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KEYWORDS	ABSTRACT
School Environment, Instructional Strategies, English Language Skills, Southern Districts, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa	<p>The study was conducted to examine the role of environment & instructional strategies in enhancing the English language skills i.e., reading, listening, writing and speaking skills among students in higher secondary schools in the Southern Districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The population of this qualitative study constitutes both male and female principals of public sector higher secondary schools. A total of 32 principals, consisting of two males and two females from each district, were selected through convenient sampling technique for in-depth interviews. A semi-structured interview was conducted to explore effect of environment and instructional strategies that influence English language skills. The study reveals that environment is loud and overcrowded and outdated teaching methods are used in public sector schools. Study concludes that a supportive environment and relevant instructional strategies are vital to enhancing students' language skills. The study stresses the need to foster a culture of ongoing improvement in English books, ensuring sustained continuous professional development of teachers' English language education. Interview results were abridged as narrative summary.</p>  <p>2024 Journal of Social Sciences Development</p>
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INTRODUCTION

The citizens of Islamic Republic of Pakistan speak 72 different languages (Mansoor, 2004). Rahman (2006) states that the main languages which are spoken are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtu, Saraiki, and Balochi in addition to Urdu and English are spoken in the country. Altaf (2016) and Amna (2017) pointed out low performance in English skills in the exams of Central Superior Services (CSS) 2016. The majority of the candidates (6841 out of 9673, 81 %) were declared failed in the English paper. It

is crystal clear that the role of English in communication whether it is national or international or even in commerce too is significant in Pakistan. Sincere efforts need to be taken to promote English language skills keeping in view importance of this subject not only in Pakistan but across the world (Haleem, Javaid, Qadri & Suman, 2022). It is notable that about 373 million people speak English across the globe as their native language and it has now become language of world communication. It is language of political science, business, economics, medicine, and finance (Höglin, 2002). The English language may be taught in such a way to be adopted as effective communication means & it is all skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading & writing need to be focused to have strong grip over it (Haidar & Fang, 2019).

Sheikh (2019) reported in her doctoral thesis that home and institutional environments need to be made more conducive to English language learning. Her study suggests that B.Ed (H), pre-service training for teachers may focus on providing helpful home and institutional environment. Seminars may create awareness to mobilize the community for giving the key position to English language for global marketable needs. The teachers may be trained to teach the students an effective way of using a dictionary, to know the contextual meaning of the words, similarly, readers' skimming and scanning skills need to be improved. The students may be taught to write creatively and develop their critical thinking skills. The other language skills i.e., proper use of punctuation in writing skills related to building their English vocabulary, Dicto-compo skills, legible good spacing, and proper alignment need to be polished. Houwer (2017) talked about adopting suitable ways to improve the language skills of the students. Thus, Sunggingwati (2017) suggests innovative ways to improve the language skills of students. The role of environment and instructional strategies need to be analyzed for identifying the low status of the English in Government schools and suggest remedial measures for its resolution.

Objectives of Study

1. To examine the role of environment in promoting English language skills of high school students in southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.
2. To observe the role of Instructional strategies in promoting English language skills school students in southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of environment in promoting English language skills of high school students in southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?
2. What is the role of instructional strategies in promoting English language skills of high school students in southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa?

REVIEW LITERATURE

Warsi and Khurshid (2022) stress the need for English language development reforms to achieve better performance in the educational process. Listening plays a crucial role as it provides feedback that enhances speaking abilities as stated by Mardila, Ramli and Kurniawan (2017). Fata and Mutia (2017) also find that exposure to different media such as the internet, English music, movies, and TV shows can significantly impact the language acquisition process for Indonesian students. The use of

team games-based language learning that emphasizes speaking and listening skills has affected interest of many English instructors and educators (Yeh, 2017; Hasan & Hoon, 2013). Hasan, Younus, Ibrahim, Islam, and Islam (2020) conducted a research study to analyze how use of new media tools like Facebook, blogs, wikis, Google Docs, and YouTube affect motivation of English language (L2) learners at tertiary level in Bangladesh. The study involved six Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with thirty English language learners from eight universities. Tacarraouch, Zano and Zamorano (2022) showed that new media tools greatly motivated learners, transforming passive learners into active and autonomous learners.

