students had difficulty in grammar. This study's findings showed that students also had a lack of confidence, 57% of students don't communicate in English because of shyness. The major problem faced by participants was that 57% of students face shyness because of that they don't communicate most of the time (Table 1).

Table 1: Challenges Faced in Communication

Questions	Frequency (%)
Do You Like the English Language?	
Yes	86 (86.0%)
No	14 (14.0%)
English Speaking Skill Is Difficult For You?	
Yes	41 (41.0%)
No	59 (59.0%)
Can You Speak English with Your Fellows?	
Yes	65 (65.0%)
No	34 (34.0%)
You Are Unable to Use English in All Aspects of Life Like Conversation in Real Life?	
Yes	40 (40.0%)
No	60 (60.0%)
Do You Express Your Ideas in Correct English During Lectures?	
Yes	55 (55.0%)
No	45 (45.0%)
Pronunciation of Words in English Is Difficult?	
Yes	38 (38.0%)
No	61 (61.0%)

Do You Speak English Accurately/Grammatically Correct?	
Yes	41 (41.0%)
No	59 (59.0%)
Your Society Discourages You for English Language Learning?	
Yes	27 (27.0%)
No	73 (73.0%)
Your Shyness Prevents You from Speaking English and Afraid of Mistakes?	
Yes	57 (57.0%)
No	42 (42.0%)

The second part of the questionnaire consists of close-ended questions related to difficulties and challenges in understanding faced by students in the curriculum, this study's findings showed that the majority of students had difficulty in vocabulary, and 60% of students had difficulty in understanding specific words. Because of insufficient English proficiency and lack of academic writing skills 50% of students face difficulty in writing and cannot express their concepts completely. Study findings showed that 42% of respondent's grades were affected because of a poor understanding of English (Table 2).

Table 2: Challenges Faced in Understanding

Questions	Frequency (%)
Do You Have Any Difficulty in Understanding Specific Vocabulary?	
Yes	60 (60.0%)
No	40 (40.0%)
Do You Try to Work Out the Meaning of Difficult Words?	
Yes	76 (76.0%)
No	24 (24.0%)
Are You Capable of Making Notes by Yourself?	
Yes	77 (77.0%)
No	23 (23.0%)
Does Your GPA Get Affected Due to the Lack of Understanding English Language?	
Yes	42 (42.0%)
No	58 (58.0%)
Your Understanding of Concept Is Clear, But You Struggle to Express Them in Writing Due to Limited English Skills?	
Yes	50 (50.0%)
No	50 (50.0%)

The third part of the questionnaire consists of questions related to difficulties and challenges in understanding faced by students in writing English language (Table 3).

Table 3: Challenges Faced in Writing

Questions	Frequency (%)
Do You Feel Difficulty in Understanding Your Lecture Which Is Delivered in English Language?	
Yes	31 (31.0%)
No	68 (68.0%)
Is Writing A Difficult Task for You?	
Yes	33 (33.0%)
No	66 (66.0%)

Can You Summarize and Properly Paraphrase Your Ideas?	
Yes	55 (55.0%)
No	44 (44.0%)

The study's outcome showed that shyness and lack of confidence in participants prevent them from engaging in reading skills. 53% of participants don't speak English or read English because of shyness and 51% participants hadn't enough confidence to read in English in front of people (Table 4).

Table 4: Challenges Faced in Reading

Questions	Frequency (%)
Do You Find It Difficult to Read and Comprehend English Text?	
Yes	30 (30.0%)
No	69 (69.0%)
Do You Find It Difficult to Read English Text in Front of Bunch of People Because of Lack of Confidence?	
Yes	51 (51.0%)
No	49 (49.0%)
Does It Get Difficult for You to Understand Questions in English?	
Yes	25 (25.0%)
No	72 (72.0%)
Your Society Discourages You for English Language Learning?	
Yes	34 (34.0%)
No	65 (65.0%)
Your Shyness Prevents You from Speaking English and Afraid Of Mistakes?	
Yes	53 (53.0%)
No	47 (47.0%)

The last part of the questionnaire consists of open-ended, descriptive questions. The first question is about the most difficult aspects of the English language, like writing, reading, speaking or understanding. 56% of participants responded that speaking is most difficult due to lack of confidence, and lack of vocabulary, participants also responded that speaking is most difficult because of improper sentence making. Writing issue was the second major problem for participants, 22% of participants responded that writing is a major task for them, because of vocabulary and somehow because of spelling mistakes. This study's results showed reading difficulties are the third number, 18% of participants had difficulties in reading because of inappropriate pronunciation and unawareness of the meaning of difficult words. 5% of contributors had difficulty in understanding (Table 5).

