



EXPLORING THE FACTORS INFLUENCING CLASS XI- XII PRIVATE COLLEGE STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the factors influencing students' attitudes towards learning English as a second language (ESL) in private colleges in Pakistan. Using a qualitative research approach, the study integrates to explore learners' motivation, challenges, and perceptions. A sample of 20 students from Hayat Girls College and Superior College in Hyderabad was selected through purposive sampling. Data of the study was collected through semi-structured interviews, and was analyzed using thematic analysis. The thematic analyses highlighted the role of sociocultural influences and classroom dynamics with students expressing a preference for interactive and practical teaching methods. These findings suggest that while English is viewed as essential for academic and professional growth, addressing key barriers such as anxiety, grammar, and speaking practice for improving ESL learning experience.

Keywords: *ESL learning, student motivation, pedagogical approaches, socio-cultural influences, private college students, Pakistan.*

1 Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The origin of English's dominance over the world can be seen largely during the period of colonial expansion, especially at the height of the British Empire. Britain dominated most of the territories in Africa, Asia, the Americas, and the Pacific during this time. In line with the British imperial policy, English became the official language for administrative and legal issues, education, and the government in most colonies. The use of English in colonial institutions created a legacy that would last long after the empire's dissolution in the middle of the 20th century, and it became ingrained in these regions' social, political, and educational structures (Phillipson, 1992).

In many recently independent nations, English continued to be a vital language even after the colony had gained its independence. In India, Nigeria, South Africa, and Pakistan, for example, the English language was retained as the official working language in many official venues, particularly in law courts and administrative environments (Mahboob, 2017). It has been accepted in many lands as an official or semi-official language, making intercommunication between people of different lingual backgrounds possible. That legacy of the past established a massive network of communities speaking in English, all connected through their common colonial histories. Because of the widespread of English in those regions, the language would remain an important means of communication in international forums and trade (Pandey, 2023).



The Role of English in Pakistan

The English language is sociopolitically and economically quite valuable in Pakistan since it was once a British colony. Being one of the national languages of Pakistan along with Urdu, English continues to play a very necessary role in numerous spheres that include education, governance, media, trade, and more. The continued importance of the English language in Pakistan is an example of broader trends evident in many post-colonial nations, where English remains the dominant language of governance, higher education, and professional communication (Mansoor, 2021). While Urdu is the officially declared national language, English remains the language of power, privilege, and access in Pakistan.

It is taught as a subject within the curriculum, but, simultaneously, it is also a medium of instruction for most of the universities and institutions of higher learning in all of the cities. It is held to be a highly valued knowledge language of intelligence and modern study. In private educational institutions, specifically in urban cities like Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, English is the medium most frequently used for instruction in nearly all subjects, such as sciences, mathematics, social studies, and humanities. Pervez (2023) has pointed out that more than 94% of private educational institutions in major urban areas have English as the language of instruction, which further confirms the role of English in forming the lives of children's education in those areas.

Consequently, Pakistan's private schools are Western-style educational institutions with identical curricula that are only widely accepted by the middle-class to upper-class classes due to the belief that English is the "tool for success" in both academic and professional settings. Higher academic achievement and potential admission to better universities in Pakistan and other nations are frequently the results of the emphasis placed on these educational institutions. Being able to read, write, and speak English fluently is essential for increasing social mobility and expanding access to resources for higher education. In this regard, it is a global trend shift in education where the use of English is gradually becoming a condition for more resourceful educational inputs (Jabeen, 2020).

In the case of public institutions of learning, it is a different scenario altogether. The scenario becomes considerably different, especially in the rural and backward regions. There, the medium of instruction is either Urdu or a local language, while English remains an auxiliary one. The scope of availability of resources and opportunities to learn that language is quite narrow within rural regions even though officially allowed. Teachers in public schools do not have the right teaching skills and resources to teach quality English education, and in this case, students here are mostly exposed to the language in limited contexts, mainly in assessments or higher education campuses (Khan, 2021). This inequality of language education between urban schools and rural schools creates an enormous gap in the understanding of the English language, thus perpetuating and widening the gap in the educational system and social stratification.

