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Thinking Versus Speaking: An Analysis of English Fluency Dissociations in the Beginner Pakistani Learners

Muhammad Saad

BS English, Division of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Education, Lahore

Email: m.saad04122005@gmail.com

Laiba Javed

BS English, Division of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Education, Lahore

Email: laibajaved7272@gmail.com

Amna

BS English, Division of Arts & Social Sciences, University of Education, Lahore

Email: amnamehar0201@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the reasons behind the ability of most new English learners in Pakistan to think but not speak the language in a fluent manner. Even though they are aware of grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures, they have a problem in putting thoughts into words. The gap between the internal and external fluency (thinking and speaking) is in the scope of the study. It describes that speech begins at the mind first ideas are formed and then put into words.

Some Pakistani students have an internal understanding of the English language but fail to speak it out of hesitations, being shy, or lacking self-confidence. The study concludes that the learners do not speak with smoothness due to psychological reasons of anxiety, hesitation and fear of critical errors. Lack of practice and poor speaking conditions in schools are other issues.

The paper reveals that teaching English in Pakistan has mostly been taught on reading and writing as opposed to speaking and communication. It proposes that educators must propose students to speak English and develop their confidence. Another point that the study raises is that the concept of fluency is not merely linguistic knowledge but the psychological preparedness and emotional ease.

This study by determining the discrepancy between thought and speech can make learners and teachers comprehend why even intelligent students find it hard to speak fluently. It also suggests ways of enhancing speaking ability with practicing, building of confidence and interaction in the classrooms. In general, the study will help to make the English learning more practical, communicative, and oriented to the real-life fluency.

Keywords: Internal And External Fluency, Speech Production Barriers, Psychological Factors

Introduction:

Background:

Language is the medium of communication (Pandey, 2018). It has its own vocabulary grammar and structure, but learning a language is not only memorizing the vocabulary and using correct grammar. Rather it is the development of ability to think and express



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ideas in that language. English is an international language (Crystal, 2016). It is also spoken by non-natives in many countries including Pakistan. Fluency in English is taken as speaking smooth with accurate pronunciation. But fluency begins long ago the words are spoken. It begins in minds. In learners' minds comprehension, pronunciation, grammar and linguistic planning takes place. This mental process of thinking is Internal fluency. It allows a learner to create ideas in mind. The process starts with mother language. The learner creates the idea in mother language and then converts it into English via applying the linguistic planning and rules in mind. After converting mental ideas into vocabulary, learners speak English fluently. This speaking smoothness is known as External Fluency. In Pakistan, beginner English learners face the gap between internal and external fluency.

In Pakistan, English contains dual value; it's both foreign language and Lingua Franca. It is mostly used as marker of prestige at formal meetings. Despite of learning English language since childhood, learners are still unable to speak English fluently. Although they have all the rules, vocabulary and structure in their minds but they can't speak it practically. Learners may understand English, rephrase it in their minds or think what to speak but still struggle to be fluent. It indicates that there is a gap between the internal and external fluency and thoughts can't be always converted into speech.

According to psycholinguistics, speech production includes many stages; conceptualization, formulation, articulation and monitoring (Robinson, 2011). There may be certain factors which affect the fluent speech. For beginners these factors may include lack of practice, confidence, vocabulary and appropriate knowledge. In Pakistani institutes the English learning process mainly focuses on the reading and writing skills at a basic level.

English learners of Pakistan have been focusing upon their ideas and thoughts in English language since last few years. They are able to process English language internally and tend to speak fluently, but only having the knowledge of linguistics is not enough. In order to speak English fluently certain factors must also include like hesitation, practice, vocabulary, anxiety and mentally preparation (Tavakoli & Wright, 2020). Unfortunately, the environment provided to English learners in Pakistan don't come up with the availability of these factors which results in the division of cognitive linguistics. At the end learners come up with the problem that they are unable to speak English fluently even after having appropriate knowledge and years of studying English as a compulsory subject.

Statement Of Problem:

“An analysis of English internal and external fluency gaps among beginner Pakistani learners.”

In beginner English learners of Pakistan, a gap is observed between the internal and external fluency. Many of the beginners can mentally process their thoughts in English yet struggle to express those thoughts through speech. The paradox between the ability to think in English and the inability of thoughts verbally is the main barrier which affects speakers' fluency.

