Learners' Perception Regarding the Role of Native-like English Language Proficiency in a Pakistani Academic Setting

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Abstract

Students learning any foreign language must develop listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and become proficient in the use of that language. In Pakistan, English is a language that is highly used in educational institutions as well as professionally. This research has been carried out by quantitative method approach. This research carries two objectives. Firstly, to explore the Pakistani student's perception regarding the role of native English proficiency in their Academic setting. Secondly, to statistically analyze the variation in perception regarding the role of native-like English language proficiency in an Academic setting. The data has been collected from a university from university students. The exact number of participants from which the questionnaire has been taken is 30 students from 3 different departments of the university. This research comes with the result that participants generally agreed that good handwriting, fast writing speed, and use of technical words in papers all have a positive impact on their marks in exams. However, they did not agree as strongly that the use of difficult vocabulary increases their marks in exams. This research is beneficial for the students that how they can get native-like English language proficiency. This research is also good for the teachers because this gives them an understanding of designing syllabi for the students.

Keywords: English language proficiency, Pakistani students, Academic performance, English language teaching, English speaking

1. Introduction

English has significant importance in Pakistan. Although English is Pakistan's second language, it is as important as Urdu, the country's lingua franca and national language. English is prevalent in Pakistan in official government and military papers. For instance, in Pakistan, the syllabus books and papers are all written in English. Students who want to pursue education in other countries must be able to communicate and understand English in order to excel in their particular subjects.

Perception plays a crucial role in learning English as a second language. Learners' perception of English can influence their motivation, attitude, and learning strategies, which in turn can affect their language proficiency and success in using English. A positive perception of English can motivate learners to learn the language and improve their proficiency. For instance, learners who perceive English as a global language or a language of opportunity may be more motivated to learn it and invest more time and effort in language-learning activities. On the other hand, negative perceptions of English, such as perceiving it as a difficult or irrelevant language, can demotivate learners and hinder their progress in language learning. Perception also affects learners' attitudes toward English and their learning strategies. A positive perception of English can lead to a more positive attitude toward the language and a preference for communicative and interactive learning strategies. Conversely, a negative perception of English can result in a negative attitude toward the language and a preference for more passive learning strategies, such as memorization and translation.

According to one of its harsher detractors, Grammar Translation was the product of German academics, whose objective was Grammar. When learning a language through translation, one first thoroughly examines the grammatical rules of the target language before applying what they have learned to the process of translating sentences and texts into and out of the target language. Hence, it sees learning a language as little more than memorization of rules and phrases.

1.1 Problem Statement

As is the case, the use of English language comes with its benefits for learners, yet their perceptions regarding achieving native-like proficiency falls far from learning English as a skill set. Their perceptions are important to be highlighted in order to comprehend their interests and priorities, which may affect their attitude towards learning English. Particularly in an ESL country like Pakistan where most of the curriculum has been designed in English, it is significant to know how university students view the value of English language proficiency in their academic environment and whether or not they associate this skill set as contributing to their academic success.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore Pakistani students 'perceptions regarding the role of the English language in their academic success. İn particular, this study focuses on exploring their perceptions regarding the two basic productive skills; Speaking and Writing.

1.3 Objectives

The objectives of this research are:

- To explore Pakistani student's perceptions regarding the role of native-like English language proficiency in their academic setting.

- To statistically analyze the variation in perceptions regarding the role of native-like English language proficiency in an academic setting.

1.4 Research Questions

- To what extent do students perceive English writing proficiency as a contributing factor to their academic success?
- To what extent do students perceive English speaking proficiency as a contributing factor to their academic success?

1.5 Limitations

This research is performed by using quantitative research methods (questionnaire and Likert scale). This research only deals with the academic level of university students, not with local people, and is limited to the perceptions of English language proficiency by Pakistani Students.

1.6 Délimitations

Although more research has been done in this area but due to limited time this research only focuses on the perception of Pakistani university students regarding the role of native English language proficiency in their academic level. Due to limited time, this research only takes data from 30 students from 3 departments.

