EXPLORING SOCIO-PSYCHOLOGICAL BARRIERS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN TEHSIL SWABI

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Abstract:

This study investigates social and psychological challenges faced by students at the secondary level in five Government High Schools in Tehsil Swabi. The nature of the research is quantitative, using a questionnaire consisting of 14 items as a tool for data collection. The study seeks out a multitude of socio-psychological barriers encountered by students at secondary level in learning English as Second Language (ESL), including peer pressure, lack of interest and motivation, dominancy of mother tongue, cultural and religious influences, teaching methodologies, teacher competence, and limited speaking partners. The study also uncovers the adverse effects of these barriers in language learning, such as reduced confidence, limited participation, fragmented learning experiences, restricted exposure to authentic language use, stagnated progress, and decreased motivation.

Keywords: Socio-psychological barriers, ESL classrooms, Tehsil Swabi, Second language, Learning.

Introduction

The modern world is a global village and communities of the world are getting closer to each other. Language plays a pivotal role in this regard by uniting people from diverse culture and background. It is through language that different people and communities across the border share their ideas and concepts with each other. As Lyytinen (1985) pointed out "man uses language to express feelings and attitudes and to establish coordinate and control relationship with others. Language facilitates the exchange of knowledge and tradition promoting empathy and mutual understanding. Communication in multiple languages promotes collaboration on global level. Language offers numerous benefits for career advancement and multilingual candidates are highly sought after by corporations all over the world. Foreign language learners have a higher chance to be hired for a job as they possess enhanced cultural awareness and adaptability. The benefits to learn a foreign language is undeniable, but it is also undeniable that mastering a foreign language is not an easy task and presents considerable challenges. Learners face a lot of social as well as psychological challenges while learning a foreign language in this case English.

English is a global language that acts like a bridge to connect people from all over the world of different cultures and background. There are four major pillars on which the entire building

of English language stands and they are very essential for communication and understanding of the language which includes reading, speaking, writing and listening. Achieving proficiency across these areas is crucial for unlocking world of international communication, education and professional growth. The ability to learn a second language alongside mother tongue is often viewed as a valuable skill with numerous academic, social and cognitive benefits. However, the process of acquiring a new language is not a walk in the park and is always a challenging task. Language learning is a complex and dynamic process influenced by various factors, including socio-psychological barriers that can hinder the progress and affect the self-confidence and motivation of the learners in learning the target language.

Social and psychological obstacles may be defined as the issues by which the learning processes get hampered. Social barriers may include cultural dynamics, societal pressure, influence of mother tongue, peer pressure, and family background while psychological barriers are negative personal experience, low self- esteem, inferiority complex, attitude, anxiety and fear. These barriers can contribute to lake of motivation, and act as an obstacle to fully engage with the language learning process and thus the learner fails to acquire the langue of the target language. The effective English language learning has become crucial to express one self and to extend connectivity to global network. Every student makes mistakes and face difficulties during the process of learning a language. To Maicusi (2000) "Making errors is the natural thing in the world and it is evidently attached to human beings. It is a necessary part of learning and teacher should use the errors with the view of having better results in the classroom". This indicates that second language teacher should be experienced and qualified enough to use the learner errors for learning process. This research has attempted to answer the following questions:

Research questions

1. What are the major socio-psychological barriers that the students of Tehsil Swabi face while learning English as a second language?
2. What are the effects of those barriers on second language learners?

Literature Review

The process of learning English as a second language (ESL) is intricate and impacted by a number of social and psychological variables. The purpose of this research project is to present a thorough analysis of the social and psychological obstacles that ESL students face, emphasizing how these obstacles affects the learning process of the learners.

Examining social barriers makes it clear that exposure to real language use and access to English- speaking situations are essential for language learning. On the other hand, learners who live in areas where English is not commonly spoken sometimes have little opportunities for practice and immersion, which impedes their growth. Furthermore, the way that society views English and how different cultures' view language acquisition can have a big impact on how motivated and involved learners are. In order to overcome these societal hurdles, inclusive educational practices that support linguistic diversity and respect must be implemented as well as a sophisticated understanding of cultural settings.

Conversely, learners' attitudes toward language acquisition are shaped by internal perceptions, beliefs, and emotions, which give rise to psychological barriers. Language anxiety can damage students' confidence and inhibit their motivation to speak. It is typified by a fear of failing and a negative self-perception. Furthermore, emotions of inadequacy and self-doubt may be exacerbated by prior experiences with academic disappointments or language barriers, which can hinder the effective acquisition of a second language. Building a supportive learning environment that encourages learners' resilience, self-efficacy, and growth attitude is essential to overcoming these psychological barriers.

Teachers and language professionals can provide more inclusive and productive learning environments for ESL students by addressing social and psychological barriers. With focused treatments like cultural sensitivity training, immersive language experiences, and mindfulness-based activities, students can gain the self-assurance and abilities needed for successful language learning. Furthermore, encouraging a growth mentality and offering tailored support can enable students to overcome obstacles and meet their language learning objectives. The social and psychological barriers that ESL students specifically face will be covered in greater detail in the following sections of this study.

2.1. Types of Barriers in Second Language Learning

2.1.1 Social Barriers in Second Language Learning

These are a variety of outside variables that limit ESL students' access to practice opportunities, materials, and opportunities to communicate with native speakers. Lack of exposure to English-speaking surroundings is a major social obstacle, especially in areas where English is not generally spoken. Limited exposure can impede language learning and the development of fluency. Further hindering success is the potential for stigma or aversion to learning the language to arise from cultural differences and societal views towards English. Furthermore,

the confidence and motivation of ESL learners can be severely impacted by social exclusion and discrimination based on language ability. Anxiety and a reluctance to participate in communicative activities might result from a fear of being judged or made fun of by peers and authoritative figures. Such societal influences have the potential to obstruct successful language learning.

2.1.2 Psychological Barriers in Second Language Learning

Learners' internal perceptions, beliefs, and cognitive processes are the root cause of psychological barriers in ESL instruction. Language anxiety, or the dread of making mistakes, is one prevalent psychological barrier. Linguistic anxiety can take many different forms, including self-doubt about one's linguistic abilities, shame dread, and nervousness about speaking in front of people. Anxiety can seriously impair a learner's capacity for fluent communication and limit their progress in general.

Furthermore, the motivation and endurance of ESL learners might be undermined by poor self-confidence and unfavourable self-perceptions. Having experienced something negative, like criticism or failure in the past, might make one feel inadequate and self-conscious. These internal obstacles can lead to a vicious cycle of avoidance and disengagement from language learning activities, which makes it more difficult to acquire new skills and become proficient.

The success of ESL learners can also be impacted by cognitive characteristics like cognitive processing skills and learning styles. In order to effectively meet the demands of a varied student body, tailored instructional approaches may be necessary due to variations in cognitive capabilities and learning preferences. In addition, insufficient metacognitive awareness and strategic competency may hinder learners' capacity to control their learning, establish objectives, and utilize efficient learning techniques.

2.2 Strategies for Overcoming these Barriers

Overcoming social and psychological obstacles in ESL instruction necessitates a multidimensional strategy that includes targeted tactics, support networks, and pedagogical interventions. By promoting language exposure and cultural integration, immersive language experiences for ESL learners—like chances for in-person conversations and cross-cultural exchanges—can aid in the removal of social obstacles. Furthermore, social stigma and discrimination can be lessened by establishing inclusive learning environments that value linguistic diversity and encourage positive attitudes toward language acquisition. Instructors

can create a supportive environment where students feel appreciated and empowered to take chances in their language development by promoting peer cooperation, peer tutoring, and cooperative learning activities.