However, culturally inappropriate and misinterpreted language content in these tools' hurt learner motivation. Thus, new media tools should be monitored to reduce any adverse effects upon learner motivation. Sheikh (2019) focused on reading and writing skills to be promoted at secondary school level for developing English language skills. English skills are increasingly becoming a priority for English teachers as they believe it to be the most critical skill that should be prioritized over other skills. This is because listening has the positive roles and effects on improving other language skills (Masalimova et al., 2016; Galante, 2018; Tragan & Falbona, 2018). The English teachers encourage students to participate in presentation, group activities, and games where they can practice English language skills, provide feedback, and recognize teamwork (Tacarraouch et al., 2020). Sabet (2012) talks that the listening makes up over 40% of our everyday communication, speaking accounts for 35%, while reading and writing make up 16% and 9%, respectively. This shows that hearing and speaking are not as important as reading and writing. In this linking, if learners lack proper speech skills, they may struggle with their pronunciation, spelling, as well as intonation, as noted by Yanar and Tutunis (2016).

Linguists believe that speech is the essential element of study, especially in oral communication, as it is the primary mode of communication that distinguishes humans from other animals (Mandasari & Aminatun, 2020). Assignments that emphasize listening and speaking abilities are also included in upper-secondary level English textbook (Siddique, 2004). Safitr, Rafli, and Dewanti (2020) also found that practicing can improve student language skills. To receive information daily, we depend on listening skills (Nushi & Orouji, 2020). The poor pronunciation can be a reason for ineffective communication in the listening skills, as reported by Enciso et al. (2019) and Orlando (2020). Rost (2013) reported that listening is a complex process that enables individuals to comprehend spoken language. Effective communication in a foreign language dramatically relies on solid listening and speaking abilities (Cabell et al., 2015). It is mandatory to prioritize mastery and command of English skills (Idrissova et al., 2015). Shavelson (2007) suggested that teachers should support change for it to occur in society. This is especially true for the teaching of English in Pakistan. Unless teachers are trained and students are taught English as skill, meeting demands of learners to learn English as L2 will not be possible.

Slattery and Wills (2001) argued that learning a foreign language is the complex phenomenon especially for communication. Shin (2011), states that teachers can enhance the students' skills to successfully acquire foreign language learning skills. Teachers should introduce various listening activities in classroom to improve students' listening skills, such as rhymes, songs, role plays, dramas,

chants, speeches, etc. These activities provide an authentic language and real-world context that makes foreign language learning interesting, motivating, quick, easy, and meaningful. Information gap activities provide opportunities for communication, while role-plays prepare children for free speaking. Intrinsically motivating activities like 'talking on phone' and 'having tea' help children get ready for real-life contexts and utilize all aspects of language use (Scott & Ytreberg 1990). For young learners (YL), listening strategies such as predicting, guessing from context, and recognizing discourse patterns and markers are crucial (Brewster, Ellis & Girard, 2004, cited in Shin, 2011). The causes of the low English language skills include lack of family support, crowded environment, and lack of readiness, speaker's sluggish attitude and behavior, listener's not responsive attitude and irrelevant materials.

The solutions involve creating a suitable learning environment, improving teacher development, hands-on learning and collaboration with the family, school, environment, and teachers (Shartrand, Weiss, Kreider and Lopez (1997). Maitlo, Tumrani, and Ali (2022) examined the factors that affect English language learners at the secondary level in Sindh, Pakistan. Speaking and listening skills are essential in process of learning English, yet Pakistani teachers do not give them much emphasis. Interviews and data analysis revealed that pronunciation, accent, vocabulary, and mother tongue influence hinder progress. In recent years, English has become increasingly prominent in Pakistan, according to Haidar and Fang (2019) and Rao (2019). This is partly due to the growth of educational technologies and emphasis on English language skills, which has led to increased use of technology in English language teaching. One such technology is video, which can be an effective tool when used correctly (Zhaogang, 2015). Wang (2003) argues that the listening comprehension is the most essential aspect of English language proficiency. Consequently, educators should actively study the nature and process of listening comprehension and the theory and practice of the listening to improve teaching outcomes and help students understand the importance of listening in English language learning.

