

Exploring the Regional Languages Influence on the Perception and Confidence Levels of Undergraduate Engineering Students when Communicating in English: A Case Study at QUEST Nawab Shah, Pakistan



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Abstract: *This research studies how regional languages such as Sindhi, Urdu, and Punjabi impact undergraduate engineering students' perception and confidence when communicating in English at Quaid-e-Awam University of Engineering, Science and Technology (QUEST), Nawabshah. The findings reveal that good performance in academics and professions is closely linked to the ability to do well in English. However, many of them face problems switching from their mother tongues to English. The Results further reveal that these regional languages impact students' thoughts and thus place psychological and cultural barriers on acquiring the English language. Additionally, a lack of practice opportunities and teaching methods not suited to students coming from varied language backgrounds makes the learning process more challenging. To address these issues, the study proposes several solutions, including peer learning groups, practicing English in engineering classes, teachers' support, organization of language workshops, and integration of technology in language learning. These strategies may improve students' confidence and strengthen their English communication skills. Therefore, this research aims to identify specific challenges faced by QUEST Nawab Shah Students and explore how teaching methods that consider their linguistic and cultural backgrounds can enhance their English communication skills. Ultimately, this will support their academic success and better prepare them for professional careers in a global environment where English is widely used.*

Keywords: Languages, Sindhi, Urdu, Punjabi

Introduction

English has become a language of communication throughout the world, particularly in educational and engineering institutions. For the students of Pakistan,

learning English as a second language is quite challenging. Students face many challenges when learning English as a second language, especially at the university level, where English is the primary medium

of instruction (Niazi, M. M., Ahmed, S., & Khan, D. S., p. 2023). At QUEST, students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and commonly speak regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, or Urdu. These Regional languages influence students' perceptions and confidence in English, which further shapes their way of thinking and communication styles (Ahmad, A., Rao, I. S., & Rao, M. S., 2023).

While indigenous languages are culturally and emotionally rich but sometimes make it difficult for the students to speak fluently in English. The students, particularly those from rural areas, often have limited opportunities to speak English in an academic environment. This lack of exposure negatively affects their vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency (Rao, 2024). Research shows that insufficient practice and a poor learning environment are key contributors to language learning among ESL students.

Moreover, some students get nervous while speaking because of the fear of making mistakes in English; this anxiety significantly impacts their ability to communicate effectively and reduces their confidence, making English a hard skill for them to master. Studies show that language anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and communication apprehension play a major role in hindering English language acquisition (Sana, A., & Atta, A, 2024) .

Additionally, anxiety has been found to affect students' academic performance, motivation, and self-confidence (Mari, N., Panhwar, A. H., & Ansari, S, 2024).

The pressure on students to speak English fluently is also associated with the perception of academic competence and social status. Such pressure could lead to students losing their self-esteem and confidence, especially if they feel that they are not meeting the expectations. Students in engineering need more English skills. Research indicates that English language anxiety remains a persistent challenge for ESL learners at the university level in Pakistan (Niazi, 2024). For engineering students, the challenge is even greater as they are required not only to communicate effectively but also to master technical vocabulary. So there is a cultural dimension that makes it even more difficult for regional languages to be considered more traditional than modern English. This creates an inner contradiction for the students learning English as they attempt to balance their identity with academic demands (Ahmad, 2023). Moreover, many educational institutions lack practice teaching methodologies that address the needs of students' transitions to shift from their mother tongues to using English, resulting in gaps in English proficiency and usage. (Rao M. S., 2024)

Background of the study

Language plays an essential role in shaping learners' identity, cognitive development, and academic performance, particularly in Multilingual countries such as Pakistan (García, O., & Wei, L, 2021). At the tertiary level of education, English is widely used as the medium of instruction, especially in technical fields like engineering (Khan, I., & Asghar, M., 2022). It presents a particularly arduous environment for students who pursue a program in Engineering. However, students entering universities often come from diverse linguistic backgrounds where regional languages such as Sindhi, Urdu, and Punjabi dominate their daily communication. This shift creates a challenge in adopting English medium as students simultaneously process complex academic content, technical jargon, and extremely advanced English vocabulary and expression (Ali, Z., Hussain, M., & Raza, S, 2023). In reality, it does create a high degree of cognitive overload simply because it's during this moment that the learning student faces challenges to change from one language to another new language of instructions (Sweller, 2023). More importantly, pupils without a secure foundation in the target language, such as English, also lack the basic ability to absorb abstract technical know-how, which further opens an even greater distance in academic output (Khan, I., & Asghar, M, 2022).