In order to overcome psychological obstacles, it is critical to help ESL students develop resilience and a growth attitude by redefining setbacks as learning experiences and highlighting the value of tenacity and self-compassion. Building learners' confidence and self-efficacy can be facilitated by offering constructive criticism and acknowledging their efforts rather than concentrating only on results.

Furthermore, incorporating stress-reduction methods and mindfulness-based practices into ESL lessons might help students feel less anxious when speaking the language and improve their emotional health. In addition to fostering metacognitive awareness, reflective techniques like journaling and self-evaluation can enable students to take charge of their educational path.

In conclusion, social and psychological barriers provide serious difficulties for English as Second Language (ESL) learners, affecting their confidence, motivation, and language acquisition. Teachers can establish inclusive and empowering learning environments by using targeted interventions and supporting tactics based on their understanding of the intricate interaction of social and psychological elements influencing ESL learning. We can get past these obstacles and give all ESL students meaningful language learning experiences by working together and being dedicated to meeting their varied requirements.

Lejla Basic (2011) explored the impact of speaking anxiety on second language acquisition. This research, which predominantly draws on literature, also incorporates interviews with two upper secondary school teachers. The findings indicate that speaking anxiety hinders students' verbal participation, adversely affecting their speaking skills. Moreover, the study suggests that speaking anxiety is not a focal concern in schools, potentially because it is perceived more as a social issue than a language teaching problem.

Juhana (2012) investigated the psychological barriers to speaking in English classes at a senior high school in Banten, Indonesia, through research conducted at the Indonesian Open University. This study included 62 students and gathered data via observations, interviews, and questionnaires. The results showed that psychological factors significantly influence student participation, with the fear of making mistakes being the most prevalent (37%), followed by shyness (26%), anxiety (18%), lack of confidence (13%), and lack of motivation (6%).

Rou-Jui Sophia Hu (2013) examined socio-psychological factors predicting EFL learners' English proficiency at Cheng Shiu University, Taiwan. This quantitative research utilized a 57-item questionnaire and found that self-confidence is a key predictor of proficiency in EFL learners, followed by motivation, anxiety, fear, and indirect cultural contact.

Gavriil et al. (2015) evaluated socio-psychological difficulties in learning English as a second language within the context of lifelong education. Their research found that adult learners face various social and psychological challenges, including lack of responsibility, fear of making mistakes, low interest in studying English, and lack of confidence.

Stella et al. (2015) researched factors influencing English language learning. Data were collected via self-drafted questionnaires distributed to 36 students learning English as a foreign language. The analysis revealed that technological, social, academic, cultural, and economic factors all affect learning.

Mohit Kumar (2017) investigated socio-psychological factors in learning communicative English in professional colleges. He found that learners from particular groups are hindered by internal psychological forces and external sociological factors. The lack of competent, motivated, and qualified teachers, fear of making mistakes, social pressure, and lack of an English-speaking environment also impede language learning.

Sumaiya Sharmin (2019) examined social and psychological barriers in adult EFL classrooms in Bangladesh. Using qualitative methods, she conducted face-to-face and online interviews with 21 students from an adult English language institution. Her findings revealed five significant challenges: classroom anxiety, fear of a new language, previous learning experiences, age, and motivation.

Souvik Barua (2022) researched language anxiety variables and their negative effects on SLA at Chittagong Independent University, Bangladesh. Data were collected qualitatively from 39 Bangladeshi tertiary-level students through semi-structured interviews and focus discussions. The research found that these students experience high levels of language anxiety due to psychological, linguistic, and socio-cultural barriers. They are particularly anxious about speaking in front of teachers and classmates due to fear of negative evaluation and ridicule.

Md. Ruhul Amin (2023) researched the difficulties of effective English speaking at the higher secondary level at NPI University of Bangladesh. Using a quantitative method, questionnaires were distributed to 100 students from four colleges. The study revealed several

barriers, including interference of the mother tongue, fossilization, anxiety, emotional barriers (shyness), cultural barriers (local accent), lack of practice, vocabulary issues, immersion, student-teacher interaction, attitude barriers (lack of motivation), and psychological barriers (consciousness, emotion, etc.).

Qiangfu Yu et al. (2023) investigated the anxiety associated with learning English among rural junior high school students in China within an online class environment. Employing a mixed-method approach, they utilized questionnaires as the primary data collection tool, complemented by interviews to enhance accuracy. The findings indicated that these students typically experienced a moderate level of English learning anxiety, with no significant correlation between gender differences and anxiety levels in online language classes. The factors contributing to their anxiety encompassed personal characteristics, home environment, teacher and school influences, and broader social contexts. The study also proposed five strategies to alleviate foreign language learning anxiety: acknowledging the presence of anxiety, communicating openly about it, enhancing psychological resilience, adopting a positive attitude towards life's challenges, and setting achievable goals in English learning.

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research methods and procedures, explaining the chosen approach and detailing the research design, participants, data collection, tools, and data analysis methods. The study's main questions are:

What are the major socio-psychological barriers faced by students in Tehsil Swabi while learning English?

How do these barriers affect second language learning?

3.2 Research Design

A quantitative technique is used to gather numerical data through a questionnaire. This method ensures a comprehensive understanding of the socio-psychological challenges in second language learning by analyzing statistical data.

3.3 Research Setting

The study involves both public and private schools in Tehsil Swabi, with approximately 12,000 students enrolled in 50 schools. Five schools were randomly selected, with class sizes varying

from 30 to 40 students, all of whom share Pashto as their common language. Good relations with school principals facilitated access.

3.4 Research Participants

The study involves 50 male students, aged 14 to 17, from five schools. These SSC level students provided their opinions on language learning barriers through questionnaires. Their enthusiasm was demonstrated by a high return rate of completed questionnaires.

3.5 Tools and Instruments

A 14-item close-ended questionnaire was used to gather data on various issues faced by students in learning English. The questionnaire covers social problems, personal factors, and institutional challenges, with responses rated on a five-point Likert scale.

3.6 Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted to ensure the research problem was viable and the questionnaire was understandable. Some items were rephrased and translated into Urdu to avoid confusion and ensure authentic feedback.

