



Available Online

## Journal of Education and Social Studies

ISSN: 2789-8075 (Online), 2789-8067 (Print)

<http://www.scienceimpactpub.com/jess>

### AN EXPLORATION OF THE FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENGLISH LANGUAGE ORAL FLUENCY PROBLEMS FACED BY THE UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL STUDENTS IN DISTRICT KOHAT

Nasim Gul<sup>1,\*</sup>, Syed Sabih-Ul-Hassan<sup>1</sup>, Said Imran<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of English, Kohat University of Science & Technology (KUST) Kohat, Pakistan

#### ABSTRACT

The present study was conducted on the English language oral fluency problems faced by students at the university level. The main purpose was to look into factors responsible for oral fluency problems faced by the BS English students at FATA University and Kohat University of Science Technology (KUST) Kohat. Data were taken from the undergraduate students of BS English through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was divided into two sections, i.e. section A and section "B" which contain 32 items, of which 30 were closed-ended, and only 2 items were open-ended. The study yielded important results such as poor target language grammar, lack of opportunities to speak English in the classroom, lack of speaking practice, L1 interference, and fear of making mistakes are the prominent factors which contribute to the poor oral fluency of graduate students of English departments in both universities. Furthermore, the study also provided possible solutions for the problems in oral fluency, i.e. improvement in grammar, increase in vocabulary knowledge, more confidence, improvement in pronunciation, the guidance of well-trained teachers, use of audio-visual aids, more opportunities to speak inside the classroom, frequent use of oral activities, employment of communicative approaches, extensive reading, prioritizing oral fluency over oral accuracy, and less fear of making mistakes bring about an improvement in the oral fluency of BS English students. Participants in the study also opined that course/s on oral fluency in BS English Curriculum in both universities need to be included.

**Keywords:** English language; Oral fluency; Fluency problems; Undergraduate students.

\* Nasim Gul, Email: [naseemgul2016@gmail.com](mailto:naseemgul2016@gmail.com)

© The Author(s) 2022.

<https://doi.org/10.52223/jess.20223205>

This is an open-access article under the CC BY license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

#### INTRODUCTION

Language is the main means of communication. It is the tool through which a teacher instructs a language class. The English language has gained great importance internationally. An estimated 340 million people worldwide speak English as a mother language, specifically in UK and US (Esmail et al., 2015). However, English is also very important because a vast majority of the world's population speaks it as a second language. This added utility of the language gives it a status of a global lingua franca (Warschauer, 2001). Among the language skills, oral fluency is generally considered more important as compared to the skills of reading, writing and listening (Rossiter et al., 2010). Our students do not have the proficiency that is required by the modern world (Hassan, 2016). Though teachers emphasize the importance of spoken English in Pakistan, the schooling system at the elementary level is so poor in quality that students cannot speak English properly, even at the postgraduate level (Sharma, 2004).

There are various reasons for choosing this topic. Firstly, speaking skills are not given enough importance in Pakistan, which leads to problems in speaking skills, and by extension, in the English department students of FATA University and Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) students have problems in speaking English as reported by Imran (2020). Regarding this point, Bashiruddin (2004) says that “students have no exposure to English in their everyday communication. Both students and teachers use Urdu or the regional languages to communicate inside the class”. This limits their overall exposure to the English language in general. To pass exams, students are required to read and write in English to some extent, but speaking skills get ignored considerably because of the lack of willingness to communicate in English. This leads to serious problems with speaking skills. Students of FATA University and Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) are no exceptions in this regard. They cannot speak well in English (Imran, 2020). The international status of English and its ability to provide us with up-to-date information about every aspect of human development gives it an elite status in almost all developing countries, including Pakistan (Shahzadi et al., 2014). Therefore, this study aims to examine the factors that hinder English language oral fluency of graduate students studying English at FATA University Kohat and Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST) Kohat.

Furthermore, the English language is considered the global language that is now necessary for finding an appropriate job. Educational institutions, governments, and companies, among others, prioritize those whose fluency is up to the mark. This makes fluency as one of the vital skills for getting promotions, jobs in prestigious organizations or seeking education beyond a Bachelor’s degree (Baker and Westrup, 2003). To further support this point, Yang (2014) asserts, “a good English speaker nowadays will have more competitive advantages to gain education opportunities overseas and have a good pathway in career development”.

In Pakistan, English has been given more importance than the native language because it is the mode of instruction used for science subjects and technical education (Sarwar, 2002; Esmail et al., 2015). As mentioned earlier, we get the idea of how important English is for the students studying at FATA University Kohat and Kohat University of Science and Technology (KUST). Whether for good purposes, education, or just for pleasure, mastery of the English language is the main requirement.

Ascione (1993) mentions in his study that plenty of students are not “fluent in speaking the foreign language”, which will definitely reduce their chances of communicating with people whose native language is English. It will also have a negative impact on their educational careers. In addition, Wang (2014) also finds that English speaking is greatly ignored in ESL classrooms. This issue is also common in the Pakistani context, as Akram and Nosheen (2013) assert that “speaking skill has been neglected at almost all levels in Pakistan”. It implies that changes must be made to reduce this issue.

Keeping in view the above points, it can be inferred that oral fluency in English is very important for students at both universities. It does not only improve students’ speaking skills, but it generally has an impact on other skills as well (Ryczek, 2013). Oral fluency is given importance because it allows us to communicate with other people, which is the ultimate goal of any language (Iswara and Rochsantiningih, 2012). The aforementioned writers have worked on oral fluency in different contexts, highlighting that fluency is a problem prevalent in areas where English is not spoken for day-to-day communication. Various techniques and models have been used to overcome this issue. However, there is much room for improvement.

