

Strategies and Challenges in Developing Communication Skills among Students in Higher Educational Institutes in Karachi

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## ABSTRACT

*Communication skills especially English communication skills are vital for developing academic skills, engaging in class, career and professional development in higher education and for employment. Many students in higher educational institutes, however, do not have the confidence to express themselves confidently in English because of limited opportunities for meaningful interaction, language barriers, limited vocabulary and lack of confidence. The study aims to shed light on the strategies and difficulties of the learners in the English communication Training in Higher Learning Institute. The design used in this study was a qualitative phenomenological research design that would give insight into the lived reality of students and teachers. Focused group discussions were used to collect data and thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The results show that there are three general approaches to improve communication skills: interactive teaching and learning activities, opportunities for English communication on campus and co-curricular activities and practice. These strategies offer students opportunities for active involvement, authentic communication practice and confidence building. The study also reveals important problems in the development of effective communication such as lack of students' confidence, language and vocabulary barriers and less opportunities for students to participate in the classroom. The study findings suggest that interactive, supportive and practicing learning environment could be useful for improving communication skills. The findings indicate the need for developing the academic environments of higher education institutions as English friendly environments in which the students can engage themselves with English continuously and actively.*

**Keywords:** *English communication skills, higher education, communicative competence, interactive teaching and learning, co-curricular activities, student confidence, language barriers, qualitative research.*

## INTRODUCTION

Communication skills are one of the most important skills that are expected from students in higher educational institutes as they aid academic learning, classroom participation, professional preparedness and employability. In present scenario of education, students are expected to know the subject matter and also to express ideas clearly, to participate in discussions, to make presentations, to interact with peers and to express themselves confidently in academic and professional situations. English language skills are particularly important in higher education, as English is the dominant language of research, technology, academic writing, professional communication and global employment. The English language also plays a significant role in higher education and professional life in Pakistan. However, many students still find it hard to speak English with confidence and effectiveness. Education, science, technology, business and cultural exchange depend on English (Younas, El-Dakhs, Anwar, & Jiang, 2025). The study of Younas et al. (2025) was specifically on the development of English speaking skills among university students in Punjab, Pakistan.

English communication is very important but students in higher educational institutes face many difficulties while speaking, presenting or participating in classroom communication. The problems include lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, poor vocabulary, pronunciation problems, limited fluency and anxiety when speaking in public. Rodero (2025) pointed out that while university students acknowledge the importance of oral communication for academic and professional success, they still experience anxiety, embarrassment, and mental blocks in presentations. Similarly, Magsino (2025) found that college students' oral communication apprehension is associated with fear of negative evaluation, lack of linguistic self-confidence, poor organisational skills, and emotional reactions. The findings of these studies indicate that the development of communication skills is related not only to knowledge of language but also to psychological confidence, classroom practice and social interaction.

In Pakistan, the question of English speaking proficiency is still very much alive. A recent study on Pakistani university students reported that students are still struggling with English speaking skills due to language background, ineffective teaching strategies, lack of exposure to English speaking situations and examination centred learning (International Premier Journal of Languages & Literature, 2025). Similarly, Nageen, Sarwar, Alam, Jabeen, and Tayyab (2025) identified the gaps in the English-speaking proficiency of Pakistani students and emphasised the need for reforms in instructional strategies, assessment, and speaking skill development. The findings suggest that communication skills particularly English speaking skills need to be emphasised more in the education system of Pakistan. Students may learn English for many years but still lack the practical confidence and fluency for academic discussion and professional communication. Recent research suggests that active, practice-oriented and interactive learning opportunities can be used to enhance communication skills. Students get chances to use English in meaningful situations through interactive teaching and learning practices such as group discussions, debates, role plays, oral presentations, peer interaction, and question-answer sessions. According to Pham (2025), role-play activities helped develop English oral communication skills for students in giving university learners authentic speaking contexts. Urena-Rodriguez, Lowell, and Yan (2025) also emphasized the importance of peer feedback and technology-aided speaking tasks in improving English public speaking self-efficacy and performance in undergraduate students. The studies support the idea that providing students with repeated opportunities to speak, receive feedback, and be active participants will improve communication skills.