3.7 Procedure for Data Collection and Analysis

After obtaining permissions, participants were informed about the study's objectives and their voluntary participation. Questionnaires were distributed and explained in Urdu and Pashto. Data were analyzed using SPSS software to determine percentages and frequencies, presented through figures.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical issues were addressed by obtaining informed consent, protecting privacy, ensuring confidentiality, and providing clear information about the study. Participants under 18 received information sheets in plain English. Only the researcher and supervisor had access to personal details, highlighting a commitment to ethical principles in researching socio-psychological barriers in Swabi's ESL classes.
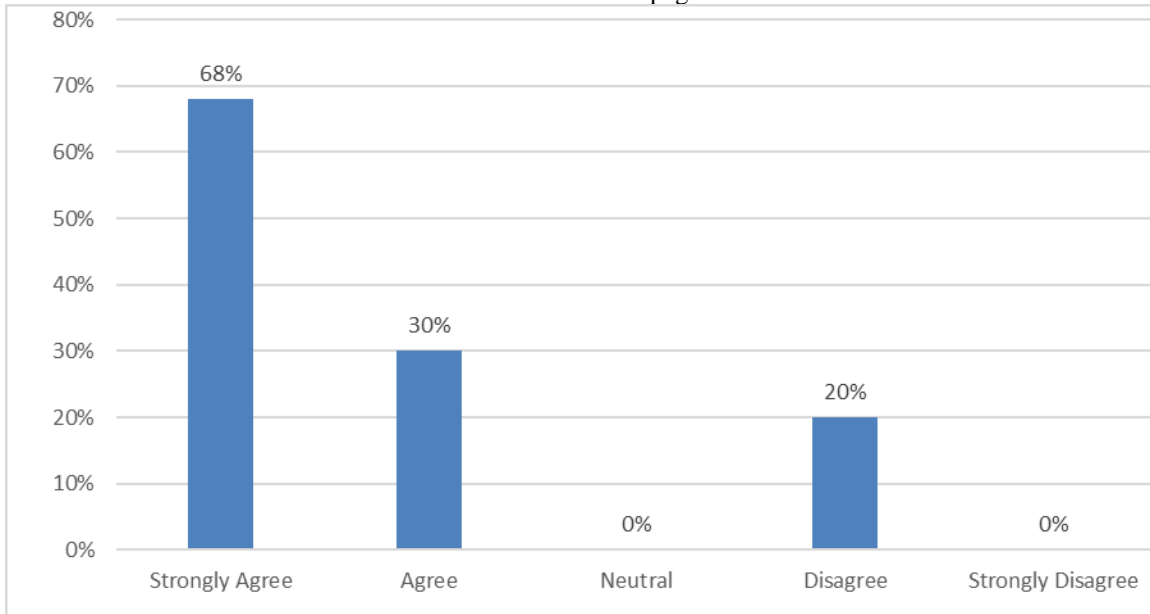
Data Analysis

Following is the analysis of the data collected during the research process.

Figure No. 01 *Learning English as second language (ESL) at the (SSC) level is important for my future educational career prospects.*
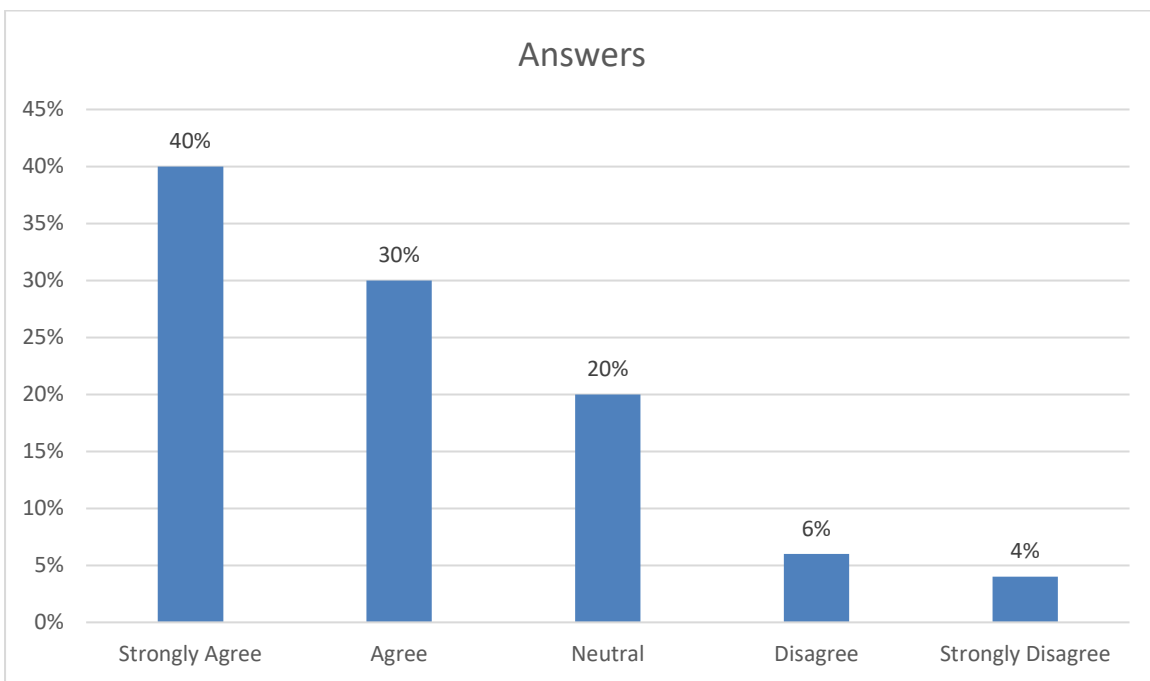
The data in figure 01 shows that 68% of the students are strongly agree, 30% are agree, 20% are disagree and no one is neutral and strongly disagree with the statement. From the above results, it is clear that learning English as a second language (ESL) at the (SSC) level is crucial for students future educational and career prospects. Knowing the importance of English language in career opportunities most of the students strongly agreed with the statement.

Figure No. 02 *I believe I have the necessary language skills to effectively learn and communicate in English.*

The data in figure 02 shows that 40% of the students are strongly agree, 30% are agree, 20% are neutral, 6% are disagree and 4% are strongly disagree with the statement. It is evident the above results that most of the students have the necessary language skill to effectively learn and communicate in English language and they just need opportunities to speak in English.

Figure No. 03 *Peer pressure or social stigma related to learning English has negatively affected my motivation to study English.*
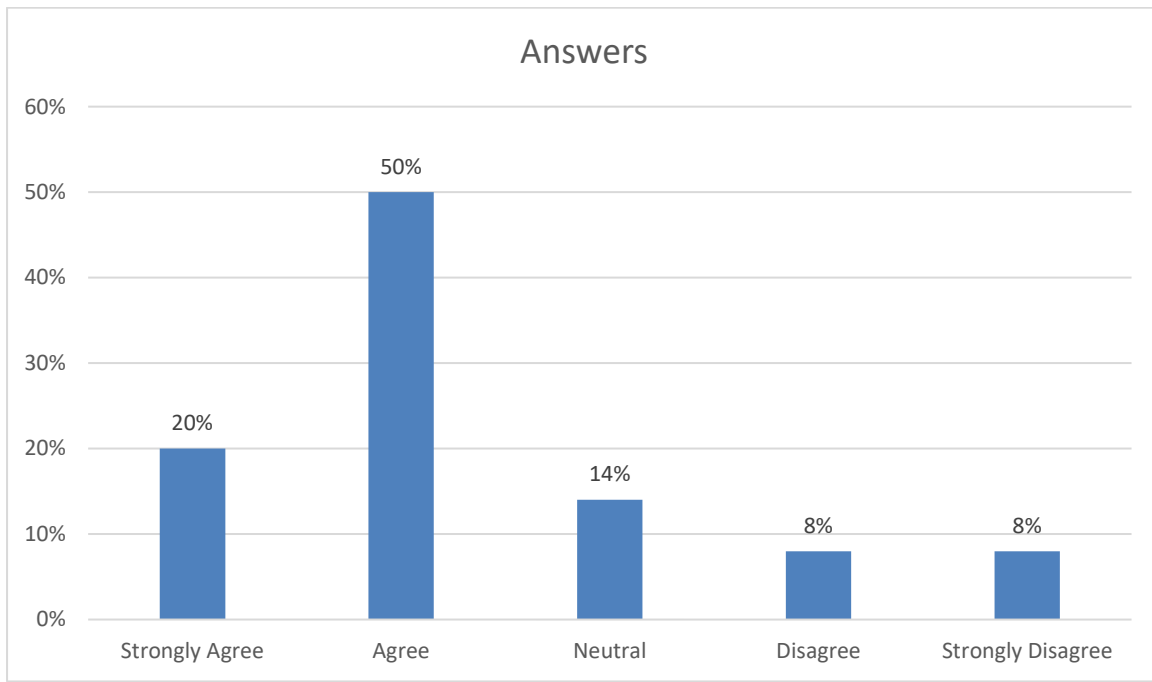
In figure 03, we see that 20% of the students are strongly agree, 50% are agree, 14% are neutral, 8% are disagree and 8% are strongly disagree with statement. The results shows that peer pressure or social stigma related to learning English has negatively affected and demotivated the students to learn English language as half of the students are agree with the statement.