Moreover, research has shown that regional language influences not only

communication but also students' cognitive and thinking processes. When students think primarily in their mother tongues and attempt to translate their ideas into English, it can lead to hesitation, reduced fluency, and lower student confidence level (Mercer, p. 2011). This cognitive burden is also associated with language interference and processing difficulties in Second language acquisition (Derakhshan, A., Fathi, J., & Pawlak, M., 2021). Language anxiety is another significant factor affecting students' ability to communicate effectively in English. Recent studies in Pakistan indicate that fear of negative evaluation, communication apprehension, and low self-esteem are common among ESL learners (Niazi, M. M., Ahmed, S., & Khan, D. S., p. 2023) these Barrie's discourage students from participating in class and creating a cycle of avoidance and reduce language development (Mari, N., Panhwar, A. H., & Ansari, S., 2024).

Furthermore, existing teaching methodology in many Pakistani institutions is not adequately designed to support students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds; as a result, students are unable to develop the confidence required to use English effectively in real-life contexts (Sana, A., & Atta, A, 2024). Given these challenges, there is a need to explore how regional language influences students' perception and confidence in English communication, particularly in specialized

fields such as Engineering. This study aims to address this gap by examining the experiences of undergraduate engineering students at QUEST and identifying practical solutions to enhance their English communication skills and academic success.

Significance of the study

This is significant as it highlights the impact of regional languages among undergraduate engineering students in an educational environment. It also provides valuable insights into how linguistic backgrounds affect students' confidence, participation, and academic performance in English at QUEST. The study will be beneficial for teachers, students, and educational policymakers. The study will also provide guidance in developing supportive learning environments, such as workshops, peer learning activities, and interactive teaching methods that will help students shift from their mother tongues to English and also improve English language proficiency among engineering students, which is beneficial for their academic success and professional careers in a globalized world where English plays a key role in communication and technical fields.

Aim of the study

This study aims to investigate how regional languages (Sindhi, Urdu, Punjabi) influence the confidence and perception of undergraduate engineering students at QUEST, Nawabshah. The study seeks to

identify the challenges faced by students in English communication and to explore effective strategies that can help improve confidence and communication skills for academic and professional success.

Problem statement

Undergraduate Engineering students at QUEST, Nawabshah, are facing significant challenges in communicating effectively in English due to the influence of their regional language backgrounds, although English is the primary medium of instruction and essential for academic and professional success. Many students struggle to express their ideas in English. This difficulty arises from multiple factors, including limited exposure in their daily communication environments, especially among students from rural areas, and the strong influence of their mother tongues. As a result, students often experience language anxiety and low self-esteem. Furthermore, existing teaching methods in many institutions do not adequately address the needs of students who come from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The lack of practical opportunities to use English and an insufficient supporting system further widens the gap between students' academic requirements and their actual language proficiency. So, these challenges not only affect students' performance but also limit their readiness for professional careers

where English communication is essential. Therefore, there is a need to investigate how regional languages influence students' perception and confidence in English and to identify effective strategies that can help students to overcome these barriers.

Research objectives

1. To examine the impact of regional languages on the perception and confidence of undergraduate engineering students in English communication at QUEST.
2. To propose effective strategies that can enhance students' English communication skills.

Research Questions

1. How do regional languages influence the perception and confidence of engineering students in communicating in English at QUEST?
2. What effective strategies can be implemented to enhance students' English communication skills?

