



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**The Reason for Low English Language Literacy among the Students  
of Social Sciences in Rural Colleges, of the Punjab**

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DOI [http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)1.50](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)1.50)

**PAPER INFO**

**ABSTRACT**

**Received:**

October 12, 2021

**Accepted:**

December 28, 2021

**Online:**

December 31, 2021

**Keywords:**

English Learners,  
English Literacy,  
Higher Education,  
Influencing Factors,  
Rural Colleges,

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Language is a medium to express feelings and emotions. The English language is taught to college students as a second language to uplift their English skills. The majority of the students of rural areas' colleges are weak in the English language because of unqualified teachers, lack of interest, lack of motivation, parental interest, weak English background, lack of resources, and multilingual classrooms. Social science students studying at rural area colleges perform poorly as compared to students studying at urban colleges. The current study is designed to explore the reasons for low literacy among social science students studying in rural areas of Punjab, Pakistan. In this study, we also investigated the challenges that affect the performance of rural area students in the English language. We designed qualitative and quantitative research by interviewing 36 English language teachers teaching English subjects in rural area colleges. Findings show that student is poor in English from matric class, class is multilingual, Outdated resources, Limited teachers are available, Management has not hired qualified teachers and teachers do not motivate the students. The study suggested that qualified, experienced, and trained teachers should be hired in the colleges, classes should not merge, and multimedia and digital library facilities to teachers and uncrowded classrooms.

**Introduction**

Today, the English language become one of the most important languages for communication. The English language is also used for reading, speaking, and understanding in most countries of the world. It is also used as a medium of instruction in educational institutions. Universities, as well as colleges, are focusing to implement the English language as a medium of instruction in their institutions but due to the poor background of the English language, these institutions could not implement the English language. (A. Hussain et al., 2020).

In the Pakistan context, the English language is used for different purposes by different private as well as public sector departments. The English language is one of the top foreign languages in Pakistan. The core reason for English as a foreign language is the infrequent use of the English language in daily life as well as students have no opportunity to learn the English language formally. Students of third world countries are found weak in learning English languages and their reasons have already been identified in many kinds of research. (Haidar, 2016, 2017; A. Hussain et al., 2021).

In Pakistan, to get a white-collar job, the English language plays a key role to get a job, it is the official language in many international offices operating in Pakistan even in many local offices, English language awareness is mandatory (Gurney, 2018). All government offices, courts, and private institutions use the English language for correspondence. Similarly, the English language is also used in higher education, it helps scholars to get knowledge of technology, and access local and worldwide resources (Mahboob, 2020; Tamim, 2021).

In Asian countries, a person who does not have a background in the English language is considered an uneducated person, and such individuals have no market value. Similarly, keeping in view the demand for the English language, and in the context of Pakistan that scholars who have English language capabilities can get admission, to a job in renowned institutions as compared to those students who lack proficiency in English (Manan & David, 2014).

The statistics show numerous languages are spoken in Pakistan country. Urdu is the official language of Pakistan but unfortunately, all institutions use the English language for correspondence. English language has become social status and dominated all over languages. All university students are required to learn the English language to reach information over the internet and obtain knowledge (Akram, 2020). In Pakistan, if anyone wants to get a prominent job and keep his position, the English language cannot be avoided.

The Pakistani government is day by day prioritizing its goals by motivating and signing agreements with foreign universities to train their English language teachers for the best English language training. In past, the higher education commission spent a lot of its budget on this project. At present, so many English teachers are foreign-qualified but unfortunately, most teachers are at the university level.

The research problem the study is that at present many researchers are digging into the reasons for English language learning reasons in different countries, cities, universities, schools, colleges, urban areas, and rural areas but still, no study was conducted in rural areas of Lahore, Pakistan. Therefore, the authors of the article decide to cover the undiscovered areas of this research by conducting the same study on the social science students studying in the rural areas of Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan.

Section 2 of the paper is about the literature review, the discussed the methodology in section 3 of the paper, section 4 is about the results which were obtained from the survey and these results are discussed in section 5 of the paper. Findings have been concluded in the last conclusion section of the paper.

### **Literature Review**

Pakistan is a country where people speak multiple languages and estimated 77 languages are spoken in Punjab, Pakistan. Pakistan has four provinces and these provinces are linked with each other and have their language and culture. Peoples of these provinces use English as a foreign language for study purposes and sometimes used for communication (Mbuli & Zhang, 2020). The literature review revealed that several types of research have been conducted to identify the challenges.