Figure No. 04 *Limited availability of resources or materials has hindered my progress in learning ESL on SSC level.*
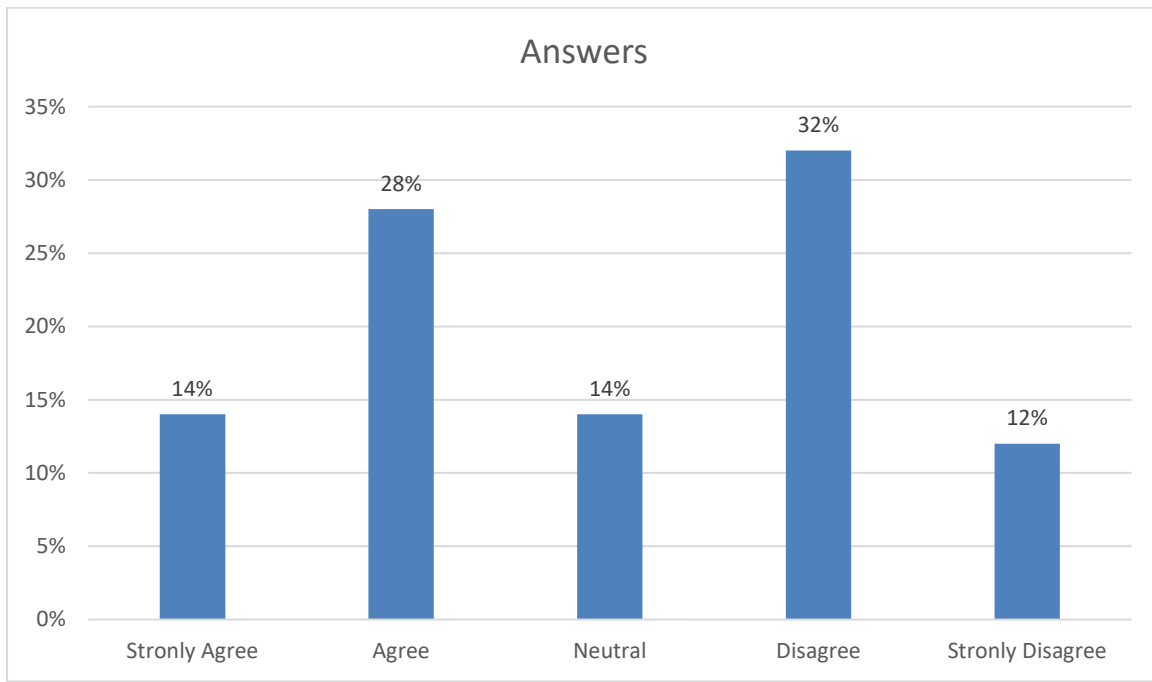
In the above figure 04, 14% of the students are strongly agree, 28% are agree, 14% are neutral, 32% are disagree, and 12% are strongly disagree with the statement. So from the above results it is clear that the lack of materials and available resources does not hindered students from learning English language. It means that the materials and resources necessary for learning English is available to most of the students and the only thing they need is positive motivation and conducive environment for learning.

Figure No. 05 *The lack of support from family or community members had made it difficult for me to continue learning English.*
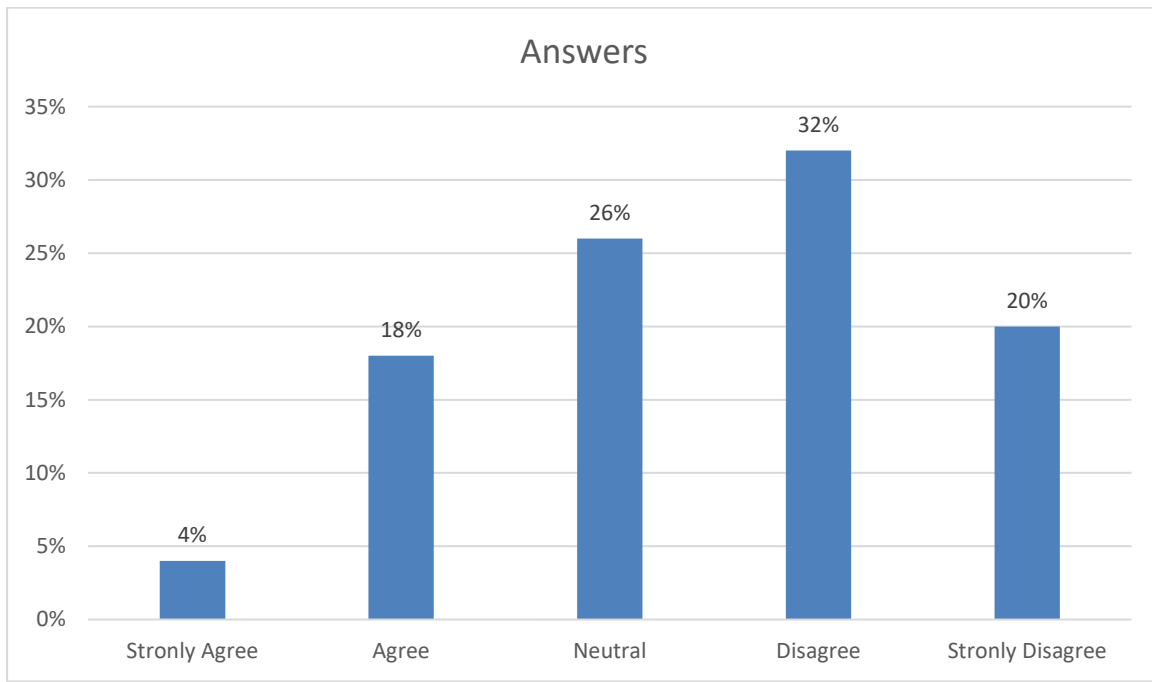
In figure 05, 4% of the students are strongly agree, 18% are agree, 26% are neutral, 32% are disagree and 20% are strongly disagree. The results reveal that the lack of support from family and community members does not make it difficult for students to learn English language as most the students are disagree with this statement. It means that family members and community support their children to learn English language.

