



Speaking with Intelligence: A Quantitative Study of Verbal-Linguistic

Intelligence Strategies in Pakistani Higher Education

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Abstract

This investigation examined the utilization, frequency, and perceived effectiveness of verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) strategies among graduate-level English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in Pakistan to enhance speaking competencies. Grounded in Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, and Oxford's Strategy-Based Learning framework, the study employed a quantitative design. A convenience sample of 120 students from English-related programs in Bahawalpur was surveyed using a 30-item Likert-scale questionnaire. Instrument reliability was confirmed by a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85, and data were analyzed via descriptive statistics in SPSS. Findings indicated that participants engaged with VLI strategies at moderate to high levels. Socially mediated strategies, such as interacting with fluent speakers (60.7%) and language clubs (57.3%), emerged as primary drivers for proficiency. Cognitive-linguistic practices, including grammatical monitoring (56.6%) and mental rehearsal (52.7%), were systematically used to bridge the gap between receptive input and oral output. While lexical expansion was highly valued, a substantial minority (up to 41%) reported difficulties with high-

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level articulation, such as explaining complex concepts. Overall, participants perceived these strategies as highly effective for developing fluency and communicative confidence. The study suggests that integrating strategy-based instruction into the Pakistani higher education system can significantly improve oral outcomes by transitioning cognitive strengths into spontaneous communication.

Keywords: Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence, Speaking Skills, ESL Learners, Language Learning Strategies, Pakistani Graduate Students, Multiple Intelligences Theory

