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# Attitudes towards the English Language among Agriculture Students: A Case Study

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## ABSTRACT

**Background:** At the University of Agriculture in Peshawar, like at other professional institutions i.e., medical, law and engineering, all the core subjects are taught through English and all the exams (both oral and written) are conducted in English. Therefore, proficiency in English is an essential need of every student. Since a majority of the agriculture students perform poorly in the core subjects due to their weak English, this study was undertaken to explore the attitudes of agriculture students towards the English language and its four skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing.

**Purpose:** The basic aim to this study was to examine the attitude among Agriculture students towards the English language and its basic skills. Moreover, the present study is also an attempt to establish the differences, if any, in the attitudes of the male and female students towards English.

**Method:** This study used a mixed-methods approach to find answers to the research questions. In order to obtain valid and reliable results, the researcher considered quantitative and qualitative approaches to be very appropriate for the collection and analysis of data for the present study. Quantitative data was collected by means of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire with 30 closed items and was analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 30 deliberately selected students and were analyzed using thematic analysis.

**Conclusion:** The findings revealed that the agriculture students had positive attitudes towards the English language and its four skills. The study also highlighted no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of students by their gender. However, female students displayed slightly more positive attitudes towards English as compared to their male counterparts. A majority of the students regarded writing in English as a hard task. Nevertheless, most students desired achieving high proficiency in all the four skills of English language.

## KEYWORDS

Agriculture students' attitudes, English language skills, students' attitudes, case study, mixed-methods, questionnaire, interviews

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## INTRODUCTION

Since the English language is the medium of instruction at all Higher Education institutions in Pakistan, proficiency in English is thus a requirement for all university graduates. Agriculture students are no exception, if they are to survive in this highly competitive local, national and international market. According to Oroujlou & Vahedi (2011), it is an acknowledged fact that fluency in English is

a gateway to success in life. Most international companies/organizations offer jobs to those graduates who can speak and write English well and face no problem in understanding instructions from their seniors and co-workers. Bearing this fact in mind, Coulby, as cited in Wa-seem (2015, p. 67) points out: "Families all over the world invest large amounts of money to ensure that their children will acquire competence in English". Bottery, as cited in Rukh (2014), sees a close



association between globalization and English language. According to Javed (2017), in Pakistan, English is the medium of instructions in educational institutions and plays the role of lingua franca. It is also considered as: a vehicle to modernization, liberalism, power and prestige (Rahman, 2007); a basic condition for getting white collar jobs (Hafeez, 2004); the language of power, prestige and a gateway to successful and bright future (Umrani & Bughio, 2017); a precondition for one's own progress and prosperity (Muftah, 2022).

Students' academic success throughout the world is judged by their ability to read, speak and write English well (Maldonado, 2018). Ahmad, et al (2021) and Rashid (2022) affirmed that proficiency in English language is critical for students' success in life, since it boosts their analytical ability. Chamcharatsri (2013) regarded English as necessary for social mobility, for sharing information and for interacting with others. Students' proficiency in a second language, to a great extent, is influenced by their attitudes towards it (Gardner, 1968). Gardner (1968) further states that learners acquire language easily and successfully, allowing them integration with the target language-speaking community. Holmes (1992) reiterated that attitudes have the potential to motivate the learners to initiate learning the language spoken by people they like.

## Problem Statement

At the University of Agriculture in Peshawar, English is a basic requirement, since it is not only the mean of communication, but also the medium of instruction at all levels. Like other professional institutions i.e., medical, law and engineering, here too, all the core subjects are taught through English. All exams (both oral and written) are conducted in English. Hence, proficiency in English is an essential need for every student. The students (both male & female) here come from both the public and private college systems with different English backgrounds. A majority of these students display below satisfactory level performance in the core subjects due to their weakness in English. These students need to achieve proficiency in English since after graduation, they will try to find jobs in national/international companies and organizations where preferred candidates are those who are proficient in English along with expertise in their related field. A large number of these students (both male & female) will also try to seek admission in the universities of technologically advanced countries to pursue their doctorate and post-doctorate studies where English is the basic requirement for admission (Rahman, 2007; Waseem, 2015).

In Pakistan, several studies have been conducted at secondary, higher secondary and tertiary levels to examine students' attitudes towards English (Ahmad, et al, 2015; Ali, 2016; Asghar, et al., 2018; Khan, 2016; Rukh, 2014). Since no study exists in Pakistan to explore agriculture students' attitude towards English, this study was undertaken to obtain

an in-depth understanding of what goes on inside students' mind with regard to the English language.

The basic aim of this study was to examine the attitude of Agriculture students towards English language and its basic skills. Unlike in the past, female students constitute one third of the student strength at the University of Agriculture in Peshawar. There is not a single discipline of agriculture, where females have no representation. Consequently, the present study is also an attempt to identify the differences, if any, in the attitudes of the male and female students towards English.