Figure No. 06 *I feel confident and comfortable speaking English in front of others.*
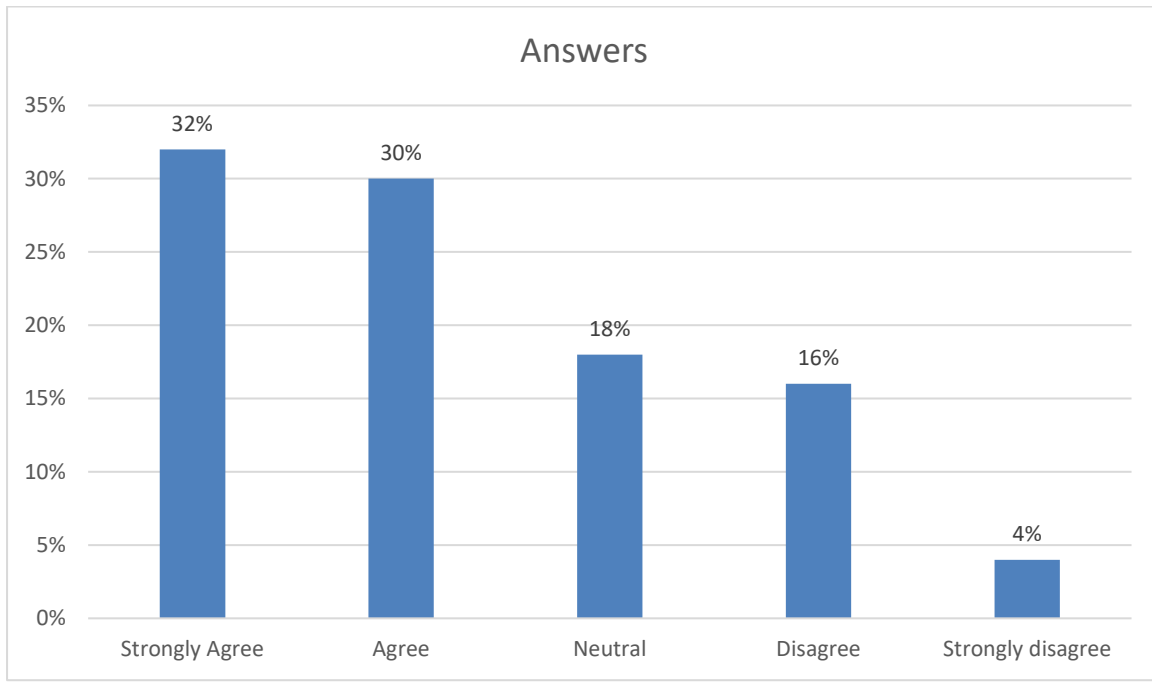
The data in figure 06, shows that 32% of the students are strongly agree, 30% are agree, 18% are neutral, 16% are disagree and 4% are strongly disagree with the above statement. It means that majority of the students feel confident and comfortable speaking English in front of others as most of them are agree and strongly agree with the statement.

Figure No. 07 *I believe my cultural and religious background has influenced my English language learning experience in a negative way.*
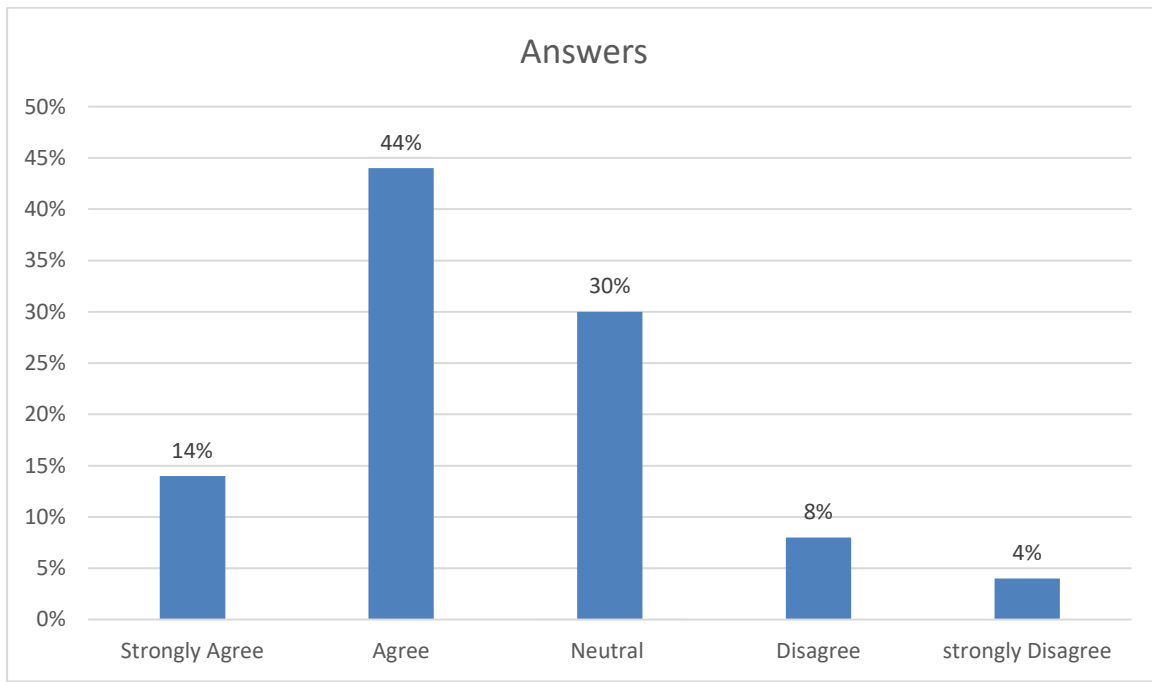
In figure 07, 14% of the students are strongly agree, 44% are agree, 30% are neutral, 8% are disagree and 4% are strongly disagree with the above statement. It is clear from the above results that cultural and religious background has made it difficult for students to learn English language. Religion can significantly impact the process of learning a new language, influencing individual language learning choices, societal communication dynamics and cross border negotiations.

