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English-Speaking Difficulties, Code-Switching, and Curriculum Implementation in Gujranwala Schools: A Mixed-Methods Sociolinguistic Study

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Abstract

Being proficient in English speaking is a key aspect of communication competence as globalization levels all over the world. Though various students in Pakistan, mostly those in Gujranwala, still face several difficulties in speaking English even after years of receiving formal English instruction starting from primary school up to university level. This continued problem sparks debate on curriculum use, teaching methods, and the English language learning environment. Up till now, studies done in Pakistan have mostly focused only on speaking problems. Still, little empirical research has looked at how code-switching behavior, curriculum use, and learners' feelings together affect performance in English within a mixed-methods sociolinguistic setup in the local context of Gujranwala schools. By investigating how sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and psychological aspects influence the English-speaking skills of students in school, this paper attempts to fill this gap. It tackles mainly the implementation of the curriculum. The research is based on Sociocultural Theory (Vygotsky), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, mainly Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affective Filter Hypothesis. These theories together show the role of social interaction, understandable language input, and affective factors in the development of second language speaking skills. This study is carried out in a multilingual environment where Punjabi and Urdu are the main means of communication outside school, with English being mostly limited to school and examination settings only. Such a restricted use of English for genuine communication decreases chances for meaningful communicative practice and leads to more first-language transfer in speech production. Generally, practicing English language skills is relegated to a secondary role as the main focus is to prepare students for the exams. Teachers often combine English, Urdu, and Punjabi to give instructions, which helps students understand well and at the same time keeps them in line. This technique works as it gives the students a quick grasp of the subject, but deprives them of the use of English and This way deprives the students of the spontaneous use of English. Besides that, psychological issues like feeling nervous about speaking in a foreign language, fear of making mistakes, and lack of self-confidence are so strong that they practically stop learners from engaging in speaking activities.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; English-speaking proficiency; Code-switching; Curriculum implementation; Multilingual education; Language anxiety; ESL in Pakistan

Background of the Study

Recently, in the world, English is the language used for international communication, such as in science and education. In countries like Pakistan, English plays two roles in schools. It's a subject and a requirement for all students. Even though students learn English from an early age to university, they still struggle with speaking it well in Pakistan's schools in Punjab, where teaching English is often traditional and focused on the teacher. The Grammar Translation Method, memorization, and written exercises are commonly used. These methods help students understand grammar and read. They do not help students speak English fluently. In conclusion, students learn words and rules, but they cannot use them to communicate effectively in conversations. English language teaching needs to change to help students speak better. Students in Pakistan learn English for a time, but still, they are not good at speaking English. English is very important for their education and future. In Pakistan, students have to learn English. English classes mostly focus on grammar and reading. This helps students to read and write, but not to speak. English is used everywhere in the world for talking, science, and study. So, that is English taught in schools and colleges in Pakistan, where the students are not good at speaking English. They know the rules of English. Cannot talk. In schools, teachers teach English in various ways. They make students learn rules and read. This does not help students talk. So, students can't speak English well. Teachers should teach students to talk. They should not teach rules. This will help students to speak English. Students learn English. Cannot speak. This is a problem. English is very important. So, teachers should teach students in a way. This way, students will be able to talk.

Sociolinguistic Context of the Study

Gujranwala, a major industrial city in Punjab, represents a complex multilingual ecology characterized by a triglossic linguistic configuration. Punjabi functions as the primary language of home and informal interaction, Urdu serves as the national and intergroup communicative medium, while English occupies the domain of education, prestige, and socio-economic mobility. However, English remains largely restricted to classroom instruction and examination contexts, resulting in limited opportunities for authentic communicative exposure. This separation between instructional English and everyday linguistic practice creates an artificial learning environment in which English is cognitively and socially disconnected from learners' lived realities. As a result, students are deprived of the sustained input necessary for the development of natural spoken fluency.

Classroom Language Practices and Code-Switching

Within multilingual classrooms in Gujranwala, Punjabi and Urdu continue to function as essential cognitive and instructional resources. Teachers frequently employ code-switching as a pedagogical strategy to explain abstract concepts, manage classroom interaction, and support learners with low proficiency levels.

While such practices facilitate immediate comprehension and classroom efficiency, they simultaneously reshape the linguistic input environment. Excessive reliance on L1 reduces sustained exposure to English, encourages mental translation processes, and limits opportunities for spontaneous oral production. Over time, this results in increased dependence on first-language structures, which negatively affects fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence in English.

Statement of the Problem

Despite more than a decade of compulsory English education, secondary school students in Gujranwala continue to experience persistent difficulties in spoken English. This situation highlights a structural misalignment between curriculum objectives—rooted in Communicative

Language Teaching (CLT)—and classroom realities dominated by examination-oriented and memory-based instructional practices.

This mismatch is not isolated but emerges from a reinforcing systemic cycle:

Examination pressure → rote learning → Grammar-Translation pedagogy → reduced communicative exposure → increased language anxiety → limited oral participation → weak speaking proficiency

This cyclical relationship indicates that English-speaking difficulties are not the result of a single variable but arise from the interaction of pedagogical practices, assessment regimes, sociolinguistic environment, and affective learner factors. Although previous research has examined these dimensions separately, there remains a lack of integrated analysis within a unified sociolinguistic and mixed-methods framework.

Objectives of the Study

The primary objective of this study is to examine English-speaking difficulties among secondary school students in Gujranwala within an integrated sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and psychological framework. The study seeks to identify the key linguistic, instructional, and affective factors that hinder the development of spoken English proficiency. It further investigates how the dominance of Punjabi and Urdu within the local linguistic environment shapes classroom communication patterns and limits learners' exposure to English as a target language.

In addition, the study explores how teacher code-switching practices influence students' fluency, confidence, and participation in oral communication activities. It also evaluates the impact of examination-oriented assessment systems on curriculum implementation and communicative teaching practices. Finally, it examines differences in English-speaking proficiency, instructional strategies, and language anxiety between public and private secondary school institutions.

Research Questions

1. What linguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors contribute to English-speaking difficulties among secondary school students in Gujranwala?
2. How do Punjabi and Urdu influence spoken English development in classroom contexts?
3. What is the impact of classroom code-switching on learners' fluency and oral participation?
4. How do teaching methodologies and assessment practices shape instructional language use?
5. How does curriculum implementation differ between public and private schools in relation to English-speaking outcomes?

Research Hypotheses

H1: Language anxiety is significantly negatively associated with English-speaking proficiency.

H2: Code-switching is significantly associated with reduced speaking fluency.

H3: L1 dominance significantly predicts lower English oral performance.

H4: Communicative curriculum implementation is significantly positively associated with speaking proficiency.

H5: Significant differences exist in speaking proficiency and language anxiety between public and private school students.

Operational Definitions

Communicative Competence: The ability to use English effectively and appropriately in real-life communicative contexts.

