



Challenges in Developing English Productive Skills among Students in Azad Jammu and Kashmir

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the challenges faced by students in Azad Kashmir, specifically in Tehsil Pallandri District Sudhnoti, in developing English productive skills within a multilingual context. Despite the global importance of English, Azad Kashmir unique linguistic, sociocultural, and educational landscape presents significant obstacles. Linguistic challenges include interference from local languages and limited English exposure, while sociocultural issues involve perceptions of English as a status symbol and financial constraints. Educationally, outdated teaching methods and large class sizes further hinder progress. The study aims to explore these challenges, assess the effectiveness of available educational resources, and understand the sociocultural and systemic factors influencing students' English developing experiences. Using a mixed-methods approach with surveys and interviews of 80 students and educators. The research seeks to offer insights and recommendations to improve English language education and support in this region, ultimately aiming to bridge the linguistic divide and enhance students' global competitiveness.

1. Introduction

Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJ&K) is an autonomous administrative region Under Pakistani authority. It is situated in Pakistan's northeast and is bounded to the north by Gilgit-Baltistan, to the east by Indian-administered Jammu and Kashmir, to the south by the Punjab province, and to the west by Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Approximately 4.5 million people, primarily Paharis and ethnic Kashmiris, live in AJ&K, which occupies an area of about 13,297 square kilometers (AJ&K Bureau of Statistics, 2023).

In terms of linguistic diversity, AJ&K is home to the most widely spoken languages, Pahari, Gojri, and Kashmiri, with Pahari being the most common in most regions. Urdu is the official language and the medium of instruction in administration and education, while English is used in official correspondence and higher education. Punjabi is also understood in some areas due to increased mobility and media exposure, and English language proficiency is increasing, especially among the younger generation (Rahman, 2021; Zia, 2022)

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The students in AJ&K find themselves under a host of difficult situations when it comes to English language learning, especially speaking and writing. They have regional languages like Pahari, Gojri or Kashmiri as their first language, while the same is far removed from English in terms of syntax, phonology and grammar. The linguistic disparity between other languages to English is one of the main challenges that make students hard to get a proper pronunciation and proper language structure or lexical connotations. Moreover, social as well as economic background also affect the learning of English language for the AJ&K students (Mahmood, 2020).

The sub-standard English language teaching in AJ&K is attributed to outdated curricula, poor-quality textbooks, overcrowded classrooms, limited technological resources (Azam & Kingdon, 2013). Furthermore, the one-size-fits-all curriculum overlooks the linguistic and cultural context of learners, reducing students' motivation to develop English productive skills (Rahman, 2004). The socio-political instability of the region further disrupts education through frequent school closures, limiting continuous language instruction and practice (Shamim, 2011). In addition, the stress and anxiety caused by political uncertainty negatively affect students' concentration, and participation in speaking activities, making English language learning even more challenging (Jamil & Majeed, 2019).

1.1. Statement of the Problem

English productive skills remain a major challenge for students in Tehsil Pallandri, District Sudhnoti, AJ&K. In this multilingual region, linguistic interference from Pahari, Gojri, and Kashmiri, combined with limited English exposure, socioeconomic constraints, inadequate educational resources, and sociopolitical disruptions, collectively hinder students' language development. Although these challenges have been studied individually, little is known about their combined impact on English productive skills in the context of AJ&K. Addressing this gap is essential for developing context-specific teaching strategies and educational policies that enhance students' speaking and writing proficiency.

1.2. Research Objectives

This study is guided by the following objectives:

- To investigate the influence of linguistic diversity on English productive skills.
- To assess availability and effectiveness of English language education resources.
- To explore the sociocultural and systemic factors influencing English productive skills among students in Azad Kashmir.

1.3. Research Questions

The following questions were addressed in this study:

- How does linguistic diversity in Pallandri, District Sudhnotti of Azad Kashmir affect developing English speaking and writing skills?
- To what extent do the availability and effectiveness of English language developing materials influence students' English proficiency?
- How do societal expectations, community circumstances, and institutional support affect students' English language development in this multilingual society?