In addition to classroom activities, English communication opportunities on the campus also play an important role in developing students' communication skills. Universities can create English speaking environments through English clubs, seminars, workshops, presentation forums, student societies, language competitions, conferences, peer discussion groups. Such platforms provide students opportunities to learn and practice English communication outside the formal lecture in class and build confidence in real academic and social contexts. Wahyuni (2025) found students' speaking skills, confidence, fluency, and overall speaking performance in English were improved due to English extracurricular activities, especially English clubs, which offered a supportive environment to practice communication. Chetioui, Lebdaoui, Bakkali, Elalamy, and Aallali (2025) also pointed out that extracurricular activities are crucial for the development of students' cognitive, social, and emotional skills in higher education, which is closely related to the development of communication skills. Meanwhile, there are some problems that influence the development of English communication skills. Many students lack confidence, have language and vocabulary barriers, and have few opportunities for classroom participation, all of which often discourage students from speaking freely. In the lecture-dominated classrooms, students have less opportunity to practice oral communication. According to Hashmi (2025), public speaking courses could help relieve communication apprehension in university students and emphasised the need of structured speaking opportunities in higher education. This implies that students require a supportive, low anxiety and practice-based environment to overcome their hesitance and develop confidence.

Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the strategies and challenges in developing English communication skills among students in higher educational institutes. The study is important because communication skills are directly related to the students' academic success, employability, confidence

and future professional performance. In addition, the study focuses on the methods that may encourage the students' English communication development by exploring the interactive teaching and learning, English communication opportunities on campus, and co-curricular and practical activities. Simultaneously, the study explores challenges such as lack of confidence, language and vocabulary barriers, and limited classroom participation opportunities to provide an understanding of the barriers that need to be addressed. This research is very important for higher educational institutes of Pakistan where students require more practical exposure, opportunities to build confidence and English communication-friendly environments.

### **Problem Statement**

Communication skills especially English communication skills are very important for the students of higher educational institutes as they help in academic achievement, classroom participation, employability and professional growth. Students in higher education are expected to be able to articulate ideas clearly, participate in discussions, present and communicate with confidence in academic and professional environments. However, many students still have problems in developing effective English communication skills. Research in Pakistan found that English is a key to education, science, technology, business, and cultural exchange. However, university students often require motivation, practice, and help in developing English-speaking skills (Younas et al., 2025). Nageen et al. (2025) also exposed the gap in the English-speaking competence of Pakistani students, which calls for improved instructional strategies, course content, and assessment practices, respectively.

Universities and colleges provide opportunities to study, but students may not always get enough practical experience to improve their communication skills. The development of students' communication may be restricted by traditional lecture-based teaching, limited classroom interaction, lack of opportunities to speak English on campus and low participation in co-curricular activities. Thus students may finish their academic programs with subject knowledge but without the confidence and competence to communicate effectively in English. Rodero (2025) also mentioned that university students understand the value of oral communication but many have anxiety, embarrassment and problems in public speaking situations. This indicates a gap between the communicative competence that students are supposed to have and the opportunities for developing it.

Hence, there is a need to explore the strategies that can help in the development of English communication skills among the students in higher educational institutes. It is also crucial to find out what the challenges are that prevent students from developing these skills. This study attempts to explore the strategies of interactive teaching and learning practices, campus-based English communication opportunities and co-curricular and practical activities. It also looks at challenges such as lack of student confidence, language and vocabulary barriers and limited classroom participation opportunities. By identifying these strategies and challenges, the study can help higher educational institutes to create more supportive, interactive, and practice-based environments to improve students' English communication skills.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To explore the strategies to develop communication skills in students in higher educational institutes.
2. To explore the challenges that hinder English communication skills among students in higher educational institutes.