The Urdu language is majorly used for talking to each other and it is a symbol of national unity. The English language is taught at elite schools and colleges. The courses developed by the boards for the English language are inadequate. They teach the basics of the English language to the students and students due to many language constraints could not speak, read or write English. (Ullah et al., 2011).

It is a reality for every developing country that the English language becomes the symbol of status and it is mostly used for communication in an elite class. Although the Urdu language is the official language for correspondence, unfortunately, every government and private institution uses the English language for correspondence even the packing of every grocery item is in the English language. (Manan et al., 2016).

There are many challenges and factors to low English literacy across the world. As mentioned above, many pieces of research were conducted to find these challenges and authors observed that these challenges vary due to geographical location, and policies of the governments. During the literature review, the authors find out that the same nature of the study was conducted in Quetta, Pakistan where the authors highlighted the challenges faced by the teachers in the multilingual classroom. A study reported that multilingual, Weak Linguistic Background of the student, Anxiety among students, Syllabus, and Teacher Training is the key factors (Rasheed et al., 2017).

Poor English skills are the first and core reason for low English language literacy. There are many reasons for poor English language skills lack of standard textbooks, effective learning strategies, students are not able to understand English, reading skills are inadequate, limited vocabulary, lack of interest, less motivation, self-confidence, ineffective learning strategies, and difficulty level of English (Anwari, 2019; Rasheed et al., 2017).

The multilingual background is another reason for low English language literacy highlighted by (Rasheed et al., 2017). Pakistan is a country where students speak multiple languages in their classrooms like Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki, etc. in addition to the English language. Students feel much more comfortable speaking in their native language and the parents of the students also feel easy to communicate with their children in their mother language. In English language classes, teachers teach English in Urdu even though it is observed that in the Punjabi language.

Nelson during his Ph.D. research highlighted that Inadequate teacher training is an obstacle to achieving English language goals (Nelson, 2017). Similarly, (Zwane & Malale, 2018) proved that teacher training is a barrier to effective teaching in the classroom and also learning the English language. In Pakistan, private colleges are not offering refresher courses, and training sessions to their teachers to polish their teaching skills. Teachers just after completing their studies from college started teaching at the school level even at the college level without any experience which also become the cause of low literacy in the English language.

Another factor highlighted by the researchers is Limited Resources (Ha & Huong, 2009; Hamed & Fadhil, 2019). Without adequate resources, English language teachers are not able to deliver an effective lectures in their classrooms (Channa, 2017). In Pakistan prospect, colleges are not equipped with multimedia facilities especially the rural area colleges that have controlled resources. Colleges lack multimedia facilities which are essential for effective English language learning, and colleges are also facing a shortage of English language books in their library.

Over-capacity admissions, extensive use of the mother language, irrelevant books, and lack of teaching methodology are the core challenges faced by English language teachers (Hamed & Fadhil, 2019). The English language is very tuff to teach in over-capacity classrooms especially when sufficient resources are not available(Erkan, 2012). A limited number of teachers are available in the colleges and therefore, colleges merged English subject classes as being common subjects with other disciplines.

The syllabus is also a reason for low literacy in the English language (Rasheed et al., 2017). Colleges and universities offer very difficult books to the students for study as well as introduce lengthy course work. Students are not able to complete their coursework in due course time due to a shortage of time and try to select only important questions. Selected studies become the cause of low English language literacy, especially for students who are living in rural areas and have no approach to getting a full knowledge of the subject.

Another reason that has been identified during the literature review is the Deficiency of English teachers (Castro López, 2018; Uhrich, 1987). Non-English language teachers are being asked to teach English language classes which creates a reason for low English language. In rural areas of Punjab, most teachers are avoiding

to be posted and only the teachers of native towns stay there. It is a big issue with the management of the colleges that they do not hire qualified teachers for rural areas, and if qualified teachers are posted there, then they try to use undue influence to transfer back to the big city.

The investigation of the study shows that a Lack of Parental Interest is also a reason for low literacy in the English language (Nirana et al., 2015). The parents living in rural areas are mostly uneducated and do not take interest in the education of their children. Most parents belong to poor families and have not able to bear the expenses of the study of their children (Du Plessis & Mestry, 2019). Sometimes, students need extra coaching that is affordable to parents that's why they also do not take interest in the English language learning of their children.