Researches have mostly focused upon the sociolinguistics, computational Linguistics and applied Linguistics. For many years researchers have been focusing upon the factors which affect the effective learning of any language. These researched are limited until learner is not known of the gaps which create hurdle in his speech. The problem is mainly the gap between the fluency of English in mind and the fluency of English in speech. The learning process begins with memorizing vocabulary, structure and



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linguistic principles. Speech production is just way of controlling vocabulary traffic (Li, Lei, & He, 2018). Learner's mind thinks of a perfect structure via applying linguistic principles. After that these thoughts are to be spoken verbally and this is the point where learners struggle.

As the research is based upon psycholinguistics, there may be psychological factors which create hurdle in spoken English fluency; either lack of confidence or stage fear. Even the intellectual learners construct accurate sentences in English but they hesitate, pause or switch to their mother language. Only having the knowledge of language rarely cultivates the psychological and cognitive transition of internal thoughts to spontaneous verbal expressions.

The problem lies in exploring the gap which acts as a barrier in between their internal and external fluency. It includes the study of possible factors that create a question on the learning of beginners. These gaps may affect the production of new English speakers who know what to speak but can speak verbally. The research explores the areas of improvement so that effective and fluent speakers may emerge from Pakistan.

Objectives Of Research:

In the paper, the authors will focus on the mental and communication gaps in learning English. It concludes that there is a gap between what beginner Pakistani students think and what they are able to say, which is produced by certain interior factors. The study is intended to:

Fill the gaps between internal and external fluency of beginner English learners of Pakistan.

Determine the ways through which learners can speak English fluently and are able to communicate with natives easily.

Suggest pedagogical strategies to cover psychological problems of learners that make them struggle to speak confidently and fluently.

Research Questions:

The research will try to answer following queries:

What are the barriers that create the gap between internal and external fluency of English language?

How a beginner Pakistani English learner can overcome these drawbacks and improve his speech production?

What are the pedagogical strategies to convert thoughts into speech confidently and fluently?

Significance Of Study:

The research is of great importance as it includes the real challenges faced by beginner English learners in Pakistan. Many learners are able to process their thoughts in English but can't speak it practically. This gap affects their speech production and speaking skills. By identifying the gap behind this gap, the research can help teachers and learners understand the mental and psychological barriers that stop fluent speech. It also proves that language learning is not only about grammar and vocabulary but it also includes the psychological factors like confidence and mental readiness.

The research is helpful for learners and teachers as well. It helps them to modify their teaching methods to focus on speaking and thinking skills. The teaching method in Pakistan mostly focuses upon the reading and writing skills, ignoring the speaking aspect. There is a need for a balanced approach for both internal and external fluency. This study will help learners to improve their speaking skills, and teachers will adopt strategies to build up confidence and speech production. In this way the study will be a source of better communication in real life.



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The research is more valuable for beginner Pakistan English learners. As English is not the native language in Pakistan and learners have to learn it as a second language because English is now a lingua franca. This study will definitely help Pakistan learners to understand their own learning process. Many students blame themselves for being not fluent even when they have good understanding of English language. No doubt lack of practice is also one of the barriers but the process of speech production also includes psychological and cognitive factors. After getting this point the learners will be motivated and focus on their exposure to English speaking situations. The study will also make them independent of translating every context into their native language first.

Finally, this research will contribute to the psycholinguistics and will enhance English learning process for Pakistani beginners. It will provide a new perspective on how internal and external fluency are important in language learning. It also aims to change the learning methodology and introduce more practical and speaking oriented English learning programs. The study can serve as a base for future research on fluency and cognitive learning strategies.

Delimitation:

The research is limited to beginner Pakistani English learners who have basic knowledge of grammar, vocabulary and structure. The study does not include language experts because they are fluent in language and don't face the issue in speech production. Natives are also excluded as English is their mother language and everybody is expert in mother language. The main focus is to observe the gap between internal and external fluency at early stages of language learning.

The study only covers Pakistan as different countries have their own mother languages. English is an international language and learners learn it all across the world. Learners from different countries, having different mother languages face different issues in learning process. This research is based only upon the speech production barriers of learners of only Pakistan. It also limits its scope to formal educational institutes, where English is taught as a second language. The research does not cover learners who have acquired English naturally through immersion or extended exposure in native environments.

Moreover, the study focuses upon the psycholinguistic and cognitive aspects of fluency. Sociolinguistics, phonological errors or computational linguistic dimensions are not covered in the research. The study primarily explores psychological barriers such as hesitation, anxiety, lack of confidence and practice.