2. Literature Review

Native language interference is a major challenge in learning English productive skills. Differences in pronunciation, grammar, word order, and vocabulary often lead to errors in speaking and writing. Learners may transfer pronunciation patterns, sentence structures, and vocabulary from their first language, resulting in mispronunciation, incorrect grammar, and awkward expressions (Cassady et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019; Nikolov & Timpe-Laughlin, 2021; Budiharto, 2019). Teachers can reduce these difficulties through pronunciation practice, grammar-focused activities, and by encouraging learners to communicate without fear of making mistakes (Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021). Examples include pronunciation errors, incorrect word order, and direct translation from the native language, which negatively affect English communication (Cassady et al., 2018; Li et al., 2019; Spahiu & Kryeziu, 2021).

Limited exposure to English beyond the classroom restricts learners' opportunities to practice authentic language use. Interaction with native or proficient speakers, media, and real-life communication improves fluency, vocabulary, motivation, cultural awareness, and lifelong learning (Zhang & Zou, 2022; Brevik & Rindal, 2020; Celik & Yildiz, 2019). However, restricted

access to English media, the internet, and native speakers limits pronunciation, listening, speaking, and intercultural competence (Romeo et al., 2018; Javadi & Tajik, 2019; Schroder, 2021; Spada & Lightbown, 2019).

Motivation and positive attitudes are essential for developing English productive skills. Motivated learners are more willing to practice, overcome difficulties, and improve their language proficiency (Getie, 2020). Positive perceptions encourage learners to use English confidently and accept mistakes as part of learning (Songsiengchai et al., 2023). Supportive learning environments, clear learning goals, and recognizing the usefulness of English further strengthen learners' motivation and achievement (Getie, 2020; Uchidiuno et al., 2018; Filgona et al., 2020; Agustina et al., 2021).

English Language Anxiety (ELA) is common among Kashmiri students due to limited English proficiency, fear of public speaking, and concern about making mistakes (Bhat et al., 2021; Ahmad Kashmiri, 2020). Social pressure and self-consciousness further increase anxiety (Saeed et al., 2015). Traditional teaching methods and limited exposure to authentic English also reduce students' confidence. Student-centered teaching, language exchange programs, teacher training, counselling services, and awareness programs can help reduce ELA (Niaz et al., 2023; Irshad & Kiani, 2022; Bowman, 2021).

English teachers in AJ&K face challenges due to the continued use of traditional teaching methods, which limit communicative learning (Rahman et al., 2018). A lack of pre-service teacher training also affects students' speaking and listening skills (Shah et al., 2020). Communicative language teaching, regular teacher training, and improved teaching resources are recommended to improve English language instruction (Mushtaq et al., 2021; Rahman et al., 2018).

Research on the challenges faced by Kashmiri students in developing English remains limited (Mantry et al., 2022). Learners whose first language differs from English often face vocabulary and language acquisition difficulties, while available teaching materials rarely meet local learners' needs (Aurangzeb et al., 2022). More empirical research would help identify learners' specific needs, improve teaching methods, curriculum, and educational policies (Al-Ariqi & Mir, 2022). It would also promote collaboration among researchers, policymakers, and local stakeholders to address educational challenges effectively.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a mixed-methods, cross-sectional research design to investigate the challenges affecting English productive skills among higher secondary students in Tehsil Pallandri, District Sudhnoti, Azad Kashmir. The population comprised students aged 16–20 from Government Postgraduate Colleges for Boys and Girls in Pallandri. Using stratified random sampling, data were collected from 80 students (40 males and 40 females) through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, with teachers also included to provide additional perspectives. Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS through descriptive and inferential statistics, including correlation, and regression analyses, while qualitative interview data were used to complement and enrich the findings.