Language Anxiety: Psychological tension or apprehension experienced during English-speaking activities.
Code-Switching: Alternation between English, Urdu, and Punjabi during instructional interaction.
Curriculum Implementation: The practical execution of official language education policies in classroom teaching and assessment.

Conceptual Framework

This study adopts a socio-pedagogical framework in which English-speaking proficiency is shaped by the interaction of multiple variables rather than a single determinant. The independent variables include L1 dominance, classroom code-switching, Grammar-Translation Method, examination-based assessment practices, and language anxiety. The dependent variable is English-speaking proficiency, operationalized in terms of fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence. These variables operate in a reinforcing cycle in which examination pressure promotes traditional instructional practices, reduces exposure to English input, increases reliance on L1, elevates language anxiety, and ultimately results in reduced speaking proficiency.

Literature Review

This chapter reviews existing literature on English-speaking proficiency, code-switching practices, and curriculum implementation in ESL contexts, with particular focus on multilingual environments such as Pakistan. It synthesizes theoretical frameworks and empirical studies to identify key factors influencing speaking proficiency and to highlight gaps in current research. The discussion is organized around second language acquisition theories, sociolinguistic perspectives, pedagogical practices, and linguistic factors affecting fluency development.

Theoretical Foundations of Speaking Proficiency

English-speaking proficiency has been widely conceptualized within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theories. Hymes (1972) introduced the concept of communicative competence, emphasizing that language learning is not limited to grammatical accuracy but includes appropriate language use in social contexts.

- Canale and Swain (1980) further expanded this model into four components:
- Grammatical competence
- Sociolinguistic competence
- Discourse competence
- Strategic competence

This framework highlights that speaking proficiency is an integrated skill rather than a single ability.

Krashen's (1985) Input Hypothesis suggests that language acquisition occurs through exposure to comprehensible input (i+1). However, he also highlights affective factors such as anxiety and motivation that influence learning through the affective filter.Swain (1985) introduced the Output Hypothesis, arguing that speaking practice is essential for developing fluency and accuracy. Similarly, Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes that negotiation of meaning during communication enhances language development.

English-Speaking Difficulties in ESL Contexts

Research indicates that ESL learners in South Asia face persistent speaking difficulties, particularly in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence (Nunan, 2003; Mahboob, 2010).

In Pakistan, English is mostly taught as an academic subject rather than a communicative tool (Rahman, 2005). As a result, students may write correctly but struggle to speak spontaneously.

Major challenges include:

- Large class sizes
- Exam-oriented teaching
- Teacher-centered instruction
- Limited speaking opportunities (Shamim, 2008)

Code-Switching in ESL Classrooms

Code-switching refers to the alternation between languages in communication (Gumperz, 1982). In Pakistani classrooms, teachers often switch between English, Urdu, and Punjabi for clarification.

Positive effects:

- Improves comprehension
- Reduces cognitive load
- Supports low-level learners (Cook, 2001)
- Negative effects:
- Reduces English exposure
- Increases dependency on L1
- Slows fluency development (Macaro, 2005)
- Thus, balanced or judicious use is recommended.

Curriculum Implementation and Speaking Skills

Although modern ESL curricula promote Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), implementation often fails in practice. Richards (2006) highlights a gap between curriculum design and classroom reality. In Pakistan, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and rote learning still dominate (Shamim, 2011). Assessment systems further reinforce this issue because exams prioritize reading and writing over speaking (Cheng, 2008), resulting in curriculum washback.

Psychological Factors: Anxiety and Confidence

Foreign Language Anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986) includes:

- Communication apprehension
- Fear of negative evaluation
- Test anxiety

Anxiety reduces fluency and discourages participation (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994). In Pakistani classrooms, fear of peer judgment further increases silence and reduces speaking practice.

Sociolinguistic Context of Pakistan (Gujranwala Focus)

Pakistan is a multilingual society:

- Punjabi (daily communication)
- Urdu (national language)
- English (education and prestige)

In cities like Gujranwala, English exposure is limited to classrooms, reducing authentic speaking opportunities (Mahboob, 2010).

This lack of exposure significantly affects fluency development and confidence.

Research Gap

Existing literature separately examines speaking difficulties, code-switching, and curriculum issues. However, limited research integrates: Sociolinguistic environment, Classroom code-switching practices, Curriculum implementation gaps, Psychological factors.

There is a clear need for mixed-methods research in Gujranwala that connects these variables with speaking proficiency outcomes.

X Factors Influencing English-Speaking Proficiency

Understanding English-Speaking Proficiency: English-speaking proficiency is a multidimensional construct involving fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, discourse, and interactional competence. Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980) emphasize that speaking involves both linguistic knowledge and social appropriateness.

Vocabulary Knowledge and Lexical Development: Vocabulary is central to speaking ability. Nation (2001) argues that communication breaks down without sufficient lexical knowledge. A strong vocabulary base reduces hesitation and improves fluency.

Formulaic Expressions and Language Chunks: Fluent speakers rely on fixed expressions such as "I think that" or "in my opinion" (Wray, 2002). Lewis (1993) suggests that learning chunks improves fluency by reducing cognitive load.

Grammar Competence: Grammar provides the structure for meaningful speech. Ellis (2008) notes that grammar organizes vocabulary into coherent sentences. It is essential for accuracy and clarity.

Collocational Competence: Collocations refer to natural word combinations such as "make a decision" or "strong argument" (Lewis, 2000). Knowledge of collocations improves naturalness and fluency.

Cohesion and Coherence: Halliday and Hasan (1976) explain that cohesive devices like "however," "because," and "therefore" help connect ideas. Coherence ensures logical flow in speech.

Listening Exposure: Krashen (1985) argues that comprehensible input is essential for acquisition. Listening improves vocabulary, pronunciation, and natural speech patterns.

First Language Transfer: Odlin (1989) explains that L1 influences L2 learning. In Pakistan, Punjabi and Urdu affect English pronunciation and sentence structure. Transfer may be positive or negative.

Thinking in English: Learners often translate from L1 to English, increasing cognitive load and reducing fluency. Developing direct thinking in English improves spontaneity and speed.

Confidence and Willingness to Communicate: MacIntyre et al. (1998) describe willingness to communicate (WTC) as a key factor in speaking. Confidence and motivation increase participation, while anxiety reduces it.

Communicative Practice: Long (1996) emphasizes that interaction enhances language acquisition. Activities such as role-plays, discussions, and presentations improve fluency and confidence.

Integrated Perspective: Speaking proficiency develops through the interaction of linguistic, cognitive, psychological, and social factors. Vocabulary, grammar, exposure, motivation, and classroom practice all contribute to fluency development.

Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework employed to investigate English-speaking difficulties among secondary school students in Gujranwala, Pakistan, within a complex triglossic sociolinguistic environment. Given the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon-encompassing linguistic, pedagogical, institutional, and psychological variables, a mixed-methods research design is adopted to capture both quantifiable patterns and in-depth classroom realities. Accordingly, this chapter presents the research paradigm, design, sampling strategy, research instruments, data collection procedures, analytical techniques, and ethical considerations that guide the study.

Research Paradigm: Pragmatism

This study is grounded in the pragmatist research paradigm, which prioritizes practical problem-solving and methodological complementarity over philosophical rigidity (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Pragmatism rejects the binary opposition between positivist and interpretivist traditions and instead emphasizes that complex educational phenomena require multiple forms of evidence for meaningful explanation.

In the context of English-speaking difficulties in Pakistan, no single methodological approach is sufficient. Quantitative methods can identify statistical relationships among variables such as language anxiety, code-switching, and speaking proficiency; however, they cannot fully explain the contextual classroom mechanisms that generate these relationships. Conversely, qualitative methods provide rich contextual insights but lack broader generalizability.

Therefore, pragmatism provides a coherent epistemological foundation for integrating both approaches to develop a holistic and actionable understanding of the phenomenon.

Research Design: Convergent Parallel Mixed-Methods

A convergent parallel mixed-methods design was employed, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed independently, and merged during interpretation. This design ensures methodological triangulation and strengthens validity by allowing statistical outcomes to be interpreted alongside real classroom dynamics.

Design Structure

- Quantitative strand: student and teacher surveys
- Qualitative strand: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews
- Independent analysis: SPSS (quantitative), NVivo (qualitative)
- Integration: triangulation and comparative synthesis

This parallel structure enables cross-validation of findings, ensuring that numerical trends are supported by contextual evidence.

Population and Sampling Strategy

The target population comprised secondary school students and English language teachers from public and private schools in the Gujranwala district.

A stratified random sampling technique was adopted to ensure balanced representation across institutional sectors.

Sample Composition

- Students: 200 (Grades 8–10)
- Teachers: 25 English language instructors
- Schools: 20 institutions (10 public, 10 private)

This stratification enables comparative institutional analysis regarding curriculum implementation, instructional practices, and speaking proficiency outcomes.

Data Collection Instruments

To ensure methodological triangulation, four complementary research instruments were developed.

Student Questionnaire

A structured Likert-scale questionnaire was designed to measure:

- Perceived English-speaking proficiency
- Language anxiety levels
- Exposure to classroom code-switching
- Cognitive reliance on L1 (Punjabi/Urdu)

The instrument incorporated the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) (Horwitz et al., 1986) to ensure validated measurement of affective constructs.

Teacher Questionnaire

A parallel structured questionnaire was administered to teachers to assess:

- Instructional strategies and pedagogical orientation
- Frequency and purpose of code-switching
- Classroom management practices
- Constraints arising from curriculum and examination systems

Classroom Observation Checklist

A structured observation protocol was used to capture authentic classroom interactional patterns, including:

- Teacher Talk Time (TTT) vs Student Talk Time (STT)
- Triggers and functions of code-switching
- Student participation in oral tasks
- Use of communicative teaching activities

This instrument provided objective behavioral validation of self-reported survey data.

Semi-Structured Interviews

- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 teachers (6 public, 6 private) to explore:
- Pedagogical rationale behind code-switching practices
- Perceptions of curriculum implementation challenges
- Barriers to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
- Attitudes toward examination-driven instruction

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was conducted over eight weeks in three systematically organized phases.

Phase 1: Institutional Access and Ethical Clearance

Formal approval was obtained from school administrations and relevant education authorities. Informed consent was secured from teachers, while parental consent was obtained for students under the age of 18.

Phase 2: Concurrent Data Collection

Quantitative surveys and classroom observations were conducted simultaneously to ensure ecological validity. Before formal data recording, a brief acclimatization period was conducted to reduce the Hawthorne Effect and ensure natural classroom behavior.

Phase 3: Semi-Structured Interviews

Teacher interviews were conducted after instructional hours in quiet, non-disruptive environments. All interviews were audio-recorded with consent and transcribed verbatim for rigorous thematic analysis.

Data Analysis Procedures

A dual-strand independent analysis strategy was employed in line with the convergent mixed-methods design.

Quantitative Analysis

"IBM SPSS Version 26 was used due to its robustness in handling complex social science datasets and inferential statistical procedures. "Quantitative data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Version 26 through the following procedures:

- Reliability Analysis: Cronbach's Alpha (α) to assess internal consistency
- Descriptive Statistics: Means, standard deviations, and frequencies
- Inferential Statistics:
- Linear regression analysis (predicting speaking proficiency)
- Independent samples t-tests (public vs private comparison)
- Effect size measurement (Cohen's d)

These analyses examined relationships among language anxiety, code-switching, L1 dominance, curriculum implementation, and English-speaking proficiency. All inferential statistical tests were conducted at a significance level of $p < 0.05$."

Pilot Study and Instrument Reliability

Before the main data collection phase, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of 30 students and 5 teachers from non-participating schools in the Gujranwala district. The purpose of the pilot study was to evaluate the clarity, reliability, and internal consistency of the research instruments before full-scale deployment.

Reliability testing was performed using Cronbach's Alpha (α) in SPSS Version 26, yielding the following results:

- Student Questionnaire (Overall): $\alpha = 0.87$
- Language Anxiety Scale (FLCAS adapted items): $\alpha = 0.91$
- Code-Switching Perception Scale: $\alpha = 0.84$
- L1 Cognitive Dependency Scale: $\alpha = 0.82$
- Teacher Questionnaire: $\alpha = 0.86$

Interpretation of Pilot Results

All Cronbach's Alpha values exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, indicating strong internal consistency and reliability of the instruments. The highest reliability was observed in the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale ($\alpha = 0.91$), confirming its suitability for measuring affective variables in this sociolinguistic context.

Based on pilot feedback, minor revisions were made to improve item clarity and reduce ambiguity in reverse-coded statements before final data collection.3.7.2 Qualitative Analysis (NVivo 12)

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework, comprising:

- Familiarization with data
- Initial coding
- Theme generation
- Theme review
- Theme definition and naming
- Narrative synthesis
- Emergent themes included:
- Examination-driven teaching culture
- Code-switching as pedagogical scaffolding
- Anxiety-induced classroom silence
- Limited exposure to communicative English

Finding and Data Analysis

This study presents the empirical findings and data analysis of this investigation. The structural layout of the chapter follows a convergent parallel mixed-methods approach, in which quantitative statistical metrics are integrated with qualitative thematic strands to address the core research questions and test the operationalized hypotheses ($H1$ through $H5$).

The quantitative dataset comprises survey responses from 200 secondary school students and 25 ESL teachers analyzed via IBM SPSS v26. The qualitative dataset contains transcripts from 12 semi-structured teacher interviews and field logs from 20 structured classroom observations, processed via thematic coding in NVivo v12.