1.7 Significance

This study would help students learn how to speak English like native speakers. This research is also beneficial to teachers because it provides them with an understanding of how to create a syllabus for their students. This study also looks at how students perceive English as a second language. This is also beneficial to learners because it emphasizes the impact of bilingualism or multilingualism on how they perceive the English language in their academic setting.

2. Literature Review

The English language is widely recognized as a global communication linking the peoples of different continents for trade, commerce, and education, etc. Vency Ramganesh (2013). The universities of the developed nations have constituted a more diverse research culture, contributing to the progress of a knowledge-based economy by utilizing the scholarly results in different fields of life than the universities of the developing countries, showing feeble research culture, Salazar Clemeña and Almonte-Acosta, (2007). The writing was largely used as a convention for capturing speech and strengthening grammatical and lexical aspects of language, according to professionals in the field of teaching second languages barely 50 years ago. The distinctiveness of writing as a skill with distinct characteristics and traditions is now clear to us. Create English graphemes and orthographic patterns. Create writing at a speed that is effective for the intended audience. Create a workable vocabulary and apply proper wording conventions. Employ proper grammatical systems, patterns, and norms, such as those relating to tense, agreement, and pluralization. Use several grammatical forms to convey a specific idea. In written conversation, use coordinating devices. Make use of written discourse's rhetorical etiquette. Fulfill the communicative purposes of written texts appropriately, considering both forms.

Speaking is the result of the speaker's creative language construction; they decide on vocabulary, structure, and discourse. The smallest linguistic elements, such as phonemes, morphemes, words, collocations, and phrasal units, are referred to as "micro-skills." The speaker's attention to the bigger picture is implied by the macro skills, which include coherence, nonverbal communication, fluency, discourse, function, style, and strategic options.

English has attracted significant attention for more specialized pedagogical methodologies and techniques because it is a more widely used international language for business and higher education. Britain has made amazing progress by customizing and designing English for Academic Purposes on modern lines. The prerequisite for promoting and extending research work in Pakistani universities is to improve English language fluency, particularly academic writing skills at the postgraduate level.

The majority of postgraduates don't appear to have any writing skills, especially the academic writing abilities needed to support research activity in Pakistan, so it is observed that traditional English language courses based on general English cannot meet the needs of university students for research writing. As a result, a critical pragmatic approach to developing the academic English language can improve novice writers' writing proficiency for academic discourse and critical thinking about the rules. In most academic writing, analysis, and evaluation are more important than providing a straightforward account because writing critically is a requirement for higher education.

Research is necessary to determine the level of English proficiency and potential value added by aspiring teachers at the entrance and graduation levels. Interestingly, there was no study to show that prospective teachers' spoken English skills were at the entry-level or graduate level. The study aims to close the existing research gap. The study attempted to examine the English-speaking proficiency of Pakistani potential teachers at the entry and graduate levels. After that, research is going to offer more proof of the significance of English-speaking abilities throughout teacher training. The study's findings may be useful to administrators and teacher educators in their work to help aspiring teachers become more fluent English speakers. The evidence could be applied to enhance admission standards, curricula, and instruction. As stated earlier speaking skills are given the most weightage out of all the four skills. Rao (2019) asserts that there are multiple methods to teach language and skills such as task-based teaching, learner-centered teaching, communicative approach, cognitive and metacognitive strategies, etc. Teachers should provide learners with opportunities to learn and practice speaking, discuss with them, and evaluate their progress with formal and informal assessments. The teacher's role, here, can be a facilitator, advisor, and provider of necessary information. The need for time is to understand the student's psyche, their problems, incompetency they face. Teachers need to

be cooperative with learners to remove the root cause behind ineffective presentations. Extra guidance, material notes, and classroom practice sessions are essential.