On the other hand, speaking is second most important skill and involves expressing oneself vocally and conveying one's point of view. Gowon (2009) emphasizes that effective oral communication requires listening, understanding, and speaking. Yanar (2013) defines speaking as an interactive process of creating meaning through exchanging the information. Similarly, Saidu (2017) describes listening as a process that involves receiving, constructing, negotiating, and creating meaning over active engagement with the speaker. Listening and speaking are complementary skills that require practice and development to achieve proficiency in English language communication. Language teaching involves integrating all four language skills, not just sharing information. Learners require integrated knowledge of these skills (Patil, 2008; Karjalainen and Lehtonen (2005) state that the demand for people expert in multiple languages, particularly English, is increasing as globalization advances as communication in foreign language dramatically relies on solid listening and speaking abilities. English language skills are essential for success in global market, including employment, business, education, and technology. Speaking is a crucial skill for learners to communicate their opinions, goals, hopes, and interests. Khamkhien (2010) stated that speaking is most important skill in a second language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Clark (1991) and Merriam (2009) recommend utilizing qualitative research to investigate areas of the human experience that have not yet been thoroughly examined. Qualitative research aims to understand how participants know their experiences, perceive their reality, and attach importance to their experiences. Merriam (1998) worked in same area that individuals construct their reality through their interactions with their social environment. Qualitative scholars strive to understand the meaning that people ascribe to their world and the experiences they have in it. Creswell (2008) states that one-on-one interviews are a data collection method where the researcher asks questions and records responses of one participant at a time. The study is also qualitative and the population constitutes all principals of Govt. Higher secondary schools of Southern districts like Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, South Waziristan, Lakki Marwat, Bannu, North Waziristan, Karak & Kohat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan.

A convenient sampling technique was adopted for the sampling of study and total of 32 principals, consisting of two males and two females from each district were selected for in-depth interviews. Items of semi-structured interviews were related to factors affecting listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills and how these skills will be promoted. Participants chose a comfortable location for hour of audio-taped interviews. They were asked about their experiences with semi-structured questions. Creswell (2008) states that semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted for this research project. The data analysis consolidates and interprets collected data concurrently with collection. It allows scholars to study emerging concepts, themes and categories against successive data (Merriam, 2009). The process of qualitative data analysis is inductive, as detailed data is used to create general codes and themes, as supported by Creswell (2008). Patil (2008) suggested that using member check-in interviews is important to avoid misinterpreting participant responses and recognizing researcher bias.

Research Instrument

During the one-hour audio-taped interviews, participants were asked, semi-structured questions related to the factors that affect their English language skills i.e., Listening speaking, reading, and writing. These questions explored ways to promote these skills. The participants chose a comfortable location for interviews and shared their personal experiences. The researcher asked predetermined questions to each participant while also allowing for follow-up questions to gain more information or clarity. During interviews, focus is on exploring issues, but exact wording and order of questions are not predetermined. Follow-up questions seek to clarify information provided by participants. Items were related to whether teachers teaching English have updated the teaching methodology of language teaching. In this connection, they are provided refresher courses to update their skills related to English teaching. Consequently, teachers ensure a comfortable environment for students before teaching.

Each lesson is carefully planned with specific language objectives in the mind. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing tasks are assigned to students, listening tasks are divided into pre-listening while listening, and post-listening stages. Recorded materials are tested before use in the classroom. Thus, exaggerated intonation and short, grammatically correct sentences are used to keep students

attentive. Thus, opportunities for active involvement in class activities are provided to inspire active participation from every student. In this linking, the informative videos are shared with students to enhance their learning, and they are encouraged toward the describe scenes, events or personalities in English. The regular activities are planned to help students improve their communication skills. Presentations and group discussions are used to practice public speaking and debating skills. Thus, nonverbal expressions are utilized to enhance the speaking skills, and board work is used in order to improve spelling.