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the attitudes of students at the Agriculture University towards the English language and its skills (i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing)?
2. Are there any statistically significant differences between male and female agriculture students' attitudes towards the English Language and its skills?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

In the present era, the importance of English has grown due to its significant use in all fields including business, tourism, science and agriculture. It is a major means of communication in this interconnected and interdependent world. Therefore, persons who are proficient in English have greater opportunities for white collar jobs. Trained professional graduates are the basic needs of any country that strives to expand its economical, educational, political, cultural, scientific and agricultural horizons. All this is possible when there is a continuous exchange of information, joint projects, discussion about the cultivation of crops, exchange of students and faculty among the nations of the world. All these require experts and skilled workforce not only in their related fields, but also outstanding competency in the English language to maintain effective communication with external organizations (Zhylytyrova et al., 2016).

### Attitude and Its Importance in Language Learning

There is a general consensus among prominent scholars such as Gardner and Lambert (1972), McKenzie (2008b), Karahan (2007), Csizér and Dörnyei (2005) that learners' attitudes greatly influence their second language learning. A positive attitude towards language guarantees proficiency, whereas negative attitude impedes its learning. Gardner and Lambert (1972) and McKenzie (2008) argue that learners' linguistic behaviour is greatly influenced by their attitude towards English. Karahan (2007), Csizér and Dörnyei (2005), consider attitude as a basic element in acquiring a

second language. Nunan, cited in Bagheri and Andi (2015), argues that learners' achievement or failure, to a great extent, is influenced by his/her attitudes and skills. Students' attitude towards a second language is of vital importance since it motivates or demotivates a learner to learn the target language (Bagheri & Andi, 2015).

Attitude is one of the key factors in building students' perceptions towards the target language. A negative attitude can delay mastery of the target language even among outstanding learners. On the other hand, a positive attitude towards a certain language can guarantee the success of even less enthusiastic learners (Dörnyei, 2006). He further argued that learners with favourable attitudes towards a foreign language always enjoy its learning as they consider its learning as a joyful activity while learners with negative attitudes towards a second language always consider its learning as an onerous job. Young (2006) validates Dörnyei's view by stating that learners' like or dislike for and success or failure in a second language is determined by their attitudes towards that language. Gardner (1985) and Nunan (2000) regarded learners' attitude as a key element in learning and understanding a second language. Kara (2009) stated that students' positive perceptions help them develop a positive attitude towards life and their subject, which in turn leads to better performance and acceptable behaviour. He further states that students' positive attitudes promote good study habits amongst them and helps them develop problem-solving skills which they can easily utilize for academic development and in life.

Learners' attitudes are considered as decisive factors in acquiring a second language (Fakeye, 2010). Favourable attitudes motivate learners to attain an exhaustive knowledge of a foreign language and people's culture. Briggs (1987) also posits that students with negative attitudes always perceive language learning as a difficult and boring activity. They never put in serious efforts to improve their proficiency in it. Such students face difficulties in concentrating on foreign language learning and soon forget whatever is learnt in class. Holmes (1992) remarked that positive attitudes ensure successful learning of a new language. On the other hand, Gardner and Lambert (1972) and Ellis (1994) conclude that learners' negative attitudes always thwart the process of language learning. Csize' *et al.*, (2010) claim that learners' motivated behaviour stems from positive attitudes. Students' negative attitudes towards English language can hamper with their active participation in the learning process (Gömleksiz, 2010).

## Related Studies

Much research work across the world has been carried out to establish students' attitudes towards English. The results of the most studies reveal that a majority of the students have positive attitudes towards English and its learning

(Ahmed, 2015; Ali et al, 2021; Anokye, 2022; Alkaff, 2013; Al Noursi, 2013; Iswahyuni, 2018; Karahan, 2007; Khalid, 2016; Khan, 2020; Ofran, 2020). The main reason for positive attitudes towards English was its instrumental function i.e., for finding good jobs in the national and international markets.

Students' learning of the second language is primarily dependent on their attitude and motivation towards the acquisition of that language. Noreen, Ahmad, and Esmail (2015) studied the role of attitudes, motivation, and anxiety of intermediate learners' acquisition of English in the Faisalabad District of Pakistan. Their findings indicated that the majority of the students had positive attitudes towards leaning English and showed keen interest in talking in English to improve their speaking skills. Similarly, Anokye, (2022) investigated the correlation between students' motivation/attitude towards the English language and their performance in the target language at Accra Senior High School, Ghana. The results indicated a close association between learners' motivation/attitude towards the English language and their performance in the subject of English. The results further displayed that the more the students are motivated and have a positive attitude towards the English language, the more their performance improves. In another study, Orfan (2020) studied the attitudes of 210 randomly selected undergraduate students of Takhar University, Afghanistan. Analysis of the data revealed students' positive attitudes towards learning English for integrative purpose. In their study, As Sabiq et al., (2021) found both genders highly motivated towards English to improve their academic status and get lucrative jobs.

