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## **Barriers To The Implementation Of The Direct Method In Secondary Schools: Evidence From Teachers' Perspectives**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The study explored the obstacles in the path of effective implementation of the Direct Method (DM) in English language classrooms at secondary level in the Rustam Tehsil of District Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The Direct Method has been well documented as a good way to develop communicative competence and to motivate learners, but it has not been extensively documented in terms of its practical implementation in under-resourced, examination-oriented school systems in the local literature. A quantitative descriptive design was used, from which 323 students from Grade 9 and Grade 10 from ten public secondary and higher secondary schools were selected using stratified and simple random sampling technique. The barriers related to DM instruction were captured using a structured, expert-developed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale that had good internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha  $\geq .70$ ) after pilot testing with an independent sample. The descriptive statistics indicated that barriers to DM implementation were high overall with a composite mean of 4.16 (SD = 0.71) on 5-point scale. The main obstacles were the lack of opportunities for practice outside the classroom in English ( $M = 4.22$ ), limited vocabulary ( $M = 4.19$ ), problems with participation in communicative activities in large classes ( $M = 4.16$ ), fear of speaking in front of peers ( $M = 4.13$ ) and difficulty understanding due to English-only lessons ( $M = 4.08$ ). These results suggest that even when the Direct Method has been shown to be pedagogically and motivatingly beneficial, its use is limited by a complex web of structural, linguistic and affective factors typical of under-resourced rural school environments. The barriers are discussed in relation to constructivist and socio-educational theories of language learning and finally recommendations are made for teacher training, vocabulary-enrichment activities, lessening class sizes, anxiety reducing classroom practices and extending opportunities for language practice for better implementation of the Direct Method in the secondary schools in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and similar situations.

**Keywords:** Direct Method; Implementation Barriers; English Language Teaching; Secondary Education; Communicative Language Teaching; Pakistan



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### Introduction

#### Background of the Study

English is at the heart of Pakistan's secondary education system since it is a bridge to further education, job opportunities and into a globalised world (Crystal, 2012). This has led to education institutions in the country to look into different methods of teaching English in order to increase students' proficiency in the language and keep them motivated to learn English (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). The Direct Method (DM) is one of the methods available and is defined by the use of the target language, by using oral communication rather than grammar translation, and by having meaning constructed through demonstration, question and answer exchanges, and real-world contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The Direct Method has learners actively participate in the learning process, while the Grammar-Translation Method places the learner in a passive role and the teacher in a role of transmitter of grammatical knowledge (Brown, 2014).

Numerous studies have linked the communicative and learner-centred approaches like the Direct Method with enhancing classroom involvement, oral competence, and motivation (Dakhlan & Tanucan, 2024; Hussain et al., 2010). In Pakistan in particular, research has shown that communicative teaching methods have been found to lead to the decrease of speaking anxiety and increase in learners' confidence (Ahmed & Rao, 2013), and an increase in active participation of the learners in class as compared to the traditional and teacher-centred approach (Khan & Khan, 2019). The results of these studies give theoretical and empirical justification for the continuing use of the Direct Method in secondary English classrooms.

Its adoption into actual practice, however, is seldom a simple one. The effectiveness of a method in controlled or well-resourced contexts does not necessarily carry over to classrooms in different contexts and with different structures and socio-cultural factors (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). There are a number of factors that have been found to hinder the continued application of communicative approaches in developing country settings, such as large class size, inadequate instructional materials, inadequate teacher training, and considerable differences in learners' levels of English proficiency (Khan, 2017; Nawab, 2012). So it is important to understand the nature and relative importance of these barriers: a theoretically sound method may be ineffective—or even entirely impossible to use—if it is not implemented in the classroom settings in which it is used (Littlewood, 2014).

#### Statement of the Problem

Direct Method has proved to be beneficial for students' motivation and communicative competence but there is not much empirical research that has been conducted on the obstacles faced by the secondary schools in rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to implement Direct Method. The current literature in Pakistan focuses either on the overall problems of the English language system (Rahman, 2010) or on the motivational aspects of communicative approach (Islam & Bari, 2020), but does not pinpoint the specific problems that exist in the classroom and that would impair the successful adoption of a method like DM. This is especially true in rural and public-sector schools, where limited resources, high student populations, and a culture of the examination are more likely to intersect and have an impact than in urban and private schools (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Recommendations for promotion of DM use without knowledge of these barriers are likely to be out of synch with what teachers and students in reality experience.