The observations are based upon a small community of beginner English learners within Pakistan. However, this delimitation ensures an in-depth study of the problem of the learners facing same issues in speaking English.

Review of Related Literature:

Learning language is the most complex yet interesting process of communication. Other than it also includes the ability to express thoughts fluently. A fluent speaker can speak without hesitation, long pauses and can express his thoughts clearly. Kane (2017) explains that fluency is the automatic processing of language at a point where learners don't need to think word by word. This smoothness in speech shows that the internal thoughts and the vocabulary of the speaker are connected.

Language is not only mechanical process as it includes both mental and physical interaction (Lugrin et al., 2021b). Beginner English learners first process their language in their minds and then try to express it verbally. Tavakoli and Wright (2020) state that



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true fluency begins with cognitive readiness. It is the ability to organize thoughts internally before they are spoken. According to psycholinguistics speech production has several stages; conceptualization, formulation, articulation and monitoring (Robinson, 2011). These stages show that how thinking is directly linked with speaking. If any of these is missing, it may break fluency.

There can be two main types of fluency; Internal Fluency and External fluency. Internal fluency can be stated as process of organizing thoughts in minds (Guendouzi et al., 2023). On the other hand, External fluency is taken as the ability to express those thoughts verbally. Learners often can't link their external fluency with their internal fluency which means they can have ideas in English but are unable to express them smoothly. They struggle in speech production. According to Li, Lei, and He (2018), speech production is like controlling traffic; thoughts move in the mind and must be directed into words quickly and accurately. When this traffic is blocked due to hesitation or anxiety, speech becomes slow and less fluent.

In the context of second language acquisition, several factors affect the fluency gap. Learners' environment, confidence and exposure affect their speech production. Comprehensible input and low anxiety are necessary for natural fluency development. Learners who understand language well internally still need confidence and practice to speak externally. Anxiety and lack of confidence are barriers to spoken fluency ("Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Education and Technology (ICETECH 2023)," 2024). These emotional factors limit a learner's ability to turn thoughts into speech.

In Pakistan, English is both a foreign language and a symbol of prestige. It is taught as a compulsory subject from early grades but still learners fail to speak fluently. Many institutions focus on reading and writing rather than speaking and listening. This results in learners who can understand English mentally but struggle to communicate in real life situations. Research shows that Pakistani students often think in their mother language first and then translate into English, which slows down their speech. This translation habit takes time and creates gap between internal and external fluency.

The process of thinking and speaking in a second language involves high cognitive load. Learners must plan sentences, recall vocabulary and maintain grammar accuracy. When cognitive processing is overloaded, hesitation, pauses and speech errors appear. For beginner learners, these difficulties are even stronger because their internal processing is not yet automatic. Pakistani learners, face pressure due to environments that discourage mistakes or active speaking.

Language anxiety has been recognized as one of the key psychological barriers in second language speaking. He (2018) first identified "foreign language anxiety" as a specific type of performance fear that affects speaking ability. Learners who are anxious tend to speak less, pause more, and switch to their native language. Pakistani university students often feel nervous when speaking English publicly, which reduces their fluency. Confidence and emotional comfort are therefore essential to bridge the gap between internal knowledge and external performance.

Another major factor is the lack of exposure and practice opportunities. Many Pakistani learners have limited chances to use English in daily life outside classrooms (Preece, 2016). English remains a formal or academic language rather than a language of social interaction. This lack of real communication practice prevents internal knowledge from becoming automatic, which is necessary for fluent speech. The environment therefore plays a central role in developing fluency.

Recent studies have also emphasized that teaching methods need to focus more on



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communicative competence rather than just grammatical accuracy. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and task-based learning encourage learners to speak more and think less about rules while communicating. These methods help students link internal processing with external expression. Fluency develops best when learners are given meaningful speaking opportunities, not only grammar exercises.

In short, the gap between internal and external fluency is not caused by lack of knowledge but by lack of practice, confidence, and mental readiness. Pakistani learners may know the rules, but they struggle to use them in real time. This shows that language learning is both a mental and emotional process. Understanding the cognitive and psychological barriers can help teachers design better strategies to build learners' confidence and encourage spontaneous speaking.

