

Difficulties with English-language Content Acquisition for Undergraduates

Niaz Ali ¹Mazhar Ali ²

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Abstract: *The difficulties of teaching English material at the undergraduate level are examined in this paper. The emphasis is on the challenges that students have when attempting to navigate academic courses, especially in those areas where English is not their first language. The study explores how language limitations affect students' ability to understand, express themselves, and succeed academically overall. The article focuses on important difficulties such as limited vocabulary, low skill, and difficulty understanding complicated concepts presented in English. The article explores how these difficulties affect students' educational experiences, highlighting the necessity of focused interventions and linguistic assistance initiatives. In addition, it looks at possible differences in students' language skills and offers solutions to close these gaps, creating a more welcoming learning atmosphere. This study adds to the current conversation on language education and how it helps undergraduate students transfer knowledge in an efficient manner. The article's goal is to educate educators, administrators, and legislators on the value of establishing linguistically accessible learning environments in order to improve the academic performance of different student populations. To accomplish this, it identifies and addresses various learning problems.*

Keywords: ELT, Syllabus, Ability, Knowledge, Education

Introduction

Language is essential to the formation of the educational environment since it serves as a communication and informational channel. English frequently acts as the lingua franca, bridging disparate academic groups in the international realm of higher education. However, when English becomes the standard language of instruction in universities across the globe, a serious issue comes to light: undergraduate students' difficulty understanding content taught in a language that may not be their first language.

The article explores the complex difficulties underlying the challenge of undergraduate English topic learning. English language competency is becoming more and more necessary in today's academic environment, regardless of the student's native language. This linguistic change raises a number of issues that affect students' understanding, expression, and general academic performance, even though it is intended to support globalization and create a common platform for intellectual engagement.

The inconsistent level of English competence among undergraduate students is one of the main topics covered. There can be large differences in language proficiency between people who are fluent in the language and people who are learning the nuances of academic English as a second language. Due to these variations in language proficiency, learners come in a wide range, all of them struggling to learn and express themselves in a language that they may not be native speakers of.

¹ Lecturer, Department of Education, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

² MS (English), PST Teacher, Education Department, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Correspondence to Niaz Ali, Lecturer, Department of Education, Shaheed Benazir Bhutto University, Sheringal, Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Email: niazyoufazai@sbbu.edu.pk

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Limitations in vocabulary are another significant obstacle. Specialized vocabulary and intricate ideas are frequently introduced in the academic setting, necessitating a sophisticated command of language. Building a large academic vocabulary becomes a challenging endeavour for students whose first language is not English, which affects their ability to participate actively in class and impedes their academic advancement. (Afzal, 2019)

The article also discusses the significant difficulties students encounter in understanding difficult material when it is taught in English. Academic fields have their own specialized vocabulary and complex structures. On top of that, learning this material in a language other than one's mother tongue might make it more difficult for learners to understand basic ideas. This problem is made even more difficult in fields like philosophy, physics, and law, where language complexity is guaranteed.

These linguistic difficulties have consequences outside of the classroom as well. Language-impaired learners may find it difficult to articulate their ideas clearly in written assignments and spoken presentations. Academic achievement depends on effective communication, and students who find it difficult to express their thoughts may suffer from low self-esteem and have a more difficult time learning as a whole. (Ferris & Tagg, 1996)

The purpose of this research is to critically analyze how language hurdles affect undergraduate students' academic journeys, highlighting the importance of specialized interventions and language support programs. The study takes into account the socio-cultural aspects of language, taking into account the fact that students come to the classroom with a variety of linguistic experiences and backgrounds. Teachers and administrators may establish inclusive learning environments that meet the different linguistic requirements of children by developing solutions based on their understanding of the complex interactions between language and learning. Ma (2017)

The upcoming sections will examine topics like cultural differences, linguistic variety, and the role of educators in reducing these difficulties in greater detail. These sections will also go deeper into the subtleties of language obstacles faced by college students. The paper will also look at effective interventions and best practices used by universities to improve language inclusion, which will eventually help all undergraduate students have a more fair and fulfilling educational experience.