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### **Purpose and Research Question**

This paper presents the results of the specific hindrances in the implementation of Direct Method in Secondary school English classes in Rustam Tehsil Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It aims to answer the research question: What are the barriers in the implementation of the Direct Method at the classroom level at the secondary level? This study aims to answer this question by focusing only on the barriers dimension of a larger study of DM use and student motivation; and then looking at the barriers dimension in enough depth to come up with specific, actionable recommendations.

### **Significance the Study**

The results will guide teacher training, planning, and providing resources to improve communicative language teaching in similar school settings in rural areas like Rustam Tehsil. The results can inform classroom teachers about which barriers they are most likely to face and thus where focused PD efforts may be best targeted. The results provide school administrators and policymakers in the Elementary and Secondary Education Department with evidence to guide their decisions on class size, instructional resources, and in-service training priorities. The research adds locally relevant evidence to a literature which has tended to theorize about the obstacles to communicative methods rather than measure their salience empirically in the rural secondary school context.

### **Literature Review**

#### **The Direct Method: Principles and Rationale**

The Direct Method was developed in the late 19th century because of the grammar-translation method and is one of the most easily identifiable communicative methods in language teaching methodology (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Main principles are the use of the target language exclusively in the classroom, the vocabulary and grammar instruction is contextually-based, inductive, and not explicitly presented, use of a strong teaching methodology that relies heavily on oral interaction, question and answer sequences, and demonstration (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Nunan (2015) places the Direct Method in a wider family of communicative methods that share the belief that it is important that language should be learned through meaningful use and not through memorising isolated forms. The method has also been said to contribute to communicative competence, which is using language in a proper and effective way in real situations, through sustained interaction and negotiation of meaning in the target language (Savignon, 2018).

#### **Theoretical perspectives on implementation barriers**

The two theoretical frameworks generally helpful to explain the barriers that have been outlined in this study are as follows: the functional approach and the social-psychological approach. The functional approach and the social-psychological approach are of particular importance for the understanding of the barriers outlined in this study. Constructivist learning theory suggests that knowledge is created as learners experience, interact and solve problems, not from the teacher to learner (Vygotsky, 1978; Fosnot, 2013). This framework, when applied to the Direct Method, makes the prediction that opportunities for meaningful interaction are necessary for the method to be beneficial; if opportunities for practice or opportunities for using vocabulary or opportunities for low-anxiety interaction are limited, then the constructivist mechanism that one would expect to stimulate learning is also limited. The socio-educational model of motivation (Gardner,



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2010) also suggests that positive classroom experiences lead to enduring motivation only when language learning experiences allow the learner to interact with the target language in an environment that is reasonably comfortable and successful; ongoing difficulties including problems such as vocabulary or conversational anxiety would be predicted to reduce the motivational impact of the communicative approach even if the approach is well designed. But, Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2017) provides another lens that suggests that classroom conditions that jeopardize learners' sense of competence, such as not being able to understand the classroom instruction conducted in exclusively English, may reduce intrinsic motivation which is the goal of communicative methods.

### **Structural and institutional barriers**

Another recurring topic in the literature is classroom structure and institutional context that limits communicative teaching irrespective of the teachers' intentions. Large class sizes are always cited as an obstacle because teachers are unable to work effectively in pairs or small groups with the students, to track their individual participation, and to give fair speaking time to all students (Khan, 2017). The Direct Method's effect on class size is also highlighted by Hattie's (2023) synthesis of educational research, which revealed that instructional approaches that involve individualised feedback or interaction, like the Direct Method, are more sensitive to large class sizes. This is related to the enduring use of examination-oriented language teaching which focuses on grammar correctness and written recall over oral skills, which compels teachers to find little institutional motive to continue communicative teaching throughout a term (Kumaravadivelu, 2016). The analysis of English-medium instruction policy contexts by Macaro (2018) also reveals that top-down directives for English-medium instruction are often not accompanied by institutional support, including materials, training, and assessment reform, which are common in rural schools in Pakistan (Nawab, 2012).