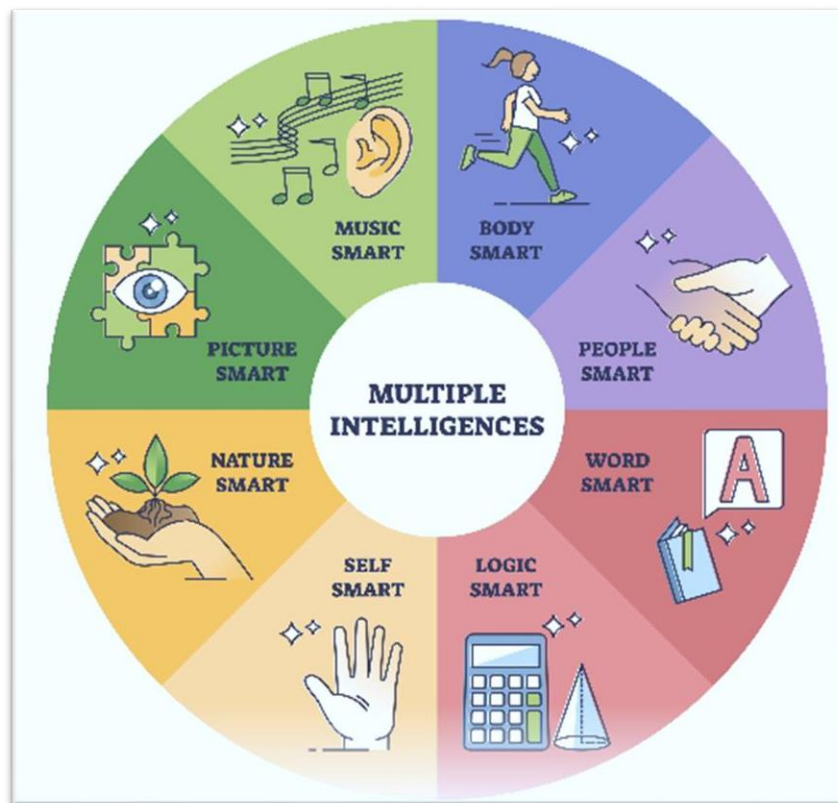
Introduction

Despite the global status of English as a *lingua franca* and its official role in Pakistani higher education, graduate ESL students frequently struggle with oral fluency due to teacher-centered methodologies and a lack of real-world practice (Khan & Khan, 2016; Shamim, 2011). Speaking remains a primary challenge; learners often possess theoretical knowledge but lack the confidence to communicate in a society where regional languages dominate daily life (Haq et al., 2017; Khan & Khan, 2016). Howard Gardner's (1983, 2011b) Theory of Multiple Intelligences suggests that leveraging verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI)—the ability to use language effectively through storytelling, debating, and persuasive speaking—is essential for overcoming these barriers and internalizing language within meaningful contexts (Bas & Beyhan, 2010). Implementing verbal-linguistic strategies, such as organizing discussion circles and conducting peer interviews, aligns with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to foster learner autonomy and discourse competence (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Richards, 2006). While these strategies and modern technological tools can bridge the gap between academic goals and professional needs (Godwin-Jones, 2018a), many Pakistani educators remain unaware of how to

practically apply these cognitive frameworks (Armstrong, 2009). Given the scarcity of research on this relationship within the Pakistani graduate context (Qureshi, 2012; Razmjoo, 2008), there is an acute need to investigate these strategies to reorganize ESL programs and enhance the communicative competency of future professionals.

Figure 1

Multiple Intelligences

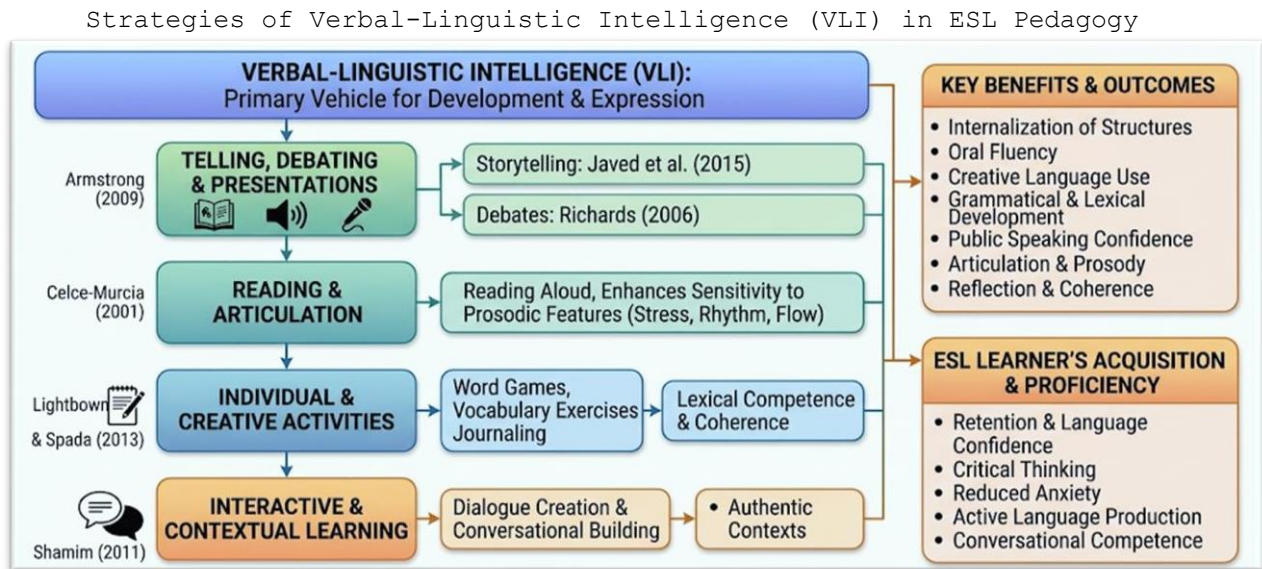


Strategies of Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence

Various pedagogical strategies are intrinsically linked to verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI), including storytelling, debating, oral presentations, word games, and dialogue creation. These strategies facilitate the internalization of linguistic structures and contribute significantly to oral