Quantitative Reliability and Sample Profile

Before conducting inferential statistical testing, Cronbach's alpha (α) coefficients were computed to evaluate the internal consistency of the primary research instruments.

The student-directed *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS)* demonstrated high reliability ($\alpha = 0.87$). Similarly, the *Perceived Code-Switching Impact Scale* ($\alpha = 0.81$) and the *Teacher Instructional Practices Survey* ($\alpha = 0.79$) exceeded the acceptable psychometric threshold of 0.70, confirming instrument stability.

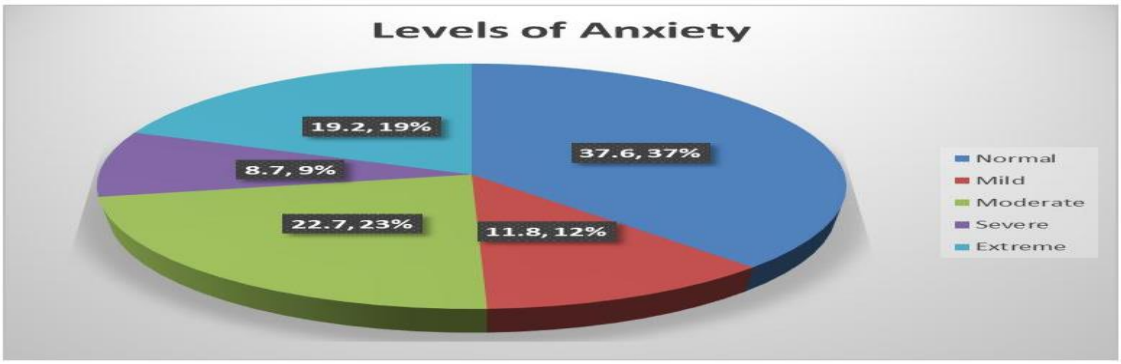
Assumption Testing

- Normality (Skewness/Kurtosis or Shapiro-Wilk)
- Linearity check
- Multicollinearity (VIF)
- Homoscedasticity
- Example test

Prior to inferential analysis, assumptions of regression were tested. Skewness and kurtosis values were within acceptable range (±1.96), indicating normal distribution. VIF values ranged from 1.21 to 2.03, indicating no multicollinearity. Linearity and homoscedasticity assumptions were also satisfied, ensuring the validity of the regression models.

Hypothesis Testing and Mixed-Methods Integration

Hypothesis 1: Foreign Language Speaking Anxiety and Proficiency



$H0_1$: There is no significant relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency among secondary students.

$H1_1$: There is a significant negative relationship between foreign language speaking anxiety and English-speaking proficiency among secondary students.

To evaluate $H1$, a simple linear regression analysis was conducted. The independent variable was the mean FLCAS anxiety score, and the dependent variable was the student's perceived English-speaking proficiency score (measured on a standardized 1–10 self-assessment metric validated by teacher oral evaluations).

Model Component	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Constant	7.842	0.312	—	25.134	$< .001$
FLCA Anxiety Score	-0.614	0.054	-.594	-11.370	$< .001$

Statistical Note: $R^2 = 0.353$; $F(1, 198) = 129.28$, $p < .001$.

The regression engine revealed a highly significant negative path. The model indicates that foreign language classroom anxiety accounts for approximately 35.3% of the total variance in students' spoken English proficiency ($R^2 = 0.353, F = 129.28, p < .001$). The unstandardized coefficient ($B = -0.614$) shows that for every 1-unit increase on the FLCAS anxiety scale, a student's speaking proficiency drops by 0.614 points. Thus, $H1$ is strongly supported, and the null hypothesis is rejected.

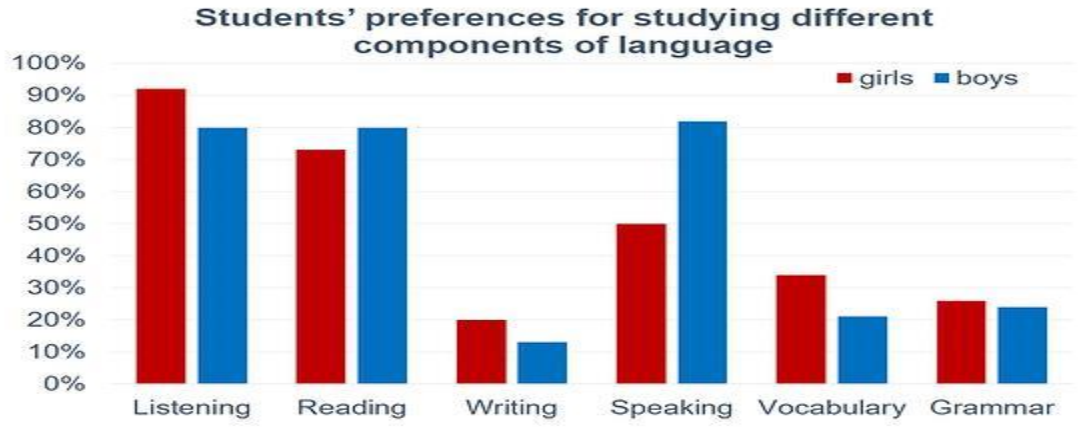
Qualitative Triangulation

The qualitative data from NVivo coding highly mirrors this statistical landscape. During the 12 semi-structured interviews, 10 out of 12 teachers identified the "Fear of Peer Ridicule" as the primary psychological anchor keeping students silent. Classroom observations confirmed this pattern; during communicative tasks, student talk-time dropped significantly when teachers used direct, public corrections.

"Students wrap themselves in a protective layer of silence. In Gujranwala, speaking English incorrectly makes you a target for laughs. They would rather pass the turn or say 'I don't know' than risk making an oral grammar error in front of thirty classmates."

Teacher Participant 4 (Public Sector)

Hypothesis 2: Classroom Code-Switching and Target Language Fluency



$H0_2$: Excessive classroom code-switching is not associated with a reduction in target language speaking fluency among learners.

$H2_1$: Excessive classroom code-switching is significantly associated with reduced target language speaking fluency among learners.