Motivation is also one of the factors in low literacy among social science students living in the rural areas of Punjab. Teachers are not motivating the students to learn English. Teachers just concentrate to complete their coursework and not do personal efforts the learning English. Unfortunately, the course is also not designed in such a way that it motivates the student to read and learn it. Furthermore, it is also noticed through research material that parents are not taking an interest to motivate their children.

## **Material and Methods**

The goal of this research is to dig out the challenges to English learners and then analyze their problems. To accomplish this task, the authors perform empirical research and conducted interviews with the teachers as well as students. This study has also given recommendations to cope with these challenges. The study is focusing social science students studying in rural areas of Punjab.

## **Study Design**

To accomplish the study comprehensively, the authors designed a questionnaire based on the factors given in the literature review section of this article as well as proved variables in different same natures studies related to low literacy in the English language. English language teachers were approached through private colleges administration who are willing to cooperate with the authors to complete this study. We opted for convenient sampling techniques and selected 36 teachers (16 Female and 20 Male) for this study. These teachers are belonging to rural areas of Lahore city and teach English language subjects to intermediate and graduate classes. The details of the college teachers are given in Table 1.

Before starting the study, every teacher was briefed about the importance of this study and demonstrated to them the way to fill out the questionnaire. Thereafter, teachers were asked to fill out the questionnaire and during this process, authors

assist them if there are any queries. The second phase of this study is to conduct an interview with the teachers and record their observations, suggestions, and remarks. Every teacher cooperated with the authors and openly answered each question.

**Table 1**  
**Details of the college teachers**

<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Frequency</b>
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	20	55.56	20
Female	16	44.44	36
<b>Age</b>			
25-30 years	10	27.78	10
31-40 years	12	33.33	22
41 years and above	14	38.89	36
<b>Education</b>			
Bachelor	13	36.11	13
Master	23	63.89	36
<b>Teaching Experience</b>			
1-2 years	8	22.22	8
2-5 years	6	16.67	14
6-10 years	14	38.89	28
More than 10 years	8	22.22	36

### **Analysis of Data**

Analysis of the data is a very important and tricky phase. After conducting interviews with the teachers, students, and the classes of the teachers were also observed to validate the remarks/comments of the participants. For the reliability of each interview, we translated each interview into the English language, each remark of the participants was carefully translated and the researchers double-checked the transcript.

### **Reliability and validity of the results**

The authors maintained the reliability and validity of the data by again and again checking the transcripts of the interviews. Teachers of the colleges checked their transcripts and validate them before finalization. The authors also validated the results on the standard checklists regarding the empirical study. The statistic experts minutely checked each questionnaire and the response of the participants and in case of any deficiency in the data, it was sorted out before finalization.

### **Results and Discussion**

The results were compiled on the computer and related mathematical and

statistical formulas were applied to the data by the experts in statistics. The results are validated through statistical tools before finalization to maintain their accuracy. The results are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Challenges to English learners and their analysis**

S. No.	Variable	Sub-Variable	F	%	CF
1	Poor English skills	Student is weak in the matric class	23	63.89	23
		Not interested to learn English	5	13.89	28
		Not able to understand English	8	22.22	36
2	Multilingual	Feel easy to speak in their language	15	41.67	15
		Class is multilingual	21	58.33	36
3	Inadequate teacher training	College administration does not offer training	19	52.78	19
		Inadequate training sessions	7	19.44	26
		Refresher courses are not available	10	27.78	36
4	Limited Resources	Outdated resources	22	61.11	22
		Invalid resources	6	16.67	28
		Multimedia and Library facility is not available	8	22.22	36
5	Overcapacity admissions	Limited teachers are available	20	55.56	20
		Students enrolled more than capacity	8	22.22	28
		Merge classes	8	22.22	36
6	Syllabus	Lengthy Syllabus	18	50.00	18
		The syllabus is difficult to understand	18	50.00	36
7	Deficiency of English teachers	Management has not hired qualified teachers	21	58.33	21
		Qualified teachers do not join colleges in rural areas	15	41.67	36
8	Motivation	Teacher not motivates	18	50.00	18
		The course is not motivated	10	27.78	28
		Parents not encourage	8	22.22	36

It is observed that the English poor from matric class is found to be the highest concern and challenge of the teachers. Students enrolled at the Intermediate level at colleges and their English base is not satisfactory. Second, the limited resources (outdated resources) in the college are the main cause of the low English language literacy in the college. The college administration is not spending money to uplift the English equipment. The third major concern of the teachers is management or administration of the college not hiring skilled/qualified teachers due to their high salary demands. The fourth major concern observed during the survey is that a limited number of teachers are available that can teach the English language.

