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**Fluency Problems Faced by Students While Speaking English as a Second Language: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students of Department of English in the University of Larkano.**

**Ali Zaman Kalhoro\*<sup>1</sup>, Khalil Jibran Abbasi <sup>2</sup>, Wazir Ali Tunio <sup>3</sup>, Muhammad Yaseen <sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1</sup> Teaching Asstt., Department of English Language & Literature (DELL), University of Larkano.  
Email: [alizamankalhoro2@gmail.com](mailto:alizamankalhoro2@gmail.com)

<sup>2</sup> Asstt. Professor, Department of English Language & Literature (DELL), University of Larkano.  
Email: [khalil.jibran@uolrk.edu.pk](mailto:khalil.jibran@uolrk.edu.pk)

<sup>3</sup> Teaching Asstt., Department of English Language & Literature (DELL), The University of Larkano. Email: [wazir@uolrk.edu.pk](mailto:wazir@uolrk.edu.pk)

<sup>4</sup> Teaching Asstt., Department of English Language & Literature (DELL), University of Larkano.  
Email: [yaseenmemon143@gmail.com](mailto:yaseenmemon143@gmail.com)

Ali Zaman Kalhoro, (Corresponding Author)

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**Abstract**

The reason behind conducting this research is to inspect the core problem of fluency in English faced by university students of final year class belonging to English Language and Literature Department at The University of Larkano. Fluency in English is a crucial skill for undergraduate students, particularly those who are in English Department. However, many second-language learners struggle with fluency due to **language problem, limited speaking practice, and hesitation barriers** such as anxiety and lack of confidence. This study investigates the **fluency challenges faced by undergraduate students** at the University of Larkano, examining the factors that hinder their ability to communicate effectively in English. Through a **semi-structured interview approach**, data was collected from sixteen students, highlighting common problems such as **limited classroom interaction, insufficient institutional support, and fear of making mistakes**. Findings suggest that students require **more structured speaking activities, interactive learning environments, and greater encouragement from instructors** to improve their fluency. Because the mostly the course of conduct at the university is English Literature and Linguistic is counted as a minor Hence the recommendations are **interactive discussions, speaking environments, and real-life communication tasks** which help students overcome fluency-related problems.

**Keywords:** English fluency, Speaking difficulties, Lack of Confidence, Undergraduate students

**Introduction**

Language is structured system of communication, that allows individuals to express their thoughts, ideas and feelings. Because it fosters communication, it sustains culture, and advancement of knowledge. Language is working as a supporting tool for social and global connections. Language is not merely means of communication; it is also symbolic one (Simpson, J. (2023). It is working as verbal and non-verbal language. Hence it is important to understand and comprehend Language accurately.

English is one of the most powerful language used in the world today, it also serves as “Global Lingua Franca” by which different native speakers communicate with each other effectively. English has been proven productive in different areas like education, science, business and technology, because it is widely used language (Crystal, 2003). According to recent Statista. (2024) survey that was taken, more than 1.5 million people speak English in which both native and other speakers are included as their language English is primary or secondary.

Speaking is a process in which individual can share their ideas, thoughts, and emotions. It is type of language skill known as product skill, because through speaking individual is supposed to produce something in the form of sound. Speaking is such a way to develop relationships, exchange of ideas and knowledge, and mostly to influence others through effective speaking skills (Brown & Yule, 1983).

Fluency is capability of a person who can speak, read and write with ease and smoothly, by which communication is natural and uninterrupted. So here in fluency it does not count only speed but also accuracy, coherence, and appropriated expression in given language (Anjum et al., 2021). Those who are fluent in speaking can express their thoughts smoothly without any hesitation or too much pauses (Nation, 2007). Fluency gives access to self-certainty, comprehending social and professional connections in proper way, it enhances active conversation for people to be involved in different context (Goh & Burns, 2012).

### **Research Question**

- What are the major fluency-related problems faced by undergraduate students of English at the University of Larkano while speaking English as a second language?

### **Research Objective**

- To identify and analyze the main problems that undergraduate students face while speaking English fluently at the University of Larkano.