### **Teacher-Related Barriers**

Another recurring challenge is teachers' preparedness. The majority of English Language Teachers (ELTs) in Pakistan have been trained in the grammar translation approach, and have limited exposure to communicative methodology, thereby limiting their ability to teach in the second language or develop activities for extended learner interaction (Rahman, 2010). This is further exacerbated by lack of instructional materials like supplementary reading materials, language laboratories, audio-visual aids, which are generally used in communicative language teaching (Nawab, 2012). The same trend was observed in the study conducted by Sheikh (2014) who found that the factors of teaching style such as teachers' own attitudes towards communicative method were also highly correlated with students' motivation to learn English, showing that the teachers' barriers may also have a cascading effect on learners' motivation to use communicative method such as DM. In cases where the official curriculum does not explicitly call for the use of a communicative methodology, but teachers have been taught to use a direct method or communicative approach, they might fall back on the more conventional grammar-based teaching methods (Richards, 2017).

### **Learner-Related Barriers**

Restricted vocabulary is often cited as a problem for spontaneous communication at the learner level as the Direct Method's policy of using no translation requires learners to draw heavily on what they already know (Nation, 2022). According to Celce-Murcia et



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al., (2014), Direct Method teaching is dependent on the students' basic vocabulary level, which enables them to communicate, and if this is inadequate, the method can lead to more frustration than confidence. Another well-documented obstacle is speaking anxiety; MacIntyre et al. (1998) report that the fear of negative peer evaluation affects learners' willingness to communicate (WTC), especially in countries where English is a social prestige language and students are afraid of being negatively evaluated by their peers for their pronunciation. Ushioda (2013) places this anxiety in a larger dimension of situated motivation in which learners' motivation to participate in communicative tasks is highly influenced by the transient social environment of the classroom, rather than by enduring personal attributes. These challenges are accentuated in the rural context, where few opportunities exist for practicing the language outside the classroom, as learners in rural, non-English speaking settings have limited opportunities to extend the classroom learning into the real world (Harmer, 2015; Ellis, 2015). A similar barrier of limited opportunities for authentic communication outside of formal training was also reported by Taqi et al. (2015) as a hindrance that prevents secondary-level EFL learners from developing oral skills.

### **Barriers to communicative methods in the Pakistani context**

Some of the challenges highlighted in various Pakistan specific studies are similar. However, Khan and Khan (2019) noted that the participation and interest of the secondary students in traditional teaching is low and they suggested some communicative and learner centered teaching methods and recognized that it is hard to adopt these in classes with large class size and limited resources. The study by Nawab (2012) revealed that teacher-centredness is still dominating the rural classrooms of Pakistan despite the efforts made in the syllabus to encourage the communicative approach for teaching English as a foreign language, due to the lack of teachers' training and availability of teaching materials. Ahmed and Rao (2013) found a positive effect on the students' speaking ability and confidence when communicative approaches were successfully implemented, however they also reported that longer-term implementation needed to be supported by the ongoing presence of the school and needed to be in place which was often lacking in under-resourced schools. More generally, Littlewood (2014) warns that "communicative approaches, while ideologically well-intentioned, should not be exported without due consideration to the sociolinguistic context in which they are implemented, such as in a rural, examination-oriented, public-sector school as Rustam Tehsil.

### **Research Gap**

Previous research in the same broader project that this data is taken from confirmed that students' motivation to learn English is positively related to their DM use, but this finding does not provide direct evidence of DM use without problems, nor does it provide a direct understanding of what the most salient barriers are from the learners' perspective. The existing literature in Pakistan has either focused on describing the barriers qualitatively and generally (Rahman, 2010, Nawab, 2012) or measuring the outcomes of motivation without providing an empirical account of the barriers associated with the implementation (Islam & Bari, 2020; Dwinalida & Setiaji, 2022). This study attempts to fill this gap by quantifying, ranking and discussing the specific barriers to DM implementation perceived in secondary classroom set-up in Public Sector in a rural area of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, thus complementing the existing literature which is mostly qualitative or theoretical.



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### **Theoretical Framework**

This study takes its theoretical foundation from three complementary theories that all provide an explanation for why the conditions at the classroom-level will or will not enable the realization of the advantages of a communicative method like the Direct Method.