A number of studies have been conducted to investigate professional students' attitude towards learning English and some have analyzed differences in gender perceptions about English. Pizzaro (2017) carried out a study to explore the anxiety, attitudes and motivations of engineering undergraduates towards English language at the University of the Balearic Islands. The findings of the study revealed that the students' overall attitude towards English was highly positive. The study also highlighted that engineering students had integrative motivation towards learning English. Nevertheless, the students also displayed a high level of L2 anxiety. Alharbi (2022) investigated Saudi health track students' attitudes towards learning English for specific purpose. A 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire was used to gather information from the respondents. Moreover, in order to verify the collected information, interviews were conducted with 25 participants. Findings showed that students had a moderately positive attitude towards the English language. Likewise, Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) carried out a research study to investigate Iranian medical students' attitudes towards learning English. Analysis of the results clearly indicated that a majority of the medical students had positive attitudes towards English language. The application of the independent sample t-test showed a difference in the atti-

tudes of the sampled students. Moreover, the attitudes of male students were reported to be more positive than their female counterparts. The results of Rahman *et al.* (2010) were similar, where male students showed higher level of motivation towards L2 learning than female students. Similarly, Pathan (2012), Shahbaz (2012), and Islam (2013) also examined the correlation between gender and learners' motivation/attitudes. Their results were contrary to those of Rahman *et al.*, (2010), Soleimani and Hanafi (2013), Noreen *et al.*, (2015) and As Sabiq *et al.*, (2021). In their studies, females were more motivated towards learning English than males.

As far as the investigator knows, no other study has explored agriculture students' attitude towards English. This study was therefore undertaken to fill the gap in literature by exploring the attitudes that agriculture students hold towards the English language and its four skills.

## METHOD

### Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods approach. In order to obtain valid and reliable results, the researcher considered application of both the quantitative and qualitative approaches very appropriate to the collection and analysis of data for the present study. These two approaches were used to complement each other. Marshall and Rossman (2006) advocated that a qualitative approach be used to make the quantitative data more acceptable and reliable. Wallace (2002: 30) also recommends the combination of both the techniques of questionnaire and interviewing, "so that the strengths of both procedures can be exploited (e.g., by using questionnaire to elicit basic factual data and interviews to follow up on attitudes and experiences." Similarly, Best and Kahn (1989: 89-90) regard both types of research as "valid and useful". They further state that a researcher can utilize both methods for a single investigation.

### Study Population and Sample

All the B.Sc (Honors) 1-8 semester students of the University of Agriculture in Peshawar enrolled in the Autumn Semester, 2019 constituted the population of the study. The total number of the enrolled students in the semester was 3000 (source - Director Teaching office). Out of these students, 162 students (104 males and 58 females) were selected as participants for the study. The participants were selected by using the simple random sampling technique. Almost all the students were majors in different fields of agriculture i.e. Agronomy, Agricultural Chemistry, Animal Health, Human Nutrition, Horticulture, Plant Breeding and Genetics, Plants Pathology and Weed Science. As all these subjects

are taught in English, therefore, the students are required to have full command over English.

### Data Gathering Instruments

In order to collect quantitative data for this study, a close-ended questionnaire, based on 5-points Likert scale, comprising 30 items, was used to elicit information about Agricultural students' attitude towards English language at the University of Agriculture in Peshawar. The questionnaire was developed after a detailed review of the studies carried out by different authors to elicit respondents' attitudes towards the English language (Abidin *et al.* 2012; Eshghinejad, 2016; Karahan, 2007). Some of the questionnaire items were also adapted from these authors with minor changes.

Part one of the questionnaire highlighted respondents' demographic information whereas part two sought information about the perceptions of the students towards the English language and its various skills.

The questionnaire was developed according to the following format: 1 = Strongly Disagree (SD) 2 = Disagree (D) 3 = Neutral (N) 4 = Agree (A) 5 = Strongly Agree (SA). The students had to tick one of the five options which they considered to be most appropriate.

### Interviews with the Participants

Bearing in mind that respondents will not express their innermost feeling/attitude through a written questionnaire, the principal researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of 30 students in five groups (each consisting of 3 males and 3 females), in order to gain an insight into their views about English. According to Creswell (2014: 163), while conducting interviews for collecting qualitative data, the researcher should try to frame questions that are "open-ended, general, and focused on understanding the dominant phenomenon". These rules were strictly followed. All the interviewees were informed two days in advance about the nature of the questions to be asked, date, time and place.

### Validity and Reliability

Both questionnaires were reviewed by a group of eight faculty members from Islamia College University and University of Peshawar, in order to ensure maximum validity and clarity of the tools. All the reviewers were experienced professors with expertise in the relevant field. They were asked to study the questionnaires thoroughly to establish that they were simple and understandable. They were given the freedom to revise and improve the statements where needed. In light of their comments and suggestions, some statements in the questionnaires were revised/rephrased or eliminated to ensure their clarity and comprehensibility. In the light of their opinions, 7% questions were deleted and

12% were modified. Reliability of the collected data was tested using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951). Internal consistency of the questionnaire was .861.

## Data Analysis

In order to analyze the quantitative data, the descriptive statistical procedure was employed to determine frequencies, percentages and mean of the data. An independent sample t-test was carried out to find out differences between the attitudes of male and female students. The significance level was set at 0.05. Similarly, the data gathered through interviews was analyzed qualitatively, using thematic data analysis approach.

As mentioned above, in order to analyse the qualitative data, a thematic analysis approach was used. It is an appropriate method for the analysis of qualitative data and provides intricate, rich and comprehensive accounts of data (Cassell, *et al.*, 2005; Braun & Clarke, 2006). Bryman (2012) prefers thematic analysis of data, since it focuses more on what is said by the respondents rather than how they said it. It also enables the researcher to revisit the data repeatedly, in order to 'make a sense of collective or shared meanings and expe-

riences....and to identify commonalities among the answers to a particular research question(s)' (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

## Results and Discussion

This section presents the results and analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative data. These findings relate to the learners' attitude towards English and its various skills i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Table 1, 3 and 5 focus on students' attitudes towards English language and its skills, whereas, Table 2, 4 and 6 highlight the differences in male and female students' attitudes towards English and its skills.