### **Poor English skills**

The core issue with college students especially social science class students is poor English language skills and it is due to matriculation in arts. It is noticed that most of the social science students have Arts subject background in matric exams that's why they are not able to perform like science subject students. The teachers stated that students are interested to learn English and can understand the basics of the English language. There may be several reasons for poor English language skills that are lack of motivation, a former English teacher was not competent, and personality factors. Teachers of the college faced poor English language skills among students in their classes that's why they work hard on the students.

### **Multilingual**

The teachers of the English language reported that due to multilingual classes, students feel comfortable delivering a lecture in the Urdu language. The course they taught is also Multilingual. The statistics show that teachers faced a lot of difficulties to handle students who are learning English as a foreign language. The students of the rural areas are habitual to speaking the native language in their classes and they feel shy to speak the English language within and outside the classrooms. Teachers stated that students faced diverse troubles due to a second language.

### **Inadequate teacher training**

Teacher training is another challenge for the department, teachers fail to get the opportunity to update their skills through departmental training or the training arranged by the private college administration. Most teachers get pedagogical skills and do not get English language training. The college administration has to offer refresher courses to their teacher at regular intervals and these courses should be mandatory for each teacher. It is an unfortunate reality that teachers who have no master's degree in the English language are teaching English classes because of he/she studied English in graduation classes. Institutions hired their services on a low salary and let them teach classes. In Pakistan, there are some English language centers that offer high-quality English language teaching skills. These colleges should develop an understanding of these institutions to get their staff trained.

### **Limited Resources**

The teachers of rural areas are unfortunately always deprived of the resources that are required for a teacher to teach English classes effectively. Without these resources, it is very hard for teachers to deliver comprehensive lessons. These resources include multimedia, computers, teaching aids, a digital library, and 3D classrooms. The authors also visited many rural area colleges where we found outdated resources. Technology is evolving day by day and the English language should be aware of the latest English language teaching skills. We also noticed that



invalid resources are lying in the colleges and the college administration has no solid excuse for this issue. Digital libraries, multimedia classrooms, laptops, multimedia projectors, and other devices should be part of English language learning.

### **Overcapacity admissions**

It is also a great concern of the faculty members of the college. They have loudly raised their voices before the authors that their classes are overcrowded. Ideally, the maximum size of the classroom should be 45 students, but in their English class, more than 90 students are enrolled and the college management just to save their income, does not split the classes into more than one section. They are not able to teach effectively to every student and even it is very hard for the teachers to check the assignments of the students effectively. Almost every teacher reported this anomaly and want the attention of the college administration.

### **Syllabus**

Almost every teacher reported that the English course at the intermediate level is very lengthy. Teachers have to teach multiple books separately and are not able to teach a complete course to the class because students' English capabilities are very weak. The college administration compelled the teachers to cover the course within three months and then revised the same course within two months. The concerned boards of intermediate and universities have to revise their course outlines in a manner that the background of the student should be considered while preparing the syllabus. Students reported that the syllabus is very tuff as compared to their previous study. The syllabus should design in such a fashion that it has problem-based learning activities, and be self-motivated.

### **Deficiency of English Teachers**

The rural area colleges are facing an acute shortage of staff in their colleges. The management of the college does not hire well-qualified teachers and experienced teachers to just save their income. Mostly, the administration posted teachers in their colleges but after a few months, qualified teachers shift their job from rural areas to the big city for their careers. College administration should offer handsome salary packages to qualified and well-experienced teachers to keep them working at college. Moreover, the participants reported to the authors that English language experienced teachers are not available in the college according to their enrolled students' capacity. In some colleges, authors also noticed that simple graduate teachers are teaching English subjects and students are much satisfied with their teaching methodology and techniques.

### **Motivation**

The last factor that contributes to low literacy is motivation. It is the

responsibility of the teachers, parents, and the college to keep motivating the students to learn about their causes. The college administration always plays a vital role in motivation. They invite motivational speakers to motivate the students, develop different competitions between students to encourage students to learn the English language, and offer prizes and different discounts. The teacher also plays a key role in motivation. Different scenarios are developed, modern learning techniques are used to motivate the students, and problem-based learning techniques are developed to motivate the students about learning of English language. The statistics of the results given in Table 2 clearly state that the majority of the teachers voted in the favour of motivation. Unfortunately, the syllabus the students are not motivational, traditional topics are offered to learn, stereotype learning techniques are used to teach traditional topics and students look no charm to learn the English language. Teachers are not highlighting the importance of English language learning. Parents of the students should motivate their children to learn the English language for their bright future.