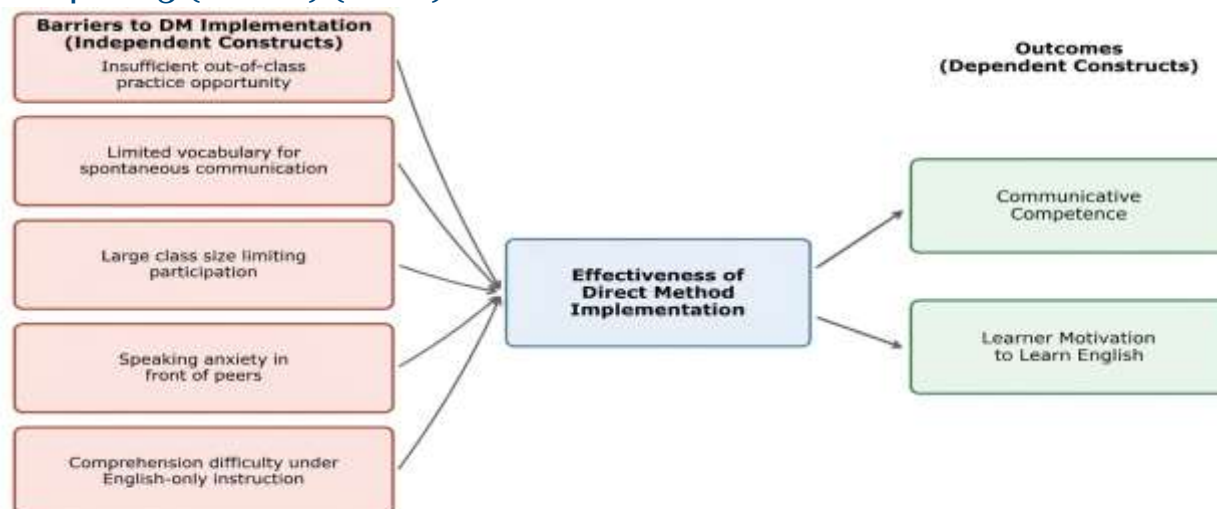
Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory of learning emphasizes that knowledge is not a direct transfer from the teacher to the learner, but it is a product of the social interaction, mediated activity, and meaningful use of language that takes place in a supportive environment. When applied to the Direct Method, this perspective suggests that learning is produced mainly from the communicative and interactive episodes that the Direct Method instruction is intended to elicit, and that these episodes are not likely to occur if the classroom conditions that facilitate them — that is, sufficient practice time, manageable group size, adequate vocabulary, and psychological safety — are not present, regardless of what the teacher does to ensure procedural adherence to the Direct Method (Fosnot, 2013).

A second lens is provided by the Socio-Educational Model of second-language motivation that was developed by Gardner (2010). The model suggests that motivation towards L2 learning is influenced by L2 learners' attitudes towards the learning context and that L2 teachers' quality of classroom management is the factor that affects the L2 learners' attitudes towards the learning context. The expectation is that positive, low-anxiety experiences with communicative success will maintain motivation, and experiences that are frustrating, incomprehensible or repetitive will destroy motivation. This model offers a direct theoretical link between the barriers explored in this study and the motivational outcomes reported in the parent study: in Gardner's terms, these barriers are those types of negative learning-situation attitudes that might cancel out the motivational gains that can be expected from DM use.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2017) provides a third complementary approach by describing the psychological needs (competence, autonomy, and relatedness) that are necessary for the development and growth of intrinsic motivation. Thus, on this view, barriers to a learner's sense of competence (comprehension difficulty, vocabulary limitation) and to social-evaluative threat (speaking anxiety in front of peers) are expected to reduce engagement regardless of the soundness of the instructional method. These three frameworks coalesce around a shared forecast: The communicative and motivational advantages of the Direct Method depend on classroom contexts in which the students can interact with the language, understand it, and feel safe, not on the procedures of the method.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This theoretical foundation is then expanded to a conceptual framework which treats the five barriers selected for this study (insufficient out-of-class practice opportunity, limited vocabulary, large class size, speaking anxiety, and comprehension difficulty under English only instruction) as independent factors that limit the effectiveness of the implementation of the Direct Method. Based on the wider literature in the field and the parent study, the two outcomes of the implementation of DM that are considered as consequences of its implementation are learners' communicative competence and motivation to learn English, which are conceptualized as proximal conditions to the implementation of DM. This is described with the help of figure 1.