fluency. According to Armstrong (2009), engaging students in language-focused tasks encourages retention and builds confidence in the target language. When applied skillfully, these methods enable ESL learners to practice and refine their speaking skills within meaningful, contextually grounded frameworks. In ESL classrooms, storytelling is particularly efficacious; it encourages creative language use while adhering to narrative and linguistic structures, which in turn facilitates grammatical and lexical development (Haq et al., 2017). Similarly, debates and persuasive speaking tasks nurture critical thinking and empower learners to present arguments coherently, while oral presentations bolster public speaking confidence (Richards, 2006). Reading aloud further refines pronunciation and intonation, enhancing sensitivity to prosodic features such as stress patterns, rhythm, and sentence flow (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). By synthesizing these strategies, educators provide diverse opportunities for active language production. Vocabulary exercises enhance lexical competence, journaling promotes reflection and expressive coherence, and dialogue building fosters conversational competence in authentic contexts (Celce-Murcia, 2001). In contexts such as Pakistan, where English is often acquired in environments with limited extramural exposure, these strategies are paramount in creating immersive and interactive learning spaces (Shamim, 2011). Strategically incorporating these techniques into lesson plans allows educators to address individual learner needs and maximize ESL proficiency. Understanding these techniques necessitates a more detailed exploration of language itself—the primary vehicle through which verbal-linguistic intelligence is developed and expressed.

Figure 2


Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, graduate-level ESL students frequently encounter significant challenges in achieving speaking proficiency—a situation often exacerbated by large class sizes, limited pedagogical resources, and a systemic neglect of verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) within the instructional environment. Despite established theoretical links between linguistic intelligence and oral fluency, current methodologies in the region often prioritize rote memorization over the strategic tools required for spontaneous, coherent communication. Consequently, there remains a notable deficit in empirical research exploring how VLI strategies can be leveraged to bridge this proficiency gap, particularly within the specific socio-academic context of Bahawalpur. This study addresses this scholarly void by examining the utilization and perceived effectiveness of verbal-linguistic strategies among graduate ESL learners. By identifying these interventions, the research aims to provide evidence-based insights for curricular reforms that foster a more robust balance between written and oral competencies.

**Research Objectives**

1. To investigate the utilization of various verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) strategies employed by graduate-level ESL learners in Pakistan to enhance their speaking skills.
2. To determine the frequency with which these learners apply specific VLI strategies within both formal academic and naturalistic language learning environments.
3. To assess the perceived effectiveness of verbal-linguistic intelligence strategies in developing key speaking competencies, such as fluency, accuracy, and communicative confidence, among Pakistani graduate-level ESL learners.

Significance of the Study

This study holds significant academic and practical value as it explores the pivotal role of verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) strategies in enhancing the speaking skills of graduate-level ESL learners. By focusing on the Bahawalpur region, the research provides a localized empirical foundation that contributes to the broader understanding of pedagogical trends in Pakistan. The findings are expected to benefit learners by fostering an awareness of specific strategies—such as mental rehearsal and social interaction—that align with their inherent linguistic strengths. Furthermore, this research provides educators with evidence-based insights into implementing intelligence-driven instructional methods that encourage learner agency and oral proficiency. For curriculum developers, the study offers a framework to design more interactive, learner-centered materials that move beyond traditional rote methods. Ultimately, the results may inform educational policymakers regarding the integration of Multiple Intelligence (MI) models into national language-education reforms, aiming to elevate the standards of communicative competence across the Pakistani ESL landscape.



Review of Related Literature

The Theoretical Supremacy of Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence

While the historical view of intelligence has shifted from a unitary IQ-based construct toward a multidimensional paradigm, Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence (VLI) has emerged as the most critical determinant of success within second-language (L2) settings (Armstrong, 2017). Although Gardner's (1983, 2011b) broader framework is sometimes debated in neuroscience as a "neuromyth," VLI remains a vital pedagogical construct for understanding how individuals process phonological, semantic, and syntactic information. Unlike other intelligence domains, VLI specifically governs the ability to manipulate language structures and use words effectively to achieve communicative goals. Within this framework, VLI is not merely an aptitude for memorization but a "plurality of independent yet overlapping fields" where linguistic skills remain central to vocabulary acquisition and oral proficiency (Gardner, 1983, 2011b). While auxiliary domains like musical or interpersonal intelligence can be strategically deployed to support learning, VLI is the primary engine that drives phonological awareness and collaborative conversation.