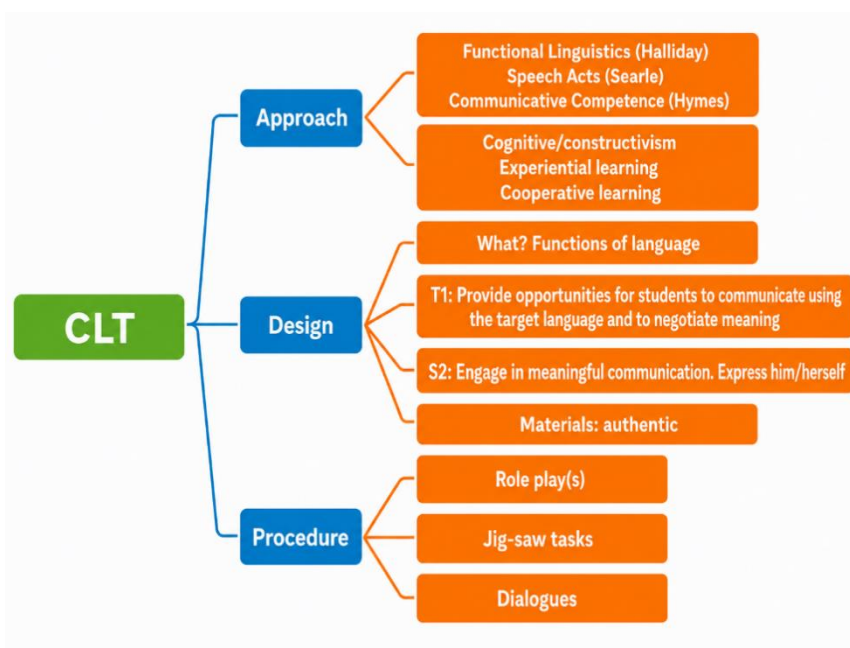
### **Research Questions**

1. What are the strategies to develop English communication skills among students in higher educational institutes?

2. What are the challenges that hinder English communication skills development?

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study is based on the theory of Communicative Language Teaching as it is appropriate to the purpose of exploring strategies and challenges of developing English communication skills among students in higher educational institutes. According to Communicative Language Teaching, language learning is most effective when students use language to communicate meaning, rather than just memorising grammar rules and vocabulary. The theory is grounded in the concept of communicative competence, which implies that the learners ought to be able to use the language appropriately and effectively in real social and academic situations (Hymes, 1972). It also emphasises the importance of fluency, interaction, meaningful use of language, and practical communicative tasks as essential elements of language learning (Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards, 2006). Therefore, CLT endorses these strategies that constitute the major themes of the study (interactive teaching and learning practices, campus-based English communication opportunities, and co-curricular and practical activities) as they offer students authentic opportunities to speak, listen, discuss, present and interact in English. It also discusses the challenges identified in the study, such as lack of student confidence, language and vocabulary barriers, and limited classroom participation opportunities, because these challenges reduce students’ chances to practice English communication in real contexts. Therefore, Communicative Language Teaching is the most appropriate theory for this research because it emphasizes active participation, meaningful interaction, practical communication, and supportive learning environment to improve students’ English communication skills.



*CLT Model by Richards and Rodgers 2001.*

**Research Design**

The study was conducted using a qualitative phenomenological research design to study the strategies and challenges in English communication skill development of students of higher educational institutes. A qualitative design was suitable as the study was aimed at understanding the participants’ views, experiences and perceptions in depth.

### **Sampling Technique**

Purposive sampling method was used to select participants for this study. This method was appropriate as samples were selected on the basis of their knowledge, experience and relevance to the research topic. The study involved teachers and students who had experience of English communication skill development in higher education

### **Research Instrument**

The research instrument for this study was focused group discussion guide. The questions were developed based on the research objectives that are related to strategies and challenges in developing English communication skills. This instrument enabled participants to express their opinions, experiences and suggestions in detail.