**Figure 1.** *Conceptual Framework Linking Barriers to Direct Method Implementation and Downstream Outcomes*

The five barriers are not nested; that is, a learner might, for instance, have limited vocabulary skills and speaking anxiety at the same time, and the barriers are not presumed to have mutually exclusive effects. As Figure 1 shows, the five barriers are considered to be parallel inputs rather than a strict hierarchy. These barriers are not assumed to be the end of the benefits of DM, but rather are considered to be limitations that decrease the extent to which the DM's theoretical benefits are being realised. The framework directly influences the methodology of the study, which takes into account the effect of each barrier construct separately and then the composite influence of all the barriers on the perceived implementation effectiveness, and it influences the discussion, which interprets the empirical ranking of barriers in relation to the theoretical mechanisms through which each barrier is expected to work: constructivist interaction, situational attitude formation, and psychological need satisfaction.

## Methodology

### Research Design

This study was conducted using a quantitative descriptive design as the purpose was to describe the perceived degree of the presence of specific barriers identified prior to the study, but not to test causal relationships between the variables (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Descriptive designs are appropriate for the research questions related to the description of the prevalence or intensity of a phenomenon across a specified population, and they allow for a construct-level analysis of the construct of interest as well as an item-level analysis (Ary et al., 2019).

### Population and Sample

The population consisted of 9th and 10th standard public secondary school and higher secondary school students of Rustam tehsil in Mardan district KPK. The School Management Information System (SMIS) records show that there are an estimated 2,000-2,500 students enrolled in Grades 9 and 10 in about 20 public secondary and higher secondary schools in the tehsil. A multistage sampling procedure was used, which involved stratification by school type (boys' and girls' schools) followed by simple random sampling of students within each stratum to obtain a sample of 323 students from



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ten schools as per Cochran's formula for the sample size of defined population (Taherdoost, 2016, Etikan & Bala, 2017). The achieved sample's demographic composition is presented in Tab. 1.

**Table 1**

Demographic Profile of Respondents (N = 323)

| Variable           | Category       | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------|----------------|------------|----------------|
| <b>Gender</b>      | Male           | 168        | 52.0           |
|                    | Female         | 155        | 48.0           |
| <b>Class</b>       | Grade 9        | 162        | 50.2           |
|                    | Grade 10       | 161        | 49.8           |
| <b>Age</b>         | 14 years       | 72         | 22.3           |
|                    | 15 years       | 118        | 36.5           |
|                    | 16 years       | 91         | 28.2           |
|                    | Above 16 years | 42         | 13.0           |
| <b>School Type</b> | Boys' School   | 168        | 52.0           |
|                    | Girls' School  | 155        | 48.0           |
| <b>Total</b>       |                | <b>323</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

*Note. Percentages are calculated within the total sample of 323 respondents.*

Gender distribution was nearly equal, with 52.0% male and 48.0% female students, and Grade level distribution was nearly equal with 50.2% Grade 9 and 49.8% Grade 10 students, as seen in Table 1 with the largest single age group being 15 (36.5%). The near-equal distribution by gender, grade, and school type increases the generalisability of the findings in the target population and will facilitate meaningful comparison of findings for sub-groups if necessary for analyses in the future (Cohen et al., 2018).

### Research Instrument

The data were collected through a structured questioner with a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree which is common in the survey research in education to measure attitudes, opinions and perceptions (Joshi et al., 2015). This study uses the barriers scale as consisting of five items corresponding to the following barriers: difficulty understanding under the only English teaching, lack of vocabulary words, fear of being questioned by peers, lack of practice, and disappointment about working in big classes. Items were selected from previous validated scales for similar studies of English language teaching and learner motivation and checked for its applicability in the institutional environment of public secondary schools in Rustam Tehsil.