All the items in Table 1 elicited agricultural students' attitudes towards English language. The mean score of items No. 1 to 3 clearly indicated that a large majority of the respondents (both genders) hold favourable attitudes towards English, listening to people speaking English, lectures delivered in English, use of English and Urdu in the classroom and listening to dialogues in English films, talk shows and English songs. However, 28(17.3%) respondents agreed or strongly agreed, 19(11.7%) students remained neutral, and 115(71%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement "I dislike English subject the most." Sim-

**Table 1**

*Students' Attitude towards English*

S#	Statements	SD N(%)	D N(%)	N N(%)	A N(%)	SA N(%)	MAS
1	I feel excited when I learn English.	11(6.8)	7(4.3)	6(3.7)	56(34.6)	82(50.6)	4.18
2	I practice English when I find an opportunity to do so.	10(6.2)	8(4.9)	12(7.4)	79(48.8)	53(32.7)	3.97
3	English is one of my favourite subjects.	19(11.7)	19(11.7)	14(8.6)	63(38.9)	47(29.0)	3.62
4	I think English is the most difficult language to learn.	32(19.8)	85(52.5)	16(9.9)	20(12.3)	9(5.6)	2.31
5	I think all University students should learn English.	50(30.9)	75(46.3)	13(8.0)	18(11.1)	6(3.7)	2.10
6	I dislike English subject the most.	62(38.3)	53(32.7)	19(11.7)	11(6.8)	17(10.5)	2.19
7	I feel embarrassed and uneasy when studying English.	10(6.2)	2(1.2)	13(8.0)	50(30.9)	87(53.7)	4.25
8	I don't consider learning English important.	58(35.8)	57(35.2)	16(9.9)	23(14.2)	8(4.9)	2.17
9	I learn English because it can help me in understanding other academic subjects.	13(8.0)	25(15.4)	16(9.9)	65(40.1)	43(26.5)	3.62
10	I want to learn English for getting a good job.	13(8.0)	21(13.0)	51(31.5)	68(42.0)	9(5.6)	3.24
11	I want to learn English to get maximum advantage of the modern technologies and internet.	11(6.8)	9(5.6)	13(8.0)	64(39.5)	65(40.1)	4.01
12	I want to learn English to help me in my University Education.	8(4.9)	9(5.6)	9(5.6)	64(39.5)	72(44.4)	4.13
13	I want to learn English to study abroad.	10(6.2)	9(5.6)	19(11.7)	55(34.0)	69(42.6)	4.01
14	Truly speaking, I want to learn English just to pass the exams.	10(6.2)	20(12.3)	25(15.4)	76(46.9)	31(19.1)	3.60

ilarly, in comparison to 31(19.1%) who agreed or strongly agreed and 16(9.9%) neutral respondents, more than 115(71%) respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statements "I don't consider learning English important" and "I think English is the most difficult language to learn." These results strongly support the findings of Ahmed (2015), Alkaff (2013), Al Noursi (2013), Eshghinejad (2016), Iswahyuni (2018), Karahan (2007), Khalid (2016), Khan (2020) and Ofran (2020).

Students reiterated the findings of the quantitative data in their interviews also. They were very enthusiastic about learning English, since they regarded it a gateway to success in all walks of life. Two to three male students showed no liking for it, due to their weakness in grammar and speaking skills. They believed the school/college environment and teachers' incompetency to be responsible. However, they recognized the fact that "there was no escape from learning it". A majority of the male and female students strongly favoured English and considered it essential for all University students: "Its knowledge enables us to compete in the job market and study abroad." However, most students advocated simultaneous use of English and Urdu by the teachers during their lectures: "We like those teachers who deliver their lectures in both English and Urdu because when they do so, we easily follow them." Except two females and one male student, a majority of the respondents answered the interviewer's questions either in Urdu or in Pashto.

However, the results do not support the findings of Khan (2016), who explored Saudi students' attitudes towards learning English at Jeddah Community College. His results indicated that students' attitudes towards learning English was not encouraging. Similarly, the findings of this study also negate the findings of the study conducted by Asghar, *et al.* (2018). Their respondents were 63 male and 95 female students from three different departments i.e., Arts, Design, and Architecture at the University of Gujrat, Pakistan. The attitudes of the said University's students were negative towards English.

Statements 9 to 14 examine students' learning of English for instrumental purposes. The respondents' desire to learn English to help them in their university education is highest ranked (M= 4.13) followed by their desire to get maximum advantage of the modern technology (M=4.01) and to study abroad (M=4.01). A good number of respondents 77(47.6%, with M=24) wanted to learn English to get good jobs (M=3.24), whereas 107(66.0%, with M=3.60) wanted to learn English just to pass exams. These results corroborate with the findings of Moriam (2008) who identified that a majority of the Bangladeshi graduate and undergraduate students (both males and females) learn English to find access to good jobs, financial benefits, increased social status and to further their education. Strangely, statements No. 5 and 7 negate students' views about their liking for English language. These findings are contrary to the results reported

by Rahman (2008) where 86.1% students agreed or strongly agreed with the statement that English should be the medium of instruction at the graduate and post-graduate level of education in Malaysia. Similarly, the results are not in line with those of Zainol Abidin, *et al.* (2012) where Libyan secondary school students showed negative attitudes towards learning English.