Therefore, this research focuses on the psycholinguistic and psychological aspects of fluency among beginner Pakistani learners. It aims to explore how internal thought processes can be effectively transformed into external speech. By studying this relationship, the research seeks to identify the factors that prevent learners from speaking fluently despite having linguistic competence. The review of literature thus supports the idea that language learning requires balance between thinking and speaking — between what the mind knows and what the mouth says.

Methodology:

The research follows a mixed-method approach combining both qualitative and quantitative methods. It aims to explore the fluency gap between internal (thinking) and external (speaking) English fluency among beginner Pakistani learners. The study focuses on analyzing psychological and linguistic factors that act a barrier in speech production. The method includes multiple choice questions, Yes/No questions, rating scales and one open ended short question. Researcher also took interviews of learners who can at least give their introduction in English language. The population includes beginner English learners studying in Pakistani colleges and universities. The learners who are enrolled in English Language or communication courses are also included. The students who can understand English very well but can't speak were focused.

A sample of 50 beginner learners is selected from various institutes especially in Lahore. As Lahore is the capital and there is a diversity of students from all over Pakistan. The participants are chosen based on their level of English proficiency. Ones who were identified as beginners, can understand basic English but face challenges in speaking fluently. The standard was set that the person who can at least introduce himself in English was eligible for sampling.

Two instruments are used for data collection:

Questionnaire: To gather information about learners' background and challenges in speaking.

Random Interviews:

To observe learners' real time fluency and factors which broke fluency such as hesitation and lack of confidence

Data is collected in two steps. In the first step, questionnaires were distributed among participants to collect quantitative data. In the second step, interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data. All responses were observed randomly to get real time data.



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Data Analysis:

Quantitative Data:

Responses	Find Hard to Start a Sentence	Face Difficulty Even know Vocabulary	Can Think Faster than Speech	Loose Confidence When Someone Corrects Mistake
R1	Sometimes	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
R2	No	Agree	Neutral	Neutral
R3	Sometimes	Agree	Agree	Agree
R4	Sometimes	Agree	Agree	Neutral
R5	Sometimes	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
R6	No	Agree	Strongly Agree	Agree
R7	Yes	Neutral	Agree	Neutral
R8	No	Strongly disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
R9	No	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree
R10	No	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
R11	No	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Disagree
R12	Yes	Agree	Agree	Agree
R13	Sometimes	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Disagree
R14	Yes	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
R15	Yes	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree
R16	No	Strongly Disagree	Neutral	Strongly Disagree
R17	Sometimes	Disagree	Neutral	Disagree
R18	No	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree
R19	Yes	Strongly Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
R20	No	Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
R21	No	Agree	Strongly Agree	Strongly Disagree
R22	No	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
R23	No	Agree	Agree	Agree
R24	Yes	Agree	Agree	Disagree
R25	Sometimes	Neutral	Strongly Agree	Agree
R26	No	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
R27	No	Disagree	Agree	Disagree
R28	No	Agree	Agree	Disagree
R29	No	Agree	Strongly Agree	Neutral
R30	No	Disagree	Strongly Agree	Agree
R31	No	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree
R32	Yes	Agree	Strongly Agree	Disagree
R33	Yes	Agree	Agree	Disagree
R34	Yes	Agree	Agree	Neutral

Error Frequency:

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Lack of Practice	15	44.1 %
Afraid Of Making Mistakes	8	23.5 %

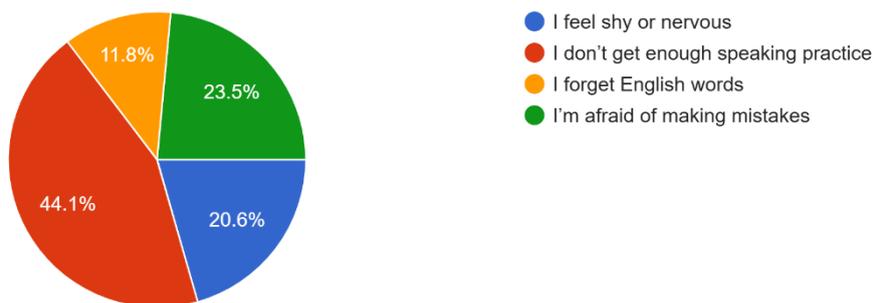


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Feel Shy or Nervous	7	20.6 %
Lack of Vocabulary	4	11.8 %

Why do you find it hard to speak English fluently?