Moreover, Khan (2014) asserts that even at the university level and choosing a discipline such as M.A English, the “emphasis is not on the use of English as a medium of oral communication” and he further

states that “speaking skills are totally neglected”. It implies that the aforementioned study further solidifies the fact that speaking skills are not given importance at all, even in disciplines like M.A English. There is very little work done to improve the oral fluency of graduate students in the Pakistani context, especially in new established English departments at the university level. Therefore, this study is intended to find out the reasons behind the poor fluency of BS English students at the department of English KUST and FATA University Kohat in both universities, English departments are newly established. The study also aims to identify the factors which could be used to improve the oral fluency of BS English students at both universities in particular and at other universities in general.

### **Research questions**

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the factors that contribute to the poor speaking fluency of undergraduate students at the English departments of FATA University and Kohat University (KUST)?
2. What are the factors which may prove useful in counteracting oral fluency problems?

### **Potential significance of the study**

The proposed study aims at aiding both teachers and students, i.e. the study is intended to facilitate English language users in general and teachers and students at FATA University and KUST in particular regarding the speaking proficiency problems and to provide possible solutions for these problems. The study's findings could be used to train English language teachers further so that problems regarding oral fluency for graduate students of English departments in both universities could be solved. Furthermore, this research study also adds to world knowledge and informs the readers, i.e. what kinds of fluency problems graduate students of English discipline face while speaking English.

### **Novelty/contribution of the study**

Many studies have been conducted in the area of speaking and oral fluency, for example (Warschauer, 2001; Esmail et al., 2015). They found various factors that contribute to speaking and oral fluency problems. This study is unique and fresh because the such study has not been conducted in the given context. FATA University and KUST are relatively new universities in KPK, Pakistan. It implies a considerable gap in conducting a study in the given context. Thus, the findings of this study can be taken into account by the undergraduate students of English departments KUST and FATA University in order to improve their speaking skills. The students usually appreciate a questionnaire used in this research because it can be filled out quickly. This is a key instrument in that this will enable students to participate willingly in the research. The research results could be influential when planning curriculum and implementing new policies regarding this issue. In addition, students may benefit from the proposed research as this research will highlight the main factors of their fluency problems and attempt to identify factors which may enhance speaking fluency. The findings of this research can be taken into account by the English department KUST and FATA University postgraduate students to improve their speaking skills.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This section begins with defining what fluency is. After that, we move from the definition of fluency to the works that have been conducted in the Pakistani context. The first two studies are about speaking skills in the school and college levels. These works attempt to find out speaking problems in their contexts. The next four Pakistani studies are based on higher-level students, i.e., students at the university level. The first three works in this university-level research generally investigate the factors blocking speaking proficiency. The final work in the Pakistani context also attempts to find out about problems related to speaking skills,

though it tries to categorize those factors on the basis of social class. This marks the end of studies conducted in the Pakistani context. In the next portion, we have studies that are conducted in European societies. The first work deals with fluency as a neglected skill, whereas the second work is about the role of extensive reading on oral fluency. Finally, the third portion is based on Asian countries. It includes places like Japan, China, Vietnam, Hong Kong, and Indonesia. It encompasses topics like the role of vocabulary on oral fluency, finding out fluency problems, solutions for fluency with accuracy-focused tasks, and the role of 4/3/2 technique in improving fluency.

### **Definition of fluency**

Fluency means differently to different sources. Hornby et al. (2010) consider fluency as “the quality of being able to speak or write a language, especially a foreign language, easily and well”. However, the focus of this study is just on the speaking part of fluency in a second language. For oral communication, fluency plays a vital role. Rossiter et al. (2010) explain that fluency is a polysemous word, the most common meaning of which is related to the proficiency that one has in a language, i.e., the command that one has over grammar and vocabulary of a language.

### **Studies conducted in the Pakistani context**

Students face plenty of problems while speaking English as a second language, for instance, fear of the classroom, fear of fellow students and hesitation from teachers, which hinder their speaking proficiency. There are numerous factors at play which can negatively impact the way we perceive a language which is not our mother language. It is obvious that when practising a new language, problems regarding oral skills come, as Hassan and Ahmed (2015) highlighted the problems faced by English language learners, especially at intermediate level students in Pakistan. In language learning, oral skills are taken into account in this study. They conclude i.e. students speak their first language, i.e. Urdu in the case of us, because of a lack of interest in English speaking. They consider it as an academic subject rather than a means of communication. They also point out reasons such as the lack of audio-visual aids, speech competitions, and debates. They observe that the social environment provides no reason to switch to English as a language. Moreover, this study mentions that the syllabus is limited to exam purposes and provides no opportunity to practice oral skills.

The foregoing study was a predictable but authentic study. Simple observation of MA students reflects that students are in favour of their mother languages instead of English. At KUST, the common tongue is Pashtu as opposed to Urdu, but the gist of the study cannot be invalidated. Most of the students are here for a degree of Masters. They do not come here to learn a language as a means of communication. Interestingly, Hassan and Ahmed (2015) have indirectly implied that the poor quality of our teachers is one of the many causes of this prevailing issue. Though the teaching practices have much improved, we see that the teaching methodology of many experienced teachers is not up to the mark. In this regard, Baker (2008) mentions that this issue can be solved if there is a cooperation between practitioners and researchers in the ESL field. The latter is supposed to instruct the former on what kinds of techniques can be applied to enhance the teaching of English as a second language.

