

An Analysis of Perceived Learning Difficulties in English among Secondary School Students: Underlying Causes and Strategic Interventions

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ABSTRACT

This research examined the perceived challenges in learning English faced by secondary school students in District Multan, together with their root causes and possible remedies. A correlational design was employed, and information was collected from 1155 students (from a total of 1505). Descriptive findings indicate moderate to high levels of difficulty, particularly in verbal communication, auditory comprehension, enunciation, and syntax. The main factors involved were restricted opportunities for practice, unproductive instruction, and emotional obstacles. A slight affirmative association ($r = 0.421$, $p < .001$) between classroom conduct and work ethics suggested that contextual elements are tightly to the difficulties faced by students. While Inferential analyses revealed notable variations in relation to gender, class level, school sector, and study practices, factor analysis confirmed the effectiveness of the instruments. There were no discernible differences between private and public schools. To tackle these widespread challenges in the study indicates that learner-centered and holistic methods are effective for studying English.

Keywords: Learners of the English language, Challenges in learning, Tactical Actions.

Introduction

Human communication and society are fundamentally based on language. It is a potent instrument for influencing behavior and maintaining culture in addition to being a cognitive tool for forming thought. Second language acquisition necessitates deliberate, systematic study, whereas native languages are organically learnt via interaction and immersion. Limited exposure to second-language environments presents a significant obstacle, often making proficiency difficult to attain (Bose, 2007; Ellis & Laporte, 2014).

Restricted exposure to second-language contexts poses a major challenge, frequently hindering the achievement of proficiency (Bose, 2007; Ellis & Laporte, 2014).

Second language adaptation involves students who change mental and emotional treatment Communication responses and style. This could lead to a change in identity, as more people. Many times, languages alternate in different social contexts. This language fluidity in particular, in multilinguals, differences are stricter among more porous languages. Effective discourse is an important aspect of language proficiency. Brown (2007) Nonverbal communication, including gestures, facial expressions, and visual contact; It is also important for social interactions as oral communication. Influence and meaning Collar words are greatly increased by these components. Trenholm (2020) spreads this think of as emphasizing that human interactions are inherently multimodal and nonverbal.

Actions work together to establish meaning, train relationships, and promote mutuality. As a result, you need to be careful when building performance at the same time. Recently, the context and support network are important for learning English. The study for example, Chan et al. (2025) studied how language anxiety affected Chinese people. Ability to read children in English. They found to be at a lower level of reading. First, following the short vocabulary, he was related to his parents' language concerns: Especially these mothers. This emphasizes the importance of family participation.

From a pedagogical perspective, Aspuri (2025) offers a method for seventh-grade pupils that incorporates vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation through interactive exercises. The results revealed notable improvements in test scores and vocabulary, suggesting that learning outcomes can be significantly enhanced by comprehensive, engaging instruction. Similarly, Mitari et al. (2025) identified notable barriers to vocabulary acquisition in the same age group, such as spelling difficulties, error-related anxiety, and decreased enthusiasm, which are made worse by uninspired teaching methods. More student-focused approaches with lots of practice opportunities were recommended by the researchers.

These difficulties are not unique to a particular area or to younger students. In higher education contexts, Bouherar and Salem (2025) analyzed the shift to English-medium instruction in Algerian universities. Despite intentions to globalize education, the abrupt transition brought difficulties, including insufficient resources and student language struggles. Their results emphasize the significance of considering learners' preparedness and implementing a gradual, bilingual strategy. In Ethiopia, Gobena (2025) discovered that psychological obstacles like fear, shyness, lack of self-confidence, low motivation, and anxiety about performing on stage

influenced 88% of students' English-speaking skills, particularly affecting female students. Adhikari (2025) reported comparable outcomes in Nepal, noting that public school students faced challenges stemming from excessive use of their native language, a lack of classroom materials, and inadequate practice opportunities. The research suggested instructing English in English, utilizing a variety of resources and methods.

The circumstances in Pakistan are in line with these global observations. According to Macaro et al. (2018), English is a required course at every educational level in Pakistan. After secondary school, English is the primary language of instruction for the majority of undergraduate, graduate, and doctoral programs, especially in universities and other professional settings.

English serves as the main language of academic education and institutional communication as a result. However, a contradiction in education has resulted from its widespread use. Rahman (2020) asserts that although English provides access to privileged social and economic opportunities, it also acts as a barrier for those who are not as familiar with the language. While it is used in the government, courts, universities, and the media, it is still inaccessible to a large section of the population. This contradiction hinders many children's progress in school and makes educational disparities worse. Additionally, there are institutional as well as personal barriers to speaking English. In her study of presentation-related problems, Abduvaliyevna (2025) found that the use of the native language, a small vocabulary, a fear of making a mistake, and a fear of being mocked were the main things preventing students from performing well. These results are consistent with the larger body of research on environmental and psychological barriers to spoken English acquisition. All of this research points to the need for more than just curriculum modifications to improve English competence, especially in speaking. It entails tackling the sociolinguistic, educational, and psychological elements that influence students' experiences and results. The purpose of this study is to learn more about these difficulties in the Pakistani setting, with an emphasis on the obstacles that students have when trying to learn spoken English.