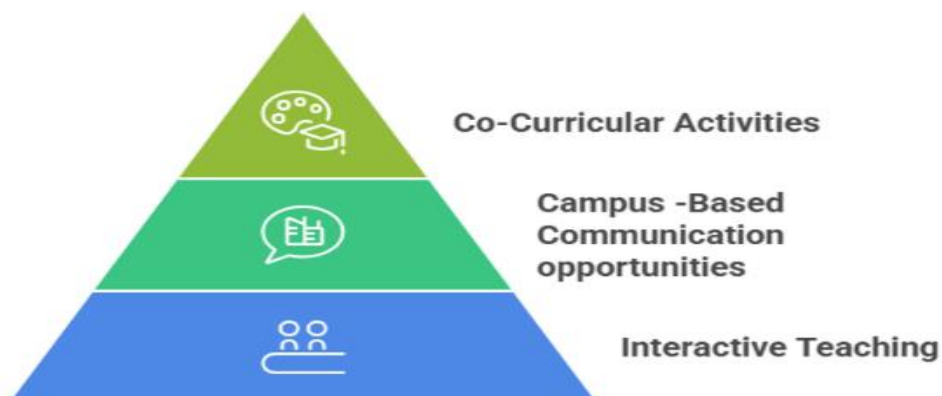
### **Ethical Considerations**

The study was performed in accordance with ethical principles. The research purpose was explained to the participants and their consent was obtained before data collection. The participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity and that their responses would be used for academic purposes only. Participants also had the right to drop out of the study at any stage.

### **DATA ANALYSIS**

The data were analyzed using a thematic analysis based on the two research objectives. First objective was to find out the strategies used for development of communication skills among the students of higher educational institutes and second was to find out the challenges faced during this process. Six major themes were emerged: interactive teaching and learning practices, curriculum integration of communication skills, co-curricular and practical activities, lack of students' confidence, language and vocabulary barriers and limited classroom participation opportunities. To explore the ways of forming communication skills of students in higher education institutions.

## **Strategies to Develop English Communication Skills**



*Graphical Representation of Theme 1*

### **Interactive Teaching**

The first theme that emerged from the data was interactive teaching and learning practices. The responses showed that students can improve their communication skills through active participation in classroom activities rather than passive listening. Students get opportunities to speak, listen, respond and express their ideas in academic settings through group discussions, class presentations, debates, role plays, peer interaction, pair work, question answer sessions and problem solving tasks. These activities also build student confidence, fluency, critical thinking, and interpersonal communication. Recent studies also support the importance of interactive and student-centered teaching for communication skills development. Huang (2025) found that in a university context, cooperative learning and problem-based learning improved students' learning motivation and attitudes. Koromyslova (2025) pointed out that inductive teaching can improve students' communication skills through active participation and analytical expression. Similarly, Magsino (2025) highlighted that role plays, pair work, interviews, games, and learning-by-teaching strategies can improve oral communication development and decrease communication apprehension in college students.

In conclusion, it can be said that interactive teaching-learning practices are an effective way to develop students' communication skills. As students engage regularly in speaking and discussion activities in the classroom, they slowly become more confident, more expressive and more competent in their communication. The theme suggests that communication skills are developed through regular practice, active engagement and substantial interaction in the classroom.

### **Campus-Based English Communication Opportunities**

Campus-based English communication opportunities are university activities, spaces, and learning culture that provide students with the opportunity to practice English communication outside formal classroom lecture. The strategy is to create an English speaking environment in the campus through English clubs, discussion corners, student societies, seminars, workshops, presentation forums, debates, peer interaction sessions, conferences and language based competitions. These opportunities give students real-life contexts to speak, listen, ask questions, share ideas and interact with others in English. In this way, students gradually build fluency, confidence, pronunciation, vocabulary and the ability to speak in public.

Recent studies have supported the role of campus-based and extracurricular activities in improving the ability to communicate in English. The study by Younas, Ahmed, and Khan (2025) found that university students' English speaking skills improved when they were motivated and given chances to speak in academic settings. Extracurricular activities in higher education are beneficial for students' cognitive, social and emotional development and are strongly linked to the development of communication skills, according to Chetioui, Lebdaoui, Bakkali, Elalamy, and Aallali (2025). A 2025 study on English clubs also revealed that extracurricular activities in English increase students' speaking performance, fluency, and confidence due to a supportive environment for communication practice (Wahyuni, 2025). The findings imply that in the university context, being constantly exposed to real life situations in English is important, not only learning from textbooks.