The process of learning a second language is similar to that of learning a first language: Preproduction (the learner only listens), early production (they can use short language chunks), speech emergence (they try to start short conversations with friends), intermediate fluency, and advanced fluency (the students are nearly-native in their ability). The best method for learning a spoken language is to converse in the target language about other languages. However, in Pakistan, aside from external limitations, instructors do not develop adequate spoken English competency during teacher education programs. To provide and assess oral English effectively, teacher education programs must be strengthened. Students are inspired to practice and develop their English-speaking abilities when oral assessments are used. The professionals in Pakistan are having trouble despite all these advantages.

Inadequate training, a lack of public confidence in oral evaluation, and problems with test validity are the main causes of this scenario. In Pakistan, teachers lack the required training to administer oral exams. Either the teachers don't want to assess oral skills or they don't believe their tests are reliable. The problem is made more difficult by the general lack of confidence in oral examinations. The ability to make meaningful inferences from test results, also known as validity, has been deemed the most crucial aspect of a test. Tests of spoken skills must ensure seven test criteria, including validity, interactivity, impact, practicality, and absence of bias. These qualities are similar to those required for other types of tests.

The interest in learning English as a second language has grown daily, according to Paik (2008). In addition to the importance and requirements of English in the modern world, it is also believed that having a strong background in English language proficiency helps participants enter advanced educational institutions and gives them greater employment chances. Better education and work prospects are known benefits of speaking English.

Several educational approaches that promote language acquisition may play diverse roles in the development of the English language. Patil (2006) claimed that practitioners and academics have issues concerning the instructing of English, all things considered, to not only deliver the information regarding the subjects to the kids but also to build up their abilities in perusing, creating, and fluently speaking.

3. Research Methodology

This research is analytical and exploratory owing to its purpose, which is, to know the Pakistani student's perceptions regarding English language proficiency in their academic settings. This research has been conducted on Pakistani students by using a structured/ close-ended questionnaire as its main tool for data collection. The results have been analysed by using statistical tools for data analysis.

3.1 Research Type

This research has quantitatively examined Pakistani students 'perception regarding English language proficiency in their Academic settings and explored the methods to learn the language.

3.2 Sample Type

The sample type of this research is the responses gathered from students by using a close-ended questionnaire. These responses depict what they think about the role of English language in their academic setting.

3.3 Sampling technique

This research has opted for stratified random sampling as it serves relevance to the type of research work at hand. This sampling technique has a high probability of achieving a representative sample following a data driven approach. All members of the population groups had equal chances of selection from their relevant departments and have independently given their responses.

3.4 Sampling Criteria

The sample for this research has been taken from university students aging between 18 and 23 years. The basic purpose of this study is to know the perceptions of university students regarding the role of native-like English. So, results are collected from students of a certain age.

3.5 Sample Size

The exact number of participants from which the questionnaire responses have been gathered is 30 students; 10 each from 3 different departments of the university. The number of samples taken in this research is usually considered as a theoretically standard size.

3.6 Tool for Data Collection

The tool used for this research is a close-ended questionnaire in which the questions are structured and responses would be determined. Close-ended questionnaires are used because according to Cohen (2007), it is one of the most reliable ways to gather data and is easy to interpret later.

> "Structured, closed questions are useful because they generate response frequencies that can be statistically treated and analyzed. They also allow for comparisons across groups in the sample (Oppenheim, 1992, p. 115). They are easier to code and analyze than word-based data (Bailey, 1994, p. 118), and they are frequently more direct and focused than open-ended questions." (p. 321)

In general, closed questions are quick to complete and straightforward to code, and do not discriminate unduly based on how articulate respondents are (Wilson & McLean, 1994, p. 21). A 5-point Likert scale has been used to find out the range of responses in this research. A type of psychometric response scale in which responders specify their level of agreement to a statement typically in five points: (1) Strongly Disagree; (2) Disagree; (3) Neutral; (4) Agree; (5) Strongly Agree.

3.7 Tool for Data Analysis

This research quantitatively analyzed the data given by the students of the university about their perception of the English language in academic success by using SPSS.