Statement of the Problem

Even though English is the main language of teaching in Pakistan's higher education system, many secondary school pupils still struggle to build their English language proficiency. Numerous contextual, psychological, and classroom-related factors frequently have an impact on these difficulties. Effective intervention strategies are still scarce, especially in urban areas like Multan, unless these challenges and their root causes are clearly understood.

Objective and Research Question of the Study

The aim of this study was to examine the particular learning challenges faced by secondary school pupils in Multan's English classes as well as the root causes of these issues. The goal of the study is to investigate the nature of these challenges as well as any potential influencing contextual or demographic factors. In keeping with this goal, the study's main research question was: What are the main obstacles secondary school pupils encounter when studying English, and what underlying

factors influence these obstacles in the Multan context?

Research Methodology

This study used a quantitative research methodology to examine how Multan secondary school students perceived their English language learning challenges. Male and female students from both public and private secondary schools, along with English language instructors, made up the population. A total of 160 participants—150 pupils and 10 teachers—were chosen. Eight schools—four public and four private—were purposefully chosen to guarantee diverse representation. Students in their 9th and 10th year were at the center of the attention of the cluster sample. Based on availability and accessibility, individual students and teachers were chosen from these clusters using simple random sampling. This combination of sampling methods preserved the quality and dependability of the data gathered while enabling comparisons across various school types.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistical methods were used to analyse the gathered data. The data was summarised using descriptive statistics, such as mean and standard deviation. The study used factor analysis, independent sample t-tests, and the Pearson correlation coefficient for inferential analysis in order to look at the relationships and differences between the variables. To improve readability and clarity, the results were displayed using tables, charts, and graphs.

Table 1:

Students' Perceived Learning Challenges,

Senior No.	Statements,	AG	%N	%DA	% M
SD					
1.	I have trouble understanding spoken English.	25.8	5.5	68.7	3.69
		1.43			
2.	I struggle to speak English fluently.	21.3	11.6	67.1	3.69
		1.27			
3.	I have problems writing correct English sentences.	24.6	11.7	63.7	
		3.62	1.31		
4	I cannot understand English grammar rules.	46.9	10.9	42.2	2.94
					1.45
5	I have limited vocabulary to express my thoughts.	29.3	13.9	56.7	3.38
					1.33
	I have trouble pronouncing English words correctly.	22.2	8.7	69.1	3.75
					1.33

According to the information in Table 1, most students believe that learning English is extremely tough, particularly when it comes to speaking fluently, comprehending spoken English, and pronouncing words correctly. However, many students seemed to find it even harder to comprehend grammar rules and read comprehension. Overall, secondary school students' replies show moderate to

high levels of perceived learning challenges.

Table 2

Underlying Reasons for Learning Difficulties

Sr #	Statements	AG %	N %	DA %	M	SD
1	I do not get enough opportunities to practice English outside of class.	81.6	2.2	16.3	4.06	1.23
2	The teacher's teaching methods do not help me understand English.	75.2	6.3	18.5	3.88	1.20
3	I do not have enough access to English learning resources (books, videos, etc.).	59.2	21.7	19	3.59	1.17
4	I feel nervous or afraid of making mistakes when learning English.	58.2	19.0	22.9	3.53	1.25
5	My home environment does not support learning English.	71.6	7.7	20.7	3.76	1.33
6	The English class size is too large to get individual attention.	73.8	8.1	18.1	3.86	1.29
7	I do not have enough time to study English at home.	61.4	15.8	22.7	3.61	1.29
8	I find it difficult to understand the teacher's explanations or instructions.	71.1	8.7	20.1	3.78	1.31
9	I do not enjoy English lessons because they are not interesting.	70.8	7.3	21.9	3.75	1.34
Overall students' work ethics			3.63			1.30

In Table 2 Students identified limited practice opportunities, ineffective teaching methods, and lack of learning resources as key barriers to English learning. Emotional factors like fear of mistakes, unsupportive home environments, and large class sizes also hindered progress.

Table 3:

Correlation Between Perceived Learning Difficulties (PLD) and Underlying Reasons for Learning Difficulties (URLD) of Students

Variables	PLD	URLD
PLD	1.00	.421** (.000)
URLD	.421** (.000)	1.00

Note. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson product-moment correlation was used to investigate the connection between students' perceived learning difficulties (PLD) and the root causes of those difficulties (URLD). PLD and URLD were found to have a statistically significant positive correlation ($r = .421$, $p < .001$), as indicated in Table 3.. This result indicates a moderate relationship, suggesting that as students' perceived difficulties in learning English increase, they are likely to attribute these difficulties to identifiable underlying causes.