Research Question

1. What are the primary linguistic challenges faced by undergraduate learners in the English language teaching process, particularly in terms of comprehension and expression?
2. How do cultural and socio-economic factors contribute to the difficulties encountered by undergraduate students in English language learning, and what impact do these factors have on the teaching process?
3. What strategies and interventions are most effective in addressing the identified problems faced by learners in English language teaching at the undergraduate level, and how do these interventions contribute to improved language acquisition and academic performance?

Literature Review

The literature reveals a comprehensive understanding of the challenges posed by language proficiency in the academic context. As universities increasingly adopt English as the medium of instruction, scholars have explored the multifaceted nature of difficulties encountered by undergraduate learners.

One recurrent theme in the literature centres around the variable proficiency levels among students. (Shohamy, 2012) highlight that the adoption of English as the language of instruction often assumes a certain level of language competence among students, creating a significant gap for those who may not possess the necessary

proficiency. This gap can manifest in issues related to reading comprehension, verbal expression, and overall academic engagement.

Vocabulary limitations emerge as a prominent concern, as identified by studies such as Alqahtani (2015). The specialized lexicon inherent in academic disciplines poses a challenge for students whose first language is not English. These learners face hurdles in comprehending course materials, leading to a potential disconnect between the intended curriculum and their understanding of the subject matter.

Furthermore, the literature emphasizes the impact of linguistic challenges on students' academic performance. Research by Liang and Fung (2021) reveals that language-related difficulties can impede cognitive processes, affecting critical thinking and analytical skills. The academic writing of non-native English speakers is a particular focus, with studies by Lin and Morrison (2021) illustrating the struggles students face in expressing complex ideas coherently.

Cultural and socio-economic factors are explored in the work of Byrd (2016), who argues that students from diverse linguistic backgrounds bring unique cultural perspectives to the learning environment. However, these differences can pose challenges in terms of understanding and assimilating into the academic discourse, creating a need for culturally responsive teaching practices.

The studies also delve into pedagogical strategies and interventions aimed at mitigating the identified challenges. Approaches such as task-based language teaching (Ellis, 2021) and language support programs (Murray, 2010) have been explored for their effectiveness in enhancing language acquisition and academic success. These interventions underscore the importance of a proactive and inclusive approach to language instruction.

Additionally, the role of educators in addressing language-related issues is a focal point in the literature. Borg (2006) argues for the need to investigate ways in which a teacher's characteristics are perceived in a specific context and suggests that in preparation for different contexts, language teachers and teacher trainers should be made aware of these expectations. In addition, Professional development programs for educators have been proposed as essential in equipping instructors with the tools to navigate the complexities of teaching in a linguistically diverse classroom (Segura, 2016).

In conclusion, the literature review provides a comprehensive overview of the challenges faced by undergraduate learners in the English language teaching process. It illuminates the multifaceted nature of language-related difficulties, explores the impact on academic performance, and offers insights into pedagogical strategies and educator roles in addressing these challenges. This body of work sets the stage for the current study, which aims to contribute further insights into effective interventions and practices for enhancing language inclusivity at the undergraduate level.

Methodology (Data Collection and Analysis)

The research methodology employed in investigating the "Problem of Learning Contents through English at the Undergraduate Level" is designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by students in language learning and to identify effective strategies for addressing these challenges. The methodology encompasses both qualitative and quantitative approaches, offering a nuanced perspective on the multifaceted nature of language-related difficulties.

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to triangulate data and draw robust conclusions. The qualitative strand focuses on in-depth interviews with undergraduate students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, educators,

and administrators. Meanwhile, the quantitative strand involves a survey distributed to a representative sample of undergraduate students across various disciplines.

Participants

The participants in the qualitative phase will be purposefully selected to represent a diverse range of linguistic backgrounds, academic disciplines, and proficiency levels in English. In the quantitative phase, a stratified random sampling technique will be employed to ensure a balanced representation across different departments and language proficiency levels.

