

## **Role of Affective Factors in ESL students' oral proficiency: A Qualitative insight from Teachers**

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### **Abstract**

*The complex impact of emotional elements on the oral competency of ESL students in secondary school is the subject of this qualitative study project. The research investigates four significant topics by conducting in-depth interviews with 18 instructors. These topics include motivation, anxiety, joyful learning experiences, and cultural influences of the participants. The research demonstrates the significant influence of these emotional aspects on the oral communication abilities of ESL students, revealing their linked nature. By giving nuanced insights that are relevant for educators and policymakers, the study contributes to the current body of literature by enriching it. It also provides a framework for individualized interventions that are targeted at improving the oral competency of English as a Second Language (ESL) students. The discussion that follows incorporates the findings of the current study with those of previous research. This places the study within the larger discourse of emotional aspects in language learning, providing a thorough understanding of the impact that these elements have on the language acquisition of ESL students.*

**Keywords:** Oral Proficiency, Affective Factors, ESL Students, Language Learning.

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### **1. Introduction**

Communication has always been an essential component of human connection, and in the modern, globalized world, the English language stands out as a linchpin that unites people who come from a variety of different origins (Akram et al., 2020). According to Huang and Flores (2018), its relevance extends well beyond the realm of linguistic significance; rather, it pervades many other aspects of life, including the forms that it takes on education, employment prospects, cultural interaction, and technological breakthroughs. English is the de jure language of academics, scientists, and technologists in the field of education (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). The ability to communicate effectively in English is frequently a prerequisite for gaining access to a vast amount of information, including research papers and instructional resources. Knowing one's way around this language environment enables one to keep up with the newest advancements in one's chosen profession. When viewed in the context of Pakistan's educational landscape, the implications of

educational practices and policies extend far beyond the confines of traditional learning (Akram & Yang, 2021; Akram, 2020). These implications place an emphasis on the integration of English skills across subjects, technology-driven learning, and inclusive practices.

English, which is recognized as one of Pakistan's official languages, is taught in a formal setting in all institutions, beginning with elementary school and continuing through university education. According to the Pakistan Ministry of Education (2018), it works not only as a topic but also as a medium of instruction, with the exception of the primary level, which is where the mother language is employed while teaching. Language learners may face difficulties in achieving oral competency even when they are exposed to English from an early age; for others, this may even be their first language (Akram et al., 2020). Despite the fact that English is widely spoken in Pakistan, this problem might nevertheless affect their success in further education and while applying for jobs.

When it comes to speaking, there are a lot of different aspects that influence the oral competency and accuracy of language learners. Students' oral fluency is significantly impacted by a number of elements, one of which is the affective aspects that have been found. Language learners are provided with a driving force in the form of motivation, which encourages themselves to actively engage in the process of learning. Students who are driven to increase their language abilities, particularly their oral competence, are more likely to devote time and effort to doing so, regardless of whether the motivation comes from personal interest or from benefits from the outside world. However, Akram et al. (2019) found that those with language anxiety had a far more difficult time learning new languages, especially when it came to speaking to others. Students who experience high levels of anxiety may be less eager to participate in speaking activities, such as discussions, examinations, or other speaking activities (Malik & Pervaiz, 2023), which can have an effect on the development of their oral language skills. For ESL students to feel comfortable speaking and practicing the language, it is essential to create a welcoming and calm learning atmosphere.

In light of the growing significance of English proficiency in global communication and employment markets, the study is very necessary for enhancing the worldwide competitiveness of ESL students in Pakistan. The development of focused therapies that equip students to overcome the obstacles of language learning and improve their global oral communication abilities can be informed by insights into emotional aspects.

To what extent do affective factors, such as motivation, anxiety, and enjoyment, influence the oral proficiency of ESL students in the context of Pakistan?

## **2. Review of Literature:**

When it comes to achieving language competency, ESL learners confront a complex road, with a variety of factors determining their level of success. Particularly in the context of oral proficiency, affective elements, which include feelings, attitudes, and motivation, play a significant role in the process of molding the experience of learning a language. The purpose of this review is to gain a better understanding of the complex link that exists between emotional elements and the spoken language development of ESL students. Ramzan et al. (2023) have explained that in the ESL domain motivation determines the priority of second language learning. Further Ramzan et al. (2023) elucidate in the sense of oral proficiency that entertainment mostly operates in English. So Ramzan et al. (2023) have suggested that the incorporation of authentic language use can be helpful in this aspect. Furthermore, Ramzan et al. (2023) that for the enhancement of oral proficiency in the ESL domain, the use of social media is a dynamic educational tool. Finally, Ramzan et al. (2023) suggested imperative aspects are useful in academic writing.