So far, we see that English is not given enough importance as a means of communication. The issue of oral proficiency in English as a second language has its roots in our schooling system. Alam and Uddin (2013) conducted a study on how to improve the oral communication skills of 6<sup>th</sup>-class students in Karachi, Pakistan. Their study reflects that reading and writing skills are given more importance as compared to listening and speaking skills. This paper discourages teacher-centred classes in favour of student-centred classes so that students can be more active in classroom activities. Shyness, lack of motivation, and fear are

natural for students when they try to speak a different language. However, a teacher should create a conducive environment where students feel relaxed and are urged to speak English as a second language.

The aforementioned study is critical about the way the schooling of children is being done. As it was in our times and in the times of our teachers, reading and writing skills were given top priority. Our schools still adopt the Grammar-translation method, which has been proven to be inadequate in developing all four skills. In contrast to that, communicative language approaches are recommended by Alam and Uddin (2013). The lack of motivation in students suggests that English is being treated as an academic subject and a requirement for a class promotion. This finding is corroborated by Hassan and Ahmed (2015), who also implied that poor-quality teachers are to blame for lack of interest, among other things.

Shyness and fear are two important factors which are increasingly becoming one of the biggest hurdles for students. Pakistan is a conservative country where males and females are not supposed to talk to each other. Such an environment makes people of both sexes hesitant when they speak in class. Furthermore, another issue that needs to be addressed is the fear of saying something wrong in front of the class, which will probably result in the whole class ridiculing the speaker for his mistake.

A lot of studies are being conducted to rectify the speaking problems that students may face at various levels. For instance, one of the many studies conducted in the Pakistani context is by Akram and Nosheen (2013). They tried to identify the speaking problems at the postgraduate level and suggest solutions for overcoming them. Through questionnaires, it came to light that lack of confidence, teachers' inability to motivate students, lack of vocabulary, weak grammar, and shyness are some of the issues that postgraduate students face. This research shed light on the opinions of students in which students said that students coming from English medium schools are better at speaking English. Another factor that was revealed is students translate from Urdu to English which negatively impacts their fluency. In the end, the study suggests that there must be a compulsory English subject at the postgraduate level so that students get the opportunity to enhance their speaking skills.

In the Pakistani context, there is relatively little work done to improve the speaking skills of students, let alone at the postgraduate level. This has something to do with the fact that research was not given as much emphasis as is required (Imran, 2020). With the passage of time, many disciplines are incorporating research into their degree programs in order to add something new to world knowledge. Even today, BS students at KUST and FATA University are awarded degrees without having any research in their curriculum. The point is the only way to solve the problems regarding language is to have research-oriented degrees at the postgraduate level. Aside from that, in the aforementioned study, it was revealed that a lack of vocabulary is also considered a problem regarding speaking skills. This finding further corroborates the finding of Koizumi and In'nami (2013), who have done extensive research on the relationship between vocabulary and speaking proficiency.

Another study related to the study of Akram and Nosheen's (2013) was conducted by Shahzadi et al. (2014) and focused on problems faced by Pakistani university students regarding English language learning. Results conducted by this study reveal that students are hesitant to speak English. Another important point to note is that students do not feel satisfied with the current teaching methods, which suggests that current methodologies are to be revised. Audio-visual aids are to be used in all English classrooms.

There is a shift happening from the grammar-translation method to new communicative approaches. Students are becoming aware that this method cannot cope with the demands of society. This is further proved by the fact that participants are not satisfied with the current methodologies of teaching, according to Shahzadi et al. (2014) audio-visual aids have proven useful in teaching, which is why the aforementioned

study suggests it. Speaking from personal observation seems to be more interested when the lecture is being delivered on multimedia. It is appealing to the students and engages students to listen carefully to what the teacher has to say.

As is the case with every country in the world, there are different people belonging to different social classes. Unlike Khan (2014) study, most of the studies do not take into account the social status that a person has. This study exemplifies the fact that people from different backgrounds perceive the English language differently, and thus it affects the outcome. We cannot just say that a person from the upper class will be better because Khan (2014) study clearly mentions that middle-class students are the most proficient. Such findings clearly change the landscape in which researchers have to work, and it further implies that the status of the English language has changed compared to the status it had years ago. People have got access to the Internet which provides plenty of exposure to people of all backgrounds, which is great news for those who want to get exposure to authentic English written by native English speakers, and this is definitely having an impact on oral proficiency of students (Hassan, 2016). The same trend is generally observed in BS English students of KUST and FATA University, in which those who have access to the Internet are more proficient and skilful in using language as compared to those who only rely on books and lecture notes.

### **Studies conducted in European contexts**

Fluency is one of the challenging things to achieve in L2. This one is important because a speaker whose speech is not fluent is not given preference. This is a great need for students who want to get successful in life. Unfortunately, it is a factor which is widely neglected in our classrooms. Rossiter et al. (2010) conducted a study on oral fluency as a neglected skill in classrooms. They analyzed a number of relevant second language (L2) literature in order to see how to improve fluency. They also conducted numerous surveys regarding fluency. They found that there is an emphasis on free-production tasks to improve fluency and less emphasis on rehearsals, repetition, fillers, and formulaic sequences. According to them, many studies have been done to improve L2 fluency; however, instructors or teachers may be unaware of the new approaches to teaching.