### Validity and Reliability of the tool

A structured review process was used to demonstrate content validity. The instrument was constructed after literature review on the Direct Method and related communicative approach, with the items directly related to the research question. It was then checked by content experts in Education, English Language Teaching, and Educational Research for clarity, relevance, and the use of language at secondary-school level (Cohen et al., 2018). They provided feedback which was integrated before the pilot phase. The instrument was also checked for its comprehensibility from the target respondents' point of view, by an experienced secondary-school English teacher for face validity. The questionnaire was pre-tested with around 20 students from schools outside the sample to determine how well it was understood and how long it took to complete, as well as to check the general



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acceptability to secondary-school students. The pilot had an intraclass correlation coefficient equal to 0.87, which was very stable. Subsequently, internal consistency was examined using Cronbach's  $\alpha$  in SPSS which common cut-off points for research instruments in education are .70 and higher (Taber, 2018; Fraenkel et al., 2019).

### Data Collection Procedure

The study was carried out after getting formal permission from District Education Office (DEO), Mardan and from principals of schools before accessing the study data, which is a standard procedure used to access school-based research population (Mertler, 2021). Questionnaires were given by the researcher during school hours with the cooperation of school administration and English teachers, after a briefing of the purpose of the study and the voluntary and confidential nature of the participation. All questionnaires were completed and picked up by the researcher personally to maximise return and minimise loss of data.

### Data Analysis

Data were coded, tabulated and analyzed with SPSS (Version 26). All items of the barrier's subscale were summarised using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations), in line with standard practice for summarising Likert scale data (Field, 2018; Pallant, 2020). The interpretive scheme used elsewhere in the parent study was applied to the mean scores, where 1.00-2.49 are considered low, 2.50-3.49 are considered moderate and 3.50-5.00 are considered high mean scores.

### Barriers to Direct Method implementation

The descriptive statistics for the five items on the barrier's subscale are presented here in Table 2. The mean of the composite scores for all five items was 4.16 (SD = 0.71), which suggests that overall, the respondents believed that the barriers to DM implementation were high. The mean of the five individual barriers was above 4.00, indicating that none of the barriers is particularly more salient than the other, but rather, these five barriers are part of a cluster of equally high-intensity barriers.

**Table 1**

*Barriers to Direct Method implementation*

| Item                            | Statement                                                       | SA (%) | A (%) | M (SD)             | Level       |
|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------|--------|-------|--------------------|-------------|
| 21                              | Difficulty understanding lessons delivered only in English      | 42.7   | 30.0  | 4.08 (0.92)        | High        |
| 22                              | Limited vocabulary hinders communication in English             | 48.3   | 28.8  | 4.19 (0.89)        | High        |
| 23                              | Shyness/anxiety when speaking English in front of classmates    | 45.5   | 29.4  | 4.13 (0.91)        | High        |
| 24                              | Lack of practice opportunities makes spoken English difficult   | 50.2   | 27.6  | 4.22 (0.88)        | High        |
| 25                              | Difficulty participating in English activities in large classes | 46.7   | 28.5  | 4.16 (0.90)        | High        |
| <b>Composite Barriers Score</b> |                                                                 |        |       | <b>4.16 (0.71)</b> | <b>High</b> |

*Distribution of Perceived Barriers to Direct Method Implementation (N = 323)*

*Note. M = Mean; SD = Standard Deviation. Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree. A higher mean indicates a more strongly perceived barrier.*

Only just over half of the respondents (50.2%) strongly agreed that insufficient practice



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had made English speaking difficult, and another one in four (27.6%) agreed. This was the most salient problem identified, with a mean score of 4.22 (SD = 0.88). The second salient barrier was limited vocabulary (M = 4.19, SD = 0.89) with 48.3% strongly agreeing. Difficulty in participation in communicative activities in large classes (M = 4.16, SD = 0.90) and speaking anxiety in front of classmates (M = 4.13, SD = 0.91) also received high ratings, with comprehension difficulty resulting from English-only instruction being rated the lowest, but still high. (M = 4.08, SD = 0.92)

### Rank Order of Barriers

The five barriers are summarised in Table 2, ranked in order of mean intensity, and categorised into one of four groups, according to the main category of the barrier, for ease of interpretation in the following section: exposure-related barriers, language-related barriers, structural barriers and affective barriers.