The questions are asked to gauge understanding, and guessing games are used as a learning tool. Recordings of student discussions and conversations are used to help them learn from their mistakes. Reading out loud is encouraged to improve pronunciation, and digital tools are used to enhance it further. Students are allowed to rephrase stories or articles in English, and public speaking events are available for participation. The students are facilitated with English storybooks, journals, and novels for reading in the school libraries. The school arranges parent teachers' meetings to discuss students' issues related to supporting their English language skills. The respondents were allowed to express their opinions other than these items. In this linking, the study is qualitative and in-depth interviews of 32 principals of Government high schools of 8 southern districts of KP, were conducted to see in their views about the role of environment and instructional strategies on promoting English language skills.

RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

The study shows that various factors contribute towards poor English language skills i.e., poor or not supportive environment to English language skills, lack of qualified and well-trained teachers. In Pakistan, a Master's degree in English Literature or English language is the minimum requirement for college-level English instructors (Mansoor, 2003) but at school level, majority of teachers who teach English do not have Master or BS English or 16 years education. Other factors like distractions from noise or visual disturbances make focusing challenging. Psychological factors like emotions also play a role. Other barriers to good language skills include difficulty staying focused, trouble prioritizing, and preference for the style over substance. Despite these obstacles, these skills can be improved with practice & hard work. Mardila, Ramli and Kurniawan (2017), Fata and Mutia, (2017), Maitlo, Tumrani and Ali (2022) supported results and stressed need for parental and institutional support for polishing English language skills. Secondary school students face a range of difficulties, including a lack of awareness of language rules, boredom with listening to English speech, reading English books, feel hesitation in speaking English or chatting with friends in their native language not in English.

Students do not pay attention during lessons, have difficulty understanding what is being heard, have low motivation to listen, struggle to express themselves, do not listen to speaker, and disregard irrelevant information. These problems primarily stem from the opinions of prospective teachers about listening difficulties. The study reveals other factors affecting these skills include the listener, the topic, and environment. Secondary school students face several challenges in Urdu or Pashtu language lessons, such as issues with classroom environment, listening to texts, completing listening activities, Urdu language teachers, other students. Most difficulties occur during the pre-listening

stage. These challenges can be classified as students, teachers, texts, and classroom environment. Classroom conditions can sometimes be inadequate when there are too many students in the class. This can lead to a lack of motivation and poor-quality teaching, as well as the shortage of quality materials. In this connection, some students may struggle to practice the speaking due to limited opportunities. The personal factors such as anxiety or shyness can also play a role in student success. Some high secondary schools in KP may need more resources to teach English as [Khamkhien \(2010\)](#) supports it as the English language learners aim to develop proficiency in speaking, despite it being a difficult task.

Due to the global status of the English language, there is a high demand for it in global market as it is widely used in all fields by most countries. Outdated textbooks, inadequate language learning materials, and a shortage of audio-visual aids can make it difficult for the students to enhance their speaking abilities. Effective language learning requires skilled teachers. Still, if English language teachers in high schools need more training in teaching methodologies, they may require assistance in establishing environment that promotes English language skills. Some students may experience anxiety or embarrassment when speaking English, especially in front of their peers, due to the fear of making mistakes. This fear of being judged negatively impact their assurance and willingness to link verbally. Students may have limited chances to practice English skills in classrooms with large class sizes and teacher-centered approach. Classroom dynamics rank listening and writing skills, which further limit individual speaking or writing chances. The perception of English as foreign language be influenced by sociocultural factors. Some communities may prefer local languages or perceive English as irrelevant to daily lives, impacting students' motivation and interest in learning and using English.

The code-switching refers to alternating between two or more languages during communication. In regions where local languages are dominant, students may often switch to their native language while speaking, which can hinder their ability to develop fluency and proficiency in English. Many English language learners aim to develop proficiency in speaking, despite it being a difficult task. Due to the global status of the English language, there is a high demand for it in the global market as it is widely used in all fields by most countries. According to [Harmer \(2007, pp. 58-59\)](#), teacher's role is to organize students in the classroom for different tasks. This involves grouping students and providing them with information on how to complete the activity within a limited time frame. One such technology is video, can be effective tool when used correctly. A teacher who fulfills this role should ensure that students understand task at hand to involve them and benefit from activity they are practicing. Several factors count for the enhancement/deterioration of listening skills, they do not know about phonemes and morphemes, Native speakers can rally listening skills by intensive listening for just three phonemes at a time, using tape recorder to listen to chunks of speech for two to three hours.