The data in Table 2 clearly demonstrates that with the exception of statement No. 9 & 11, there is no statistically significant difference in the attitudes of males and females towards English. One possible reason for the positive attitudes towards English can be that both the genders are mature and are aware of the importance and use of English in their academic and social life (Ali, 2016). Similar findings were echoed in the study conducted by Bagheri & Andi (2015). The results reported statistically no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female medical students towards English language. These results also support the findings of the research conducted by Orfan (2020) in Takhar University, Afghanistan. He reported no significant difference in the attitudes of male and female students towards English.

The mean scores of the majority of the statements indicate that females are slightly more inclined towards learning English. These findings are in line with the results reported by Pathan (2012), Islam (2013) and Ali *et al.* (2021). The results also corroborate Muftah's (2022) findings where female students demonstrated a more enthusiastic attitude towards the English language than male students. Dörnyei *et al.*, (2006: 59) have also endorsed the results of the study by stating that female students exhibit more 'commitment towards language learning when compared to their male counterparts.' Similar were the findings of Ahmad, Esmail and Noreen (2015).

However, the results are contrary to the findings of the study conducted by Asghar *et al.*, (2018), where the mean score of male respondents show that they are slightly more inclined towards learning English when compared to the mean score of their female counterparts. They consider females' limited exposure to the use of English outside the classroom as the major factor in negatively affecting their attitudes towards English.

Interestingly, female students appear ahead of their male counterparts in their responses to statements No. 12 & 13. The mean scores of female students (M=4.22 and 4.12) is higher than their male counterparts (M=4.08 and 3.95). This clearly indicates that in comparison to their male counterparts, female students are more aware of the fact that in this era of globalization and competition, efficiency in English can enhance chances of finding a job in the field of his/her choice and can help him/her enjoy a better social status. The findings are in consonance with those of Ali (2016), who found that the majority of female students were motivated towards learning English, since they associated proficiency

**Table 2***Students' Attitudes towards English in terms of gender*

	Statements	Group	Mean	SD	t-ratio	P-value
1	I feel excited when I learn English.	Male	4.08	1.138	-1.532	0.128
		Female	4.36	1.135		
2	I practice English when I find an opportunity to do so.	Male	3.88	1.168	-1.451	0.149
		Female	4.12	0.088		
3	English is one of my favourite subjects.	Male	3.56	1.364	-.779	0.437
		Female	3.72	1.268		
4	I dislike English subject the most.	Male	2.37	1.300	2.423	0.017
		Female	1.86	1.249		
5	I feel embarrassed and uneasy when studying English.	Male	4.27	1.072	0.348	0.728
		Female	4.21	1.104		
6	I learn English because it can help me in understanding other academic subjects.	Male	3.42	1.312	-2.863	0.005
		Female	3.97	1.059		
7	I want to learn English for getting a good job.	Male	3.30	1.023	0.959	0.339
		Female	3.14	1.017		
8	I want to learn English to get maximum advantage of the modern technologies and internet.	Male	4.01	1.235	0.054	0.957
		Female	4.00	0.991		
9	I don't consider learning English important.	Male	2.26	1.132	1.179	0.241
		Female	2.02	1.318		
10	I think English is the most difficult language to learn.	Male	2.40	1.111	1.410	0.161
		Female	2.16	1.056		
11	I think all University students should learn English.	Male	2.20	1.135	1.618	0.108
		Female	1.93	0.953		
12	I want to learn English to help me in my University Education.	Male	4.08	1.094	-.846	0.399
		Female	4.22	1.044		
13	I want to learn English to study abroad.	Male	3.95	1.202	-.925	0.357
		Female	4.12	1.061		
14	Truly speaking, I want to learn English just to pass the exams.	Male	3.63	1.080	0.440	0.661
		Female	3.55	1.187		

in English with teaching morality to their children, becoming good mothers and finding jobs of their choice.

Table 3 displays students' attitudes towards listening and speaking English. The mean scores of the responses to items 15, 16, 17 and 19 are more than 4, which clearly indicate that the students enjoy listening to people speaking English, understanding what others say in English, enjoying lectures delivered in English, and enjoying English songs, dialogues in films and talk-shows. However, a majority of the respondents (M= 3.75) showed a liking for lectures delivered in both English and Urdu. Item No. 20 revealed that as many as 35.8% students agreed and 37.7% strongly agreed that they felt reluctant and anxious when speaking

English. Contrary to this, the students negated their own statement while responding to the next item. As many as 42.0% respondents agreed and 22.8% strongly agreed with the statement: "I feel confident when interacting in English with my teachers and class fellows". The reason for reluctance and anxiety was explained by the students in their interviews with the interviewer. They disclosed that inefficiency in all the four language skills, a lack of speaking opportunity, limited vocabulary, syntax errors, peers' mockery and the fear of not responding correctly in English were the main causes behind their communication anxiety. They also regarded poor background knowledge of English, nonexistence of favourable learning environment in schools/colleges, lack of exposure to practice English and lack of motiva-