Data Collection

- **In-depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 100 undergraduate students. The interviews explored personal experiences, challenges faced, and perceptions regarding language learning in an English-medium environment.
- **Survey:** A structured survey instrument was distributed to a sample of 100 undergraduate students. The survey will include questions related to language proficiency, perceived challenges in learning content in English, and awareness of available language support programs.

Data Analysis:

The survey data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the participants' demographic characteristics, language proficiency levels, and perceived challenges.

Rigor and Validity

Member checking, where participants review and verify the accuracy of their statements, will be employed to enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative data. Additionally, inter-rater reliability will be established through independent coding and analysis by two researchers.

This study adhered to ethical guidelines, ensuring the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Informed consent will be obtained from all participants, and they will have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without repercussion.

In summary, the methodology employed in this research aims to provide a comprehensive and rigorous investigation into the challenges faced by undergraduate students in learning content through English. The combination of qualitative and quantitative data will offer a holistic understanding of language-related difficulties and contribute valuable insights into effective strategies for promoting language inclusivity at the undergraduate level.

For the research population's collected replies, numerical values were employed. The participant data is shown as follows:

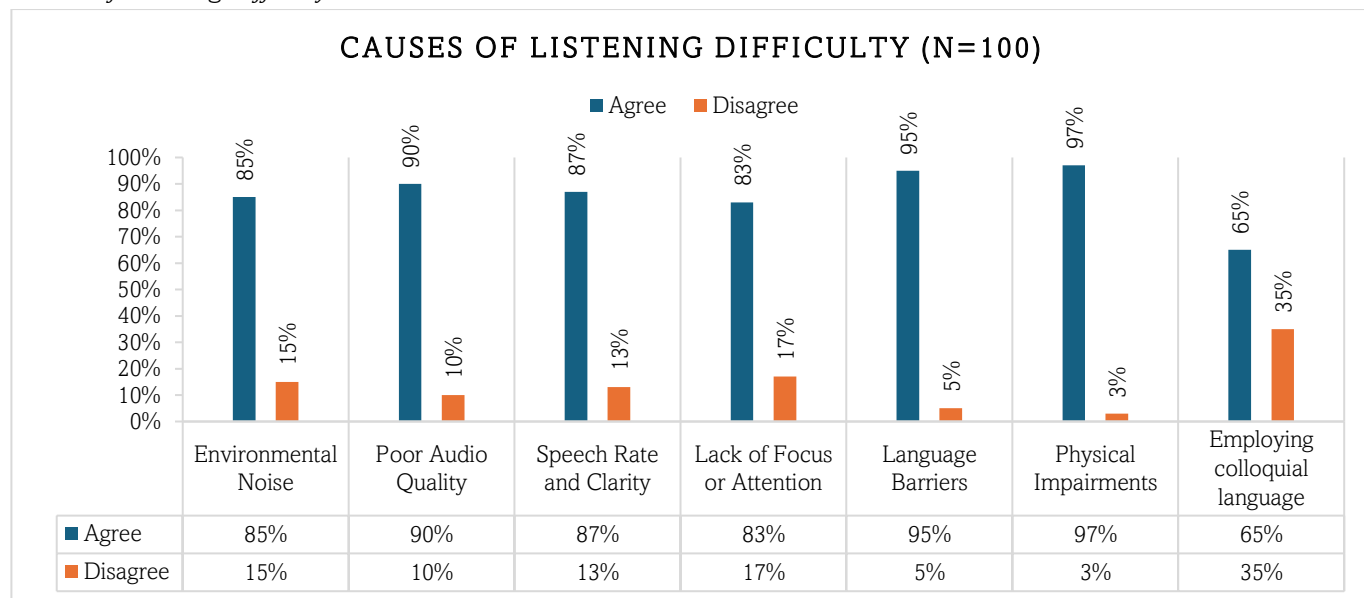
Table 1

Causes of Listening Difficulty (N=100)

Causes	Agree	Disagree
Environmental Noise	85%	15%
Poor Audio Quality	90%	10%
Speech Rate and Clarity	87%	13%
Lack of Focus or Attention	83%	17%
Language Barriers	95%	5%