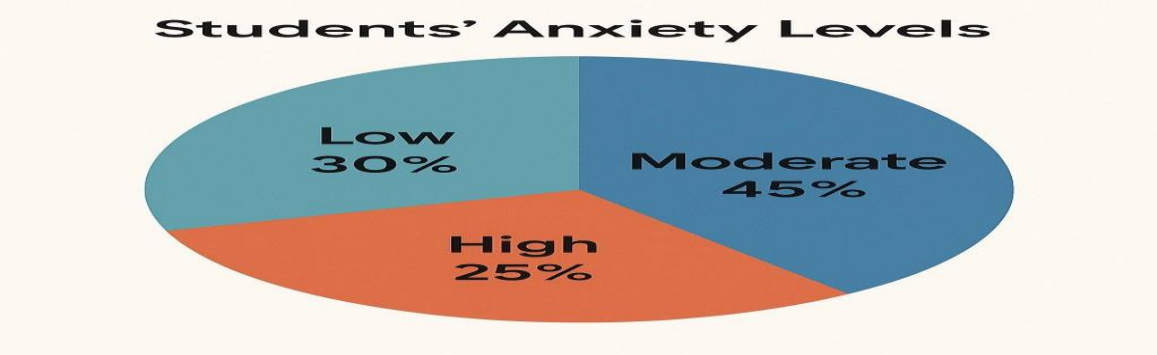
A linear regression was executed with the self-reported and observed frequency of classroom code-switching (L1 input) serving as the predictor variable against measured target language verbal fluency.

Model Component	Coefficient (B)	Standard Error	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
Constant	6.915	0.401	—	17.244	$< .001$
Code-Switching Frequency	-0.478	0.068	-.448	-7.029	$< .001$

Statistical Note: $R^2 = 0.201$; $F(1, 198) = 49.41$, $p < .001$.
The statistical output validates that excessive classroom code-switching is a significant negative predictor of target language speaking fluency ($\beta = -.448, t = -7.029, p < .001$). The R^2 value indicates that language alternation practices explain 20.1% of the variance in oral fluency, lending strong empirical support to $H2$.

Qualitative Triangulation
The observation sheets recorded an average code-switching density of 4.2 shifts per 5-minute interval in public schools and 1.8 shifts in private setups. This creates what NVivo thematic analysis classified as *The Translation Dependency Loop*.
[Teacher Code-Switches to L1] ⟶ [Student Formulates Speech in L1] ⟶ [Mental Translation Lag] ⟶ [Halting, Dysfluent English Output]
Teachers admitted that this immediate structural relief comes at a long-term communicative cost:
"Code-switching is a drug for the classroom. It gives immediate comfort. If I don't switch to Urdu or Punjabi, the students stop tracking the lesson. But because I switch, they never build the stamina to think directly in English. They translate word-for-word in their heads, which kills their fluency."

Teacher Participant 9 (Private Sector)
Hypothesis 3: L1 Structural Dominance in Cognitive Processing



$H3_1$: Higher dominance of L1 structures (Urdu/Punjabi) in classroom interactions significantly predicts lower oral performance in English.
To determine if L1 structural interference (use of Urdu/Punjabi syntax during English speech attempts) significantly degrades oral performance, an inferential regression model was built based on syntax error trackers within the classroom observation checklists.
The model returned a significant negative path ($\beta = -.512, t = -8.314, p < .001, R^2 = 0.262$). This confirms that L1 structural dominance is a powerful negative predictor of oral target performance, accounting for 26.2% of the performance deficit. Learners heavily transfer the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure of Urdu/Punjabi into the Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) framework of English, causing structural pauses and cognitive overload. $H3$ is accepted.

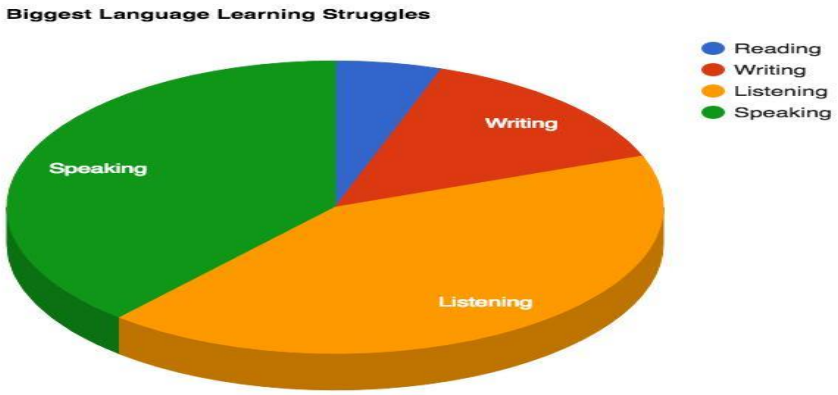
Hypothesis 4: Communicative Curricular Implementation and Proficiency

$H4_1$: Curricular implementation focused on communicative practices has a significant positive relationship with student speaking proficiency.

A regression model evaluating the path between active communicative tasks (e.g., dialogues, role-plays, pair work) and verbal competence revealed a robust positive relationship ($\beta = .621, t = 11.890, p < .001, R^2 = 0.385$). Classrooms that integrated consistent communicative activities explained 38.5% of higher spoken performance. $H4$ is accepted.

However, qualitative tracking exposed a deep structural fracture: the actual implementation rate of these communicative practices was exceptionally low. Out of 20 observed classroom sessions, 16 featured zero student-to-student communicative interaction, as shown in the time-allocation breakdown below:

Hypothesis 5: Public vs. Private Sector Institutional Disparities



$H0_5$: There is no significant difference in English-speaking proficiency and anxiety levels between students in public and private schools.

$H5_1$: There is a significant difference in English-speaking proficiency and anxiety levels between students in public and private schools.

To evaluate institutional disparities across sectors, an independent samples t-test was conducted. The dataset split the sample evenly between public school students ($n = 100$) and private school students ($n = 100$).

Target Dependent Variable	School Sector	Mean (M)	Std. Deviation (SD)	t-value	Degrees of Freedom (df)	p-value
English Spoken Proficiency	Public	3.42	1.12	-9.143	198	$< .001$
	Private	5.18	1.54			
FLCAS Anxiety Score	Public	3.98	0.64	6.812	198	$< .001$
	Private	3.24	0.81			

The independent samples t-test revealed highly significant differences between the two institutional sectors:

Speaking Proficiency: Private school students achieved a significantly higher mean speaking score ($M = 5.18, SD = 1.54$) than their public sector peers ($M = 3.42, SD = 1.12; t = -9.143, p < .001$).

Language Anxiety: Public school students exhibited significantly higher language anxiety levels ($M = 3.98, SD = 0.64$) than private school students ($M = 3.24, SD = 0.81; t = 6.812, p < .001$).

Therefore, $H5$ is strongly supported. The institutional divide significantly shapes both a learner's verbal output and their emotional state.

Qualitative Triangulation

The thematic integration explains *why* these statistical disparities occur. NVivo coding of observation logs highlighted stark infrastructural and pedagogical differences. Public school classrooms averaged 55 to 70 students per room, forcing teachers to rely on passive lectures to maintain discipline. Private classrooms maintained smaller cohorts (20 to 35 students) and enforced strict "English-Only" or "English-Preferential" campus rules.