**Table 3**  
Students' Attitudes towards Listening and Speaking

	Statements	SDA	DA	N	A	SA	MAS
		N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	N(%)	
15	I truly enjoy listening to people speaking English.	6(3.7)	7(4.3)	11(6.8)	54(33.3)	84(51.9)	4.25
16	I fully understand what others say to me in English.	5(3.1)	13(8.0)	17(10.5)	63(38.9)	64(39.5)	4.04
17	I greatly enjoy the lectures delivered in English.	5(3.1)	14(8.6)	7(4.3)	82(50.6)	54(33.3)	4.02
18	I like those teachers who use both English and Urdu while teaching us.	12(7.4)	23(14.2)	13(8.0)	59(36.4)	55(34.0)	3.75
19	I enjoy listening to English dialogues in films, talk-shows and English songs.	10(6.2)	9(5.6)	11(6.8)	62(38.3)	70(43.2)	4.07
20	I feel reluctant and anxious when speaking English.	15(9.3)	18(11.1)	10(6.2)	58(35.8)	61(37.7)	3.81
21	I feel confident when interacting in English with my teachers and class fellows.	12(7.4)	20(12.3)	25(15.4)	68(42.0)	37(22.8)	3.60
22	I wish to speak English fluently.	10(6.2)	7(4.3)	15(9.3)	48(29.6)	82(50.6)	4.14
23	I wish to convey my message to the listener Effectively.	10(6.2)	20(12.3)	25(15.4)	76(46.9)	31(19.1)	3.60
24	I wish to improve my English pronunciation.	8(4.9)	19(11.7)	30(18.5)	78(48.1)	27(16.7)	3.60

tion from English teachers responsible for their reluctance, anxiety and lack of confidence. This finding is in consonance with the results of Khan (2020) and Mohemad (2022) who explored that limited vocabulary, lack of the knowledge of grammar rules, poor spelling, exposure to the use of English inside and outside the classroom, motivation from English teachers was the major reasons for the participants' nervousness and anxiety. The results are in line with the findings of Bhatti, Memon and Pathan (2016) who found that a majority of the students reported anxiety, nervousness and communication apprehension when called to express their views in English in front of their classmates. However, the results are contrary to the findings of Ansarey (2016) whose study revealed that a majority of the Agricultural students in Bangladesh felt very confident in communicating in English.

The mean scores of item No. 22, 23 and 24 is  $M=4.14$ ,  $M=3.60$  &  $3.60$  respectively show students' strong desire to speak English fluently, to develop good communication skills and improve their English pronunciation, in order to convey their message effectively and properly. In their interviews, almost all the participants, with the exception of two, reiterated their desire to gain fluency and to improve their pronunciation skills, and to enable them to convey their message to receptors coherently and effectively. They stated:

*Good communication skill is mandatory for doing business; for securing good jobs in local and international markets; for getting through competitive examinations (e.g., the Provincial Management Service and the Central Superior Service); for joining NGOs; and, for interacting with people from different countries of the world.*

However, most participants wanted to improve their communication skills not at the cost of their cultural values and identities. In spite of repeated requests from the investigator to answer the questions in English, all the interviewees,

except two females, responded either in Urdu or in Push-to. This clearly indicated that most of the students lacked strong communication skills and showed a keen desire to improve it. This deficiency in communication skills and the desire to improve confirm the findings of Khan (2020) when analyzing intermediate students' proficiency in English. Similar findings were echoed in the research of Noreen, Ahmad & Esmail (2015) who found that most of the University's students were enthusiastic towards English just for promoting their communicative skills. The results also corroborate the findings of the study conducted by Ali (2016). His findings revealed that most of the University's Postgraduate students in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan were motivated towards English for both instrumental and integrative purpose. These findings do not substantiate the outcomes of Zainol Abidin, *et al.*, (2012) and Soleimani and Hanafi (2013) where a majority of the Iranian medical students and Libyan secondary school students did not consider English learning mandatory for them.

All the statements in Table 4 demonstrate that on the average, the attitudes of both male and female students towards listening to and speaking English are the same. When compared to males (with  $M=4.17$  &  $SD=1.074$ ;  $M=3.93$  &  $SD=1.143$ ;  $M=4.03$  &  $SD=1.127$ ), female respondents (with  $M=4.40$  &  $SD=0.897$ ;  $4.22$  &  $0.839$ ;  $M=4.14$  &  $SD=1.146$ ) were somewhat more inclined towards listening to people speaking English, understanding what others say in English, and enjoying listening to English dialogues in films, talk-shows and English songs. These findings are contrary to the results reported by Javid *et al.* (2017) where females were not as interested in watching films as their male counterparts. No statistically significant difference was observed in the mean scores of males' and females' attitudes in response to state-



ments 20 and 23. As evident from the mean scores of both the genders, females seemed slightly more reluctant and anxious when speaking English. However, they were less eager to convey their message effectively as compared to their male counterparts. These findings confirm the results of Tristeza et al (2021) who found that female and non-working EFL learners had a higher level of anxiety than their male and working counterparts. However, the results of the present study are contrary to the findings of Hussain (2018), where a majority of the students reported a high level of apprehension about learning English. His findings further exposed that the anxiety level of the male students was higher than females. In the remaining three statements (i.e., 21, 22 and 24), the female participants (with mean scores M=3.84, M=4.24 and M=3.62) appeared ahead of their male counterparts (whose mean scores were M=3.53, M=4.09 and M=3.62).