Physical Impairments	97%	3%
Employing colloquial language	65%	35%

Figure 1
Causes of Listening Difficulty

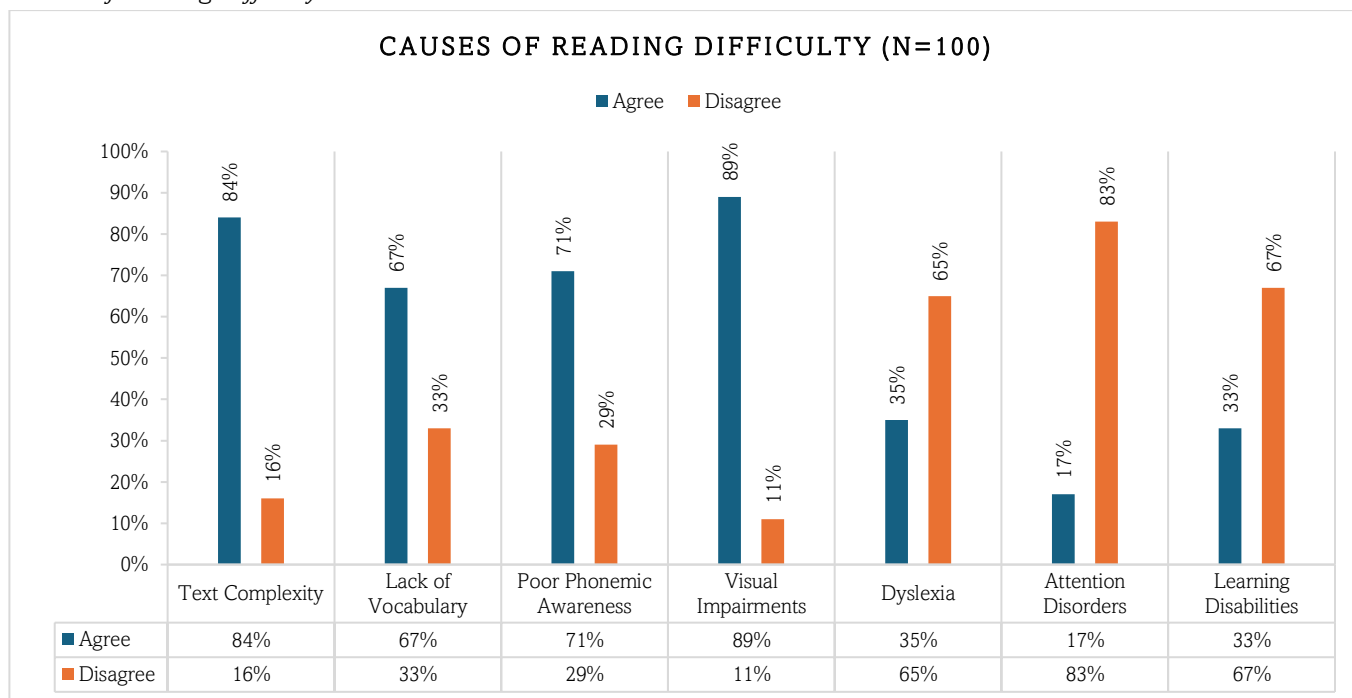


15% of students disagreed with the 80% of students who felt that the "environmental sound" around them made listening impairment more difficult. 10% disagreed with the statement made by 90% of the students, who said that "poor audio quality" also hinders their ability to listen. 87% of students agreed that "Speech Rate and Clarity" contributes to listening difficulties, whereas 13% disagreed. 83% of the students agreed that "Lack of Focus or Attention" impairs one's capacity for listening, while just 17% disagreed. 95% of respondents, compared to 5%, said that "Language Barriers" also make listening harder. 97% of them said that "Physical Impairments" had a significant role in their hearing issue, whilst 2% disagreed. 35% of the learners disagree, with 65% of them believing that "Using colloquial language in real life situations" is the main reason for their inability to listen well.