4. Data Analysis and Discussion

The close-ended questionnaire used for this study generated multiple responses from 30 different participants. These results are shared below:

Table 1. Number of Responses Per Statement

Sr. No.	Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Good handwriting increases my marks in the exam.	3	7	10	2	8
2	Fast writing speed increases my marks in the exam.	0	3	6	12	9
3	The use of difficult vocabulary increases my marks in the exam.	5	6	7	4	8
4	The use of technical words on paper increases my marks.	2	8	7	10	3
5	Writing essays in good English helps me increase my marks.	1	0	7	13	9
6	The use of defined words to deliver concepts on paper helps me to increase my marks.	2	0	5	15	8
7	The use of conveying links through words in the paper helps me increase my marks.	0	1	11	16	2
8	Knowing the difference between the literal and implied meaning when writing paper increase marks.	0	4	14	9	3
9	The use of proper pronunciation during presentations helps me increase my marks.	0	3	2	15	10
10	The use of reduced forms of words and phrases in class discussions helps me convey my ideas.	0	5	6	16	3
11	Using an accent like English people when giving a presentation helps me increase my marks.	0	7	8	10	5
12	English fluency when giving presentations helps me increase my marks.	0	2	10	14	4
13	Knowing how to emphasize a particular word when giving an idea in class discussion develops a good impression.	0	2	7	13	8
14	The use of gestures when giving a presentation helps me to emphasize my idea.	0	2	3	19	6
15	Knowing how to give a concept by using different words during the class discussion helps me.	0	3	6	9	12
16	The use of appropriate communication skills when giving the presentation helps me increase my marks.	1	0	3	14	12

To have a deeper understanding of the data and to find patterns, a one-sample t-test was applied, the results of which have been discussed below:

Table 2. One-Sample Statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error Mean
Good handwriting increases my marks on the exam	5	6.00	3.391	1.517
Fast writing speed increases my marks in the exam.	5	6.00	4.743	2.121
The use of difficult vocabulary increases my marks in the exam.	5	6.00	1.581	.707
The use of technical words on paper increases my marks.	5	6.00	3.391	1.517
Writing essays in good English helps me increase my marks.	5	6.00	5.477	2.449
The use of defined words to deliver concepts on paper helps me to increase my marks	5	6.00	5.874	2.627
The use of conveying links through words in the paper helps me increase my marks.	5	6.00	7.106	3.178
Knowing the difference between the literal and implied meaning when writing paper increase marks.	5	6.00	5.523	2.470
The use of proper pronunciation during presentations helps me	5	6.00	6.285	2.811

increase my marks.				
The use of reduced forms of words and phrases in class discussions helps me convey my ideas.	5	6.00	6.042	2.702
Using an accent like English people when giving a presentation helps me increase my marks.	5	6.00	3.808	1.703
English fluency when giving presentation helps me increases	5	6.00	5.831	2.608
Knowing how to emphasize a particular word when giving the idea in class discussion develops the good impression	5	6.00	5.148	2.302
The use of gestures when giving a presentation helps me to emphasize my idea.	5	6.00	7.583	3.391
Knowing how to give a concept by using different words during the class discussion helps me.	5	6.00	4.743	2.121
The use of appropriate communication skills when giving the presentation helps me increase my marks.	5	6.00	6.519	2.915

The given data shows the mean and standard deviation of the self-reported belief of a group of 30 individuals on how various factors influence their exam marks. All the means are equal to 6.00, indicating that the group believes that each of the listed factors has an equal impact on their exam marks. The standard deviation ranges from 1.581 to 7.583, indicating that there is a range of variability in the group's beliefs about the impact of the factors on their exam marks.