The English language teachers should implement these suggestions to teach speaking skills: reduce teacher talking time, provide maximum speaking opportunities, create a rich and collaborative environment, motivate all learners, ask eliciting questions, diagnose the common problems, involve parents, give positive feedback, and be a facilitator rather than a traditional teacher. Other factors

like distractions from noise or visual disturbances make focusing challenging. Quality of education is directly linked with quality of instruction that whatever is delivered in the classroom. The quality of teaching, vast knowledge of teachers, teachers' qualification, their commitment, and devotion to obtain desired objective affect overall education process effectively (Kurbanov & Sirojiddinova, 2021). Speaking and listening skills are vital in process of learning English, yet Pakistani teachers do not give them much emphasis. The study findings are supported by Houwer (2017) who talked about adopting suitable ways to improve the language skills of students. Similarly, Sunggingwati (2017) suggests innovative ways to improve language skills of students, and Warsi and Khurshid (2022) stress the need for English language development reforms for getting better performance in the educational process.

CONCLUSION

The parents of southern districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Pakistan particularly in rural areas do not give due attention to their sons/daughters' education. They are not providing proper support for English improvement to their children. The majorities of the parents of rural set up are not highly educated and have no sound knowledge of speaking English or having an environment supportive of English language skills. Government school teachers have no up-to-date knowledge of English language education. They are not provided refresher courses/constant professional development especially for English language teachers in specific areas. As suggested by Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon and Birman (2002), professional development programs can enhance teachers' instructional practices; it can help in the deeper understanding of the curriculum, pedagogy, and techniques of teaching. They are not used to applying updated teaching strategies for enhancing the listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills of their students. In this linking, the social awareness may be created by organizing seminars to mobilize parents and create an environment for students to learn this language.

English language skills may be improved by taking initiatives to extend professional development courses for the teachers, to support holistically integrating the technology into the facet of English language instruction, the creative assessment may be promoted, the teachers and students may be provided with the opportunity of engagement in research-based activities, to encourage learners centered and inclusive environment, to promote leadership development, encourage peer learning communities, continue programs to language proficiency for teachers, needs regular evaluation of programs to be more learners based and encourage teachers who have gotten a lot out of program to talk about their experiences and best practices with their colleagues and at professional growth events. By sharing effective teaching methods, educators can motivate one another and promote a culture of cooperation and ongoing development. Thus, schools should play a more active role to minimize the difficulties of those students who cannot get proper parental support from their homes. Improving language skills can be challenging due to various factors like the distractions as well as psychological barriers.

However, with practice and hard work, it's possible to overcome these obstacles. Secondary school students often require the assistance with listening skills, as they may be unaware of listening rules; have difficulty understanding what they hear, or face language barriers in Urdu and Pashtu lessons.

Socio-cultural factors can affect their motivation and interest in learning English. To have effective conversations, students should maintain eye contact, pay attention to nonverbal cues, and create a mental picture of what the speaker is saying. Active listening is important, but distractions like TVs and phones can make it harder. Additionally, self-centeredness, past experiences, negative self-talk, and psychological barriers like assumptions and defensiveness can also make communication difficult. To improve language skills, one can find a language partner online or in person, use Skype or WhatsApp for the online exchanges, and practice speaking frequently. If speaking with native speakers is challenging, consider finding a language exchange partner to practice with. Reading habits may be improved by providing extra books of English, newspapers in the library and library sitting for one hour may be made mandatory to develop their reading habits of the English books, journals or newspapers.

Future Research

The current study aimed to gather the perspectives of Principals of Government Schools in southern districts KP, Pakistan related to status of English language skills in these districts, future researchers should also consider the viewpoints of students about low status of English language skills among students of Government schools in these areas. Study was conducted in public secondary schools. To gain an inclusive understanding of topic, future studies should expand to include private schools across the province.

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