VLI in the Digital and Multimodal Era

Modern research highlights that VLI is no longer confined to traditional reading and writing; instead, it is enhanced through innovative, multimodal pedagogical strategies (Mañeru Rodríguez, 2025). The integration of AI and digital tools has redefined VLI by facilitating content acquisition and increasing oral participation through personalized linguistic input. Empirical evidence suggests that focusing on a learner's VLI profile increases engagement and intrinsic motivation,



leading to superior language proficiency (Chen et al., 2009; Mañeru Rodríguez, 2025). Furthermore, personalized instruction that targets a student's specific linguistic strengths results in long-term knowledge sustainment and higher academic performance (Contrino et al., 2024; Du Plooy et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2024). This learner-centered approach allows educators to move beyond reductionist testing, instead mobilizing the student's "whole linguistic and cognitive repertoire" through plurilingual strategies (Albuquerque & Moore, 2024).

The VLI Deficit: Challenges in ESL Speaking

Despite the centrality of VLI, traditional ESL settings often neglect its development by prioritizing formal grammar over active discourse (Richards, 2006). This creates a "pedagogical imbalance" where students may possess high theoretical VLI but low "discourse confidence" (Brown, 2007). In the Pakistani context, English serves as the primary means of global communication, and a lack of VLI-based speaking practice directly impacts the employability of graduates in international sectors (Raman et al., 2024). This emphasis on examination-oriented literacy often leaves students unable to process spoken English units effectively, even if they can decode them in print (Liu, 2015).

Verbal-Linguistic Strategies for Oral Proficiency

The development of effective speaking is a multifactorial process requiring the high-level integration of VLI components: vocabulary, grammar, phonology, and contextual expressiveness (Thornbury, 2005). Modern research emphasizes that speaking is an interactive process where the learner uses their VLI to construct meaning in real-time (Abdul Aziz & Kashinathan, 2021). To bridge the proficiency gap, Celce-Murcia (2001) advocates for strategies that directly stimulate VLI, such as real-world simulations, role-plays, and interviews. These methodologies reduce language anxiety by allowing VLI-strong learners to use their natural affinity for storytelling and persuasion.



Recent studies confirm that VLI-focused strategies—including small group discussions and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)—significantly improve oral performance by creating a psychologically supportive environment that fosters student engagement (Nugroho et al., 2020).

Strategic Application of VLI in the ESL Classroom

Consequently, verbal-linguistic strategies in ESL classrooms leverage the learner's inherent ability to manipulate lexical and semantic units through authentic activities—such as storytelling, debating, and persuasive speaking—which facilitate the transition of the target language from passive knowledge into active use (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Narratives and debates are instrumental in refining phonetic accuracy and critical thinking, while creative exercises—including poetry, tongue-twisters, and wordplay—enhance articulation and prosodic rhythm in alignment with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). High-engagement tasks, such as information gaps and simulations, further necessitate that learners negotiate meaning and collaborate to achieve specific linguistic objectives (Richards, 2006). Additionally, the integration of language games involving riddles and puns fosters a "low-affective-filter" environment, which significantly bolsters intrinsic motivation and reduces learner inhibition (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Finally, reflective practices—such as maintaining audio diaries and speaking journals—promote metacognition and learner autonomy, empowering students to monitor their own progress in fluency and pronunciation (Godwin-Jones, 2018a).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983, 2011b), Vygotsky's Social Constructivism (1978), and Oxford's Taxonomy of Language Learning Strategies (1990) to elucidate the multifaceted nature of ESL speaking proficiency.



Gardner's theory identifies verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) as a specialized cognitive domain essential for mastering the nuances of rhetorical persuasion, expressive discourse, and complex lexical acquisition. Vygotsky's model complements this cognitive perspective by emphasizing that VLI is most effectively developed through social mediation and collaborative dialogue within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Finally, Oxford's model bridges the gap between cognition and classroom practice, suggesting that learners with high linguistic intelligence more efficiently employ metacognitive and compensatory strategies—such as paraphrasing, self-monitoring, and progress tracking—to navigate oral communication barriers. Collectively, these theoretical lenses advocate for a pedagogical shift toward interactive, strategy-based instruction that aligns with students' inherent cognitive profiles to foster robust communicative competence.