Table 3. One-Sample Test

	Test Value = .05					
					95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Lower	Upper
Good handwriting increases my marks on the exam.	3.923	4	.017	5.950	1.74	10.16
Fast writing speed increases my marks in the exam.	2.805	4	.049	5.950	.06	11.84
The use of difficult vocabulary increases my marks in the exam.	8.415	4	.001	5.950	3.99	7.91
The use of technical words on paper increases my marks.	3.923	4	.017	5.950	1.74	10.16
Writing essays in good English helps me increase my marks.	2.429	4	.072	5.950	-.85	12.75
The use of defined words to deliver concepts on paper helps me to increase my marks	2.265	4	.086	5.950	-1.34	13.24
The use of conveying links through words in the paper helps me increase my marks.	1.872	4	.134	5.950	-2.87	14.77
Knowing the difference between the literal and implied meaning when writing paper increase marks.	2.409	4	.074	5.950	-.91	12.81
The use of proper pronunciation during presentations helps me increase my marks.	2.117	4	.102	5.950	-1.85	13.75
The use of reduced forms of words and phrases in class discussions helps me convey my ideas.	2.202	4	.092	5.950	-1.55	13.45
Using an accent like English people when giving a presentation helps me increase my marks.	3.494	4	.025	5.950	1.22	10.68
English fluency when giving presentation helps me increases	2.282	4	.085	5.950	-1.29	13.19
Knowing how to emphasize a particular word when giving the idea in class discussion develops the good impression	2.585	4	.061	5.950	-.44	12.34
The use of gestures when giving a presentation helps me to emphasize my idea.	1.755	4	.154	5.950	-3.47	15.37
Knowing how to give a concept by using different words during the class discussion helps me.	2.805	4	.049	5.950	.06	11.84

The use of appropriate communication skills when giving the presentation helps me increase my marks.	2.041	4	.111	5.950	-2.14	14.04

This data is from a one-sample t-test, where the null hypothesis is that the mean difference between the independent variable (good handwriting, fast writing speed, use of difficult vocabulary, etc.) and the dependent variable (marks in the exam) is 0. The alternate hypothesis is that the mean difference is not 0.

The "Sig. (2-tailed)" column shows the p-value for each variable, which represents the level of significance. If the p-value is less than .05, it is considered statistically significant and the null hypothesis is rejected, meaning that there is a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable.

In this data, some of the variables have a significant p-value, meaning that they have a significant relationship with marks in the exam. For example, "Use of difficult vocabulary increases my marks in the exam" has a p-value of .001, which is less than .05, indicating a significant relationship. "Use of technical words in a paper increases my marks" and "Use of proper pronunciation during presentation helps me increase my marks" also have significant p-values.

However, for other variables, such as "Use of gestures when giving presentation helps me to emphasize my idea," the p-value is .154, which is greater than .05, meaning that there is not a significant relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. As is the case, significant differences may be seen in the responses taken from 30 students, thus answering both research questions.

Question No (1-8) based on the writing. Most students agreed that good handwriting increases the marks in the exam. In question 2 most students disagree with this perception regarding the grades. In question 3 responses the students mostly agreed with this perception of getting good grades in the exam. In question 4 most students agreed with this because the use of technical words in the exam increases the marks. In question 5 students disagreed because most students did not well in English to write an essay in good English. Questions 6, 7, and 8 show that students disagreed with the use of defined words, conveying links, and the difference between the literal meanings and implied meaning increases the marks in the exam. High values of standard deviation prove that there is a lot of variation in these responses.

Question No (9-16) based on the speaking. Responses getting from the students regarding the English language mostly show high standard values. It means that most students disagreed with the use of English in speaking because in Pakistan English is used as a second language and the high education is mostly based on the English language due to the Lingua franca English is an international language. In question 14, the high value of standard deviation shows that the use of gestures using the presentation did not effective for the students because some students does not understand the meaning of gestures. There is a gap in the research that gestures are very important while presenting something. However, the conclusion is that most students agreed in the writing areas for getting good marks in the exams.

5. Conclusion

The values are the results of the Likert scale survey, where the participants were asked to rate their agreement with a statement on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being strongly disagreed and 5 being strongly agreed). The mean score for each statement shows the average level of agreement. The standard deviation measures the spread of the scores around the mean, with a low standard deviation indicating a tighter grouping of scores around the mean. Based on these results, it appears that participants generally agreed that good handwriting, fast writing speed, and the use of technical words in papers all have a positive impact on their marks in exams. However, they did not agree as strongly that the use of difficult vocabulary increases their marks in exams. It's important to keep in mind that these results are based on small size and may not be generalized to a larger population.

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