Furthermore, they advocate that activities regarding oral fluency must be incorporated as a part of classroom activities rather than hoping that reading and writing skills will enable students to communicate outside the classroom. They also suggested some strategies to supplement the development of oral fluency and concluded that cooperation between researchers and teachers has become vital to implement new findings in classrooms. This study further cements the idea that the problem of fluency is severe enough to warrant research. In MA English course of KUST, I have observed that fluency is not given any importance, which is reflected in real life.

The aforementioned study tells us how much fluency is ignored in ESL classrooms. This, however, begs the question of how to improve fluency. An interesting study comes from Baker (2008), who analyzes the relationship between oral fluency and extensive reading, in which he says that reading a lot will bring a definite improvement in oral fluency. He also asserts that fluency is a part of oral proficiency and gives examples of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Oral Proficiency Interview, the University of Cambridge ESOL exams and the Test of English as a Foreign Language internet-based test (TOEFL iBT), etc., to support his view. In his opinion, extensive reading is an effective tool to build up the fluency of students. Looking back at his work, we see the reality that reading activities are often not given a considerable time to let it help speaking skills. Most of our students do not even read texts to prepare for exams. For instance, novels are part of the course, but given the lack of interest that students

have in reading, they only buy those books which can provide summaries of the chapters rather than the whole unabridged versions of the novels. This reflects that teaching in the English department has much room for improvement about which Baker (2008) says that we have both “an empirical, quantitative research heritage and a qualitative research heritage” which can be used to remedy this issue.

The discussion above shows the importance of reading in building up fluency. Another positive point of extensive reading is it helps students in learning hundreds of new words or at least gives them exposure to new words. There is a link between reading and vocabulary that one has at his disposal (Koizumi and In'nami, 2013).

### **Studies conducted in Asian countries**

There is a study conducted by Koizumi and In'nami (2013) in which they analyzed the link between vocabulary and speaking proficiency. The results of the study reveal that vocabulary knowledge can greatly predict oral proficiency that one has, or size and depth of vocabulary are “predictors” of oral proficiency. In relation to this study, we observe that postgraduate students of the English department do not have a good deal of vocabulary knowledge. They are usually groping for words which require a break in speaking, thus negatively affecting oral fluency in the process. We can say that, to some extent, the quality of a spoken conversation also depends on a person's vocabulary. However, just cramming vocabulary like reading dictionaries does not help in improving spoken skills. The new words learnt must be practised so that they can have some meaningful impact on fluency.

An interesting study conducted by Gan (2012) aimed to find out the problems of students when it comes to oral English skills. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. The findings revealed a lack of vocabulary, poor command over grammar, wrong pronunciation of words and lack of opportunities to speak in class to be one of the main problems for students whose oral skills are not up to the mark. Moreover, the curriculum is designed in such a way that it does not assist students in developing oral skills.

Tuan and Mai (2015), like Gan (2012), have also worked on finding factors affecting students' speaking. They used questionnaires and class observation to collect data. Many factors emerged; however, anxiety, lack of topical knowledge, pressure to perform well, motivation, the time assigned to perform a speaking task, and listening ability, among other things, were responsible for affecting their speaking performance. This study also highlighted other problems as well. Both teachers and students agree that students have nothing to say, so they stay silent. They speak very little in class. They are also worried about making mistakes.

The above findings are some of the many which are reflected in daily life. Oral fluency is being negatively impacted by these factors. Iswara et al. (2012) discuss in their paper how trivia-based activities help in developing spoken fluency. They assert how such activities can give a boost to motivation, interest, learning, as well as speaking fluency. Furthermore, these activities can be used by teachers to get students to communicate in a second language because there is no academic pressure and these trivial activities contain a variety of topics which are interesting for students and will allow them to actively participate in the class. Another point is these activities are driven by asking and responding to questions which students do to exchange ideas. Here, the focus is on message rather than the form, which means that these activities are not pressurizing for students.

Considering these findings in the context of KUST university, we find that having a talk about trivialities in class results in having less anxiety because of having no academic pressure. This practice is entertaining as well as motivating for students to let them overcome their problems and talk in English. This study also

subscribes to the communicative language approach because the focus is the meaning, not the form. This focus on meaning will build the fluency of MA English students. In relation to this point, Alam and Uddin (2013) mention in their article that fluency precedes accuracy. Being accurate in form does not lead to one being fluent in English. This is in contrast with Luchini (2004), who discusses the development of oral skills by integrating fluency with tasks focusing on accuracy in China. According to him, the trend in second language teaching has shifted towards communicative approaches, which means there should be a focus on combining "structural, functional, and communicative aspects of the target language, " which English teachers neglect. He used self-assessment reports and questionnaires to collect data from students. He asserts that both form-focused and accuracy-focused tasks are important for L2 acquisition. Finally, he comments that though group work is advocated by this study, yet this approach may also be helpful as teachers should promote group activities to create a low anxiety context for L2 learning.