### **Literature Review**

Fluency in English as a second language, a considerable challenge for non-native speakers, especially for those seeking higher education. A lot of studies have examined the various factors that impact fluency, spanning linguistic, psychological, and social dimensions (Ellis, 2009). Fluency in speech transcends mere vocabulary; it is also reliant on confidence, exposure, and opportunities for practice (Goh & Burns, 2012). A significant obstacle that L2 learners encounter is the interference of their native language, particularly affecting English sentence structures, pronunciation, and cognitive processing. According to Lenneberg's (1967) Critical Period Hypothesis, individuals who begin learning a language past a certain developmental stage often struggle with fluency due to the deeply ingrained frameworks of their first language (L1). Further, research by Odlin (1989) underscores how negative language transfer emerges when students try to apply L1 grammatical rules to L2, resulting in disruptions in their fluency. In the context of Pakistan, languages such as Sindhi and Urdu possess unique phonetic and syntactic characteristics that diverge from English, thereby complicating learners' ability to achieve fluent speech (Kachru, 2005). Investigations conducted by Khan et al. (2020) indicate that many Pakistani students habitually translate their thoughts directly from their native language into English, impeding their fluency and causing increased hesitance while speaking. Fluency embodies not just a linguistic skill but also a psychological competency that calls for confidence and relevant exposure. Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis illustrates how anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-esteem can create psychological barriers, hindering fluent speech production. Moreover, social dynamics and classroom contexts

significantly influence this aspect. A study conducted by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) reveals that language anxiety constitutes a primary factor for students' reluctance to communicate in their L2, particularly in formal scenarios such as classroom presentations.

Educational institutions play a fundamental role in shaping students' fluency by providing **structured opportunities for speaking practice** (Brown, 2000). Effective language instruction must include **speaking activities, group discussions, role-playing exercises, and immersive environments** (Harmer, 2007). However, research on Pakistani universities (Khan & Mansoor, 2016) indicates that many English departments focus more on **literature and theoretical knowledge** rather than practical speaking skills, leaving students with limited exposure to real-world English conversations. A study by Nation (2013) emphasizes that **fluency development requires extensive practice** rather than passive learning. Students who engage in **real-life conversations, debates, and presentations** tend to develop stronger fluency than those who only rely on textbooks. Additionally, **teachers' proficiency in English matters significantly**, as students learn better when they are regularly exposed to fluent speakers (Lightbown & Spada, 2006).

Several strategies have been proposed to help students **enhance their English fluency**. Studies suggest that **watching English movies with subtitles, engaging in conversation with peers, practicing self-talk, and using language-learning apps** can significantly improve fluency (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Immersion in an **English-speaking environment**, even within a non-native context, helps students **think directly in English rather than translating from their L1** (Swain, 2005). Furthermore, social media and **artificial intelligence-based platforms** provide learners with opportunities to **interact with native speakers and AI tutors**, thereby **reducing speaking anxiety and improving fluency** (Godwin-Jones, 2018). Encouraging students to participate in **debates, storytelling, and public speaking** can also help build confidence and **minimize hesitation in speech** (Thornbury, 2005). Existing literature suggests that fluency problems in second language learners arise from **linguistic interference, psychological barriers, and lack of institutional support**. While some students overcome these challenges through self-motivation and practice, many require **structured guidance, interactive learning environments, and confidence-building exercises**. Universities need to **prioritize fluency-based activities** in their curriculum and create a **supportive English-speaking environment** to help students develop **natural and confident communication skills** in English.

## Methodology

Methodology to conduct this research is qualitative method, in which semi-structured interviews are being conducted through open ended questions. From undergraduate students of English, at University of Larkano. Specifically, students are selected from Department of English Language and Literature, final year students that how students deal with their learning situations. Medium of their instruction is English, mostly students are belonging from Sindhi, Seraiki, Balochi as their native language. And the researchers have collected data just for the sake of sampling. The data was collected from six students of English Language and Literature Department, **8 male and 8 female** students of final year batch.

**Population of Study:** The population of this study was the undergraduate students of English in University of Larkano, Pakistan. The main aim to select the population from University of Larkano was that it is newly established University in the area of Larkano. Where students are learning English from English Department but unfortunately they are unable to speak English fluently. So, in that case, the researchers have conducted this study to find out the root causes of fluency problems at university level in the University of Larkano.

**Sample:** The Researchers have collected data from English Department, University of Larkano, Sindh, Pakistan. Because it is quite near to researcher and the researcher is working in that university as a Teaching Assistant in the Department of English Language and Literature, that's why data was collected easily from namely University.

### **Instruments used**

The only instrument taken in this study was;

- **Semi-structured interviews:** The researchers have conducted semi-structured interviews for collecting data from the participants. Because it was easy to interact with students of that university and that was quite easy availability.