Conceptual Framework

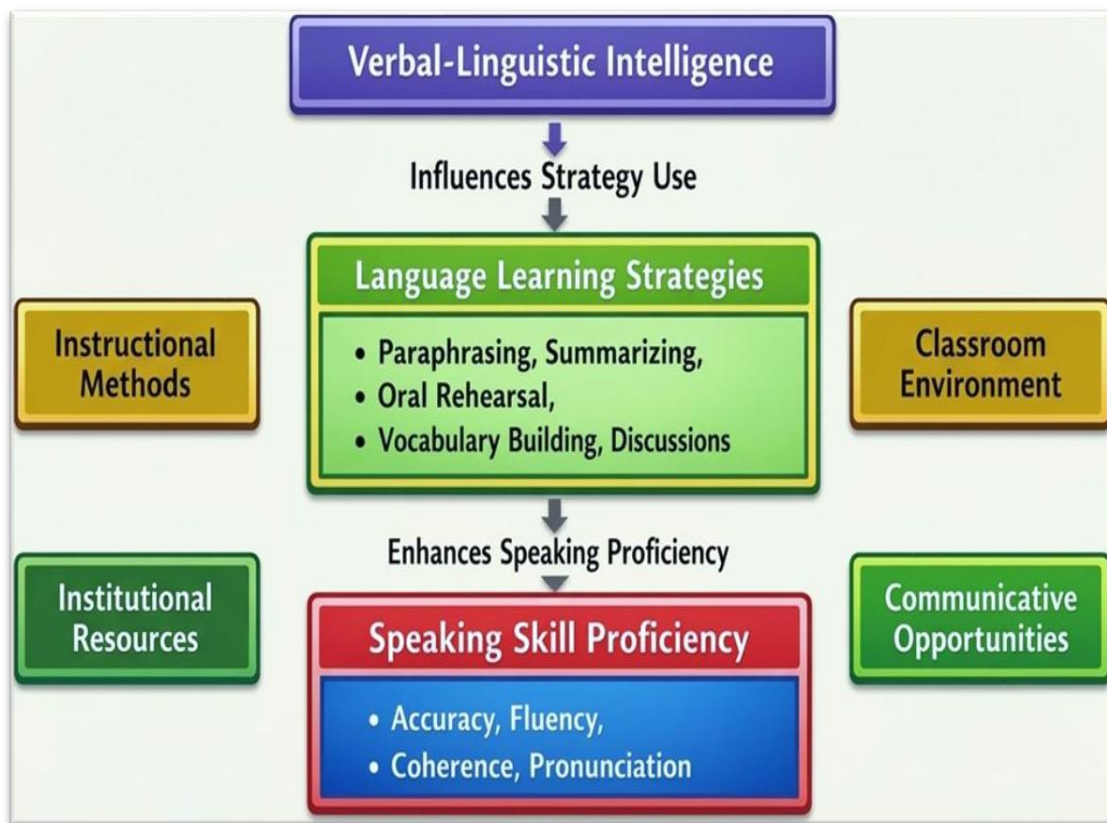
The conceptual framework of this study is organized around the dynamic interaction of three primary variables: Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence (VLI), Strategic Employment, and Speaking Proficiency. VLI is defined as the learner's cognitive capacity to acquire and effectively utilize language across various modalities, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. The framework posits that high levels of VLI serve as a catalyst for the effective use of Language Learning Strategies (LLS)—such as paraphrasing, oral rehearsal, and vocabulary building. These strategies, in turn, are hypothesized to positively influence Speaking Proficiency, which is measured through the core components of fluency, accuracy, cohesion, and pronunciation. Crucially, this association is not isolated; it is mediated by external contextual factors, including Instructional Modalities (teacher-centered vs. learner-centered), the Classroom Environment (conducive vs. anxiety-provoking), Institutional Resources (such as technological aids and library facilities), and the availability of Communicative Opportunities (peer interaction and extracurricular exposure).