### **Discussion**

Pakistan is a third-world country and it is very hard for the college to equip themselves like developed countries. During this study, detailed interviews were conducted with the teachers, college administrations, and students as well. To make this study more appropriate, the opinions of the English language experts were also taken into consideration. Although we tried our level best to identify and include the most relevant reasons during the interview, we found other reasons as well.

During the discussion with all the participants, we observed that students of the social sciences who belong to rural areas have less English vocabulary as compared to science subject students. The core reason behind this problem is that most social science students completed their matric in Arts. The limited range of English vocabulary creates difficulty for the students in reading, writing, and speaking English. Students of social science subjects are facing great trouble in understanding the text of English books.

The influence of the mother language was also noticed during the conversations with the participants. Students showed great interest in reading their textbooks in the Urdu Language. Some authors wrote textbooks in Urdu language and these books are famous among students. Students easily read books written in the Urdu language and they stated that they can easily understand the meanings of the topic.

Another factor that was brought into the knowledge of the authors is that different levels of English language students are mixed up. Few students have a good level of English and they easily attempt English-related questions in class whereas, on the other hand, the students who belong to the Urdu medium of instruction feel

guilty in the class. Some students are informed that they do not take the class because they have no English background.

Class size is one of the big issues for the teacher. Teachers informed the authors that they cannot pay attention to all the students in the class. Private colleges due to their revenue problem, mixed science and art classes together just to save income. It is very hard for every teacher to check and identify each mistake of the student during tests. Participants also informed that they spent most of their time taking classes and very they got very few minutes checking weak tests of the students. The college administration is required to reduce the overcapacity class size to maintain the quality of education.

The Socio-Economic Status of the learners also plays a vital role in the learning of English as a foreign language. In rural areas, the families of the students are not rich and they are not able to buy supplementary materials and extra coaching charges. The majority of the students after their college hours work with their parents to grow their family business. Students are not able to pay their full attention to their studies as they should pay.

Tuition is also a factor in the low literacy of English language students. Every student has developed their mind that if he/she could not get tuition, he/she will fail the exam. Here some college teachers cover English courses in 2 to 3 months but in college, these same teachers do not complete their courses in a 6-month academic session. Students also informed that some English language teachers have a negative attitude toward weak students.

## **Conclusion**

The main goals of this research are to identify the reasons for the low literacy of the English language among the social science students studying in the rural area colleges of Punjab, Pakistan. This study identified many major factors that cause poor English language. During the literature review, the authors identified many factors but selected the most important and most relevant to rural areas. This study also suggested how to overcome these reasons.

The subject of Pak studies is compulsory for the students of intermediate and graduation levels in Punjab. They are also required to study the English language. They have been provided an option to select English or Urdu language to attempt the paper on Pak studies. But 99.95% of students adopted the Urdu language instead of the English language in rural areas due to the factors mentioned in the present research paper. The situation can be improved by providing competent teachers equipped with communication techniques and making the size of the classroom small consisting of only 40 students so that they can do language activities in the classroom. They must be encouraged to opt for the English language to attempt the

paper of social sciences so that their English language may be improved due to the clear concept of social studies in their mind.

The colleges should build more spacy classrooms to cater to the overcapacity classrooms problem or at least enroll students according to their seating capacity. Teachers who have no master's degree in English subject should not be hired in the college to teach English subjects. Parents are required to financially and morally support their children to learn the English language. The colleges should conduct pre-service training before handing over the class to the teacher. Multimedia and laptop facilities may be provided to the English teachers to prepare slides and visual effects. Refresher courses should organize in the college after regular intervals. The duration of the English period must be at least 45 min. The English language teacher should teach a maximum limit period in college. English teachers should motivate students before and after class. The teacher should equip themselves with the latest training. Problem-Based Learning techniques may be applied in the class. Students must be encouraged to speak the English language during and after class with their class fellows and family members. Inter Board Committee of Pakistan should revise the curriculum in light of the background of the students and their learning needs for higher classes.

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