While conducting interviews with the participants, the interviewer established a deep insight into the interviewees' views and attitudes towards speaking skills. The interviews confirmed the findings of the quantitative data, since a majority of the participants were reluctant and fearful to respond in English to the interviewer's questions. With the exception of two females and one male, all the interviewees

used either Urdu or Pushto language in answering the questions. This clearly indicated their deficit in oral competency, despite the fact that they had studied English as a compulsory subject for 10 to 12 years. All the students acknowledged their lack of competency in all the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) of the target language along with pronunciation problems, but were determined to improve it by all means. One male student had no wish to improve his English, responded: "What's the need of learning English? What's its importance for me? Why not promote our native language instead of English"?

Again, no significant difference was indicated in the mean scores of male and female attitudes while responding to statement "I feel confident when interacting in English with my teachers and class fellows". However, in comparison to their male counterparts, females seemed more confident when interacting in English with their teachers and class fellows. Both genders showed a strong desire to speak English fluently. Interestingly, here too, females with a mean score of 4.24 appeared head of their male counterparts with a mean score of 4.09. Similarly, no significant difference was reported between the attitudes of males and females when responding to statements 25 and 26. Both genders desire

**Table 4**

*Difference in Male and Female Students' Attitudes towards Listening and Speaking*

Statements	Group	Mean	SD	t-ratio	P-value
15. I truly enjoy listening to people speaking English.	Male	4.17	1.074	-1.414	0.160
	Female	4.40	0.897		
16. I fully understand what others say to me in English.	Male	3.93	1.143	-1.855	0.066
	Female	4.22	0.839		
17. I greatly enjoy the lectures delivered in English	Male	4.04	0.924	0.220	0.826
	Female	4.00	1.139		
18. I like those teachers who use both English and Urdu while teaching us.	Male	3.85	1.245	1.240	0.218
	Female	3.59	1.298		
19. I enjoy listening to English dialogues in films, talk-shows and English songs.	Male	4.03	1.127	-.584	0.560
	Female	4.14	1.146		
20. I feel reluctant and anxious when speaking English.	Male	3.80	1.332	-.222	0.824
	Female	3.84	1.254		
21. I feel confident when interacting in English with my teachers and class fellows.	Male	3.53	1.182	-1.099	0.274
	Female	3.84	1.178		
22. I wish to speak English fluently.	Male	4.09	1.224	-.872	0.385
	Female	4.24	0.997		
23. I wish to convey my message to the listener Effectively.	Male	3.63	1.080	0.440	0.661
	Female	3.55	1.187		
24. I wish to improve my English pronunciation.	Male	3.59	1.067	-.199	0.843
	Female	3.62	1.040		

**Table 5***Students' Attitudes towards Reading and Writing*

	Statements	SDA N(%)	DA N(%)	N N(%)	A N(%)	SA N(%)	MAS
25	I like to read whatever is written in English.	7(4.3)	9(5.6)	14(8.6)	79(48.8)	53(32.7)	4.00
26	I like to read English newspapers, story books and magazines.	10(6.2)	15(9.3)	16(9.9)	79(48.8)	42(25.9)	3.79
27	Writing correct English is really a hard task.	13(8.0)	34(21.0)	21(13.0)	60(37.0)	34(21.0)	3.42
28	I feel very excited when writing in English.	9(5.6)	16(9.9)	23(14.2)	63(38.9)	51(31.5)	3.81
29	I wish I could write correct English.	10(6.2)	12(7.4)	14(8.6)	76(46.9)	50(30.9)	3.89
30	To attain proficiency in English is the basic goal of my academic life.	15(9.2)	11(6.8)	25(15.4)	51(31.5)	60(37.0)	3.80

good communication skills and to improve their speaking power along with pronunciation skills.

Table 5 shows that all the items scored more than 3, clearly indicating that all the students have positive attitudes towards reading and writing skills. They like to read whatever is written in English (M=4.00), they like reading English newspapers, story books and magazines (M=3.79). They feel excited when writing in English (M=3.81). They wish to write correct English (M=3.89), and consider proficiency in English as a basic aim of their academic life (M=3.80). These findings are similar to those of Hussain and Munshi (2011), who indicated that most Pakistani secondary school students showed their preference for reading religious books, novels, magazines and newspapers. However, the findings are contrary to those of Khan (2013) who identified that most of the postgraduate students considered reading textbooks a burden and failed to grasp the thoughts and contents of foreign authors. The findings are also not in line with those of Awais (2013) who indicated that most Pakistani students have a negative attitude towards reading and mostly give it secondary importance. Similarly, the results were also contrary to those of Paker and Erarslan (2015) and Sentürk (2015) who all reported neutral attitudes of Turkish students towards English.

However, a little more than half of the students (i.e., 58%) agreed or strongly agreed that writing correct English was really a hard task. *"We want to express our ideas in written form, but cannot, due to our weak writing skills"*, they said. They also showed a strong desire for writing correct English because it guarantees their success in both professional and academic career. *"Without having good command of writing skills, we can neither get a good job nor can we advance our studies"*, were the comments of most of the participants.