The first significant emotional aspect is motivation, which stands out as a driving force in the process of language learning. (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015) Several types of research have

demonstrated that it has a favorable link with oral proficiency among students learning English as a second language. According to Lovato and Junior (2011), Gardner's socio-educational model emphasizes the relevance of integrative motivation, which is a form of motivation in which learners are pushed by a desire to connect with the culture that is linked with the English language. Students of English as a second language who are driven by integrative elements tend to demonstrate a higher level of engagement in oral communication, actively participating in conversations and discussions, which ultimately results in an improvement in their oral competence (Gardner, 2019).

On the other hand, the influence of instrumental motivation, which is motivated by practical goals such as job success, on oral proficiency is equally important. However, instrumental motivation can lead to diligent language practice, which in turn can positively influence the oral communication abilities of ESL students (Azar & Tanggaraju, 2020). Integrative motivation, on the other hand, encourages a profound emotional connection to the language.

Anxiety over language is another major element that has a detrimental impact on the oral skills of ESL students. Anxiety over language is described as "a distinct complex of self-perceptions, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours related to classroom language learning arising from the uniqueness of the language learning process," according to Horwitz (2010) and (2001). According to Zhang (2019), high levels of anxiety can impair oral communication, which in turn reduces the likelihood that learners would be ready to talk and take part in activities that include speaking.

There is a possibility that language anxiety will be more prevalent in the setting of Pakistan, where English is frequently seen as a difficult subject. According to the findings of a study conducted by Malik and Pervaiz (2023), it is essential for ESL students to have a learning environment that is both supportive and low-anxiety in order for them to feel comfortable practicing and speaking the language verbally (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023). Addressing language anxiety is of the utmost importance for educators who wish to build an environment that is favourable to the development of competent oral language and communication skills.

An important factor that contributes to the oral competency of ESL students is their enthusiasm of language study. Students are more likely to actively engage in their learning practices (Khanam et al., 2022) when they feel joy in the process of learning. These practices assist students develop their speaking activities, conversations, and presentations. The research conducted by Zhang and Tsung, L. (2021) also includes the hypothesis that learners who are calm and like the process of learning are more responsive to language input, which in turn facilitates the development of spoken language.

The effect of engaging in language exercise that is pleasurable on speaking ability has been the subject of research. In Pakistan, where traditional teaching techniques may be more prevalent, integrating activities that are both entertaining and participatory might help to increase the level of engagement that ESL students have in oral communication (Panhwar & Bell, 2023). Positive outcomes in terms of oral competency among ESL students are more likely to be observed in educational programs that place a priority on providing students with pleasurable language learning experiences.

After reviewing the research on the impact of emotional components on ESL students' oral proficiency, it became clear that factors like enjoyment, anxiety, and motivation all work together to alter language learning results. Language programs in Pakistan should be adapted to foster inclusive, interesting, and culturally appropriate classrooms by educators and politicians who acknowledge the complex interplay of these elements. Improving ESL students' oral proficiency in Pakistani environment may be achieved via addressing language fear, encouraging intrinsic

drive, and introducing fun language learning situations. To further understand the unique dynamics of emotional components among Pakistani areas and to guide tailored interventions for efficient language teaching, additional study is necessary.

### **3. Methodology**

Using a qualitative research approach, this study surveyed secondary school educators about their thoughts on how students' emotions impact their oral communication skills as ESL learners. According to Hollstein (2011), qualitative research permits a thorough investigation and comprehension of the perspectives and experiences of participants. Participating in the study were 18 secondary school teachers hailing from various schools. It was important to have a diverse group of participants with different backgrounds and experiences teaching ESL students. Educators who had a minimum of five years of experience teaching English as a second language were required to meet the inclusion requirements. To guarantee a varied representation of instructors with different degrees of expertise, a purposive sample strategy was used (Rai & Thapa, 2015).

#### **3.1.Data Collection**

The majority of the data was collected through the use of semi-structured interviews with participants. Due to the fact that the interviews were done one-on-one, the participants were encouraged to provide comments that were open and honest. In order to give participants with a formal framework while yet providing them the opportunity to contribute their own unique ideas, an interview guide was designed based on the literature review and research questions.

#### **3.2.Interview Process**

The participants' schools were the sites of the in-person interviews. We were able to delve deeply into the participants' points of view since each interview lasted between forty-five minutes and an hour. Participants were guaranteed that their answers would remain personal and anonymous, and informed consent was sought before the interviews. The semi-structured interview guide asked instructors about their thoughts and feelings on how affective characteristics like motivation, anxiety, and enjoyment affect their ESL students' ability to communicate verbally. The purpose of the questions was to get in-depth answers from the participants so that we could learn a lot about their perspectives.