The role of English is more acute in higher education. Most universities in Pakistan, including prestigious ones like Lahore University of Management Sciences (LUMS), Aga Khan University, and the University of the Punjab, require students to prove proficiency in English as the starting point for entry. In such universities, the medium of teaching is the mother tongue itself,



though all the material, books, research papers, and other assessments are taught in English. As Hoodbhoy (2021) pointed out, the hegemony of the medium is supported by the domination of English language books and academic journals. English is indeed used in a large number of academic studies and papers in Pakistan. Therefore, the inadequacy of speaking the language of English puts substantial disadvantages on people, especially within the much more competitive higher education, since many of the prominent educational programs and courses are reserved only for those who can hold the language.

In addition, the use of English in the learning sphere is not limited to regular classrooms. English is extensively used for out-of-class communication, academic competitions, and intellectual debates. For instance, debates, science fairs, and literary associations within both schools and colleges are primarily conducted in English. The high penetration of English into both academic and social realms creates a learning environment in which students are expected to be literate in the language to fully participate and succeed (Hasan, 2020). Thus, students coming from English-medium institutions possess marked advantages over their peers who come from Urdu-medium schools or rural schools, a factor that further exacerbates existing social and educational inequalities.

1.2 Research Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To explore the key factors influencing the attitudes of private college students toward learning English as a Second Language (ESL), including motivational, social, and educational determinants.
2. To identify the challenges and barriers faced by students in learning English, and to analyze how these factors affect their overall attitudes and learning outcomes.

2 Review of the Related Literature

In educational psychology, attitudes are defined as people's evaluative judgments about people, objects, or ideas. Such judgments can be positive or negative and are frequently motivated by a person's experiences, beliefs, and emotions (Ajzen, 2005). In simple terms, language learning attitudes express "feelings and predispositions by which a learner approaches the language they learn." It has all of the significant implications for such influence through engagement and motivation, as well as their learning success in a language that requires successful learning (Baker 1992), that they are dynamic rather than something inherent on the internal or external nature, to come from learners' socioeconomic background, cultural contexts, and learning environments.

Students' attitudes towards learning a second language (L2), such as English, can have a significant impact on their learning. Positive feelings increase students' ability to want to participate in class and continue studying even when it is difficult, whereas negative feelings cause students to decrease desire and increase anxiety, resulting in lower success rates (Gardner, 1985). Attitudes are important in the process of language learning because, once teachers and researchers understand this, they will be able to understand what helps and hinders others' language learning success. Attitudes are of extreme importance for motivation, which is one of the most critical factors for the successful learning of a language. Motivated learners are likely to invest time and energy in practicing the language and remain determined even when they face challenges (Lamb,



2019). It can be seen from the findings that positive attitudes towards a language boost not only motivation but also the environment in which learning occurs (Kayaoğlu, 2013).

Sociolinguistic theories examine the relationship between the use of language and other social forces, particularly ways in which class, culture, and identity seem to influence people's perceptions of language. Gumperz (1982) demonstrated that language is highly connected with social contexts, reflecting and creating social identities through language use. Social and cultural contexts have a big impact on how students learn a language, like English. English is more of a representation of globalization, modernity, and class in Pakistan. For others, English may be a manifestation of colonialism, which other people may find unpleasant or even unacceptable (Ke, 2019).

The linguistic landscape involves making language visible in public settings that may include billboards, signs, and adverts among other things. In Pakistan, using English in broadcasting the media and public information supplements the country's image and, for people, gives notions to perceive its importance. If the students are persuaded in a way that brings up the social value of knowing it, then they want it more. For example, some communities may not be ready to adopt fluency in English because they consider it a legacy of colonial rule (Manan, 2017).

Socioeconomic status, family income, and the availability of learning materials determine the two critical factors determining a learner's attitude toward acquiring a target language. Researchers believe that higher socio-economic statuses are known to possess better attitudes towards the learning process because more children in those families receive high-class schooling. They would receive more outstanding learning opportunities along with excellent faculties, where learning and experiencing the usage of the language would become inevitable, mainly in high-class schools affiliated with private learning institutions, (Butler, 2018). Moreover, these students are also more likely to be exposed to the English language through other media sources like films, TV shows, and the internet.