Table 2
Causes of Reading Difficulty (N=100)

Causes	Agree	Disagree
Text Complexity	84%	16%
Lack of Vocabulary	67%	33%
Poor Phonemic Awareness	71%	29%
Visual Impairments	89%	11%
Dyslexia	35%	65%
Attention Disorders	17%	83%
Learning Disabilities	33%	67%
Environmental Distractions	22%	78%

Figure 2
Causes of Reading Difficulty

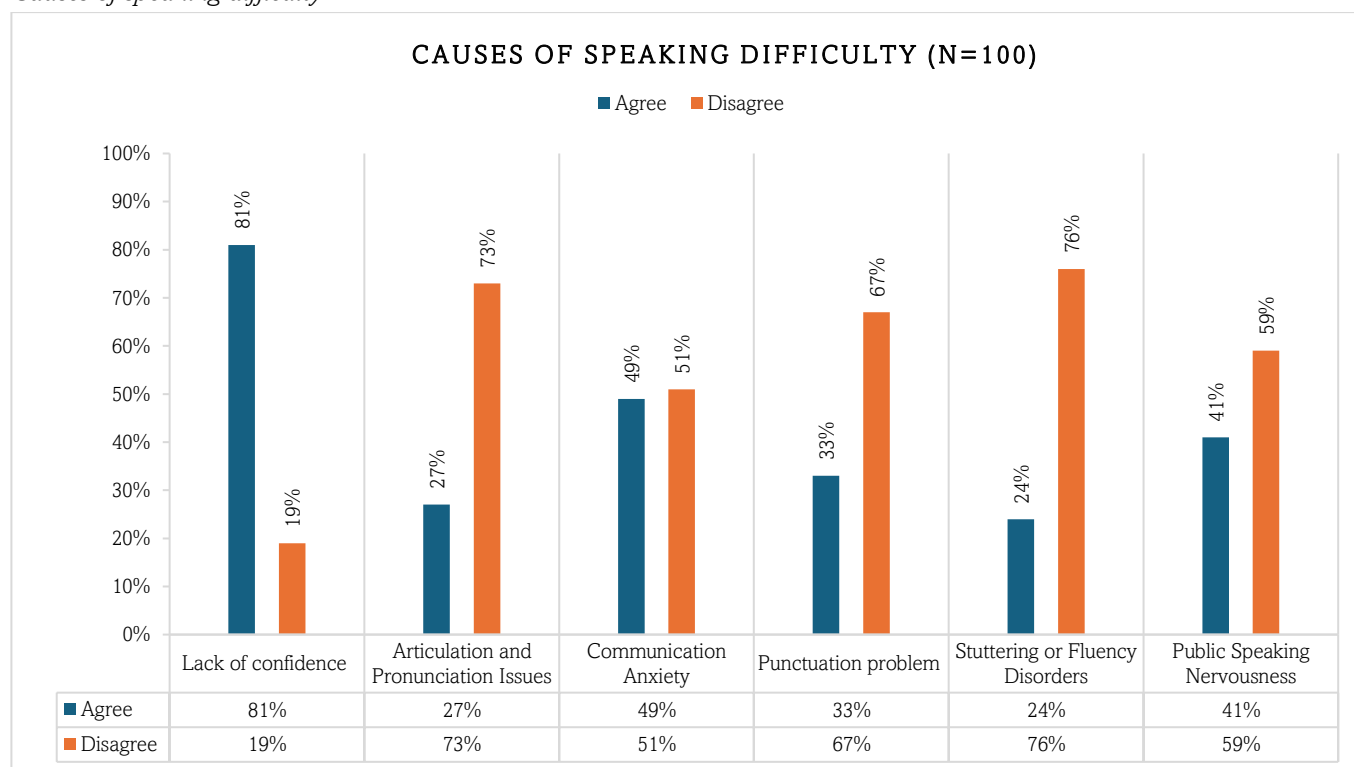


84% of students agreed with the first question's premise that "text complexity" causes reading difficulties, while just sixteen per cent disagreed. While 33% of students disagreed, 67% of students felt that "Lack of Vocabulary" also makes it difficult for them to read. While 29% of learners disagreed, 71% of them said that they had difficulties as a result of "Poor Phonemic Awareness." While 11% of students held a different opinion, 89% of students believed that "Visual Impairments" also contribute to reading impairment. 35% of students shared the belief that having "Dyslexia" makes it harder for them to read, whereas 65% of students disagreed with this notion. While 83% of students disagreed, 17% of them said that "Attention Disorders" also play a role in reading comprehension issues. While 67% disagreed, 33% believed that "Learning Disabilities" also contribute to reading impairment. While 78% disagreed, 22% of respondents said that "Environmental Distractions" also contributed to reading comprehension issues.