Table 4.

Reliability Statistics of Students' Work Ethics (SWE) Scale

Subscale	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Alpha (Standardized Items)
Students' Work Ethics	11	0.766	0.772

In Table 4 the Students' Work Ethics (SWE) scale showed acceptable reliability, with a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.766. The slightly higher value based on standardized items (0.772) confirms internal consistency. This indicates that the scale is appropriate for assessing student-related factors contributing to English learning difficulties.

Table 5:

KMO and Bartlett's Test for Underlying Reasons (URLD) Scale

Test	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.834
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	$\chi^2 = 2921.538$, $df = 55$, $p < .001$

The KMO value (0.834) and the significant Bartlett's Test ($p < .001$) confirm that the data is suitable for factor analysis, indicating strong correlations among items.

Table 6:

Descriptive Statistics of Underlying Reasons for English Learning Difficulties

Sr #	Statement	Mean	Std. Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	I do not get enough opportunities to practice English outside of class.	3.85	1.35	-0.78	-0.72
2	The teacher's methods do not help me understand English.	3.72	1.33	-0.74	-0.69
3	I lack access to English learning resources (books, videos, etc.).	3.90	1.31	-0.80	-0.75
4	I feel nervous or afraid of making mistakes when learning English.	4.05	1.29	-0.82	-0.78
5	My home environment does not support English learning.	3.78	1.34	-0.76	-0.73
6	Class size is too large to get individual attention.	3.88	1.32	-0.79	-0.71

7	I do not have enough time to study English at home.	3.60	1.28	-0.72	-0.70
8	I find it difficult to understand teacher's instructions.	3.70	1.30	-0.75	-0.72
9	I do not enjoy English lessons as they are not interesting.	3.55	1.29	-0.71	-0.68

Students cited a number of challenges in learning English, as seen in Table 6. Anxiety about making mistakes was the most significant factor (Mean = 4.05), followed by a lack of resources and big class sizes. The majority of students agreed with these statements, as indicated by the negative skewness values. The wide range of responses indicated by the flat distribution (negative kurtosis) supports the variety of difficulties encountered

Table 7:

One-Way ANOVA Results Based on Respondents' Age

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	3502.40	7	500.34	6.78	.000
Within Groups	84639.48	1147	73.79		
Total	88141.88	1154			

There is a statistically significant variation in perceptions between age groups, according to the ANOVA results ($p < .05$). This suggests that respondents' opinions differ significantly based on their age. To determine which particular age groups differ from one another, a post-hoc test is advised.

Table 8:

Independent-Samples t-Test Results Based on Demographic Variables (N = 1155)

Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig. (p)
School Sector	Public	550	39.65	8.70	1153		.13
	Private	605	40.35	7.05			
Current Class	9th	387	42.32	6.86	1153		.00**
	10th	768	38.85	8.11			
School Location	Urban	772	39.45	8.00	1153	-3.48	.00**
	Rural	383	41.16	7.57			
Variable	Group	N	Mean	SD	df	t-value	Sig. (p)
Student Gender	Male	697	39.36	8.22	1153	-3.48	.00**
	Female	458	41.01	7.23			
Subjects of Study	Science	543	41.20	7.53	1153	4.87	.00**
	Arts	612	38.96	8.04			
Residential Area	Urban	769	39.34	8.09	1153	-4.13	.00**

	Rural	386	41.36	7.27			
Work Preference at School	Individual	687	41.05	7.52	1153	5.40	.00**
	Group	466	38.53	8.16			
Overall Perceptions	—	1155	40.18	7.73	1153	4.90	.13

Note: statistically significant differences are shown by $p < .05$

The findings of the independent-samples t-test indicate statistically significant differences in students' performance across a variety of demographic factors. 9th graders, female students, students from remote locations, students pursuing science, and students who liked working alone at school instead of with their peers all received significantly higher marks. These differences demonstrate how perceptions and experiences are greatly influenced by grade level, gender, residence area, subject of study, and preferred working method. However, while their p-values were more than the 0.05 cutoff, attitudes and the kind of school sector (private vs. public) did not, on the whole, exhibit statistically significant differences. This suggests that while certain demographic characteristics influence students' responses, the educational system has less effect on their perspectives.

Table 9.

One-Way ANOVA Findings: Perceptions of Respondents by Weekly Class Absence Frequency (N = 1155)

Origin of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1401.59	4	350.39	5.72	.00
Within Groups	70379.99	1150	61.20		
Total	71781.58	1154			

Based on the frequency of absences from class per week, the ANOVA findings show a statistically significant difference in respondents' opinions ($F(4, 1150) = 5.72$, $p < .05$).