Literature review

Language is an integral part of individual identity, and it plays an important role in the self-concept and self-efficacy of students in schools and the workplace (Norton, 2013). For students in Pakistan who converse in two to three languages, such as Sindhi, Urdu, and Punjabi, the English medium can be a major issue in terms of identity (Mahboob A. , p. 2025). Regional languages

are one of the media through which thoughts, feelings, and cultural identities are expressed. Often, regional languages lead students to think about how language proficiency and communication exist (Block, p. 2014). When students are abruptly shifted to English, mostly in the academic sphere, it leaves them feeling very alienated or disconnected, as they have not used that much English in their real life (Sana, A., & Atta, A. , 2024). This tension between mother tongue and English can affect the confidence level of students, especially in participation in class, oral expression, and written expression (Niazi, M. M., Ahmed, S., & Khan, D. S, 2024).

In many societies, English is said to be the gate opener toward social mobility, higher education, and professional success. (Rahman, T., & Alhaisoni, E., 2023) Calls this phenomenon "linguistic imperialism," whereby the English language supplants regional languages as the lingua franca for power and prestige. In a student who has a rural background or lower socio-economic status with limited exposure to regular English, this difference might work as a barrier to his success (Sana, A., & Atta, A. (2024)., 2024). According to Tannenbaum (2009), in this scenario, students undergo psychological barriers when using English at educational levels, as they fear that they will be judged against their accents or grammar. This cultural contrast, where regional languages are viewed as inferior to

English, makes the students feel that their abilities are low and develops insecurity. (Mari, N., Panhwar, A. H., & Ansari, S, 2024).

Furthermore, Regional languages affect the way students process academic content. In particular, in fields such as engineering, regional languages shape the cognitive frameworks of students. Bilingual students typically experience cognitive overload when they have to process complex academic material in a second language. (Mari, 2024). For engineering students, having to master technical concepts and academic English simultaneously can be too much to handle (Khan, I., & Asghar, M., 2022). However, in instances where students do not master the use of English when trying to develop their abstract conception or general cognition abilities, poor school results are realized (García, O., & Wei, L., p. 2022). This explains the argument that comprehensible input provides access to English by relating students to contextually enriched circumstances to achieve results that overcome these hindrances (Ali, 2023). However, students from rural backgrounds, where English is not commonly spoken outside the classroom, lack sufficient exposure to English in natural settings, reducing their fluency and confidence (Sweller, 2023).

Language anxiety is another factor that will hinder one's confidence to communicate in

the English language. Language anxiety prevents proper acquisition of a target language as well as makes someone shy from communicating (Derakhshan, A., Fathi, J., & Pawlak, M., 2021). For students whose native language is regional, this anxiety will likely be compounded when they have to present or write using English in formal academic or professional contexts (Yusuf, 2024). In the case of engineering, where the expression of technical communication is significant, a student fears that their proficiency in the English language might become an obstacle to saying the same thing in detail. This fear can give rise to a vicious cycle of low self-esteem and avoidance of tasks that require the use of English (Khan, I., & Asghar, M., 2022). According to Macintyre and Gardner, "Students' perceptions of their language abilities are linked with their self-esteem: the latter can be culturally and linguistically conditioned". When perceived as superior, "students who feel weak in English begin to internalize debilitating inadequacy feelings that reduce their confidence" (Mahboob A. , p. 2025).

The views about English and the students' confidence in using it are further developed through teaching practices in educational institutions. (Richards, 2006) argues that content-based language teaching should be carried out in which the students are engaged in meaningful, communicative activities directly related to their academic

and professional needs. However, most education systems, especially in countries like Pakistan, follow rote memorization and grammar-based traditional methods. These do not provide the students with adequate communicative competence to use English confidently in actual situations. According to (Mahboob, 2022), the lack of student-centered learning and a focus on reading and writing at the expense of speaking and listening makes students more alienated from using English for academic and professional communication.