By considering all the studies and discussions that have been made regarding speaking skills and the various stances that are taken regarding fluency, we can easily realize that fluency is a topic which is well-researched, but there is still room for improvement. By taking all the studies into account, this study aims to identify the factors which students are supposed to overcome to achieve oral fluency, and it also aims to highlight factors which may have a positive impact on oral fluency.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Since the purpose of this research is to find out something that has not been found yet, no model can be used to conduct this research. By nature, this is exploratory research in which the researcher intends to find out the factors that are barriers to effective oral fluency. A quantitative approach will be used in the study, in which closed-ended questionnaires will be the data collection method. Questionnaires will allow the researcher to collect a large amount of data in a short time plus students are more willing to participate in tasks that are not time-consuming, like interviews, for instance. Moreover, this questionnaire will have two sections. The first will deal with identifying factors harming oral fluency, and the second will attempt to highlight factors to improve oral fluency. Both sections have one open-ended item in order to know what participants think about the issue at hand. Tuan and Mai (2015) used questionnaires to carry out their study. Hassan and Ahmed (2015); Esmail et al. (2015); Akram and Nosheen (2013); Shahzadi, et al. (2014) have also made use of questionnaires in the Pakistani context to conduct their studies. Baker (2008) supports quantitative methods.

### **Research sites and sample**

Quota sampling was used to decide the sample population for the study in hand. The total sample population was 30 for questionnaires. Furthermore, 15 BS English students were selected from FATA University, and 15 BS English students were selected from KUST and studying in 6<sup>th</sup> semester.

### **The procedure of data collection**

The data collection was preceded by a pilot study for which students from BS. English was selected to ascertain the clarity of the questionnaire. Changes were made to the questionnaire, and the final questionnaire was distributed amongst the research participants. The students were asked to read plain language statements and give their consent for data collection. Subsequently, they were given time to complete the questionnaire and instructed to submit it to the English department clerk.

### **Analysis of collected data**

Quantitative data collected were analyzed through SPSS, a software known for quantitative data analysis. This enables the researcher to gain descriptive statistics of the collected data and to present the findings in



the next chapter of this study. In SPSS, Frequency and mean are taken into account for the purpose of analysis of the data. The inference was drawn based on the percentages in each item of the questionnaire.

It is worth noting that two open-ended questions were added to the questionnaire, which enabled the researcher to know participants' perceptions of the factors behind poor oral fluency. It was also brought to light what factors they think can improve fluency. This may prove useful in identifying factors which may have been missing in the questionnaire.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Section "A" findings of items 1-18 regarding research question 1**

From the findings as shown in Table 1, we get to know that different participants have different views about different factors. For instance, item no. 1, which is about the fear of speaking English, produces a mean score of 3.60. Since 1.00 mean means something is wholeheartedly accepted and 5.00 mean score means a complete rejection of an item, this item has a 3.60 mean score, which tells us that this factor is not considered relevant by most students. The 2<sup>nd</sup> item is about poor grammar being a barrier to fluency. In this, we see that majority of the students agree with this and this gives this item a mean score of 2.33. This finding is corroborated by Akram and Nosheen (2013), who said that students face problems in speaking English due to "grammar illiteracy". The 3<sup>rd</sup> item is related to the vocabulary that one has. The result of this item does not clearly state whether it is a hurdle or not. The mean score of this item is 3.13, which is very close to being neutral. Therefore, we can truly determine whether this factor negatively impacts oral fluency or not. The 4<sup>th</sup> item is about the impact of shyness on oral fluency. The mean score, in this case, is 3.36 which means that we cannot truly measure the extent to which this affects fluency. Aside from that, the mean score of 3.43 suggests that poor pronunciation has no impact on oral fluency. Then, we come to item no. 6, in which the mean score of 2.96 suggests that, according to participants, shyness does not have a clear relationship with oral fluency. This mean score comes under the neutral territory, so to speak.

The majority of the students agree that lack of opportunities is one of the reasons their oral fluency is poor, and the mean score of this item is 2.40. This finding is in line with the findings of Gan (2012). Aside from this, the mean score of 3.53 suggests that the majority of the students were inclined to disagree that there is no lack of encouragement from the teachers' side. This finding is also supported by Akram and Nosheen (2013) which it is said that "university teachers motivate the students to speak the English language". Other than that, the mean score of 2.16 states that lack of practice hurts the oral fluency of students. This finding is corroborated by the findings of Shahzadi et al. (2014) in which it is recommended that students "should practice speaking the English language". Item no. 10 has got mean score of 3.40 which means that students are inclined to disagree with their teachers being incompetent and not able to improve their fluency. This shows that teachers hired at KUST and FATA University are up to the mark and they do not negatively impact students' fluency. Moreover, the mean score of 2.93 shows that the impact of accent on L2 oral fluency is chosen by participants to be neutral. We cannot certainly say whether it negatively impacts oral fluency or not. In addition to that, a 3.30 mean score shows that students remained neutral when they were asked whether their oral fluency was negatively affected by teachers' methodology.

harmful factor nor contradicts this statement. Item no. 14, however, gets a mean score of 2.26, which tells us that participants agree to have L1 interference in spoken English. This finding is in line with the findings of Akram and Nosheen (2013). Aside from that, the mean score of 2.56 suggests that students are inclined to agree with making mistakes negatively affects their oral performance. This finding is supported by the findings of Horwitz et al. (1986) which it is stated that students agree that they "worry about making mistakes in language class".

Table 1. Response of the students in frequency, percentage as well as in mean.