4. Results and Discussion

The analysis included the following steps: Quantitative Analysis and Qualitative Analysis (thematic analysis). The quantitative analysis uses SPSS, descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis to examine the factors affecting students' English language learning.

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Dataset	Mean	Median	Std. Deviation	Range
Social Context	16.5625	17	3.97729	20
Teaching Methods	16.025	16	3.89734	19
Classroom Environment	16.7	17	2.34602	13
Educational Resources	16.6625	17	3.85806	18
Teacher Competence	17.175	17	2.63749	13
English Productive Skills	15.6375	16	2.77075	16

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for the study variables, including mean, median, standard deviation, and range. Teacher competence recorded the highest mean (17.1750), indicating that participants viewed it as the strongest factor influencing English productive skills. It was followed by classroom environment (16.7000), educational resources (16.6625), social context (16.5625), and teaching methods (16.0250). English productive skills had the lowest mean (15.6375), suggesting

comparatively lower self-perceived proficiency. The median values ranged from 16 to 17, showing that respondents generally rated all variables positively. The standard deviations indicate moderate variability in responses, with social context showing the greatest variation ($SD = 3.97729$) and classroom environment the least ($SD = 2.34602$), reflecting more consistent perceptions. Similarly, the widest range was observed for social context (20), whereas classroom environment and teacher competence had the narrowest range (13). Thus, the descriptive statistics suggest positive perceptions of the factors affecting English productive skills, with teacher competence receiving the highest ratings and English productive skills showing relatively lower scores

4.2. Correlation Analysis Results

Table 2: Correlation statistics

		Social Context	Teaching Methods	Classroom Environment	Educational Resources	Teacher Competence	English Productive Skills
Social Context	Pearson	1	.539**	.067	.914**	.788**	.459**
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.554	.000	.000	.000
Teaching Methods	Pearson	.539**	1	.087	.462**	.354**	.469**
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.445	.000	.001	.000
Classroom Environment	Pearson	.067	.087	1	.166	.385**	.682**
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.554	.445		.140	.000	.000
Educational Resources	Pearson	.914**	.462**	.166	1	.747**	.539**
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.140		.000	.000
Teacher Competence	Pearson	.788**	.354**	.385**	.747**	1	.390**
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.000	.000		.000
English Productive Skills	Pearson	.459**	.469**	.682**	.539**	.390**	1
	Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	

****.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 2 presents the Pearson correlation analysis between the independent variables and English Productive Skills. The table includes five key independent variables—Social Context, Teaching Methods, Classroom Environment, Educational Resources, and Teacher Competence—alongside the dependent variable, English Productive Skills. All variables show significant positive correlations with English Productive Skills ($p < .01$). The strongest relationship is with Classroom Environment ($r = .682$), followed by Educational Resources ($r = .539$), Teaching Methods ($r = .469$), Social Context ($r = .459$), and Teacher Competence ($r = .390$). Among the independent variables, Social Context has a very strong positive correlation with Educational Resources ($r = .914$, $p < .01$) and Teacher Competence ($r = .788$, $p < .01$). Similarly, Educational Resources and Teacher Competence are strongly correlated ($r = .747$, $p < .01$). However, the relationship between Social Context and Classroom Environment ($r = .067$, $p = .554$) and between Classroom Environment and Educational Resources ($r = .166$, $p = .140$) is weak and not statistically significant. Thus, the findings indicate that Classroom Environment, Educational Resources, Teaching Methods, Social Context, and Teacher Competence all contribute positively to English productive skills, with Classroom Environment showing the strongest association.