34 responses



Analysis:

The numerical data clearly shows that there is a huge discrepancy between the internal and external English fluency in the beginners of Pakistani learners. Although students typically have sufficient internal awareness in English, i.e., the ability to think and create verbal concepts in English, they have problems expressing them because of psychological factors. These include the fear of being corrected, lack of confidence and speaking practice. The results indicate that there is no strong correlation of the vocabulary or grammatical knowledge lapse in causing the fluency gap, but instead, it is caused by the performance anxiety and lack of communication exposure. Thus, it is important to improve the speaking confidence, practice opportunities, and supportive feedback conditions of the learners so that the gap between the fluency in thinking in English and speaking it can be reduced.

Qualitative Data:

Why you can't speak English fluently as you think or imagine in your mind?

R1	Because I don't regularly speak English. A little bit speak English when I'm here in class
R2	English is our 2nd or in some cases 3rd language. So, we are not taught to think in English. When we have that, we can speak fluently.
R3	Because I feel nervous and sometimes afraid of making mistakes because I think when you make mistakes while speaking English your listeners will make fun of you and that's my big issue
R4	In my opinion I feel shy maybe I am afraid of mistakes and when sometimes I tried I take the response that "isko zyada English ati hai"
R5	Because I have no individual to which I can communicate in English
R6	My grammar is weak.
R7	sometimes I think about grammar and sometime I think about is it right that i am saying.
R8	I can't speak English fluently because in our college there is no environment of



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	speaking English.
R9	My mouth can't keep up with mind while speaking. I process English fluently and swiftly in my mind. But when I speak words come out of my mouth slower than I thought which was quick.
R10	Because I haven't spoken English from the childhood
R11	I think practice makes man perfect and we don't practice to speak English language in our daily life that's why our English is not as good as it should be.
R12	Because I am facing much difficulty to speak English in paragraph
R13	Deficiency of Vocabulary
R14	As I didn't focus on it too much as Urdu is our mother language used anywhere but English is a professional language so it's innate but I don't find difficulty in speaking English
R15	I'm afraid of making mistakes and being shameful in front of people

Analysis:

The qualitative answers shed more light on the psychological and cultural obstacles that bring about the discrepancy between the internal and external fluency of English. The majority of the participants stated that they are able to think in English but they do not speak fluently. This is because they do not practice it regularly and are not exposed to English speakers. Some learners introduced fear of errors and nervousness as one of the most significant impediments. They are afraid to make a mistake because they are afraid to be mocked and perceived by others (R3, R4, R15). Some of them said that they are preoccupied with grammar and correctness when they talk (R6, R7) and this distracts their natural flow of speech. Some respondents mentioned limited vocabulary and the lack of communication partners as well (R5, R13). Interestingly enough, one participant (R9) explained that their mouth cannot keep up with their mind, proving that there is a definite gap between the processing of information and verbal performance of it. It's exactly the fluency gap that is being studied. Taken together, these remarks point to the fact that psychological influences (fear, shyness, anxiety) and environmental constraints (a non-English context, the lack of practice) are even more likely to prevent the achievement of spoken fluency as opposed to linguistic incompetence itself.

Conclusion:

This paper examined the distinction between internal and external fluency in Pakistani English learners as beginners. The results indicated that the majority of the learners are able to think and process using the English language, but they were not able to convey the ideas in a fluent speech. The disjuncture is not caused by bad grammar and vocabulary, but by psychological and environmental impediments. The primary causes of this fluency gap are fear of errors, lack of confidence, hesitation, and the lack of speaking practice. The findings reveal that the minds of the learners are quicker than their speech. They form right sentences in their heads but have difficulties in uttering them fluently. It was acknowledged by many participants that they do not speak with confidence because of anxiety and shyness. Other people have noted that English conversation is not supported in the classroom environment. Such non-practice of real communication keeps internal fluency apart of external fluency. It is evident that the issue of fluency is not reduced to linguistic knowledge only. It also relies on the mental preparation, confidence, and constant exposure to talking. Students require an environment that is favorable and supportive in which they can talk without being judged. Instructors need to concentrate on the communicative activity, group discussion, and interactive-based learning in order



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to enhance the student's confidence and speaking. This research can be used by learners and teachers to address the actual issues behind poor spoken fluency because it involves the identification of the psychological and situational barriers. This is because it takes continuous practice, emotional encouragement and confidence building techniques to bridge the gap between thinking and speaking. When dealt with in the right manner, Pakistani learners may be able to transition into silent knowledge to verbal expression fullness to become truly an English language.

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