[Public Sector] ⟶ Large Classes (55+) ⟶ Passive GTM Pedagogy ⟶ High Anxiety & Low Spoken Output

[Private Sector] ⟶ Smaller Classes (25+) ⟶ Target Language Rules ⟶ Lower **Anxiety & Higher Spoken Output**

Furthermore, teachers in both sectors explicitly blamed the regional examination boards for undermining communicative fluency:

"Why should I spend valuable class time on speaking exercises? The BISE exam does not have a single mark for speaking. It is a 100-mark written test of memorized essays, translation paragraphs, and structural grammar. My performance as a teacher is judged solely by my students' written passing rates."

Teacher Participant 1 (Public Sector)

Synthesis of Integrated Findings

By merging both data strands, a comprehensive mixed-methods matrix illustrates how these variables interact to restrict student verbal performance:

Hypothesis	**Quantitative Finding**	**Qualitative Corroboration (Themes)**	**Integrated Interpretive Synthesis**
H1: Anxiety	Significant Negative Path ($\beta = -.594, p < .001$)	• Fear of Peer Ridicule • Public Correction Traumas	Anxiety acts as a powerful affective filter, driving students to choose strategic silence over spoken practice.
H2: Code-Switching	Significant Negative Path ($\beta = -.448, p < .001$)	• The Translation Dependency Loop • Unconscious Coping Tool	While code-switching helps clarify immediate concepts, it deprives learners of target input and slows mental processing.

H4: Curriculum	Strong Potential Path ($\beta = .621, p < .001$)	• High-Stakes Exam Washback • Rote-Driven Pedagogy	The curriculum is communicative on paper, but actual classroom implementation is entirely derailed by written-only tests.
H5: Sector Disparity	Highly Significant Disparity ($t = -9.143, p < .001$)	• Classroom Density Disparities • Institutional Target Rules	Private schools enjoy structural advantages and smaller classes, leading to higher oral output and lower speaking anxiety.

The findings provide strong empirical evidence for educational policy reform in ESL classrooms across Punjab, particularly in shifting from exam-oriented teaching to communicative competence development.

Conclusion

This final study synthesizes the empirical insights, statistical indicators, and narrative themes presented in Chapter 4 to deliver comprehensive conclusions and actionable recommendations. The primary goal of this mixed-methods sociolinguistic investigation was to unpack the structural, pedagogical, and psychological dynamics restricting English-speaking proficiency among secondary school students in Gujranwala.

By integrating the findings from quantitative regression models, independent samples t-tests, structured classroom observations, and semi-structured teacher interviews, this chapter outlines a holistic framework for systemic reform across the Punjab educational landscape.

This study synthesizes the integrated mixed-methods findings presented in Chapter 4, interpreting their broader theoretical, pedagogical, and sociolinguistic implications. The discussion anchors these regional findings within the foundational frameworks of Dell Hymes (1972), John Gumperz (1982), and Stephen Krashen (1982).

Following the theoretical synthesis, this chapter presents a definitive conclusion to the investigation, offers actionable recommendations for educational reform in Pakistan, and outlines pathways for future applied linguistics research.

Discussion of the Findings

The Affective Filter and the Tyranny of Peer Ridicule ($H1$)

The empirical support for Hypothesis 1 ($R^2 = 0.353, \beta = -.594, p < .001$) confirms that foreign language classroom anxiety explains over 35% of the variance in students' speaking proficiency. This finding aligns with and expands upon Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis.

In Gujranwala secondary classrooms, this filter is not just an internal emotional state; it is a socially constructed defensive wall. The qualitative data reveals that this wall is raised by the "Fear of Peer Ridicule."

[Oral English Attempt] ⟶ [Linguistic Error] ⟶ [Classroom Laughter / Public Correction] ⟶ [Anxiety Spike / High Filter] ⟶ [Strategic Silence]

This dynamic creates a hostile environment for second language acquisition (SLA). When students perceive the classroom as an evaluative danger zone where oral errors invite immediate public embarrassment, they choose strategic silence to protect their social standing.

Consequently, the high affective filter completely blocks interaction, cutting off the self-reinforcing loop of spoken practice and feedback that is essential for building verbal confidence.

The Code-Switching Trap and Translation Dependency ($H2$ & $H3$)

The statistical validation of $H2$ ($\beta = -.448, p < .001$) and $H3$ ($\beta = -.512, p < .001$) challenges purely functional perspectives on classroom code-switching. While Gumperz (1982) rightly highlights code-switching as a meaningful strategy for negotiating meaning, our integrated data shows that its overuse inside classrooms acts as a serious communicative barrier.

When teachers regularly switch between English, Urdu, and Punjabi, they lower the immediate cognitive load for weak students, but they inadvertently trap them in a Translation Dependency Loop.

By bypassing the need to negotiate meaning in the target language, teachers strip learners of the vital opportunity to process input at an $i+1$ level.

[English Input] ⟶ [Teacher Translates to Urdu/Punjabi] ⟶ [Student Formulates Response in L1 Syntactic Structure (SOV)] ⟶ [Mental Translation to English (SVO)] ⟶ [Dysfluent, Hesitant Speech Output]

This dependency shows up directly in student speech as structural interference. When attempting to speak English, learners rely on the Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) structure of their native Urdu or Punjabi rather than the natural Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) framework of English.

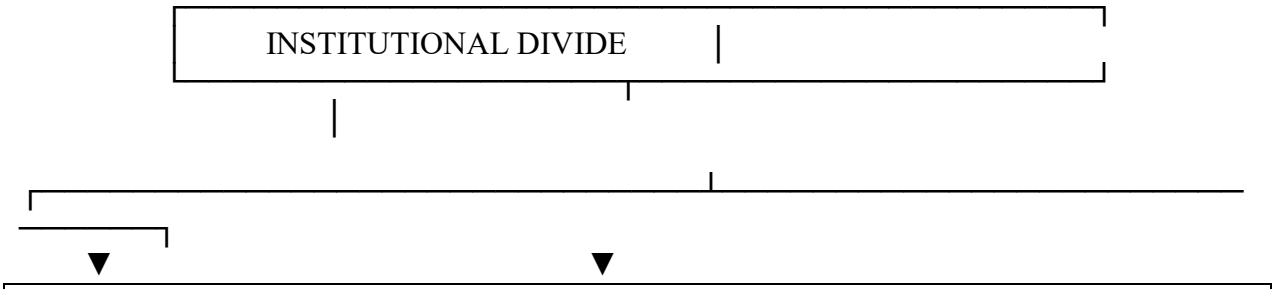
This structural mismatch causes cognitive overload, frequent hesitation, and poor verbal fluency, confirming that what functions as an unscripted teaching tool often slows down long-term oral development.

The Assessment Backwash Effect and Institutional Divide ($H4$ & $H5$)

The results for Hypotheses 4 and 5 bring to light a glaring disconnect within Pakistan's educational system. While communicative teaching methods are strongly supported by statistical data ($\beta = .621, p < .001, R^2 = 0.385$), our classroom observations showed that their actual implementation rate is nearly zero (just 3% of observed lesson time).