4.3. Regression Analysis

Table 3: Regression analysis

Dependent Variable	Predictor	R	R Square	df	F-value	P-value	Beta Score	Significance
English Productive Skills	Social Context	0.901	0.812	5, 74	63.807	0.000	0.468	0.005
English Productive Skills	Teaching Methods	0.901	0.812	5, 74	63.807	0.000	0.207	0.001
English Productive Skills	Classroom Environment	0.901	0.812	5, 74	63.807	0.000	0.816	0.000
English Productive Skills	Educational Resources	0.901	0.812	5, 74	63.807	0	0.349	0.009
English Productive Skills	Teacher Competence	0.901	0.812	5, 74	63.807	0.000	-0.627	0.000

Table 3 presents the regression analysis examining the effects of different predictors on English productive skills. The model shows a strong relationship between the predictors and the dependent variable ($R = 0.901$) and explains 81.2% of the variance in English productive skills ($R^2 = 0.812$). The overall regression model is statistically significant ($F = 63.807$, $df = 5, 74$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that the selected predictors significantly explain variations in students' English productive skills. Among the predictors, classroom environment has the strongest positive effect ($\beta = 0.816$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that a supportive classroom environment greatly improves students' productive skills. Social context also has a positive and significant influence ($\beta = 0.468$, $p = 0.005$), followed by educational resources ($\beta = 0.349$, $p = 0.009$) and teaching methods ($\beta = 0.207$, $p = 0.001$), indicating that improvements in these areas contribute to better English productive skills. In contrast, teacher competence shows a significant negative effect ($\beta = -0.627$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting an inverse relationship in this dataset. Overall, the findings indicate that all five predictors significantly influence English productive skills, with classroom environment being the strongest positive predictor, while teacher competence is the only predictor with a significant negative effect.

4.4. Qualitative Analysis (Thematic Analysis)

Results of Thematic Analysis are given in the following table:

Table 4: Results of Thematic Analysis

Theme	Sub-themes	Key Findings from Teachers
Societal Context	Influence of local languages and societal attitudes	Local languages maintain cultural identity but reduce English exposure. Societal attitudes toward English as a tool for success motivate or discourage students depending on the context.
Teaching Methods	Methods and impact on language skills	Use of communicative methods, project-based learning, and AV aids significantly enhance skills. Rote memorization is generally ineffective for developing productive English skills.
Classroom Environment	Comfort in participation, class size, and teacher-student relationships	Smaller class sizes boost participation. Positive teacher relationships foster student confidence, while larger class sizes and societal pressures limit language use.
Educational Resources	Access to resources, technology, and online platforms	Lack of access to quality textbooks, language labs, and technology hinders student learning. Online platforms provide helpful resources for practice.
Teacher Competence	Proficiency, attitudes, and alignment with student needs	Teachers' proficiency and attitudes directly impact student confidence and motivation. Many struggles with resource constraints and large class sizes.

English Productive Skills	Confidence, clarity, coherence, and focus on grammar	Teachers observed that students lack confidence in speaking and struggle with clarity and coherence in writing. Attention to grammar and speaking practice opportunities is inconsistent.
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Table 4 displays the themes identified from teachers’ interviews regarding the challenges of developing English productive skills. Teachers reported that local languages and societal attitudes influence students’ exposure to and motivation for learning English. They emphasized that communicative teaching methods, project-based learning, and audio-visual aids are more effective than rote memorization in improving speaking and writing skills. Teachers also noted that smaller class sizes and positive teacher–student relationships encourage greater participation and confidence, whereas overcrowded classrooms limit language practice. In addition, inadequate textbooks, language labs, and technology were identified as major barriers, although online platforms were considered useful for additional practice. Teachers acknowledged that their own proficiency and positive attitudes play an important role in motivating students, but resource shortages and heavy workloads reduce teaching effectiveness. Thus, the findings indicate that societal, instructional, and institutional factors collectively affect students’ English productive skills, highlighting the need for improved teaching practices, better educational resources, supportive classroom environments, and enhanced teacher training.

5. Findings

The research reveals that one of the most significant barriers to English language developing among students in AJ&K is the linguistic disparity between their native languages (such as Pahari, Gojri, and Urdu) and English. These local languages differ vastly from English in syntax, phonology, and grammar. As a result, students frequently struggle with correct pronunciation, sentence structure, and grammatical rules when transitioning to English.