### **Data Collection**

The researcher collected data through semi-structured interviews conducted from 16 students, both male and female equally, of The University of Larkano belonging to the Department of English Language and Literature in which researcher selected only final year students of that department.

### **Data Analysis**

The researchers have asked different five semi-structured interview questions, where he received different responses. From given 16 students from Department of English Language and Literature at The University of Larkano.

**Different situations where students fell struggle to express fluently while speaking English:**  
**Table-01**

<b>Fluency Problems</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Participants Responses</b>
Struggles with vocabulary, grammar, and sentence formation	5 students	Students mentioned difficulty in forming correct sentences and using appropriate vocabulary while speaking.
Lack of fluency during presentations due to social criticism and low confidence	7 students	Students shared that they feel anxious, lose words, and struggle to maintain fluency when presenting in front of classmates and teachers.
Never faced fluency issues due to prior preparation	4 students	These students credited their fluency to early practice, self-study, and strong interest in English before joining university.

The researcher conducted a study involving sixteen final-year students from the Department of English Language and Literature at The University of Larkano. Among these participants, two students reported that their limited vocabulary and underdeveloped speaking skills significantly hindered their ability to communicate effectively. They attributed their challenges primarily to a lack of sufficient grammatical knowledge.

In addition, five students expressed that they encountered considerable difficulties when tasked with delivering presentations. They found it particularly challenging to speak English fluently on assigned topics and often struggled to maintain coherence in their thoughts. For these students, presenting in English became more and more intimidating, exacerbated by social stigma and low self-confidence. Some even admitted that as they endeavored to express their ideas, they often felt unsure of the words coming out of their mouths or the next words being spoken. The scenario was compounded by discontent from peers that took a toll on their confidence levels.

Conversely, five students reported that they had not faced such challenges in speaking English. When asked why, they attributed their abilities to hard work and practice before now, during their time studying at a university. They strongly felt that these early experiences supported their confidence and their capacity to use English in everyday situations.

One student shared about her twelfth-grade teacher calling on her to present impromptu. She was unable to express herself freely in that moment, which stuck with her and illustrated the struggle of speaking off the cuff.

Meanwhile, three students noted that their challenges primarily emerged when speaking in front of larger audiences, instructors, or native speakers. They found these situations particularly intimidating, which often led to feelings of nervousness and hesitation in their speech.

### **Native language influences English speaking fluency:**

**Table-02**

<b>Native Language Influence</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Participants Responses</b>
Pronunciation issues due to native language phonetics	7 students	Students reported difficulty in correctly pronouncing English words because of interference from Sindhi, Urdu, or Balochi phonetics.
Translates thoughts from native language to English, slowing fluency	5 students	These students think in Sindhi first, then translate into English, leading to hesitation and pauses.
No significant influence of native language on fluency	4 students	These students felt their native language does not affect their ability to speak English fluently.

The participants in this study primarily spoke Sindhi, Urdu, Brohi, Balochi, and Siraiki. Their answers revealed multiple influences of their native languages on their English proficiency. Two of the students in particular said they were used to the way subjects and modifiers are structured in connections between ideas and sentences and that in many different ways Sindhi is much different than English. This leads to them often not knowing how to line the words up from their spoken English, therefore causing them to have problems with the order of words together to make sentences -- making it difficult for them to make a sentence. Three participants mentioned that the languages they speak natively allow them to better comprehend written material. They said that when they have trouble understanding English, they can go back to their mother tongue for interpretation and explanation.

For example, one student explained how they organized a program on polio awareness and when they used their own language, they were able to reach out to a crowd which wouldn't have understood English. At the other end of this policy and practice spectrum, two students stated that their native languages help them with fluency in English. They noticed how, they unconsciously started speaking English with a Sindhi accent. One more participant elaborated that the translation from Sindhi to English, in turn, was an obstacle to their fluency as they would translate first and then would speak the sentence, moreover the translation would take time and sometimes even lead to faulty grammar. The other two students also mentioned the negative effect of their tendency to think in Sindhi before translating it into English on their fluency. Their ticket also explained how different sentence structures, pronunciations and word choices created difficulties for them, making their spoken English more awkward. The phonetic rules of Sindhi relate to Sindhi words

but the same may not be true for English, adding to the challenge of pronouncing certain words correctly, said one of the students.