Figure No. 08 *The fear of making mistakes has affected my willingness to actively participate in English learning activities.*
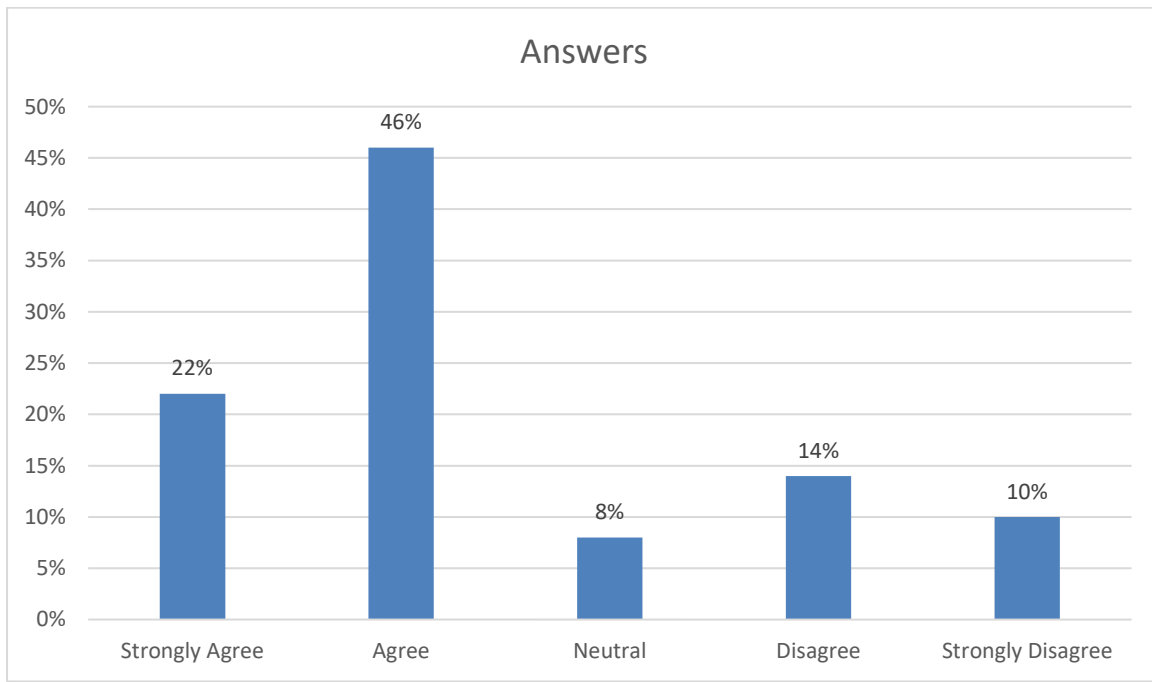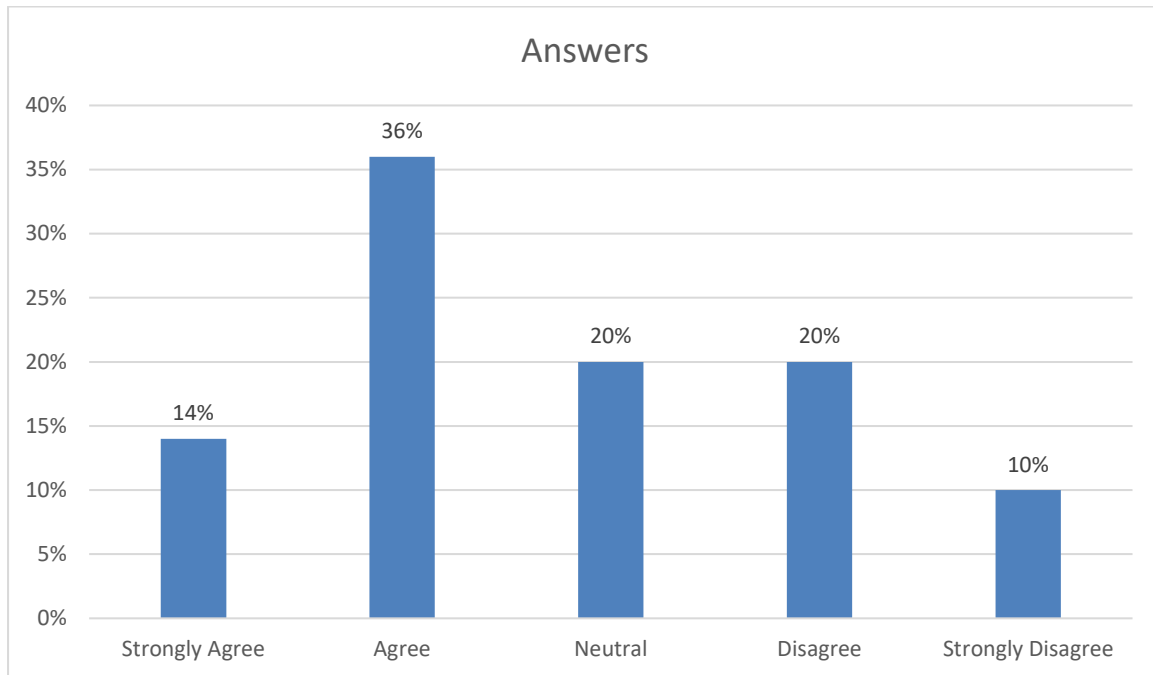

Figure 08, shows that 22% of the students are strongly agree, 46% are agree, 8% are neutral, 14% are disagree and 10% are strongly disagree with the statement. So it is clear from the above results that fear of making mistakes has affected the willingness of the students to actively participate in English learning activities as most of the students agree with the statement. The fear of making mistakes and being ridiculed by peers has always negatively affected the learning process.

Figure No. 09 *The interference of mother tongue reduce your secondary language learning.*

In figure 09, 14% of the students are strongly agree, 36% are agree, 20% are neutral, 20% are disagree, and 10% are strongly disagree with the statement. The results reveal that the interference of mother tongue reduces secondary language learning of the students as majority of the students are agree with the statement. Definitely the dominancy of mother tongue always affects the process of second language learning of the learners.

Figure No. 10 *Students do not understand English language due to lack of interest and motivation.*
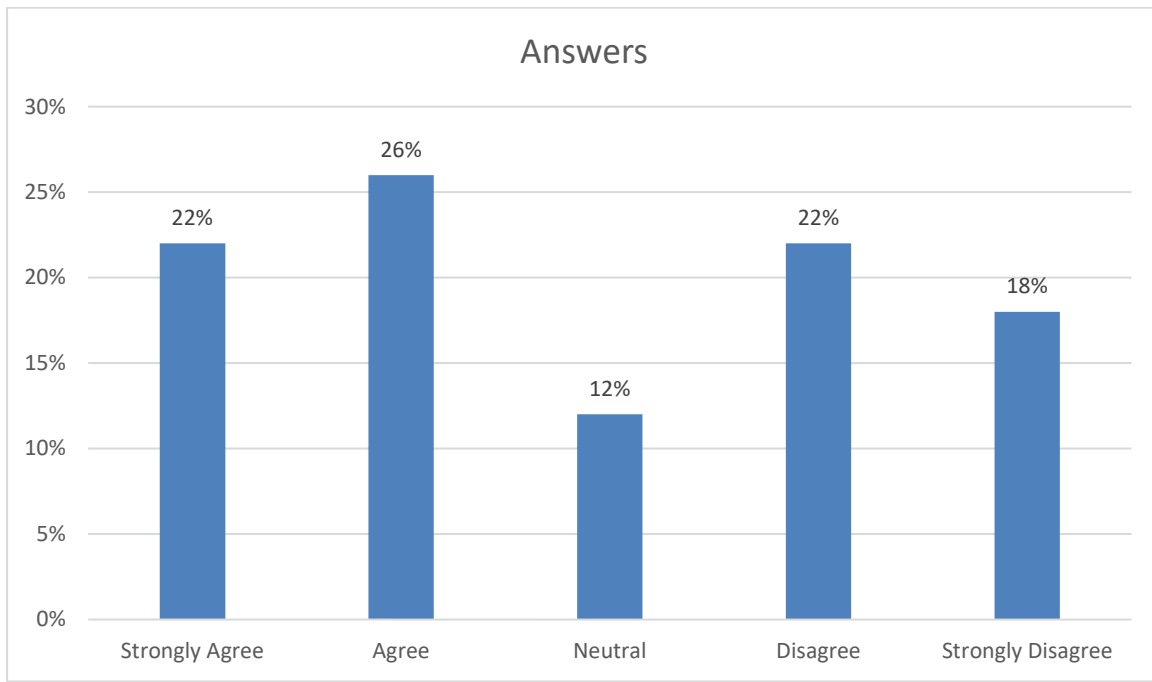
The data in figure 10, shows that 22% of the students are strongly agree, 26% are agree, 12% are neutral, 22% are disagree and 18% are strongly disagree with the statement. It is clear from the above results that due to lack of interest and motivation students do not understand English language as most of the students are agree with the statement. Interest and motivation are always playing a pivotal role in learning process.