#### **3.3.Data Analysis**

Analysis of the interview data was done using thematic analysis. According to Vaismoradi and Snelgrove (2019), there were several steps to the procedure, such as getting to know the data, making some initial codes, looking for themes, reviewing them, giving them names, and finally, writing up the results. Using this methodical technique, we were able to find similarities and patterns in the instructors' answers.

#### **3.4.Trustworthiness**

Several steps were taken to make the study more credible. To ensure the accuracy of the replies, we sent each participant a summary to review. In order to verify the reliability and validity of the results, colleagues engaged in peer debriefing. The researcher also kept a reflective notebook to record their thoughts and any biases they may have had while doing the investigation.

#### **3.5.Ethical Considerations**

Throughout the investigation, ethical issues were of the utmost importance. All participants were asked to provide their informed permission, and their privacy and confidentiality were treated with the utmost seriousness. The study followed all necessary ethical protocols, and the participants

were told that their participation was completely voluntary and would have no effect on their professional reputation.

#### **4. Results**

Findings about the role of affective factors effect influencing ESL students' oral proficiency were shed light upon by analyzing data collected from in-depth interviews and document analysis, which is described below:

##### **1. Motivation and Oral Proficiency**

When asked about the most important factor affecting their ESL students' oral ability, most teachers pointed to motivation. Students who showed strong levels of intrinsic motivation, which is generally driven by a genuine interest in the language and a desire to connect with culture, were found to be more engaged in oral activities, according to teachers. There is a favorable association between motivation and oral proficiency; students who are pushed by future employment possibilities, or extrinsically motivated, are also found to participate actively in speaking exercises. As an example, a few educators have found:

In my experience as a teacher, students who have a deep affection for the English language and its culture are more likely to take the lead when it comes to speaking assignments. It's as if their excitement motivates them to take part and hone their public speaking abilities.

Teacher B: "Indeed, and even people driven by professional aspirations appear to enjoy public speaking events. It's intriguing that various forms of encouragement may still enhance participation in spoken activities. It's as if inspiration triggers their openness to dialogue.

##### **2. Anxiety and Oral Communication**

The frequency of language anxiety and its influence on oral proficiency among ESL students was acknowledged by a large proportion of teachers. Students with high levels of anxiety were found by teachers to be more hesitant to speak up and perhaps avoid oral activities altogether. The results highlight the need of providing ESL students with specific treatments to help them overcome their fear of public speaking and build a supportive community where they may practice speaking more confidently. As an example, few teachers indicated:

Teacher A: "Some of my pupils have anxiety when it comes to speaking English in class. They seem hesitant, they avoid making eye contact, and they occasionally stop contributing to conversations altogether. Anxiety clearly makes it harder for them to express themselves verbally.

"I concur," Teacher B said. It breaks my heart to watch how some pupils are avoiding challenges because they are afraid. We need plans to assist them get over their anxiety and provide a setting where they may speak freely.

##### **3. Enjoyable Language Learning Experiences**

The beneficial effect of engaging activities on the speech skills of ESL pupils was often emphasized by teachers. Language games, role-playing, and group projects were cited as engaging and fun ways to get kids involved and involved. It was observed by teachers that children who were enthusiastic about learning were more likely to readily participate in oral tasks, leading to better fluency and communication abilities. As an example, few teachers specified:

Language games were a game-changer for my students, according to a teacher. Students' excitement throughout speaking exercises demonstrated how much they enjoyed it. Their general speaking abilities and fluency were much improved.

"Engagement is key," said by another teacher, adding that when pupils are enthusiastic about studying, it shows in their oral competence. In order to get more students involved in speaking assignments, we need to work on making class more fun.

#### **4. Cultural Influences**

Cultural factors were found to have a big effect on the emotional parts of ESL students' language learning. Teachers noticed that the way people think of English as a sign of social rank and academic success affected how their students felt about the language. The results show how important it is to take cultural differences into account in the classroom in order to make it a better place to learn a language that is also culturally appropriate. For example, some teachers say the following:

"In our setting, English is often seen as a sign of social status," said Teacher C. Students may use words in different ways depending on how society expects them to. It's important to understand these societal factors so that we can teach successfully.

Teacher D: "That's right. Cultural differences have a big effect on how kids feel about English. Being aware of these factors helps us make a language learning space that is more welcoming and sensitive to different cultures.