Sr.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
1.	I am afraid of speaking English.	3(10.0 %)	2(6.7%)	9(30.0%)	6(20.0%)	10(33.3%)	3.60
2	I think poor grammar is a hurdle in the way of speaking English.	8(26.7%)	13(43.3%)	2(6.7%)	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	2.33
3	I cannot speak English fluently and confidently due to poor vocabulary.	1(3.3%)	12(40.0%)	3(10.0%)	10(33.3%)	4(13.3%)	3.13
4	I do not want to speak in English because I feel shy in class.	2(6.7%)	9(30.0%)	3(10.0%)	8(26.7%)	8(26.7%)	3.36
5	I cannot speak fluently due to poor pronunciation.	2(6.7%)	7(23.3%)	4(13.3%)	10(33.3%)	7(23.3%)	3.43
6	I am not confident when speaking English which is why my fluency is poor.	2(6.7%)	11(36.7%)	6(20.0%)	8(26.7%)	3(10.0%)	2.96
7	Lack of opportunities to speak in the class has a negative impact on my speaking fluency.	7(23.3%)	12(40.0%)	3(10.0%)	8(26.7%)	0(0%)	2.40
8	I feel that my speaking is poor due to lack of encouragement from the teachers.	2(6.7%)	4(13.3%)	5(16.7%)	14(46.7%)	5(16.7%)	3.53
9	I think lack of speaking practice limits my speaking fluency.	7(23.3%)	15(50.0%)	4(13.3%)	4(13.3%)	0(0%)	2.16
10	I feel my speaking is poor due to the incompetence of teachers.	3(10%)	4(13.3%)	5(16.7%)	14(46.7%)	4(13.3%)	3.40
11	I think my incorrect accent negatively impacts my oral fluency.	3(10.0%)	7(23.3%)	10(33.3%)	9(30.0%)	1(3.3%)	2.93
12	I think the methodology of teachers regarding teaching speaking is not effective.	4(13.3%)	4(13.3%)	5(16.7%)	13(43.3%)	4(13.3%)	3.30
13	My speaking is poor because I am less motivated.	4(13.3%)	7(23.3%)	8(26.7%)	8(26.7%)	3(10.0%)	2.96
14	I believe that the process of translation from Urdu into English while speaking English negatively impacts oral fluency.	7(23.3%)	13(43.3%)	6(20.0%)	3(10.0%)	1(3.3%)	2.26
15	I am afraid of making mistakes when speaking English.	5(16.7%)	12(40.0%)	6(20.0%)	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	2.56
16	I feel anxious when I am asked to speak in English in the class.	2(6.7%)	9(30.0%)	7(23.3%)	10(33.3%)	2(6.7%)	3.03
17	I feel very self-conscious about speaking English in front of other students.	5(16.7%)	8(26.7%)	9(30.0%)	6(20.0%)	2(6.7%)	2.73
18	I worry that my teacher will try to correct every mistake I make in speaking English.	2(6.7%)	9(30.0%)	7(23.3%)	11(36.7%)	1(3.3%)	3.00

Item no. 13 provides a mean score of 2.96, which means that participants are almost neutral about the relationship between motivation and oral fluency. This score neither confirms less motivation to be a Moreover, in item no. 16, we have a mean score of 3.03, which reflects that, on average, students remained neutral when they were asked to state whether anxiety harms oral fluency or not. It shows that students do not get as much anxious when speaking a foreign language as they were in previous times, as suggested in the study of Horwitz et al. (1986) furthermore, when students were asked whether they were self-conscious when speaking in front of others, the mean score came to be 2.73, which that though, on average, most students remained neutral in this regard, some of them accepted to be self-conscious, which hurts their oral fluency. Finally, in item no. 18, the mean score of 3.00 represents that students, on average, remained neutral when they were asked whether the teacher correcting each and every mistake hurts their oral performance.

### **Responses to item no. 19 regarding research question 1**

This was an open-ended question in which students were asked to express their views as to what they think are the factors behind poor oral fluency. This item was ignored by the majority of the participants. Unfortunately, what factors they wrote about were already included in the questionnaire. There was nothing new to add to the factors regarding poor oral fluency.

### **Section “B” findings of items 20-31 regarding research question 2**

In item no. 20 as shown in Table 2, students were asked whether improvement in grammar would bring about improvement in speaking fluency; the mean score came to be 1.96, which means that they agreed to it. This is corroborated by Gan (2012) when he said that “anyone who wishes to speak a second language must learn the grammar” of it in order to have mastery. Furthermore, students were asked whether an increase in vocabulary knowledge would improve oral performance; the mean score came to 1.86, which means that they agreed with it. This finding is further endorsed by Koizumi and In’nami (2013) in which they proved that vocabulary knowledge is a predictor of oral proficiency. Moreover, in item no. 22, the mean score of 1.66 states that students agree that their oral fluency will get improved if they are not afraid of making mistakes. Alam and Uddin (2013) have also mentioned that we should not make students worried about making mistakes because making mistakes imply that students are actively working in understanding a new language. According to item no. 22, the mean score of 1.86 states that students agree that their oral performance will get improved if they are more confident. This fact is also supported by Esmail et al. (2015). In relation to item no. 24, the mean score of 2.06 states that students agree that improvement in pronunciation will improve their oral fluency. This finding is endorsed by Esmail et al. (2015) in which it is stated that “good pronunciation may make the communication more relaxed and easier and make it successful”. Aside from that, the mean score of 1.46 states that students strongly agree that if they get the guidance of well-trained teachers, their fluency will improve as a result. This finding is consistent with the study of Shahzadi et al. (2014), in which it is said that “students need teacher guidance for improving their learning skill”.