The educational context and the school environment play a great role in students' attitudes toward learning ESL. Studies have indicated that instructional methodologies, the disposition of educators, and the characteristics of classroom settings influence the degree to which students engage with the language. For example, interactive and communicative approaches, such as task-based learning, positively influence attitudes toward language learning in the classroom. These methods will help students relate to the English language in meaningful ways, making the language more meaningful and exciting (Nguyen, 2021).

3 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study is grounded in Gardner's Socio-Educational Model of Second Language Acquisition, which emphasizes the role of attitudes, motivation, and social and educational contexts in shaping language learning outcomes. This model highlights two key types of motivation—integrative motivation (desire to connect with the culture of the language) and instrumental motivation (practical reasons for learning the language)—as well as the influence of language anxiety and attitudes toward the learning situation. By applying this framework, the study explores how motivational, social, and educational factors, along with challenges such as language anxiety, influence private college students' attitudes toward learning



English as a Second Language (ESL) in Hyderabad, Pakistan. This framework provides a robust foundation for understanding the dynamics of ESL learning and addressing the research objectives and questions effectively.

3.1 Research Design

The researcher employed a qualitative approach approach, utilizing qualitative data so that the factors that influence learners' attitudes towards learning ESL would serve as a guide for providing in-depth insights based on qualitative responses.

3.2 Population and Sample

The study's target population consisted of 20 students from Hayat Girls College Hyderabad and Superior Boys College Hyderabad in classes XI and XII respectively. For this, purposive sub-sampling was selected for in-depth qualitative analysis and to go deeper into their experiences and perceptions associated with ESL learning.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The questionnaire was intended to focus on how to assess students' attitudes, motivation, and issues in a language learning setting. Semi-structured interviews with twenty students who were specifically selected were used to collect qualitative data. By employing qualitative methods, the researcher was able to extract firsthand knowledge of students' experiences and the elements that impact their attitudes toward learning English.

3.4 Research Instrument Validation

The research instrument was pilot-tested with a small group of students, and feedback analysis was conducted to improve the questionnaire's clarity, relevance, and reliability in making improvements. Guidelines for interviews and focus groups were also developed to ensure consistency.

3.5 Interview Protocol

A semi-structured interview protocol was developed following APA 7 guidelines (see Appendix A), comprising five open-ended questions designed to explore motivational, familial, pedagogical, economic, and cultural influences on English-learning attitudes. In April 2025, twenty volunteer students from Class XI and XII in urban private colleges were interviewed face-to-face. Each session lasted approximately 25–30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' informed consent. Transcriptions were anonymized and proofed for accuracy before analysis.

3.6 Data Analysis

Qualitative data underwent thematic analysis following the six-phase model of Braun and Clarke (2006). First, transcripts were read repeatedly to achieve immersion in the data. Next, meaningful segments were coded and collated into potential themes, which were then reviewed for internal coherence and distinctiveness. Themes were refined and labeled to reflect their underlying concepts before being illustrated with representative quotations. Finally, themes were integrated with quantitative findings to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping students' attitudes toward English as a second language.



4 Findings and Discussion

The findings provide a comprehensive summary of the numerous factors influencing English language acquisition among the participants. This discusses the implication of the findings by contrasting them with the literature and emphasizing their significance in English as a Second Language (ESL) teaching. The argument follows the general themes identified through the thematic analysis: conceptions of English language acquisition, motivational drivers, challenges faced, socio-cultural effects, classroom climate, and pedagogical approaches.

4.6 Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Attitudes Toward English Language Learning

Students exhibited a range of attitudes toward learning English, shaped by their experiences, aspirations, and exposure to the language. Many students acknowledged the significance of English in their academic and professional futures. One participant stated, *“English is not just a subject for me; it is a skill that opens doors to better career opportunities.”* Others expressed apprehension, particularly regarding speaking fluency. A student remarked, *“I can understand and write in English, but when it comes to speaking, I hesitate because I fear making mistakes.”*

Theme 2: Motivational Factors in ESL Learning

Motivation emerged as a crucial determinant in students’ ESL learning experiences. Some students were intrinsically motivated, driven by personal goals and interest in the language, while others were extrinsically motivated by parental expectations, career aspirations, and societal norms. One student reflected, *“My parents always tell me that good English skills will help me secure a respectable job, so I try my best to learn.”* Peer influence was another factor; as a participant noted, *“When my friends speak fluently in English, I feel inspired to improve my speaking skills.”* The findings suggest that motivation fluctuates based on students’ experiences and exposure to English in different settings.