The results support the views of Arslan and Zibande (2010) who determined writing as an intricate skill. Silva, cited in Paker and Erarslan (2015) emphasized that the writing of the L2 writers is not as effective as that of the native speak-

ers. The results are also pursuant to the findings of Khan (2013) who revealed that for a majority of Pakistani postgraduate students academic writing is a dilemma, and that they face difficulties when expressing their views in correct English. Similarly, Akhtar et al (2019) found writing skill to be the most challenging job for ESL learners.

In their interviews, students confirmed that the main reason behind their difficulty in writing was their lack of vocabulary and applying grammar rules. Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (2016) also attributed undergraduate students' difficulty in writing to the lack of appropriate knowledge of vocabulary, grammar rules, syntax and proper feedback; whereas, to Nik, Sani, *et al.*, (2010), the major issue in improving writing skills was lack of motivation on teachers' part.

All the items, except 27, in Table 6 show no statistically significant difference in the mean scores of male and female students' attitudes towards reading and writing skills. Interestingly, with regard to students' attitudes towards reading and writing English, the mean scores of male students are slightly higher than their female counterparts. The finding is contrary to the results of Gambrell and Marinak (2010) who concluded that females enjoyed reading more than males. They further state that girls read more to improve their writing skills. The findings of the study are also contrary to those of Sentürk (2015) whose study indicated no substantial difference in the attitudes of male and female students toward reading. Similarly, Iqbal and Shehzadi (2002) concluded on the basis of their findings that the study habits and effective reading skills of Pakistani female university students were inadequate..

Significant difference ( $p < 0.05$ ) was reported while analyzing the mean scores of male and female students' responses to the item: *"Writing correct English is really a hard task"*. When compared to the mean score of male students (M=3.61 & SD=1.224), the mean score of female students (M=3.09 & SD= 0.997) clearly indicates that for the majority of male students writing correct English is harder when compared

**Table 6**  
*Difference in Students' Attitudes towards Reading and Writing*

Statements	Group	Mean	SD	t-ratio	P-value
25. I like to read whatever is written in English.	Male	3.99	1.332	-.163	0.870
	Female	4.02	1.254		
26. I like to read English newspapers, story books and magazines.	Male	3.80	1.210	0.122	0.903
	Female	3.78	0.946		
27. Writing correct English is really a hard task.	Male	3.61	1.224	2.472	0.015
	Female	3.09	0.997		
28. I feel very excited when writing in English.	Male	3.85	1.242	0.559	0.577
	Female	3.74	1.327		
29. I wish I could write correct English.	Male	3.93	1.182	0.653	0.515
	Female	3.81	1.178		
30. To attain proficiency in English is the basic goal of my life.	Male	3.85	1.080	0.596	0.552
	Female	3.72	1.187		

to their female fellows. In her study, Yong (2010) concluded that the attitude scores of both males and females were the same. Nevertheless, females were slightly ahead of their male colleagues. Likewise, when investigating the reading habits/culture of male and female students, Shafi and Loan (2010) also discovered that female students were far advance in their reading habits/culture than males. Similarly, while comparing the attitudes of male and female students towards reading, Dilshad, Adnan and Akram (2013) found that the attitudes of female students towards reading were more favourable than their male companions.

## CONCLUSION

The major aim of this research study was to examine the attitudes of students of the University of Agriculture in Peshawar towards the English language and its four skills. It can be concluded from this study that a dominant majority of both genders exhibited favourable attitudes towards English. The reason for the positive attitude could be attributed to the fact that students are aware that fluency in English is mandatory for their future career, higher education abroad and communicating with people from other cultures.

The results also displayed that a maximum number of the students of both genders were eager to learn English for utilitarian purposes i.e. to find good jobs; to enjoy maximum advantage of modern technologies; to access higher education; to study abroad; and, just to pass the exam.

The mean scores of the responses clearly indicated that the students enjoy listening to people speaking English, understanding what others say in English, enjoying lectures delivered in English, and enjoying English songs, dialogues

in films and talk-shows. A good majority of the students demonstrated that they felt reluctant and anxious when speaking English. They attributed their reluctance and anxiety to the lack of speaking opportunity, limited vocabulary, syntax errors and the mockery of peers. Similarly, a dominant number of the students displayed encouraging attitude towards reading and writing.

On average, the attitudes of both the male and female students towards English were the same. The mean scores of both genders showed that female students had a comparatively more positive attitude towards English, its listening and speaking skill in comparison to their male colleagues. The students strongly believed that a good command of English can ensure their entry into white collar jobs, improve their social status and enhance their chances of going abroad.

Students' attitudes towards the English language could further be improved, if teachers in English classrooms began to highlight its unprecedented importance, use, and growth in this globalized world. This is possible when the English teachers are properly trained; are more friendly towards students; and use effective methodologies for improving students' language skills.

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## DECLARATION OF COMPETING INTEREST

None declared.

tration, Resources, Software, Supervision, Validation, Visualization, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

**Yousaf Hayat:** Data curation, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing – review & editing.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTION

**Kifayatullah Khan:** Conceptualization, Data curation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Methodology, Project adminis-

**Syed Munir Ahmad:** Methodology, Formal analysis, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

**Wasal Khan:** Resources, Writing – review & editing.

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