Campus-Based English Communication Opportunities, therefore, can be viewed as an effective strategy for developing English communication skills among students in higher educational institutes. Students are offered many opportunities to practice English naturally and meaningfully when universities create a supportive English communication culture through clubs, events, workshops, seminars and peer-based activities. This theme concludes that English communication skill development needs an active campus environment that promotes students' engagement, speaking, collaboration and confident expression of ideas.

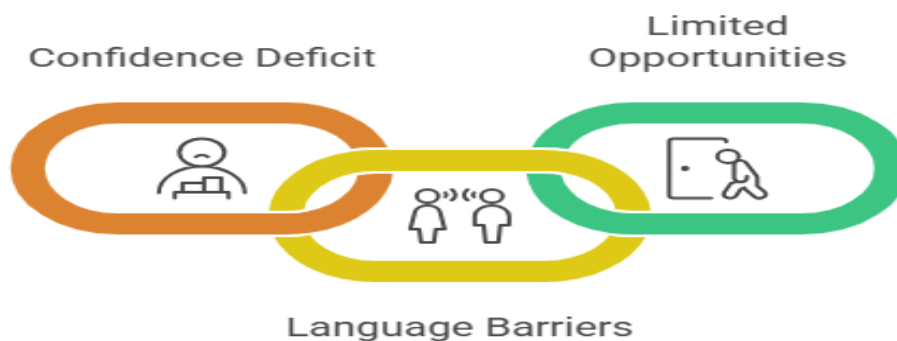
### Co-Curricular Activities

The third theme that emerged from the data was co-curricular and practical activities. From the responses it was found that Communication skills are developed not only through classroom teaching but enhanced through practical exposure outside the class. Students get real-life opportunities to communicate with other people through activities such as seminars, workshops, speech competitions, student clubs, drama, conferences, community engagement and project-based activities. These activities build confidence, teamwork, leadership, social interaction and public speaking skills.

Recent studies indicate that co-curricular and extracurricular activities also help students to develop social, emotional and communication skills. Islam, and Naveed (2025) also found that students' participation in co-curricular activities positively affected communication skills, confidence, social responsibility and collaboration. As such, Chetioui, Lebdaoui, Bakkali, Elalamy, and Aallali (2025) identified extracurricular activities as beneficial for the development of students' cognitive, social, and emotional development and recommended that universities promote such activities. Research by Kayani (2025) suggests that college club activities also help students develop teamwork and leadership skills, which are closely related to communication skill development.

Thus, it can be concluded that co-curricular and practical activities are important strategies to enhance communication skills among students. These activities enable students to use communication in real academic and social situations. This theme points to the need for higher education institutions to provide platforms for students to speak, present, collaborate and interact outside of the traditional classroom environments.

### Challenges to Develop Communication Skills



*Graphical Representation of Theme 2*

#### Confidence Deficit

The fourth theme identified from the data was Student Confidence. The answers revealed that a lot of students do not like to speak in front of others as they become shy, nervous or worried to make mistakes. The major barriers reported were fear of public speaking, fear of criticism, lack of self-belief and anxiety during presentation. Students might not participate, even if they understand the topic, because they are not confident enough to share their ideas in public.

Recent research also indicates that students lack confidence in oral communication. Hashmi (2025) states that university students experience considerable communication apprehension and public speaking anxiety, particularly in the context of oral presentation. Many undergraduate students report

anxiety, embarrassment and mental blocks during presentations, despite the fact that they recognise the importance of oral communication for their future careers (Rodero, 2025). Magsino (2025) also identified fear of negative evaluation, lack of linguistic self-confidence, poor organisational skills and emotional responses as key factors affecting oral communication among college students.

Therefore, it can be said that lack of confidence is a big challenge in developing communication skills. Students who are anxious or afraid of criticism are less apt to participate in discussions, presentations and classroom interaction. This theme indicates that the development of communication skill is a process not only linguistically but also psychologically that needs to be provided with confidence-building opportunities.

### **Language and Vocabulary Barriers**

The fifth theme identified was language and vocabulary barriers. The data revealed that the students tend to struggle in communication because of poor language skills, limited vocabulary, problems with grammar, pronunciation and lack of fluency. These barriers affect students' ability to express ideas clearly in discussions, presentations, written tasks and academic conversations. Students may know the content, but may not be able to explain it properly, because they lack mastery of language.