By synthesizing Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory (1983, 2011b), Oxford's Strategy-Based Learning (1990), and Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory (1978), this framework provides a comprehensive lens for examining the intersection of cognitive abilities and pedagogical practices. Ultimately, it seeks to map how these elements interact to develop the oral communication skills of graduate-level ESL learners within the specific educational landscape of Pakistan.

Figure 3

Conceptual Framework





Research Methodology

This study employed a quantitative design to investigate the utilization of verbal-linguistic strategies among graduate-level ESL learners in Pakistan. Adopting a descriptive survey approach, a closed-ended questionnaire was utilized to collect quantifiable data from a convenience sample of 120 participants in Bahawalpur. The research instrument was structured into three distinct domains: Strategy Participation, Pragmatic Application, and Perceived Effectiveness. All items were measured using a five-point Likert scale to ensure alignment with the theoretical frameworks of Gardner (1983, 2011b), Oxford (1990), and Vygotsky (1978). To verify the instrument's stability, a pilot study was conducted, yielding a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.85, indicating high internal consistency. Data collection was executed via Google Forms, following ethical protocols for informed consent and anonymity. This electronic modality ensured a robust dataset for subsequent analysis while accommodating participant schedules (Cohen et al., 2018).

Ethical Considerations

Research ethics, as defined by Oancea and Pring (2018), involve "the search for a set of guidelines for behaviour that will enable us to manoeuvre defensively in the political contexts in which we conduct educational research." Several critical factors fall under the umbrella of ethical considerations, including transparency of results, informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the mitigation of potential harm. In accordance with these principles, several safeguarding measures were implemented throughout this study. First, informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their involvement. Participants were provided with explicit assurances that their personal identifiers would remain anonymous and that their responses would be handled with strict confidentiality. Furthermore, it was clearly communicated that the data collected would be



utilized solely for academic and research purposes. Finally, ethical clearance was sought and obtained from the respective institutional authorities before the commencement of the study, ensuring rigorous adherence to established ethical norms and institutional standards.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its focused objectives and methodological rigor, this study encountered several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the research was geographically restricted to the Bahawalpur district; therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to the broader ESL landscape across other regions of Pakistan. Additionally, the sample comprised 120 graduate-level ESL learners selected through convenience sampling. While sufficient for this investigation, the non-probability nature of the sampling method means the findings might not fully capture the heterogeneity of learner experiences or the total diversity of strategic practices present in the wider population. Furthermore, temporal constraints precluded the collection of longitudinal data, which would have allowed for a more in-depth observation of strategy implementation over time in naturalistic settings. The reliance on self-reported data via questionnaires also introduced the potential for response bias, such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment by the participants. Finally, the specific focus on verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) may have overlooked the secondary roles played by other intelligence domains—such as interpersonal or intrapersonal intelligence—in the development of speaking proficiency. These limitations highlight the necessity for future research utilizing larger, more diverse samples, wider geographical scopes, and mixed-methods designs to provide a more holistic understanding of the subject. The study utilized descriptive statistics—specifically means (M), standard deviations (SD), and frequency distributions—to summarize the findings and address the research questions.



The internal consistency of the instrument was re-confirmed through Cronbach's Alpha ($\alpha=0.85$), ensuring high reliability. The analytical process commenced with a demographic profile, followed by a systematic assessment of participant responses. Results are presented through detailed descriptive tables and corresponding interpretations to ensure statistical clarity and transparency of the identified quantitative trends.