In another example, two students claimed that their first language has no influence in their fluency of spoken English. One of them argued that there is no strait relation in between Sindhi and English and the other one claimed that his proficiency of English comes from getting practice and not from any language. In a similar vein, one of the other participants discussed how their language learning experience was influenced by living in a multilingual context.

Sindhi was their mother tongue; English a language they had adopted but had long since become second nature for them. They felt that the use of both languages together in real-time had a positive impact on their proficiency. Specifically, two students described difficulties with achieving correct English phonetics to account for the differences in the rules of dialect and pronunciation of Sindhi. One of them emphasized was the challenge of pronouncing English words while incorporating aspects of their native language. Conversing in English was essential for some other student too, who accepted that not having practice sometimes forced her to subconsciously use words instead of English, leading to interruption in fluency.

#### Teaching instructions at TUOL to Prepare Fluent:

**Table-03**

University's Role in Fluency Development	No. of Students	Participants Responses
University lacks fluency-focused activities; more interactive sessions needed	3 students	Students felt that fluency development is not a major focus, and more practice sessions are required.
University provides opportunities but personal effort matters	5 students	These students acknowledged that UOL provides resources, but fluency depends on individual effort.
Already fluent before joining UOL; university strengthened their fluency further	8 students	Students credited UOL for helping refine their skills but mentioned they were already comfortable speaking English.

Opinions varied regarding how the **University of Larkano (UOL)** has contributed to students **English fluency**. Some students believed that fluency is primarily a **personal effort**, while others acknowledged the university's role in their language development. One student strongly believed that **fluency depends on individual dedication and hard work**, rather than institutional support. They felt that UOL faculty members themselves needed to **improve their fluency**, as not all English department teachers spoke as fluently as expected. Similarly, another student agreed that, **except for a few teachers**, most faculty members **lacked fluency**. In contrast, **three students** acknowledged that UOL had encouraged them to **speak English fluently**, making them aware that they were **learners of the target language**. One of them emphasized that they practiced English daily because of their training at UOL. Another student, who already had strong English fluency before joining UOL, mentioned that being part of the **English Language and Literature department** pushed them to **engage with materials** that further strengthened their fluency. However, **two students** expressed that while the university had helped them understand **grammar and vocabulary**, they still lacked sufficient **speaking practice in class**. One of them suggested that **more group discussions and interactive activities** would be beneficial in developing fluency. Another student simply stated that they **had never experienced significant improvement** in their speaking abilities at UOL. Diverse perspectives continued among the students.

An even bigger picture emerged: one student rejected the idea that their fluency had anything to do with their time at the university at all, while another student still agreed in part, explaining how their academic journey at UOL further developed their understanding of English but not necessarily the fluency of speech. On the other hand, two students valued the requirement of practice with presentations imposed on students, even though they struggled with speaking English fluently, as the students mentioned. But a fellow student chimed in, saying while UOL focused on the literature, the fiction, and the poetry, it did not pay attention to grammar and it showed in their conversational fluency. More students gave further insights into what had helped them improve. Another student attributed their fluency to reading novels, to writing poetry in English, and to giving a lot of presentations. Another student commended UOL for its heavy emphasis on presentations and speaking, adding that the English language tuition helped them develop more confidence and fluency than they ever had.

### **Speaking Fluency outside of Classroom:**

**Table-04**

<b>Fluency Improvement Strategies</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Participants Responses</b>
Watching English movies, reading books, listening to podcasts	4 students	Students find exposure to media effective in improving fluency.
Practicing with peers, speaking in front of a mirror, using social apps	6 students	Interactive strategies like self-practice and engaging in conversations were preferred by most students.
No specific strategies used; fluency developed naturally	6 students	These students mentioned that fluency improved with time and exposure rather than through specific methods.

A number of students commented on different ways to speak English better such as watching movies and reading foreign books and talking to others in real life. The role of media: Two students spoke about how their exposure to media in English has helped with their learning. Regularly watching movies in English, reading books, and talking on calls in English make them feel confident in speaking. Three students pointed out that they practice with friends and family. They try to listen to news in English, read some books, and write their reviews, also in English. They flagged that fluency can be improved by different means, such as watching series with subtitles, speaking in English whenever possible, etc. Another two students found a helpful online resource for speaking. Another said they had improved a lot by practicing with native speakers online. The other student stated that subscribing to movies with subtitles was especially helpful to their vocabulary and their English pronunciation.