Table 3
Causes of speaking difficulty (N=100)

Causes	Agree	Disagree
Lack of confidence	81%	19%
Articulation and Pronunciation Issues	27%	73%
Communication Anxiety	49%	51%
Punctuation problem	33%	67%
Stuttering or Fluency Disorders	24%	76%
Public Speaking Nervousness	41%	59%

Figure 3
Causes of speaking difficulty

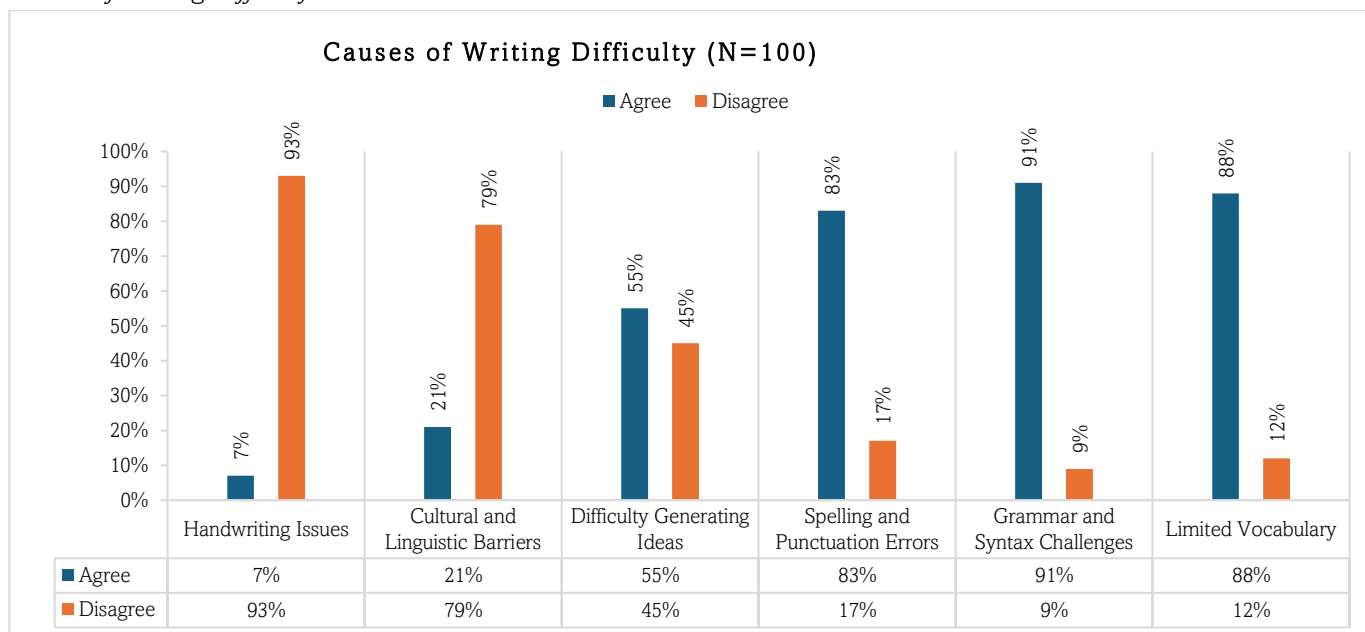


In response to the questions in the table above, 81% of students said that their lack of confidence prevents them from expressing themselves, whereas just 19% of people do not have this issue. 73% of students disagreed with the common statement that difficulties with pronunciation and articulation add to the hindrance, while 27% of students agreed with it. While 51% did not experience this issue, 49% of respondents stated that they have trouble speaking in English due to communication anxiety. While 67% disagreed, 33% agreed that punctuation errors also contribute to speech difficulties. 76% of students disagreed with the notion that stuttering or fluency disorders prevent people from speaking confidently or fluently. Only 24% of students agreed with this statement. While 59% disagreed, 41% of respondents said that public speaking anxiety is another factor contributing to the issue.