In item no. 26, a 1.66 mean score reveals that students agree that audio-visual aids can help improve their fluency, and this point is also highlighted by Hassan and Ahmed (2015). Likewise, in item no. 27, the mean score of 1.60 reveals that students agree that getting more chances to speak will improve their fluency. This finding is also supported by Esmail et al. (2015) which it is said that just like the mother language, we can learn any new language by practice or, in other words, “practice makes a man perfect”. Similarly, the mean score of 1.66 results in students agreeing to frequent oral activities to improve their speaking fluency. This finding is also supported by Iswara et al. (2012). Furthermore, the mean score of 1.86 reveals that students agree communicative approaches should be used in the classes to improve speaking skills. This statement

is further endorsed by Alam and Uddin (2013), who says that “teacher talk should be minimized in the classroom, thereby providing opportunities for learners to talk, and to practice and produce language”.

Table No. 2 Response of students in frequency, percentage, and in mean

Sr.	Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Mean
20	I will be able to speak English if my knowledge about grammar is good.	10(33.3%)	13(43.3%)	5(16.7%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	1.96
21	I will be able to speak English fluently if I have a rich vocabulary.	14(46.7%)	9(30.0%)	4(13.3%)	3(10.0%)	0(0%)	1.86
22	I can speak more if I am not afraid of making mistakes.	14(46.7%)	14(46.7%)	0(0%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	1.66
23	I will be able to speak more if I am more confident.	13(43.3%)	12(40.0%)	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	1.86
24	I think good pronunciation will encourage students to speak more English in class.	8(26.7%)	13(43.3%)	8(26.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	2.06
25	Students need the guidance of well-trained teachers to improve speaking skills.	20(66.7%)	7(23.3%)	2(6.7%)	1(3.3%)	0(0%)	1.46
26	I believe use of audio-visual aids in class can improve the quality of spoken English.	19(63.3%)	5(16.7%)	3(10.0%)	3(10.0%)	0(0%)	1.66
27	I believe that students should be given more opportunities to speak in English.	18(60.0%)	8(26.7%)	2(6.7%)	2(6.7%)	0(0%)	1.60
28	I believe a frequent use of oral activities can improve speaking skills.	16(53.3%)	11(36.7%)	0(0%)	3(10.0%)	0(0%)	1.66
29	I believe communicative language approaches should be used to enhance speaking fluency.	13(43.3%)	11(36.7%)	3(10.0%)	3(10.0%)	0(0%)	1.86
30	I believe extensive reading can be used to improve oral fluency.	11(36.7%)	11(36.7%)	7(23.3%)	0(0%)	1(3.3%)	1.96
31	I believe oral fluency should be given priority over oral accuracy.	6(20.0%)	14(46.7%)	5(16.7%)	4(13.3%)	1(3.3%)	2.33

Aside from that, item no. 30 got a mean score of 1.96 which reflects that students agree that reading extensively will bring about an improvement in oral fluency and this finding is also supported by Baker (2008). In the last closed-ended item, the mean score of 2.33 shows that students agree that oral fluency is more important than oral accuracy. This finding is also supported by Alam and Uddin (2013) in which it is asserted that the idea of oral accuracy developing oral fluency is wrong and further asserted that “the oral proficiency must be improved by taking fluency as a first step”.

### **Responses to item no. 32 regarding research question 2**

“Please write down your ideas as to how to improve the speaking fluency of MA. English students”.

In this open-ended item, students were asked to write down factors which may help in improving oral fluency. Furthermore, it was said that in classroom discussions and debates, for instance, students should be introduced so that we get to speak in English as a result. In addition, it was also said that teachers have to speak English at all times. Then, it was said that there should be proper classes for teaching speaking. It

is, however, worth mentioning that all of these responses are further reinforced by Akram and Nosheen (2013). Furthermore, there should be no code-switching within the class, and one student even asserted that if our teachers do not speak in English, then do not expect the students to speak English as well. Lastly, it was said that English movies, and English channels such as BBC TV, etc., should be used by the students to get exposure to authentic English to improve overall competence.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The aim of this study was to explore factors which contributed to the poor oral fluency of BS English students in FATA and Kohat University of Science and Technology KUST. Furthermore, the study was intended to find out factors which may improve the oral fluency of BS English students in both universities. The study revealed that poor grammar, lack of opportunities to speak in class, lack of speaking practice, L1 interference, and fear of making mistakes are the prominent factors which contribute to the poor oral fluency of graduate students of English departments in both universities. Furthermore, it has also come to light that improvement in grammar, increase in vocabulary knowledge, more confidence, improvement in pronunciation, the guidance of well-trained teachers', use of audio-visual aids, more opportunities to speak in the class, frequent use of oral activities, employment of communicative approaches, extensive reading, prioritizing oral fluency over oral accuracy, and less fear of making mistakes bring about an improvement in the oral fluency of BS English students.