Another two students were also focused on pronunciation and phonetics. One involves listening to native speakers and/or practicing in front of a mirror to observe how sounds are produced. Another student practices using a very systematic approach with a lot of listening, listening to fun exercises, and then speaking regularly. One student highlighted the need for regular reading and speaking practice, while another observed that vocabulary and everyday life outside of class are also big factors that help with fluency. For example, one student thought that social applications using artificial intelligence have helped it easier to practice spoken English in real time. These apps also served as an excellent exposure to the language since they gave immediate feedback. Another student, though, opted for a more immersive experience. They watch podcasts, speak to themselves, think in English, and practice in real-life experiences to achieve fluency levels. Finally, one students wrote that they are not sure of themselves and that if they are doing something

wrong they do not dare to practice. They shared that English is not regularly spoken in their culture, so finding avenues for practice outside of class is difficult.

#### **Resources or Support from Instructor or Institutions:**

**Table-05**

<b>Institutional Support Needed</b>	<b>No. of Students</b>	<b>Participants Responses</b>
More speaking activities, discussion forums, and interactive sessions	5 students	Students suggested that regular English-speaking activities would boost confidence.
No need for additional support; fluency depends on personal effort	4 students	These students believed that individual practice matters more than institutional resources.
Increased instructor support, feedback, and English-only environment	7 students	These students felt that teachers should communicate more in English and encourage students to do the same.

The students expressed that to overcome fluency difficulties in English, there must be supports and resources in place, with a role for both instructors and institutions to continue to aid in language development. Two learners stressed the importance of more speaking activities, more language sessions, and more teacher practice. They thought conducting events in English would boost confidence of the students in Speaking English.

Three students suggested that it would be helpful if discussions were held in English only. Reading extensively must be promoted by institutions, as pointed out by one of them, and other student referred to feedback, on-line material and interactive speaking sessions being useful tools for fluency improvement. Additionally, two of our students feel it is important to have a supportive, knowledgeable instructor in any course. As stated by them, the right guidance from a good tutor will give a confidence boost to anyone. They also emphasized that instructors should communicate in the target language and that native language was to be discouraged. Two other students took it a step farther, calling for English to be the lingua franca of the entire university. Another pair of students said the first priority in schools should be making English compulsory. They thought that uninterrupted reading, rule-based grammar feedback from the teachers, and repeated speaking practice would go a long way in addressing fluency problem.

One more student said that watching English movies, novels, presentations, and some activities help in improving fluency a lot when it involves English communication as a whole. Another student offered a reflective example, saying, "I was able to find supporting colleagues, and delivering lectures through Zoom has allowed me to improve my spoken English." Institutional Changes Two students homed in on the need for institutional changes. They suggested that universities need introduce an English-speaking policy, have separate classes for those who need speak better English, and make sure undergraduate students converse English to enhance their fluency. Ultimately, one student stated that practicing English and following the instructor's suggestions was a key factor in resolving fluency issues and another ten leaned towards the idea of ongoing practice sessions as being the most important component in developing spoken English skills.

#### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the **fluency challenges** faced by undergraduate English students at the University of Larkano. Mostly students are related **limited vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, lack of speaking practice, and hesitation barriers such as fear of criticism** were identified as



key problem of fluency. Many students also experience **native language as problem**, which slows down their capability to construct sentences naturally in English. While some students have developed fluency through self-practice, others students struggle due to **insufficient speaking opportunities and institutional support**, being a part of English department it does not quality that they are fluent in English reason behind was that they have purely syllabus of English Literature. Those who encounter the self-practice they indirectly criticize the untrained Teachers who are teaching. Along with they suggested for teachers to be interactive during academic hours and speaking in English must be mandatory for class times and after.

### Recommendations

To overcome English fluency problem among undergraduate students, it is better to add structured speaking activities throughout the environment of the University. University should contribute for organizing such interactive debate competition where students can get opportunities to present themselves as fluent speaker. Additionally, instructors should give first priority to English speaking during academic hours, and create such environment for student where they feel free to speak with them and their friends even though they can make mistakes while learning. In the environment of University students must be insisted to read and reading awareness session must be conducted to boost their speaking fluency. Additionally, it is highly recommended to deliver lecture more on visual representation, like on projectors rather than on oral communication. Which is really traditional and not integrative technique to conduct classes. Students should be aware that English is not just for your syllabus or exams. It really powerful tool, it should be communicated in academic and social setting too. English language should not be bound to just to academic specially where it is counted as second language. By applying these strategies students can speak English fluently.

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