The lack of daily exposure to English outside the classroom exacerbates these linguistic hurdles. For many students, English remains confined to academic settings, making it difficult to achieve fluency. This limited exposure results in slower progress and hinders students’ confidence in using English effectively.

Sociocultural dynamics also play a crucial role in shaping students’ attitudes toward learning English. The findings suggest that English is often associated with high social status and those from urban or wealthy backgrounds are perceived as being more proficient in the language. This creates a sense of alienation among students from rural or lower socio-economic backgrounds, who may feel that English is beyond their reach. Furthermore, the findings show that many students are reluctant to speak English in public due to the fear of being judged or ridiculed for their mistakes. This language anxiety is a significant barrier to both language practice and overall proficiency.

The study uncovers numerous shortcomings within the education system of AJK that contribute to students’ difficulties in learning English. Many teachers rely on dated, rote-learning methods, which emphasize memorization over communication skills. The curriculum itself is not tailored to the students’ needs and often fails to relate to their real-life experiences or cultural backgrounds. As a result, students are unable to connect with the material, leading to a decline in both interest and engagement.

Class sizes in many AJ&K schools are large, and students do not receive the individualized attention they need to overcome language-related challenges. Furthermore, the lack of modern educational resources, including updated textbooks, multimedia aids, and access to technology, limits students’ exposure to engaging and effective learning tools.

The findings also highlight the impact of political instability and environmental challenges on students’ education. The region of AJ&K is prone to political unrest, which often leads to the closure of schools and disruptions in academic schedules. These disruptions make it difficult for students to follow a consistent learning trajectory, causing gaps in their English education.

The region’s geographical remoteness also contributes to educational disparities, as students in far-flung rural areas have less access to modern educational infrastructure, such as well-equipped libraries, language labs, or digital tools that could support English learning. The lack of technological resources and digital devices in many households further widens the gap between students in urban and remote areas. In schools where technology is available, the findings show that teachers often lack the training necessary to integrate these tools effectively into English language instruction. Without proper guidance, students are unable to benefit fully from the potential of digital learning resources.

Gender also emerges as an important factor in the findings, with female students facing additional challenges in acquiring English skills. In some areas, societal expectations discourage female students from participating in English-speaking activities, reducing their confidence and proficiency in the language.

Cognitive factors such as the complexity of learning a foreign language in a multilingual environment also play a role. Students who are already juggling multiple languages often find it overwhelming to add English to their repertoire.

6. Conclusion

This study provides an in-depth insight into the various challenges that student in AJ&K encounter in developing English productive skills. The multilingual environment of the region, where languages like Pahari, Gojri, and Kashmiri prevail, greatly affects students' ability in English. The indigenous languages have aspects of syntax, phonology, and grammar that are radically different from English, creating bias toward non-fluent, non-phoneticized, and non-grammatical structures. In fact, in rural areas where students rarely use English at home, students even have limited access to reinforce and apply what they learn in class. Availability and delivery of English language teaching resources are key determinants of student capability. The study noted that students frequently lack up-to-date textbooks, digital learning tools and exposure to the language through English-language media. Overcrowded classrooms and dated curricula also contribute to this problem, with students often unable to reach resources that address their specific needs. Moreover, the structural and phonological differences between the native languages and English add further barriers to developing English in the context of Pallandri. Poor quality and dated educational resources prevent students from becoming proficient, and sociocultural and institutional elements either improve or obstruct the acquisition of English.

To solve these challenges, significant change that includes developing teacher training programs that would facilitate modern, interactive teaching methods. The access to more updated educational resources and digital tools, as well as the revising of curricula not only to include grammar but also, and more importantly, real-life communication skills would be the need of the hour. Also, exposure to English through media, technology and community initiatives can give the added support needed for students. In addition, this study emphasizes the need of collaborating among policymakers, educators, and community leaders to struggle these challenges. With systematic reforms and specific actions, students in AJ&K can be empowered to attain English language proficiency to succeed in the globalized world.

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