It has always been shown that students who are not fluent in the language of instruction feel anxious, fearful, and less confident, which impacts their performance (MacIntyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T., 2022). For instance, language anxiety, as a phenomenon, is very much documented as being experienced by second language learners in every kind of setting (Teimouri, 2021). Anxiety that characterizes language learning can be seen among second language learners, so this fear of speaking before people in public or academic settings often results in avoidance behaviors. This anxiety might cause students not to speak English in class and lead to a cycle where a lack of practice further eats away at their confidence (Zhang, X., Dai, Y., & Ardasheva, Y., p. 2024). This can be even more damaging when put into the context of engineering because students need to clearly and accurately communicate knowledge about

technically sensitive topics (MacIntyre, 2022). When regional languages are considered "inferior" to English, as is the case in most post-colonial societies, students internalize these perceptions and feel ashamed of their linguistic backgrounds. This contributes to low self-esteem, further limiting participation and communication in academic environments (Kubota, p. 2025).

The reviewed literature highlights that regional languages significantly influence students' perception, confidence, and ability to communicate in English, particularly in technical learning environments. It also emphasizes the role of language anxiety, limited exposure, and sociocultural factors in shaping students' academic performance. However, despite these insights, there remains a need for context-specific research that explores these challenges among undergraduate engineering students, especially within institutions like QUEST, where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Therefore, to gain a deeper understanding of these issues and to explore practical solutions, the present study adopts a qualitative research approach. The following section outlines the research methodology used to investigate the impact of regional language influence on students' English communication skills.

Research methodology

This study is carried out using a qualitative research design to explore how regional languages influence the perception and confidence of engineering students in communication in English at QUEST, Nawabshah. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it allows for an in-depth understanding of students' experience, perception, and challenges. Furthermore, the study conducted semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions. These questions encouraged participants to share detailed insights regarding their experiences with English Communication, confidence levels, and the impact of regional languages. This method provided flexibility, allowing participants to express their ideas freely. The sample consisted of 10 undergraduate engineering students from QUEST Nawab Shah. Participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique, as it enabled the choice of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Sindhi, Urdu, and Punjabi speakers, to obtain a comprehensive perspective. This study is based on primary data, as the information was collected directly from participants through interviews. The collected data were thematically analyzed. Responses were carefully reviewed, coded, and categorized to identify key patterns and themes. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their informed consent was obtained confidently, and

anonymity was maintained by not disclosing participants' identities. Additionally, participants were allowed to review their responses to ensure accuracy. To enhance the credibility of the study, triangulation was applied by comparing responses across participants to identify consistency. This helped to ensure the reliability and validity of the findings.

Findings

Respondent 1 (Male, Sindhi Speaker)

Regional Language Influence on Confidence: "Since Sindhi is my first language, I am not able to express the ideas that I have before my classmates. My thoughts remain lost in translation. And it lowers my confidence when it comes to speaking in the English language."

Perception of English Communication: "I feel like it is necessary to speak English if I want to succeed here. But sometimes it feels like judgment when I commit mistakes. Everyone expects you to speak flawlessly, and this is not what I can hold up."

Strategy Recommendations: "It would help if we could have more practice sessions where we are encouraged to speak without worrying about mistakes. Maybe we could have small group discussions in English, where we can practice technical language."

Respondent 2 (Female, Urdu Speaker)

Regional Language Influence on

Confidence: I grew up speaking Urdu at home, so I wasn't exposed to much English. So, when I came to university, I was intimidated. It took me a long time even to answer questions in class because I was afraid of being laughed at for my accent."

Perception of English Communication:

"For me, English has something to do with professionalism and education. I feel that the stress of speaking perfect English at times does make me nervous, even though I know what I'm saying."

Strategy Recommendations: "I would suggest that there be English communication workshops. It's not just about grammar; it's about how to articulate thoughts. Group exercises would also help reduce stress."

Respondent 3 (Male, Punjabi Speaking)**Regional Language Influence on**

Confidence: "Punjabi is my mother tongue, and although I can understand English well, speaking it is hard. I tend to think in Punjabi, and that affects my fluency in English. My confidence dips when I fail to voice my ideas in English."