**Table 2**

*Rank Order of Perceived Barriers to Direct Method Implementation*

| Rank | Barrier                                                 | Mean | Category               |
|------|---------------------------------------------------------|------|------------------------|
| 1    | Insufficient opportunity for out-of-class practice      | 4.22 | Exposure-related       |
| 2    | Limited vocabulary for spontaneous communication        | 4.19 | Linguistic             |
| 3    | Large class size limiting participation                 | 4.16 | Structural             |
| 4    | Speaking anxiety in front of peers                      | 4.13 | Affective              |
| 5    | Comprehension difficulty under English-only instruction | 4.08 | Linguistic/Pedagogical |

As shown in Table 2, the two most prominent barriers have to do with inadequate exposure and practice opportunity outside of the formal lesson, whereas the other three barriers are more directly related to structural and psychological aspects of the classroom. This pattern is explored through the literature and theory that is relevant to the subject, which is discussed in the next section.

### Discussion

#### Insufficient Practice Opportunity

The most salient barrier identified was lack of practice opportunity, which suggests that the Direct Method is used within the context of the school day, but that opportunities for using English outside the school are relatively scarce in Rustam Tehsil (Harmer, 2015). The limited opportunities to handle real language outside formal instructional setting are recognized as a constraint on fluency development in EFL settings and also in line with findings of Taqi et al. (2015) in the development of oral proficiency among secondary level learners, the exposure-practice gap is found to be a constraint in fluency development. From a constructivist viewpoint, this barrier is especially relevant as constructivist theories of language learning suggest that learning is achieved by a process of repeated and meaningful use, not merely classroom exposure (Vygotsky, 1978); if these opportunities are not provided, then the learning that occurs in the DM lessons may not be retained or integrated into spontaneous use.

#### Vocabulary Limitations

The degree to which vocabulary limitation was expressed as a barrier is very similar to Nation's (2022) argument that withholding translation is a high demand on learners'



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existing lexical resources, and thus, when these are not sufficiently developed, comprehension and spontaneous communication suffer. The discovery is in line with what Celce-Murcia et al. (2014) observed about the Direct Method's success depending on the minimum vocabulary that the learner needs in order to communicate. Moreover, the method's overall push for non-translation may unintentionally result in cognitive load and frustration, as was pointed out in a broader discussion of English-medium teaching in low-resources target contexts (Macaro, 2018), but which seems to be the case for many of the respondents in this study.

### **Large Class Size**

The fact that the size of the class is large and that this size makes it difficult to participate in communicative activities is an institutional barrier that is not dependent on the skill and effort of any particular teacher. This is consistent with Khan's (2017) wider finding that class sizes have a disproportionate impact on instructional strategies that involve interaction and feedback compared with those where the students work primarily in isolation from others. This is in line with Hattie's observation (2023) that instructional strategies that involve interaction and feedback are particularly impacted by class size. A large class size directly decreases the opportunities for a learner to speak in a Direct Method classroom, where turn taking and question and answers are important pedagogical strategies.

### **Speaking Anxiety**

The affective barriers are in addition to the structural barriers previously mentioned, and are manifested when speaking anxiety occurs before peers. The study of MacIntyre et al. (1998) which proposed the concept of foreign language anxiety and its related concept of willingness to communicate indicates that the fear of negative evaluation from other learner's social evaluation apprehension deters foreign language learners from taking risks in communication, as the Direct Method demands. This reluctance to making an error may be exacerbated in a context where the target language has a strong symbolic weight, such as Rustam Tehsil, where an error is likely to be apparent to other students, as compared to a context where the target language is not so influential (Ushioda, 2013). This affective barrier is also in line with the importance of psychological need for competence, as outlined by Self-Determination Theory; when they commit to errors, learners may lose their sense of competence, leading them to lose their motivation to participate (Ryan & Deci, 2020; Deci & Ryan, 2017; Ali et al., 2025).

### **Comprehension Difficulty under English-Only Instruction**

Having trouble understanding the English only instruction was the least salient of the five barriers, but it still suggests that a significant minority of learners has a problem with the main tenet of the method of avoiding the mother tongue. This confirms Rahman's (2010) and Nawab's (2012) reports on the challenges of maintaining English-medium, communicative teaching and learning in classrooms with students of varying L2 proficiency levels in Pakistan and is in line with Kumaravadivelu's (2016) general claim that communicative methods developed in one sociolinguistic context may require significant modification in another context.