Figure No. 11 *The lack of competent and qualified teachers affects my learning process.*
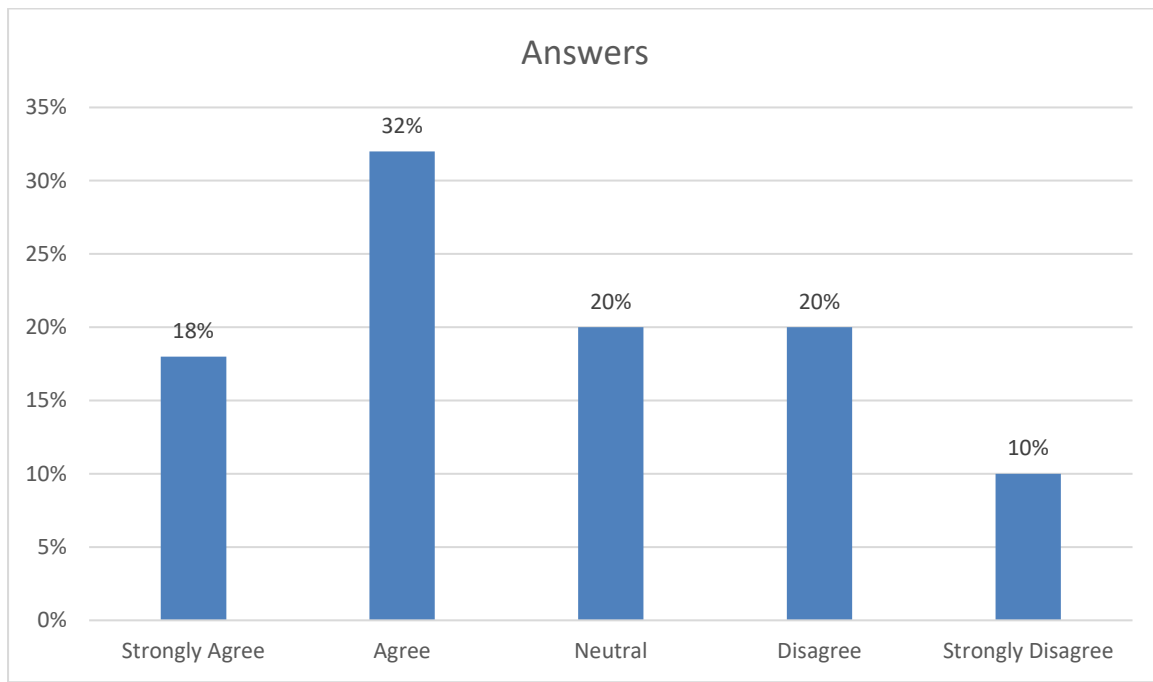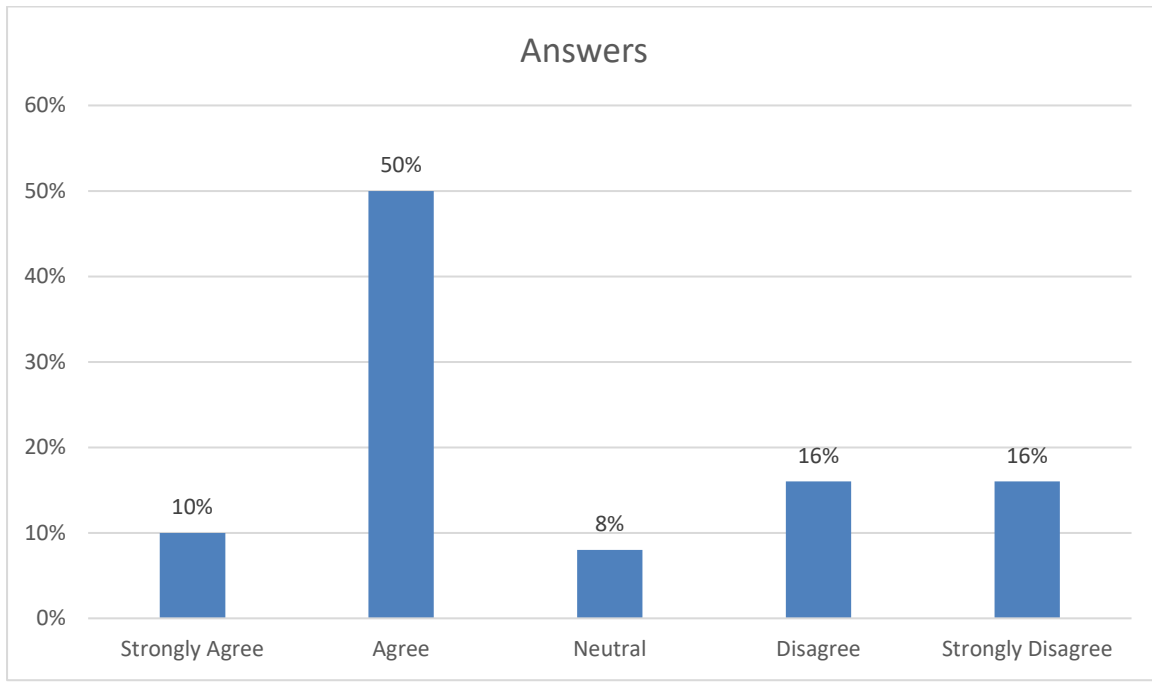

Figure 11, shows that 18% of the students are strongly agree, 32% are agree, 20% are neutral, 20% are disagree, and 10% are strongly disagree with the statement. So, it is clear from the results that the lack of competent and qualified teacher has affected students learning process as most of the students are agree with the statement. The lack of competent and qualified teacher negatively affects the students learning process.

Figure No. 12 *The method of English language teaching used in schools are ineffective.*

The data in figure 12, shows that 10% of the students are strongly agree, 50% are agree, 8% are neutral, 16% are disagree, and 16% are strongly disagree with the above statement. So, it is clear from the results that the method of English language teaching used in schools is ineffective as half of the students are agree with the statement. Teaching methods play a crucial role in the learning process, shaping the way students engage with and absorb information.