Table 4
Causes of Writing Difficulty (N=100)

Causes	Agree	Disagree
Handwriting Issues	7%	93%
Cultural and Linguistic Barriers	21%	79%
Difficulty Generating Ideas	55%	45%
Spelling and Punctuation Errors	83%	17%
Grammar and Syntax Challenges	91%	9%
Limited Vocabulary	88%	12%
Time Management in Writing	39%	61%
Environmental Distractions	25%	75%
Lack of Confidence in Writing Abilities	86%	14%

Figure 4
Causes of Writing Difficulty



93% of students thought differently than the 7% who said they couldn't write because of problems with their handwriting. While 79% disagreed, 21% of respondents said that cultural and linguistic barriers play a significant role in their writing issues. Owing to Trouble Coming Up with Ideas, 55% of students said they couldn't write, while the remaining 45% didn't agree. Additionally, 83% of students find it difficult to write due to spelling and punctuation errors, while only 17% disagree. 91% of the students believed that their lack of writing ability was caused by problems with grammar and syntax, whereas 9% disagreed. 88% of students thought they couldn't write well because of their limited vocabulary, whereas 12% thought the opposite. While 39% of the students thought the opposite, 61% of the students disagreed with the notion that time management hinders or makes writing impossible for them. According to 25% of students, environmental distractions are another aspect that makes writing more difficult, whereas 75% disagree. In a similar vein, 86% of students stated that a component is also a lack of confidence in one's writing abilities, while 14% disagreed.

Findings

Difficulty in Listening

Language Proficiency: Limited proficiency in the English language is a significant factor contributing to difficulties in listening. Learners who are not yet fully comfortable with English may struggle to understand spoken words, phrases, and nuances.

Accents and Pronunciation: Diverse accents and pronunciation variations in English can pose challenges for learners. Different regions and English speakers worldwide may have distinct ways of enunciating words and forming sounds. This diversity can make it difficult for learners to adjust to the varied accents they encounter, leading to confusion and reduced comprehension.

Speed of Speech: The natural pace at which native speakers communicate can be daunting for learners. Native speakers often speak at a faster rate, and learners may find it challenging to keep up with the speed of spoken English.

This can result in missed words or phrases, making it difficult for learners to follow and understand the overall context of the spoken language. Adjusting to the rapid pace of spoken English is a common hurdle for language learners.

Difficulty in Listening

Vocabulary Challenges: Limited vocabulary is a common obstacle for learners in reading English. When learners encounter unfamiliar words or expressions, it can impede their comprehension of the text. A lack of vocabulary also hinders their ability to grasp the subtleties and nuances embedded in written content, making the reading process more challenging.

Complex Sentence Structures: English texts often employ intricate sentence structures and syntax. Learners may struggle to decipher complex sentences, leading to difficulties in understanding the relationships between different parts of the text. Parsing intricate language constructions becomes a hurdle, impacting both reading speed and comprehension.

Cultural and Contextual Differences: Cultural and contextual disparities can pose significant challenges for learners reading English. Texts may contain references to cultural elements, historical events, or societal norms that are unfamiliar to non-native speakers. Without a solid understanding of the cultural and contextual background, learners may find it difficult to fully comprehend the intended meaning of the text. This challenge is particularly pronounced in literature, where cultural references and context often play a crucial role.

Difficulty in Speaking

Lack of Confidence: A common reason learners experience difficulty in speaking English is a lack of confidence. Fear of making mistakes, being judged, or not being able to articulate thoughts fluently can create anxiety, hindering learners from actively engaging in spoken communication. Building confidence is essential for overcoming this barrier.

Limited Speaking Opportunities: Learners may face difficulty in speaking English if they have limited opportunities to practice in real-life situations. Classroom settings often focus on written exercises or individual tasks, leaving little room for authentic spoken interactions. Lack of exposure to varied speaking contexts and conversational settings can impede the development of oral communication skills.