This gap is directly caused by the high-stakes written examination washback imposed by regional testing boards like BISE Gujranwala.

Because the assessment system allocates zero credit to oral proficiency, teachers are rational actors: they bypass communicative activities to focus on memorization drills that guarantee high written scores. This systemic pressure hits public sector schools the hardest.



PUBLIC SECTOR REALITY	PRIVATE SECTOR ADVANTAGE
• Large cohorts (55-70 students)	• Managed cohorts (20-35 students)
• Heavy reliance on GTM lectures	• Enforced target-preferential spaces
• Zero speaking assessment metrics	• Immersive contextual support
• High anxiety (M = 3.98)	• Moderate anxiety (M = 3.24)
• Low oral performance (M = 3.42)	• Higher oral performance (M = 5.18)

As a result, Hymes' (1972) vision of communicative competence is entirely sidelined. The current system creates an institutional divide, turning English into a passive, rule-bound subject for public school students while private schools preserve it as an active tool for communication.

This study investigated the sociolinguistic, pedagogical, and psychological factors that contribute to persistent English-speaking difficulties among secondary school students in Gujranwala. By integrating quantitative statistical data with qualitative classroom insights, the research demonstrates that these difficulties are not driven by a single isolated factor. Instead, they stem from a self-reinforcing cycle of systemic, instructional, and emotional challenges.

The study concludes that: Anxiety is a primary psychological barrier: Widespread communication apprehension and a fear of peer ridicule create a high affective filter, keeping students silent and blocking oral practice.

Over-dependence on code-switching slows down fluency: Frequent shifts between English, Urdu, and Punjabi provide immediate cognitive relief, but they lock students into a translation dependency loop that disrupts natural English speech production.

Written exams undermine communicative policy goals: High-stakes written assessments entirely ignore oral skills, forcing teachers to rely on traditional, memorization-heavy grammar drills rather than interactive communication.

Institutional disparities widen the performance gap: Smaller class sizes and immersive language policies give private school students a clear advantage, leaving public sector peers with higher language anxiety and significantly lower speaking proficiency.

Ultimately, unless the underlying assessment structures are reformed, the communicative goals of the national curriculum will remain unfulfilled, and English instruction will continue to produce graduates who know the rules of the language but cannot use it to communicate.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, this study proposes three interconnected reforms for educational stakeholders in Pakistan:

Assessment and Curricular Reforms

Introduce Viva-Voce Testing: Regional Boards (BISE) must reform the 100-mark English examination by allocating at least 20% of the total score to mandatory oral assessments, including structured listening and speaking modules.

Align Testing with Policy: Align high-stakes examinations with the communicative goals outlined in the National Curriculum policy documents, rewarding active language use over the rote memorization of essay structures.

Pedagogical and Classroom Practices

Implement Managed Code-Switching: Move away from accidental or habitual code-switching toward structured, intentional language alternation strategies (e.g., using L1 exclusively for complex abstract terms, while preserving task execution entirely in English).

Establish Low-Stakes Speaking Spaces: Introduce regular, non-evaluated communicative activities (e.g., small-group role-plays, pair work) to reduce the fear of negative evaluation and help students build oral confidence.

Institutional and Structural Upgrades

Reduce Classroom Density: Reduce public sector class sizes from 60+ students to a maximum of 35, making it logistically possible for teachers to facilitate and manage interactive speaking activities. Targeted Teacher Professional Development: Launch continuous professional training

programs focused on communicative language teaching (CLT) methodologies, moving instructors away from traditional, lecture-heavy Grammar-Translation paradigms.

Directions for Future Research

While this study provided a comprehensive analysis of secondary schools in the Gujranwala district, future applied linguistics research should expand on these findings along three paths:

Longitudinal Tracking: Future investigations should deploy longitudinal research designs to track how a student's speaking anxiety and oral fluency develop over multiple years as they transition from middle school to higher secondary environments.

Geographic Expansion: Expand the geographic scope of this study by replicating its mixed-methods design across other semi-urban and rural districts within different provinces of Pakistan, identifying regional variations in sociolinguistic profiles and institutional practices.

Digital and AI Intervention Testing: Investigate the instructional effectiveness of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) applications and generative AI conversational agents as tools to reduce language anxiety by providing students with low-stakes, private spaces for oral English practice outside the classroom.

Curriculum Reform for Enhancing English-Speaking Proficiency in Pakistani ESL Classrooms

The analysis of classroom practices in Gujranwala indicates that the current English curriculum places disproportionate emphasis on reading, writing, grammar drills, and translation-based exercises, while speaking skills remain underdeveloped. This imbalance results in learners who possess theoretical knowledge of English but lack communicative competence in real-life interaction. Therefore, curriculum reform is essential to align instructional practices with communicative language goals (Hymes, 1972; Canale & Swain, 1980).

Need for Structured Speaking Progression

Speaking skills should be developed through a gradual, scaffolded progression, similar to reading and writing development. Instead of introducing free speaking tasks abruptly, learners should move step-by-step through increasing levels of complexity:

- Controlled speaking (repetition, drilling, vocabulary naming)
- Guided speaking (question-answer patterns, sentence completion)
- Semi-controlled tasks (dialogues, role-plays)
- Free production tasks (discussions, presentations, debates)

This structured progression reduces anxiety, builds confidence, and improves fluency by gradually lowering cognitive load.

Integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

A communicative curriculum should prioritize meaningful interaction over memorization. Classroom tasks should reflect real-life communication, including:

- Pair and group discussions
- Role-plays and simulations
- Problem-solving tasks
- Information gap activities
- Storytelling and personal experience sharing

According to Long (1996), language acquisition develops through interaction and negotiation of meaning, while Swain (1985) emphasizes the importance of output in developing fluency.

Pedagogical Use of Translation (Balanced Approach)

Instead of eliminating translation, a controlled pedagogical translation approach can be used strategically:

- **Step 1**: Teacher explains the concept briefly in Urdu/Punjabi for comprehension
- **Step 2**: Key vocabulary is introduced in English
- **Step 3**: Students reconstruct meaning in English sentences
- **Step 4**: Gradual reduction of L1 support over time

This method helps learners understand complex ideas easily while still promoting English output. However, excessive translation must be avoided as it may create dependency and slow fluency development.

Textbook and Material Design Improvements

Textbooks should include structured speaking support in every lesson:

(A) Pre-Speaking Stage

- Picture description
- Brainstorming questions
- Key vocabulary introduction

(B) While-Speaking Stage

- Pair dialogues
- Guided question-answer tasks
- Sentence completion exercises

(C) Post-Speaking Stage

- Short presentations
- Group discussions
- Reflective speaking tasks

Example: In a lesson on "Environmental Pollution," students may:

- Discuss pollution in their local area
- Suggest solutions in groups
- Deliver short oral presentations

This converts passive reading material into active communicative practice.