Figure No. 13 *The perception that English language learning is only for academic purposes restrict my motivation.*
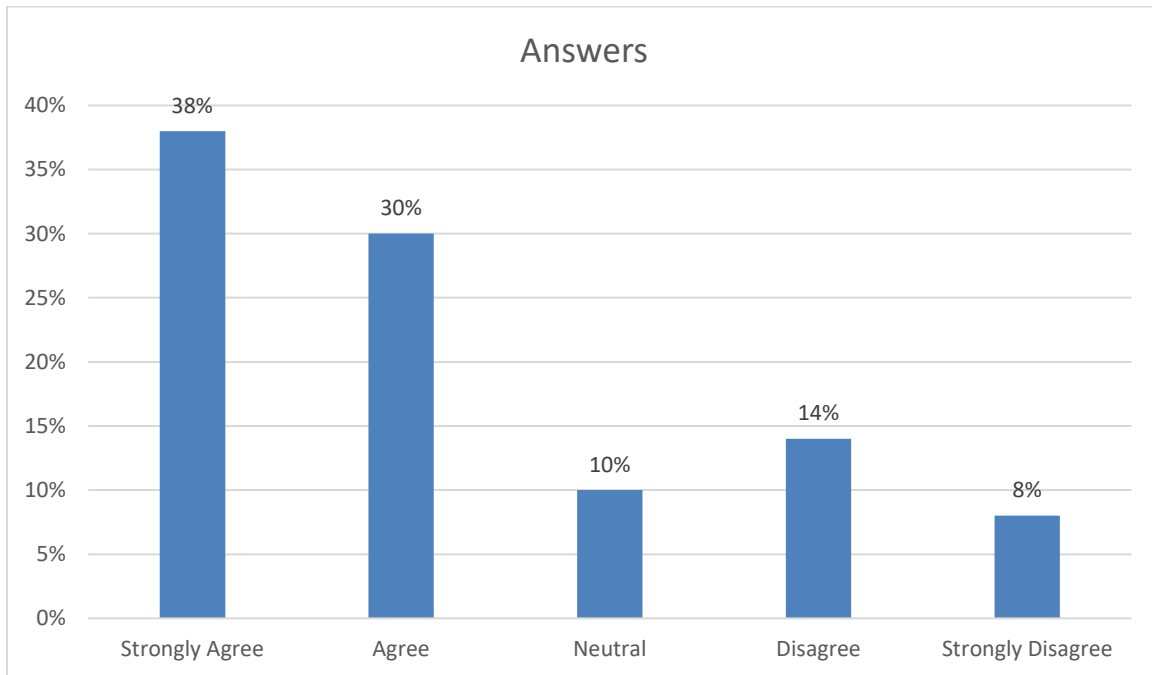
In figure 13, 38% of the students are strongly agree, 30% are agree, 10% are neutral, 14% are disagree, and 8% are strongly disagree with the statement. From the above findings it is clear that English is thought as subject not as a language therefore, students have difficulties in learning English.

Figure No. 14 *Lack of English-speaking partners hinders my English learning progress.*
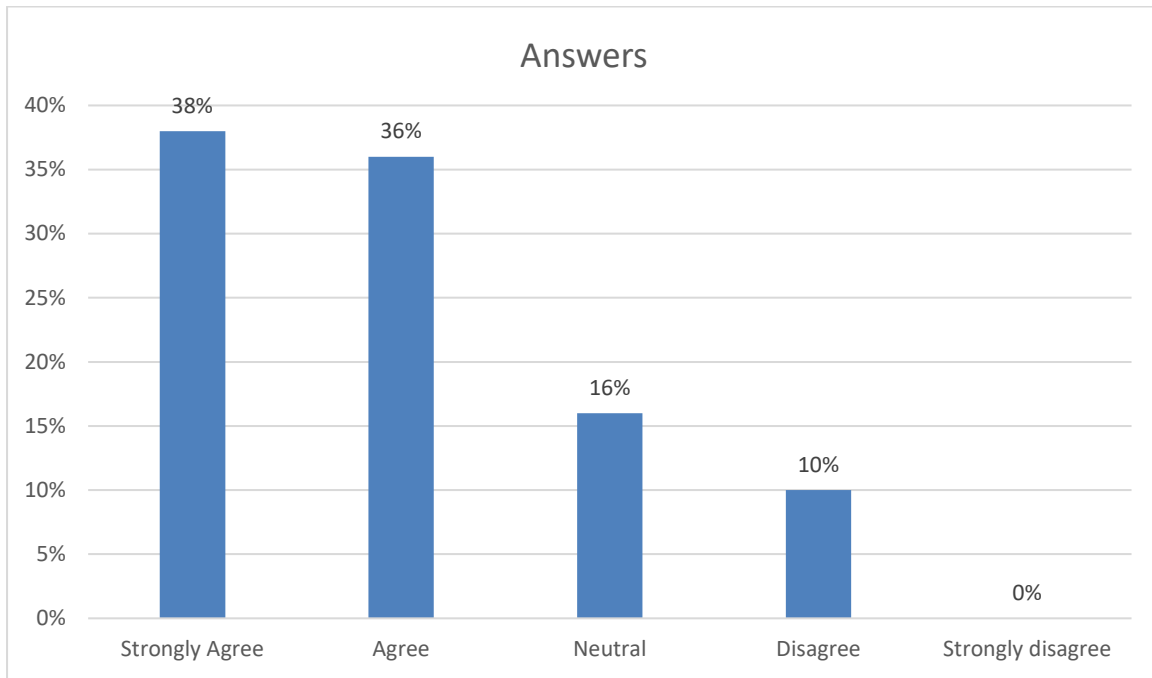
The data in figure 14, shows that 38% of the students are strongly agree, 36% are agree, 16% are neutral, 10% are disagree, and no one is disagreed with the statement. So, it is clear from the above results that lack of speaking partners hinders students learning progress as most of the students are strongly agree with the statement.

Discussion

The study explored major socio-psychological barriers faced by secondary students in Tehsil Swabi while learning English. Based on student perceptions and questionnaire feedback, these barriers include peer pressure, fear of making mistakes, lack of interest and motivation, cultural and religious backgrounds, influence of the mother tongue, teaching methods, teacher competence, subject-focused teaching, and lack of speaking partners.

Peer pressure, both direct and indirect, is a significant barrier to learning English. Negative peer pressure or social stigma affects students' interest and motivation to learn English. The attitudes and behaviors of peers can influence students' motivation to continue attending language classes.

This common concern can significantly impact language learning, especially in developing speaking skills. Students' fear of making mistakes arises from a lack of confidence, perfectionistic tendencies, and societal pressure to speak flawlessly. This fear prevents learners from practicing and improving their speaking skills.

Without genuine interest and motivation, students find the learning process tedious, uninspiring, and challenging. Despite wanting to learn English for career opportunities, students' low motivation levels hinder their language learning progress.

These can limit exposure to English and create resistance to learning it. Some students prioritize preserving their native language and view learning English as unnecessary or conflicting with their cultural identity. This lack of exposure and practice opportunities hinders the learning process.

The dominance of the mother tongue can impede the acquisition of a new language. Students tend to rely on familiar linguistic structures, leading to interference, errors, and misunderstandings. Emotional and psychological attachment to the mother tongue can also create resistance to learning English.

Traditional teaching methods often fail to cater to diverse learning styles and preferences, making the learning process less effective. A lack of engaging and varied teaching approaches can hinder students' overall language experience.

The absence of competent and qualified teachers can significantly impact language learning. Inadequately trained teachers struggle to convey language concepts effectively, provide engaging materials, and create a supportive learning environment. This lack of quality instruction affects students' understanding and mastery of English.

Teaching English as a subject rather than a language emphasizes theoretical knowledge over practical use, hindering real-world communication skills. This approach often focuses on grammar rules and vocabulary lists without providing immersive language experiences, crucial for developing fluency and cultural understanding.

The absence of speaking partners deprives learners of opportunities to practice and improve their speaking skills. Without immediate feedback and correction, students struggle to address mistakes and refine their language abilities.

Conclusion

The barriers identified significantly impede language acquisition by preventing practice, confidence, and effective instruction. Overcoming these obstacles requires specialized strategies, supportive environments, and opportunities for immersive learning. A comprehensive approach to language learning, addressing socio-psychological barriers and enhancing motivation and engagement, is essential for students' success in acquiring English proficiency. Encouraging a positive learning environment, offering meaningful exposure to real-world language use, and providing competent instruction can help students navigate the challenges of language learning with confidence and resilience.

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