Vocabulary and Pronunciation Challenges: Difficulties in vocabulary selection and pronunciation can be significant hurdles for learners when speaking English. Inadequate knowledge of the appropriate words to express ideas or difficulty in pronouncing words correctly can result in communication breakdowns. Addressing these challenges requires focused efforts on expanding vocabulary and refining pronunciation skills through regular practice and feedback.

Difficulty in Writing

Limited Vocabulary and Expressive Skills: Learners often face difficulty in writing English due to a limited vocabulary and challenges in expressing their thoughts coherently. Insufficient knowledge of diverse vocabulary restricts learners from conveying ideas precisely, while difficulties in organizing thoughts and constructing clear sentences impede the overall flow and quality of their written expression.

Grammar and Syntax Issues: Grammar and syntax errors can pose significant challenges for learners in English writing. Inconsistent or incorrect use of grammar rules, improper sentence structures, and challenges in punctuation can detract from the clarity and accuracy of written work. Overcoming these issues requires a focused approach to grammar instruction and consistent practice.

Cultural and Stylistic Variances: Learners may find it challenging to meet the cultural and stylistic expectations inherent in English writing. Different cultures have distinct writing conventions, and learners must navigate these variations to produce writing that aligns with English language norms. Understanding nuances such as tone, formality, and appropriate language usage adds an extra layer of complexity for non-native English writers.

Recommendations

Enhance English Language Proficiency: Implement language proficiency programs that focus on improving overall English language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Diversify Listening Materials: Provide learners with a variety of listening materials that expose them to different accents, speech rates, and pronunciation variations. This can be achieved through a curated selection of podcasts, videos, and audio resources.

Accent Reduction Training: Offer accent reduction training to help learners adapt to diverse English accents. This can include targeted exercises and resources aimed at improving pronunciation and comprehension.

Slow-Paced Listening Exercises: Introduce slow-paced listening exercises to gradually acclimate learners to the natural speed of spoken English. This approach allows them to build confidence and develop the ability to follow faster speech over time.

Interactive Speaking Opportunities: Create interactive speaking opportunities within the classroom and beyond. Group discussions, role-playing, and language exchange programs can provide learners with real-life speaking experiences, helping them overcome the fear of speaking.

Language Immersion Activities: Facilitate language immersion activities that expose learners to authentic English-speaking environments. This could include field trips, language camps, or virtual interactions with native speakers.

Vocabulary Expansion Programs: Implement vocabulary expansion programs to address challenges related to limited word knowledge. Encourage the use of vocabulary-building apps, word games, and reading materials with glossaries.

Pronunciation Workshops: Conduct pronunciation workshops to help learners refine their pronunciation skills. Incorporate exercises that focus on challenging sounds and provide constructive feedback.

Cultural Awareness Training: Integrate cultural awareness training into language learning programs. This can help learners better understand cultural references in spoken and written English, fostering improved comprehension.

Reading Comprehension Strategies: Teach specific reading comprehension strategies, such as summarization and context analysis, to help learners navigate complex sentence structures and extract meaning from challenging texts.

Critical Thinking in Reading: Emphasize critical thinking skills in reading exercises. Encourage learners to question and analyze the cultural and contextual aspects of texts, enhancing their ability to comprehend diverse content.

Writing Workshops: Conduct writing workshops that focus on improving vocabulary, sentence structure, and overall written expression. Provide constructive feedback to guide learners in refining their writing skills.

Grammar Clinics: Organize regular grammar clinics to address grammar and syntax issues in written work. Offer targeted lessons on common grammar rules, sentence structures, and punctuation.

Peer Review Sessions: Incorporate peer review sessions into writing exercises. This collaborative approach allows learners to receive feedback from their peers, fostering a supportive environment for improvement.

Cultural Sensitivity in Writing: Integrate lessons on cultural sensitivity and stylistic expectations in English writing. Help learners understand and navigate the cultural nuances of written communication, ensuring their writing aligns with English language norms.

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