#### **5. Cross-Cutting Observations**

Each theme gave us useful information, but it was clear that these emotional factors did not work alone. Teachers stressed that motivation, anxiety, pleasure, and cultural factors are all linked and that we need to look at these factors as a whole in order to understand and deal with them. The results show that to get ESL students to speak better, interventions should focus on a mix of ways to keep them motivated, lower worry, make learning fun, and make sure the lessons are relevant to their culture. For example, some teachers say the following:

Teacher A: "I find it interesting how these things are linked." It's not just about anger or lack of drive by themselves. These emotional factors work together to really shape how students approach speaking success. We need to look at these issues as a whole in order to deal with them properly.

Teacher E: "Yes, it is. It's like a puzzle, where each piece fits into the bigger picture." We need to think about and work on all of these things at the same time if we want to see overall changes in speaking proficiency.

#### **5. Discussion**

Existing research that emphasizes the critical role that motivation plays in the oral competency of ESL students is consistent with the findings of this study. Previous research (Dornyei, 2020) has demonstrated that both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation have a favorable influence on the results of language acquisition. The idea that motivation functions as a catalyst for active involvement in speaking activities, which contributes to better oral competence, is supported by the passion that is witnessed in students who are driven by personal interest or future professional aspirations (Abdullaev, 2021).

This study, which is consistent with the literature (Horwitz, 2010; Russell, 2020), emphasizes the detrimental influence of anxiety on ESL students' oral communication abilities. In students who are experiencing high levels of anxiety, there is a reluctance that has been seen, which is consistent with the findings of prior study and highlights the necessity of therapies to manage language anxiety. Creating supportive learning settings and employing relaxation methods are two strategies that can coincide with suggestions from research on anxiety reduction in language acquisition (Maher & King, 2023).

Research supporting the affective filter theory is in line with the observation that ESL students' oral ability is positively impacted by engaging language learning experiences (Zen & Apriana, 2015). Scholars who support student-centered and pleasurable language education have called for engaging and participatory activities, which instructors in this study have also mentioned (Zafar, 2016). These results provide credence to the theory that kids are more invested in their learning when they are in an engaging classroom setting, which in turn leads to better fluency and communication abilities.

Research confirming the effect of cultural variables on language acquisition is congruent with the recognition of cultural impacts on ESL students' attitudes towards English (Lubis, 2015). Research on the cultural and social aspects of language acquisition in various settings is consistent with popular views of English as an indicator of social standing and professional success. According to Alharbi (2022), it is essential for educators and policymakers to have a thorough understanding of these cultural subtleties, which supports the necessity for teaching methods that are culturally appropriate.

In line with the research on the holistic approach to language learning, the study's cross-cutting observations highlight the interconnectedness of emotional elements (Dörnyei, 2020). The necessity for all-encompassing treatments is further underscored by the realization that motivation, anxiety, enjoyment, and cultural factors all function in tandem. This is in line with research that supports the idea that addressing several emotional aspects at once is the best way to develop language skills (Cheng, 2021). Therefore, it is crucial to provide educators with the professional tools they need to help students develop these abilities (Li & Akram, 2023; Akram et al., 2022).

This study's findings are consistent with and add to what is already known about the role of emotion in ESL students' oral competence. The intricacy of learning a new language is highlighted by the interaction of factors such as motivation, anxiety, positive learning experiences, and cultural influences. Effective language programs that comprehensively meet the different demands of ESL students—and ultimately contribute to enhanced oral communication skills—must recognize these linked variables. Optimizing emotional components for increased language learning outcomes can be explored further through study comparing particular intervention options.

## **6. Conclusions**

Findings from the study highlight the substantial impact of motivation, anxiety, positive learning experiences, and cultural subtleties on ESL students' oral competency, providing insight into the complex dynamics of emotional components in this area of study. The results highlight the necessity for a comprehensive strategy in language instruction by highlighting the interrelated character of these elements. Educators and policymakers may address language anxiety by crafting programs that promote intrinsic motivation and by recognizing the catalytic importance of motivation and the impediment that anxiety poses. Furthermore, culturally relevant teaching techniques are emphasized by recognizing cultural influences. Insights gained from this study can be applied to improve the oral competency of ESL students in a variety of educational settings, adding to our complex knowledge of emotional aspects.

## **7. Limitations**

Despite the useful insights it provides, this study has several limitations that need to be taken into account. The results may not apply to a broader population due to the small sample size, even if it was chosen on purpose. While this study sheds light on instructors' perspectives, it may benefit from including students' viewpoints as well to create a more complete picture of the complicated interaction of emotional components. There is also the possibility of bias due to the use of self-reported data and the influence of social desirability on the reliability of answers. Longitudinal

studies and other large-sample studies can help fill in these gaps and provide light on the complex role of emotional elements in ESL students' oral ability.

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