Recent studies also support this, showing language barriers have a direct impact on communication, participation and academic engagement. As stated by Kaçar (2026), in higher education, communication barriers are generally caused by language barriers, cultural differences, and deficiencies in communication practices. Lack of linguistic self-confidence was identified by Magsino (2025) as the major factor that causes oral communication apprehension of college students. Rodero (2025) also found that many university students are not well-trained in oral communication, resulting in weak preparation for public speaking and difficulty in communication.

Hence, it can be concluded that language and vocabulary barriers are significant challenges in developing students' communication skills. These obstacles hinder fluency, confidence and clarity of expression. This theme implies that the development of communication skills requires practice in language use, vocabulary development, practice in pronunciation and the provision of opportunities for students to use language in meaningful academic contexts.

### **Limited Opportunities to Participate**

The sixth theme to emerge from the data was limited opportunities for classroom participation. The responses suggested that communication skills could not be developed properly in classes where lecture-based teaching is the norm and students have few opportunities to talk. Large class size, lack of time, no group activities, fewer presentations and teacher-centered classroom practices reduce students' communication practice opportunities. This results in students being passive learners and not developing confidence in expressing their ideas.

The importance of active participation in the development of communication skills is also emphasised in recent research. Huang (2025) found that cooperative learning and problem-based learning create more active learning conditions and improve students' motivation and attitudes. Hashmi (2025) found that public speaking courses and classroom experiences based on focus groups can help students to address communication apprehension. Rodero (2025) also found that many university students do not have specific oral communication training, suggesting that limited structured speaking opportunities remain a problem in higher education.

Thus, it can be concluded that limited opportunities for classroom involvement constitute a major hindrance to the development of communication skills among students. We improve our communication skills by practicing, interacting, and having more and more opportunities to talk. This theme suggests

that the higher educational institutes need to decrease the passive learning, and increase those classroom activities that require students to discuss, present, question, collaborate and communicate actively.

In general, the data analysis showed that the communication skills of the students of the higher educational institutes can be developed through interactive teaching and learning practices, institutional environment, and co-curricular and practical activities. These strategies allow students to speak, listen, write, present, collaborate and interact in academic and real-life situations. However, the development of communication skills is hampered by lack of student confidence, language and vocabulary barriers and limited opportunities for classroom participation. The analysis shows that the formation of communication skills requires both systematic academic planning and regular practical opportunities for students to communicate.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concluded that development of communication skills among students in higher educational institutes is dependent on continuous practices, active participation and supportive learning environment. The results, after excluding curriculum integration, suggest that interactive teaching and learning practices, campus-based English communication opportunities and co-curricular and practical activities are important strategies to improve students' communication skills. Group discussions, presentations, debates, role plays, English clubs, seminars, workshops, student societies and peer interaction are some of the activities that provide students with practical opportunities to talk and listen, express ideas and build confidence. The study also found that there are various challenges in the development of communication skills such as lack of confidence of students, language and vocabulary barriers, limited classroom participation opportunities. Such problems limit the students' motivation to communicate and hinder their ability to express themselves effectively. Thus, the higher educational institutes have to create a motivating, English communication-friendly environment where students can regularly engage in classroom and campus based activities. In conclusion, the study demonstrates that students are capable of successfully developing communication skills when provided with meaningful opportunities to communicate in academic and social contexts.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. Higher educational institutes should arrange regular interactive classroom activities such as group discussions, presentations, debates, role plays, and question-answer sessions to provide students with continuous opportunities to practice English communication.
2. Universities should create campus-based English communication opportunities through English clubs, speaking corners, seminars, workshops, conferences, student societies, and language competitions so that students can use English in real academic and social situations.
3. Students should be encouraged to participate in co-curricular and practical activities because these activities help improve confidence, fluency, teamwork, public speaking, and interpersonal communication skills.
4. Teachers should provide a supportive and low-anxiety learning environment where students feel comfortable speaking English without fear of criticism, mistakes, or embarrassment.

## **Funding Declaration**

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