### **Integrative Discussion**

When combined, these results do not seem to cast doubt on the pedagogical foundation for the Direct Method, since a direct parent study in which these results were drawn from



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showed a significant, moderate-to-large positive correlation between DM use and student motivation ( $r = .614$ ,  $p < .001$ ), thus demonstrating the real motivational benefit of the method in this context. Instead, the barriers detailed in this document point to the communicative and motivational limits of DM's due to resource, language and affective factors common to rural, public-sector education. Two of the five barriers, lack of knowledge and experience, are primarily exposure and resource related and could benefit from curricular or extra-curricular activities that provide practice opportunities and vocabulary development. The other three – difficulty with comprehending, large class size, and speaking anxiety are more directly connected to classroom conditions, and require both institutional investment (small class sizes) and pedagogical technique (anxiety reducing participation, scaffolding English usage). Contextual adaptation and institutional support are essential for the successful implementation of communicative methods Littlewood (2014) and Kumaravadivelu (2016) point out) and the barriers outlined here provide a practical foundation for such adaptations in the Rustam Tehsil context, and in similar rural contexts in the public sector, more broadly.

### Implications for Practice and Policy

In the case of classroom teachers, the two most highly rated barriers were regarding exposure and vocabulary, leading to the conclusion that small and inexpensive interventions, such as adding short vocabulary building routines to the DM lessons, or using structured pair-practice tasks to extend speaking opportunities within a lesson, could make a meaningful impact on the barriers students most often reported, without requiring institutional change (Wentzel & Miele, 2016; Johnson & Johnson, 2017). CGTs can complement or replace the other benefits of large class sizes by providing more speaking opportunities within a lesson (Johnson & Johnson, 2017).

The findings support the notion that school administrators and the Elementary and Secondary Education Department focus on class-size reduction and programmatic in-service training in communicative methodology as investments that are likely to produce direct benefits in the area of quality of DM implementation. As this composite score ( $M = 4.16$ ) is similar to what others found for the Direct Method, it is not an excuse to not use the Direct Method but rather a collection of concrete conditions that can be improved, and likely increase the benefits that the Direct Method already has on student motivation as others have demonstrated (Mercer & Dörnyei, 2020).

The barriers outlined here, especially those concerning teacher comfort with sustained English-only instruction and communicative activity design, suggest some competencies for which pre-service and in-service programmes could focus explicitly, not develop by simply delivering a monologue about communicative theory. (Richards, 2017; Slavin, 2018; Ali et al., 2025).

### Limitations and Directions for Future Research.

There are several limitations in this study. First, it is based on one tehsil in one district of the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, so the results are not generalizable for other areas, even other rural areas in the province, or other schools such as private schools, where the resource conditions may vary significantly (Al-Mahrooqi & Denman, 2018). Secondly, the barriers data presented here were gathered via self-reported student data, not directly observed in the classroom or via teacher interviews; barriers reported by teachers may differ in emphasis from those reported here and also barriers to implementing the Direct Method other than the ones related to barriers to student access to barriers were examined but not included in the present instrument. Third, the cross-sectional design



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only looks at a single time point and is unable to comment on whether these barriers vary throughout the school year or as a result of the intervention.

### Conclusions

The five barriers that emerged from the study and were found to be interrelated in the direct implementation of the Direct Method in secondary schools of Rustam Tehsil were limited practice opportunity, restricted vocabulary, large class size, speaking anxiety and comprehension difficulty under English only teaching. The composite mean was 4.16 and all five were rated as high, showing that there is indeed meaningful constraint on DM implementation in this context despite this method's proven efficacy in motivating students. These obstacles, viewed from the lens of constructivist, socio-educational, and self-determination perspectives, show that the successes of the Direct Method are dependent on classroom factors such as a high amount of practice opportunity, adequate vocabulary support, manageable sizes of classes and low anxiety participation structures that are not necessarily available in rural, public school secondary schools. Such pedagogical changes at the classroom level, institutional investment and targeted teacher training provide realistic solutions to enhance the implementation of direct method and consequently its motivational and communicative impact in Rustam Tehsil and similar contexts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

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