Perception of English Communication:

"English is essential for me as an engineering professional, though I feel it works as an inhibition for youngsters like me originating from a country whose native language is not English."

Strategy Recommendations: More exercise in practices whereby we regularly practice the language, or even the introduction of bilingual practice inside the classes, will make it more feasible."

Responder 4 (Female, Sindhi Speaking)**Regional language influence on**

confidence: "I feel more comfortable in Sindhi, and whenever I want to communicate something in English, I get shy. I know there'll be judgments on this language, so I run away to speak when I shouldn't."

Perception of English Communication:

"I think proper usage of English is required for having a proper job; yet, my regional background does not allow me to be confident of its usage in the academic as well as in the professional atmosphere."

Strategy Recommendations:

"Peer mentoring will prove miraculous. If better users of English could facilitate the guidance to their peers, then lessened apprehension of criticism may take place."

Respondent 5 (Male, Urdu Speaker)**Regional Language Influence on**

Confidence: "My mother tongue is Urdu, and since I did not use English very frequently while growing up, I find it difficult to communicate. At times, I feel less intelligent when I do not make my points clearly in English."

Perception of Communication in English:

"English is thought of as a way to success, but that makes me anxious. I feel judged by my class fellows, particularly when I go wrong."

Strategy Recommendations: "It would be helpful if our professors could use simpler English in the beginning, or at least mix in some Urdu or Sindhi to explain complex concepts. It will ease our transition."

Participant 6 (female, Punjabi-speaking)

Regional language influence on confidence: "I speak Punjabi at home, and though I know English, it's difficult with the technical words." It gives me nervousness when I have to enter into a conversation because I do not know the words.

Perception of English Communication:

"Speaking English well is important for my job, but I feel like I'm constantly playing catch-up because I did not speak much English growing up.

Strategy Recommendations: "I'd like to have more activity in class where we can work in small groups." "Sometimes using local languages to explain technical words, that's it.

Participant 7 (male, Sindhi -speaking)

Regional Language Influence on Confidence: "I try to think in English because I am not that fluent. But when I try

to say my thoughts in English, it is awkward, and I lose my confidence.

Perception of English Communication:

"Most people are compelled to speak English because this is the language of knowledge and opportunity for success. "But for people like me, that pressure makes things even tougher.

Strategy Recommendations: "There should be more casual ways to practice English, like friendly conversations where no one criticizes." Getting people involved is really important.

Respondent 8 (female, Urdu speaking)

Regional language influence on confidence: "Urdu is my first language, so my English is not very good." I don't like speaking in English because I'm afraid people will think that I am not as intelligent as others.

Perception of English Communication: "I understand that English is necessary for my study and profession, but I get nervous while trying to use it well in technical topics.

Strategy Recommendations: "We need chances to practice speaking English outside of class." English clubs or groups where people help each other can be very helpful.

Participant 9 (male, Punjabi speaker)

Regional Language Influence on Confidence: "It is hard for me to speak in English because I think in Punjabi. "I am

less confident when others speak so fluently. "It makes me unsure about joining in on class talks.

Perception of English Communication:

"There's always pressure to do well in English." I think it has to do with how people see us in society, and it impacts how I feel about myself.

Strategy Recommendations: "I would like it if teachers gave us more chances to take part in class without worrying too much about grammar mistakes." "Practicing is more important.

Participant 10 (Female, Speaks Sindhi)

Regional Language Influence on Confidence: The language that makes me feel the most confident is Sindhi. I get nervous when I have to speak in English, especially before a class.

Perception of English Communication: "I think knowing English can really help me both in my life and at work, but fear of making errors keeps me silent.

Strategy Recommendations: "We should create more opportunities to communicate in the language with other students. We can encourage them to discuss their group assignments or activities assigned to them together in English. This would allow us to practice with less stress."