Table 5: Analysis of Descriptive Questions

Difficulties	Percentage	Total
Speaking		
Because of Lack of Confidence	29%	56%
Because of a Lack of Vocabulary	17%	
Because of Grammatical Mistakes/ Sentence Making.	10%	

Writing		
Because of Spelling Mistakes.	10%	22%
Because of Grammatical Mistakes.	12%	
Reading		
Because of Pronunciation.	8%	18%
Because of Shyness.	10%	
Understanding		
Because of Lack of Knowledge	5%	5%

DISCUSSION

This study's results explored, that the major problem was speaking that faced participants and the causes were lack of confidence, lack of practice, fear of committing mistakes, not having an encouraging environment, lack of rich vocabulary, and the inability to use grammatical patterns as the key difficulties. Participants face many challenges while communicating in English. These difficulties inhibit the learners from developing their fluency in speaking English. These findings also relate to the results of the study conducted in Turkey. The study's results exposed that speaking English and writing were found to be the most perplexing areas of EMI [10]. Half of the participants responded that their speaking and communication skills were weak because of a lack of confidence and shyness. It was identified by the researchers that some students were encountering several issues with the skills of Speaking and Listening when the research was undertaken. Another major problem divulged in this study's result is lack of vocabulary. Research shows that pupils' short-term memorisation of words reveals their technical memory deficits [11, 12]. Another important factor is academic writing, as 22% of participants' report having trouble with it. A study conducted at the University of China aligns with this study, they reported that students need specific language support, particularly the prolific skills of English writing and speaking. Participants responded that they didn't completely understand the lecture due to a lack of vocabulary, they didn't know the meaning of specific words which is used in the lecture. Eventually, these challenges and difficulties affect their grade point average GPA. Students had difficulty in writing, they made grammatical mistakes, spelling mistakes, don't make proper sentences. In summary, this study's findings are in line with other research on EMI in the literature, which revealed that EMI leads to poor scholastic outcomes in the long run as well as feelings of worry, annoyance, tension, dread, and humiliation. Furthermore, during lectures, EMI denies students their fundamental rights to comprehension, interaction, communication, discussion, and inquiry. Having a strong grasp of English is vital for building a reputable academic profile and accessing top career choices [13-16]. The restrictive and dominating nature of

the classroom setting discourages students from actively contributing to the class activities [17]. Based on the results, a lesson plan was developed to conduct sessions for students. After analysis of the results, findings showed that most of the students had difficulties in vocabulary, and a major problem was speaking in English. Lack of vocabulary is directly proportional to speaking in English because if students have enough vocabulary their speaking skills can be improved [18]. According to study findings, other causes of difficulties in speaking skills are lack of confidence, shyness and deprived sentence-making competencies [19, 20]. Based on the findings, we plan sessions for students on strategies to enhance vocabulary, speaking and reading skills and also on different strategies to boost confidence for communication in English, as it is also the objective of our study to work on strategies and teach effective strategies to participants. So, we conducted a session on it very effectively. In the session we gave a general introduction to the English language and cleared concepts about the importance of English, then we divided students into groups and engaged them in the activity of searching strategies, each group searched at least one effective and useful approach and one homonym, by doing this students actively participate in session, and at last, we also impart them strategies to solve challenges and enhance English proficiency, because in university whole curriculum is in English and recommended medium of instruction is also English. That session was very effective and useful for students, analysed by student's responses.

The study is limited by its small sample size and single-institution setting, reducing generalizability. The use of a self-structured questionnaire without validation may affect reliability. Future studies should include multi-center data, larger samples, and standardized tools. Additionally, interventional studies focusing on language training programs and their impact on academic outcomes are recommended.

CONCLUSIONS

It was concluded that the majority of students have problems in vocabulary and the majority of contributors face challenges because of shyness and lack of confidence. Some participants had good writing skills. The major challenge observed from the study's findings is that participants have major problems speaking in English due to a lack of self-reliance, shyness, lack of vocabulary, absence of fluency and sentence-making problems.

Authors' Contribution

Conceptualization: I

Methodology: I, HBC, SK, RD

Formal analysis: SK

Writing and Drafting: HBC, AHB, MUH

Review and Editing: HBC, AHB, MUH, I

All authors approved the final manuscript and take responsibility for the integrity of the work.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Source of Funding

The author received no financial support for the research, authorship and/or publication of this article.

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