The study recommends that there should be a compulsory subject conducted in the first semester regarding speaking skills. This could help the students to improve their grammar. However, it must be made sure that this focus on grammar does not affect the importance of oral fluency. Furthermore, student-oriented classes should be conducted in which students participate more and thus get more chances to speak as well. In addition, a certain amount of internal marks should be assigned to students who consistently attempt to speak in English inside the classroom. This will push the students to practice speaking English. Well-trained teachers should encourage students to get exposure to English media such as BBC News, National Geographic, interviews on TV, etc. The result will be that students will be able to know how native English speakers speak and what kind of language they use in different situations. Most importantly, students who follow this recommendation will, eventually, be able to speak English with relatively less L1 interference. Likewise, every class should have a multimedia facility so that students can get benefit from audio-visual aids. Moreover, students should be encouraged to speak English regardless of how many mistakes they make. This fear of making mistakes is detrimental to the building of oral fluency; therefore, teachers and students in the department must try to make the other students feel at ease when speaking English. Making such arrangements for these students will also boost their confidence.

### **REFERENCES**

- Akram, M., & Nosheen, S. S. (2013). A study to analyze the problems of post graduate students in speaking English language at the islamia University of Bahawalpur, Pakistan. *Proceeding of the Global Summit on Education (GSE2013)*.
- Alam, Q., & Uddin, A. B. (2013). Improving English oral communication skills of Pakistani public school's students. *International Journal of English Language Teaching*, 1(2), 17-36.
- Ascione, M. E. (1993). Fluency development in second language teaching (Doctoral dissertation, Lethbridge, Alta.: University of Lethbridge, Faculty of Education, 1993). Retrieved from <https://www.uleth.ca/dspace/handle/10133/1122>.
- Baker, J. & Westrup, H., (2003). *Essential Speaking Skills: A Handbook for English Language Teachers*. Bloomsbury Publishing, London.

- Baker, T., (2008). Oral Fluency and Extensive Reading Activities. *IH Journal of Education and Development*. 24. Retrieved from <http://ihjournal.com/oral-fluency-and-extensive-reading-activities>
- Bashiruddin, A. (2004). Learning English and learning to teach English: The case of two teachers of English in Pakistan (pp. 1220-1220). National Library of Canada= Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, Ottawa.
- Esmail, A., Ahmed, M., & Noreen, S. (2015). Why Do Pakistani Students are Reluctant to Speak English. *Academic Research International*. 6(3), 372-383.
- Gan, Z. (2012). Understanding L2 Speaking Problems: Implications for ESL Curriculum Development in a Teacher Training Institution in Hong Kong. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(1), 43-59.
- Hassan, S. & Ahmed, M. (2015). Issues of English Language Learners in Communication at Intermediate Level in Pakistan. *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics*, 8, 104-111.
- Hassan, S. S. U. (2016). Recent education changes at higher education level in Pakistan: English language teachers' perceptions and practices (Doctoral dissertation, University of Glasgow). Retrieved from: [ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.695176](https://ethos.bl.uk/OrderDetails.do?uin=uk.bl.ethos.695176).
- Hornby, A. S., Turnbull, J., Diana, L., Parkinson, D., Phillips, P., Francis, B., Webb, S., Bull, V., & Ashby, M. (2010). *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Horwitz, E. K., Horwitz, M. B., & Cope, J. (1986). Foreign language classroom anxiety. *The Modern language journal*, 70(2), 125-132.
- Imran, S. (2020). Pakistani University English Language Teachers' Cognitions and Practices (Doctoral dissertation, University of Portsmouth). Retrieved from: [core.ac.uk/download/pdf/363921727.pdf](https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/363921727.pdf).
- Iswara, A. A., Azib, A., & Rochsantiningsih, D. (2012). Improving Students' Speaking Fluency through the Implementation of Trivia-Based Activity in University Students. *English Education*, 1(1), 1-17.
- Khan, M. R. (2014). Socio-linguistic Study to Investigate the Factors Affecting L2 Oral Communication at Postgraduate Level in Pakistan. *Arab World English Journal*, 5(4), 411-426.
- Koizumi, R., & In'nami, Y. (2013). Vocabulary knowledge and speaking proficiency among second language learners from novice to intermediate levels. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 4(5), 900-913.
- Luchini, P. L., (2004). Developing oral skills by combining fluency- with accuracy-focused tasks: A case study in China. *Asian EFL Journal*, 6(4), 1-20.
- Rossiter, M. J., Derwing, T. M., Manimtim, L., & Thomson, R. I. (2010). Oral fluency: The neglected component in the communicative classroom. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 66(4), 583-606.
- Ryczek, M. (2013). Promoting Oral Fluency in the ESL classroom: An Introduction to the 4/3/2 Fluency Activity. *CELE Journal*, (21), 30-42.
- Sarwar, B. (2002). *Teaching of English*. Rehman Books, Bahawalpur, Pakistan.
- Shahzadi, K., Zahabia, Manzoor, N., Shabana, H., Rehman, M., & Zahra, R. (2014). difficulties faced in learning english language skills by university of sargodha's students. *International Journal of Academic Research and Reflection*, 2(2), 76-82.
- Sharma, O.K. (2004). *Principles of education*. Deep and Deep Publications, New Delhi.

- Tuan, N. H. & Mai, T. N. (2015). Factors affecting students' speaking performance at Le Thanh Hien high school. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3 (2), 8-23.
- Wang, Z., (2014). Developing accuracy and fluency in spoken English of Chinese EFL learners. *English language teaching*, 7(2), 110.
- Warschauer, M. (2001). Millennialism and media: Language, literacy, and technology in the 21st century. *AILA Review*, 14, 49-59.
- Yang, Y. I. J. (2014). The development of speaking fluency: The 4/3/2 technique for the EFL learners in China. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, 3(4), 55-70.