Table 10.

One-Way ANOVA Results: Respondents' Opinions Based on Hours of Sleep Per Night (N = 1155)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2739.79	8	342.47	5.68	.00
Within Groups	69041.78	1146	60.24		
Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Total	71781.58	1154			

Based on the amount of hours students sleep each night, the one-way ANOVA findings show a statistically significant difference in their responses ($F(8, 1146) =$

5.68, $p < .05$. This implies that students' impressions of their challenges with learning English are significantly influenced by the amount of sleep they get. Further analysis may help determine which specific sleep ranges are associated with greater or lesser challenges in English learning.

Results

The study examined secondary students' perceptions of English learning challenges and their underlying causes using descriptive and inferential statistics. Key findings are summarized below:

Students reported moderate to high difficulty levels in learning English, especially in speaking fluently, understanding spoken content, correct pronunciation, and writing grammatically. Reading comprehension and grammar understanding were also frequently mentioned.

Ineffective teaching strategies ($M = 3.88$), a lack of practice outside the classroom ($M = 4.06$), and insufficient learning materials ($M = 3.59$) were frequently mentioned causes. Other contributing issues included crowded classrooms, unsupportive home circumstances, and a fear of making mistakes.

Students who encountered greater difficulties attributed them to certain contextual and instructional aspects, according to a substantial positive connection they discovered between felt difficulties and recognized reasons ($r = .421, p < .001$).

The Students' Work Ethics scale's usefulness for gauging students' academic attitudes was confirmed by its strong internal consistency (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.766). Factor analysis was supported by a high KMO value (0.834) and a significant Bartlett's Test ($p < .001$), validating the dataset's adequacy and interrelatedness of variables.

High agreement levels were observed across all listed causes, with fear of making mistakes ($M = 4.05$) being the most pressing concern. Response patterns showed negative skewness and kurtosis, suggesting overall agreement but diverse experiences.

ANOVA revealed significant age-based differences in perceived learning difficulties ($p < .05$), suggesting that age impacts how students experience English learning.

A significant Bartlett's Test result ($p < .001$) and a high KMO value (0.834) validated the dataset's sufficiency and interrelatedness of variables, supporting factor analysis.

High levels of agreement were found for all the identified causes, with fear of making mistakes ($M = 4.05$) ranking as the most pressing concern. Response patterns with negative skewness and kurtosis show a range of experiences but overall agreement.

ANOVA revealed substantial age-based differences in perceived learning difficulties ($p < .05$), indicating that age affects how students experience English. Speaking, pronunciation and grammar were the areas students fought most in English, and were difficult to be difficult to general. External restrictions such as Inadequate practice, poor quality of, and emotional disorders were closely related to difficulties. Age, gender, class level, location, academic flow, learning style, sleep habits, attendance, everyone shows statistically significant differences. This study helps to demonstrate

reliability and reliability, and provides complete information on the complex nature of the difficulties of secondary English studies.

Discussion

The conclusions of this study lead to a wonderful image of the complex difficulties of Multan in high school facing middle school students during their English studies. Understanding conversations in English, pronunciation and grammar was the most notable and difficult area. Lack of out-of-class practice, bad training strategies, lack of educational materials, fear of making mistakes, and the conditions of non-zero homes are some of the main reasons that they were discovered. Field Only the solution at the surface level may not be sufficient, as evidenced by a significant positive correlation ($r = 0.421$) Significant demographic differences were also observed. The students who liked solo activities were women, living in rural areas, and were engraved in the scientific vein. Furthermore, irregular attendance and inadequate sleep were associated with major difficulties, highlighting the role of lifestyle and behavioral factors. Interestingly, there was no significant difference between the state and private schools. To successfully overcome obstacles to teaching English, this study highlights the need for complex, multi-level interventions, including program changes, teacher training, improved resources, and family support.

Conclusion

Research shows that studying English is difficult for middle school students in Multan, especially when it comes to speaking, listening, grammar and pronunciation. Limited practice, poor training, lack of resources, mental stress, and unclear environments are all closely related to these difficulties. Contextual and pedagogical factors are the causes of perceived problems, as confirmed by some important correlations ($r = 0.421$).

Recommendations

It includes more conversational exercises, such as games, discussions, and group discussions, to improve students' confidence and acquisition in English.

Teacher interactive ways to prioritize conversations and to students listen more than other language skills.

Provides ample access to educational resources, including language learning software, audiovisual tools, and hardware for reading English.

Students are not afraid to make mistakes, encourage a climate of acceptance in classes inspired by participation, and break emotional barriers.

Provide targeted support to ineffective groups, such as rural girls, science students and students, using individuals and comprehensive teaching methods.

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