Theme 3: Challenges in Learning English

Several students reported struggling with English proficiency due to limited exposure outside the classroom and ineffective teaching methods. Pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary retention were frequently cited as hurdles. A participant shared, *“I find English grammar difficult to understand, and sometimes the rules seem too complicated to apply in daily conversation.”* Another student emphasized the role of classroom dynamics, stating, *“Our teachers mainly focus on textbook exercises, and we rarely get the chance to practice speaking, which makes it hard to improve communication skills.”* The lack of interactive learning opportunities appeared to hinder language acquisition for many students.

Theme 4: Socio-Cultural Influences on ESL Learning

Students’ perceptions of English were influenced by cultural exposure and societal expectations. English was seen as a symbol of modernity and global communication, yet some students felt conflicted about adopting Western cultural influences. One student observed, *“Watching English movies and listening to English music has helped me learn, but sometimes, I feel like it distances me from my own culture.”* Additionally, students acknowledged the



dominance of English in Pakistan's education system, with one participant stating, *"English is necessary for higher education, but I feel that our curriculum should also emphasize proficiency in our national language."* These insights highlight the intersection of language learning with cultural identity and national policies.

Theme 5: Classroom Environment and Pedagogical Approaches

The effectiveness of English language instruction was a recurring concern among participants. Many students felt that traditional teaching methods did not cater to their learning needs. A student remarked, *"Our classes focus too much on rote memorization rather than interactive learning, making English feel like a chore rather than a skill."* Others emphasized the importance of teacher engagement, with one participant explaining, *"A supportive teacher makes a huge difference. When teachers encourage discussions in English, it boosts our confidence."* This theme underscores the necessity of incorporating dynamic and communicative teaching strategies in ESL classrooms.

Theme 6: Recommendations for Enhancing ESL Learning

Participants suggested various improvements in ESL instruction, advocating for more practical and engaging learning methods. Many emphasized the need for interactive sessions, such as group discussions, language labs, and multimedia integration. One participant recommended, *"Instead of just reading from textbooks, we should have more speaking activities and real-life conversations in class."* Additionally, students expressed a desire for personalized feedback and mentorship from teachers to overcome individual language barriers. Another student suggested, *"Teachers should assess our speaking and writing skills separately and guide us according to our strengths and weaknesses."*

5 Conclusion

The study explored the attitudes, motivations, challenges, and perceptions of students learning English as a second language. From the findings of the study, there was confirmation that, while most students realize the significance of mastering the English language for both academic and professional opportunities, the challenges associated with mastering the language remain a significant problem. These include grammatical, lexical, and fluency problems, as well as a lack of practice outside the classroom. Socio-cultural factors and classroom dynamics were also found to play a role in the learning experience of students.

The major findings include motivation, which plays a key role in learning the English language. The students' intrinsic and extrinsic factors are also highly influenced by their career aspirations and expectations from their parents. However, the existence of a neutral group in responses to questions on motivation implies that not all the students believe that their future success is tied directly to learning the English language. This underlines the relevance of interventions connecting the dots between learning a language and the ultimate goals of the students.

The study further pointed out that more creative approaches in pedagogies are supposed to be executed in place of traditional instruction ideas. For instance, students wanted to experience more interactive learning and activities that were close to real life, like for example, group discussions and real-life conversations. Therefore, the communicative language teaching approach



is among the key principles that emphasize interaction and meaningful communication in language acquisition.

Another significant finding is the tension between globalization and cultural identity. Even though English has been regarded as a means of bridging international communities and a tool for accessing global information, some students were worried about its effects on their cultural identity. This, therefore, points to the need for a balanced approach to the teaching of English that fosters linguistic proficiency without disregarding cultural diversity.

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