Teacher-Friendly Instructional Support (Time-Saving Design)

In Pakistani schools, teachers often face heavy workloads, large class sizes, and limited preparation time. Therefore, curriculum design should provide **ready-to-use teaching support packages** to reduce preparation burden and improve classroom implementation.

Practical Support Tools:

- Ready-made lesson plans (step-by-step speaking activities)
- Speaking prompts (e.g., "Describe your daily routine")
- Role-play scripts (doctor–patient, shopkeeper–customer)
- Assessment rubrics (fluency, vocabulary, confidence scales)
- Classroom activity banks for each unit

This ensures that even busy teachers can implement speaking activities without extensive preparation.

Simple Pronunciation Awareness: Vowel Explanation (A and O Sounds)

A major difficulty in speaking English for ESL learners is pronunciation inconsistency, especially with vowel letters such as **"a" and "o."** In English, vowels do not have fixed sounds; instead, their pronunciation changes depending on the word and surrounding letters.

For example, the letter "a" can be pronounced differently in:

- *Cat* → /æ/ (short vowel sound)
- *Cake* → /eɪ/ (long vowel sound)
- *Car* → /ɑː/ (open vowel sound)

Similarly, the letter "o" can vary in:

- *Hot* → /ɒ/ (short vowel sound)
- *Go* → /oʊ/ (long vowel sound)
- *Dog* → /ɒ/ or /ɔː/ depending on accent variation

Linguistically, these letters are called **vowel graphemes**, and they represent different **phonemes (sound units)** in speech production (Roach, 2009). Understanding this helps learners avoid pronunciation errors and improve spoken clarity.

This awareness is particularly important in ESL contexts because learners often rely on spelling-based pronunciation from their first language, which can lead to misunderstandings in communication.

Self-Directed Learning and Autonomy

Students should be encouraged to adopt simple self-learning habits:

- Daily 5-minute speaking practice
- Vocabulary journals (5–10 words daily)
- Voice recording for self-evaluation
- Peer discussion groups
- Mobile-based learning tools

According to Krashen (1985), language acquisition improves when learners receive consistent comprehensible input in low-anxiety environments combined with meaningful exposure.

Theoretical Support

This curriculum reform is grounded in key SLA theories:

- Hymes (1972): Communication requires functional language use
- Canale & Swain (1980): Speaking involves multiple competences
- Krashen (1985): Input must be comprehensible and low anxiety
- Long (1996): Interaction promotes acquisition
- Swain (1985): Output develops fluency and accuracy

An effective English curriculum in Pakistani ESL contexts should shift from exam-oriented instruction toward a structured, communicative, and teacher-friendly framework. By integrating scaffolded speaking tasks, controlled translation support, pronunciation awareness (including vowel sounds such as "a" and "o"), and ready-made instructional resources, learners can gradually develop confidence, fluency, and communicative competence. This balanced approach ensures practical implementation even in resource-constrained classrooms. This study presents key issues identified in English-speaking development among school students in Gujranwala and proposes evidence-based recommendations. The suggestions are derived from classroom observations, questionnaire responses, and interviews conducted across 20 schools.

The findings indicate that English-speaking difficulties emerge from the combined influence of linguistic environment, pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and psychological factors. Therefore, improvement requires a multi-dimensional and coordinated intervention strategy rather than isolated reforms.

Key Problems Identified

Language Environment Constraint

Students are predominantly exposed to Punjabi and Urdu in both academic and social contexts. English is largely restricted to classroom instruction, which limits naturalistic exposure and reduces opportunities for spontaneous language acquisition.

Pedagogical Limitation

Classroom teaching is still dominated by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and rote-learning practices. Communicative and interactive speaking activities are either limited or absent, which restricts the development of oral fluency.

Curriculum Mismatch

The existing curriculum is largely examination-oriented and prioritizes reading and writing skills over speaking competence. This misalignment between curriculum objectives and classroom practice weakens communicative language development.

Psychological Barriers

Students experience high levels of speaking anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes. These affective factors significantly reduce their willingness to participate in English-speaking activities.

Improvement Strategies

Classroom-Level Interventions

The recommendations are prioritized into three levels based on urgency and impact on English-speaking development:

● **High Priority**

- Curriculum reform toward communicative competence
- Reduction of exam-oriented speaking suppression

● **Medium Priority**

- Teacher training in CLT and classroom interaction
- Controlled and strategic use of code-switching

● Low Priority

- Student self-learning strategies
- Exposure to English media

Teacher Development Strategies

- Teachers play a central role in shaping classroom language practices. Therefore:
- Provide professional training in modern ESL and CLT methodologies
- Develop awareness regarding balanced and strategic code-switching

Train teachers to support shy and low-confidence learners

Strengthen classroom management skills to increase student participation

Curriculum Enhancement Strategies

- Curriculum reforms are essential to align teaching with communicative competence:
- Increase speaking-focused activities in textbooks and assessments
- Reduce dependence on memorization-based exercises
- Integrate real-life communicative tasks such as introductions, directions, and daily conversations
- Ensure alignment between curriculum objectives and classroom implementation

Learner-Centered Strategies

- Students should also be encouraged to take responsibility for language improvement:
- Promote daily English speaking practice (10–15 minutes)
- Encourage vocabulary development through reading and flashcards
- Organize classroom debates, presentations, and speaking competitions
- Increase exposure to English media such as YouTube, films, and podcasts

Educational Implications

The findings suggest a necessary shift from traditional, exam-oriented English teaching toward communicative competence development. Educational institutions should prioritize speaking skills as a core component of language learning.

Code-switching should be used strategically as a supportive instructional tool rather than as a replacement for English input and practice.

Policy Recommendations

At the policy level, the following reforms are recommended:

- Revision of curriculum to include structured speaking-based assessments
- Mandatory teacher training programs in communicative language teaching
- Reduction of classroom size to enhance interaction opportunities
- Inclusion of speaking skills in formal examination systems

Policy reforms should ensure that speaking skills are formally assessed in board examinations to create alignment between curriculum objectives and classroom practices

Future Research Directions

This study concludes that English-speaking difficulties among school students in Gujranwala result from a complex interaction among the linguistic environment, pedagogical practices, curriculum design, and psychological barriers. Improving speaking proficiency requires coordinated reforms in teaching methodology, curriculum structure, and classroom environment. A balanced approach that combines communicative teaching practices with controlled code-switching can significantly enhance students' English-speaking competence in multilingual Pakistani classrooms. This study acknowledges that English-speaking proficiency development in multilingual contexts is a gradual process influenced by both institutional structures and learner psychology. Therefore, sustainable improvement requires long-term curriculum alignment, teacher capacity-building, and increased exposure to authentic language.

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