Discussion

The findings of this research are helpful in understanding how regional languages can affect the perception and confidence of undergraduate engineering students of QUEST Nawab Shah regarding their English communication skills. By employing semi-structured interviews with 10 participants, several key themes emerged that illustrate the challenges they face and some strategies they have identified as means to improve their English communication competencies. This study found that most students, regardless of whether they possessed Sindhi, Urdu, or even Punjabi as their first language, reported significant impacts of the regional language on their confidence about speaking in the English language. Many respondents expressed that their thoughts and communication processes were naturally shaped by their native language, which created a barrier when trying to express technical ideas or converse in English. Respondents frequently pointed to regional accents, vocabulary, and sentence structure as factors that challenged them in speaking fluent English. The fear of one's ability to speak correct English was another theme: most students feared being ridiculed for their poor English before classmates or professors, and therefore avoided using English in discussions, oral presentations, and public speaking. As highlighted by many participants, the pressure to be fluent in

English is most evident and significant in the engineering area, where they feel being fluent in English is quite important for both academic and career success. This perception heightens their anxiety of being judged, further lowering their self-esteem, which lowers their confidence too.

The regional influence also came through on a cultural level. Many students reflected that English was considered the language of prestige and, therefore, status, hence creating an unbridgeable gap between the good-in-English speakers and those not so proficient. The socio-cultural facet adds further anxiety and stress towards using English to communicate since there seems to be an inescapable compulsion to strive for standards that have to be achieved academically and professionally. As the respondents were interviewed and analyzed, several strategies that would be able to decrease the negative effects of the regional languages on English language communication, yet still maintain students' confidence and proficiency, were determined.

Peer Learning and Group Discussions: Peer learning groups to practice English in a freer and more informal context were one of the widely suggested recommendations. This was because the anxiety students underwent when speaking English before many individuals or professors would be erased from students' minds. Students made

significant efforts to emphasize the need to build safe spaces where mistakes would not be seen as something awful but rather as part of the learning process. More of the practice had to be directed toward the actual use of the language in real contexts, namely, the students' engineering courses. Project presentations, case studies, or technical discussions in English, for example, could all work as activities through which students might learn specific technical vocabulary and expressions in use, making them feel more comfortable using the language necessary for their further academic and professional development. **Faculty Support and Encouragement.** Many respondents felt that their professors could play a key role in building their confidence through offering much more personalized feedback and support. Professors may encourage students to make discussions and presentations, instead of just focusing on the accuracy of grammar. This would help the students not feel so self-conscious about voicing ideas in the medium of English without feeling the load of judgment.

Language Workshops and Training: Another suggestion that many respondents made was the provision of specialized language workshops or training. This would include improving technical communication skills in English, with speaking, writing, and understanding of engineering-specific terms. The sessions could be offered in a non-threatening environment, and students

would gradually become more confident and fluent.

Use of Technology: A few of the students recommended that apps for language learning and interactivity on online sites could be used to practice their English. Such tools could enhance vocabulary, pronunciation, and fluency in a more engaging way and with greater flexibility. Technology also enables students to practice their use of the English language outside of the classroom, thus correcting the problem of limited use of the language in such rural areas.

Conclusion

Conclusion: In general, the findings from this study conclude that regional languages significantly impact students' confidence and perception regarding communicating in English by undergraduate engineering students at QUEST Nawab Shah. In many cases, the transitional aspects of regional language to the English language have caused stress, especially when referring to technical language, as students are psychologically hampered, leading to low self-esteem and language anxiety. This, in turn, reflects on their academic performance and participation in class discussions, besides preparedness for the professional world.

To overcome these problems, supportive, low-pressure environments should be provided to the students so that they can

practice English with ease. Peer learning groups, practical exercises in language, encouragement by faculty members, and integrating language workshops with technology all contribute to increased confidence and proficiency in communicating in the English language. An appreciation for linguistic diversity by the universities would help create an enabling environment that allows students to learn without feelings of marginalization or hindrances in their regional languages.

This study finally underlines the need to incorporate culturally responsive teaching methods and opportunities for students to use English in informal and formal settings. Such initiatives will not only enhance their English communication skills but also empower them to succeed in the globalized, English-dominated world of engineering.

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