Results

Table 1: Frequency and Perception of Verbal-Linguistic Strategies among ESL Learners

Item / Questionnaire Statement	SA/A (%)	(N (%)	DA/SD (%)
Section One: Strategy Participation			
Improvement in Speaking through English	47.3	12.7	40.0
Vocabulary			
Practice Speaking through English Debates and Discussions	46.0	18.7	35.3

**Reading English books, articles, or news**

50.0

15.3

34.6

improves Speaking Skills**Practice Speaking by Summarizing heard or read**

52.0

16.0

32.0

in English**Consciously focused on Grammatical Rules while**

56.6

8.7

34.7

speaking**Writing notes and journal entries to help in**

54.7

14.7

30.7

Speaking**Attending English-language clubs and groups**

57.3

15.3

27.4

Learning and using English Idioms and Phrases

46.0

17.3

36.7

Section Two: Pragmatic Application**Striving to use word nuances appropriately**

45.3

20.0

34.7

Actively learning and integrating new English

52.0

12.0

36.0

words**Engaging with native or highly fluent speakers**

60.7

11.3

28.0

Making an effort to speak even when unsure of

52.0

17.3

30.7

accuracy**Reviewing English-speaking errors regularly**

49.3

16.7

34.0



Mentally rehearsing conversations or presentations

52.7 17.3 30.0

Listening to podcasts/audiobooks to improve fluency

50.7 18.0 31.3

Seeking opportunities to use English in everyday life

50.7 14.0 35.3

Section Three: Perceived Effectiveness

Explaining complex ideas/concepts in English

44.0 14.7 41.3

Regularly seeking feedback from peers or instructors

44.0 14.7 41.3

Imitating English speech patterns and accents

43.4 22.0 34.7

Vocabulary expansion leads to clearer/precise speech

46.0 18.7 35.3

Discussions and debates enhance confidence/fluency

50.0 16.7 33.4

Reading materials contribute significantly to fluency

54.7 15.3 30.0

Focus on grammar rules leads to accurate speech

52.0 20.0 28.0



Use of idioms makes speech look natural and authentic	49.3	19.3	31.4
Writing helps organize thoughts for better speaking	43.3	18.7	38.0
Practicing pronunciation improves intelligibility	51.3	17.3	31.4
Actively seeking feedback is helpful for error correction	57.3	7.3	35.3
Intentional strategies noticeably enhanced overall skills	52.0	18.0	30.0

The overall interpretation of the data indicated a predominantly positive perception among graduate-level ESL learners regarding the utility of VLI strategies, with agreement rates (Strongly Agree/Agree) consistently ranging between 43% and 61%. High engagement in social strategies—specifically interacting with fluent speakers (60.7%) and language clubs (57.3%)—underscored the recognition of socially mediated learning as a primary driver for oral proficiency. Additionally, the reliance on grammatical monitoring (56.6%) and reading-based fluency (54.7%) suggested that learners utilized cognitive and academic foundations to structure their speech. However, a substantial minority (ranging from 27% to 41%) expressed disagreement, particularly regarding high-level tasks such as explaining complex concepts or utilizing lexical nuances. This divergence suggests that while the majority bolstered their confidence through these strategies, nearly one-third of the cohort faced internal or environmental barriers that hindered the transition of cognitive strengths into spontaneous, naturalistic communication.



Discussion

This research confirms that graduate-level Pakistani ESL learners actively utilize verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) strategies, with a significant emphasis on independent cognitive-linguistic modalities such as lexical augmentation, mental rehearsal, and auditory exposure. These findings align with Gardner's (1983, 2011b) theory, which posits that VLI is a specialized domain essential for mastering complex vocabulary and communicative structures. While socially interactive strategies—such as debates and engagement with fluent speakers—were highly valued for boosting confidence, their application remained variable due to environmental constraints. This mirrors the observations of Shamim (2011), who noted that in the Pakistani ESL context, limited extramural exposure often necessitates more deliberate classroom-based interventions. Furthermore, the systematic use of metacognitive practices, including error review and feedback solicitation, supports Oxford's (1990) assertion that high-level linguistic learners effectively employ strategic tools to overcome oral communication barriers and foster learner autonomy.

RO1: Utilization of Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence Strategies

The findings for Research Objective 1 provide substantial empirical evidence that graduate-level ESL students in Bahawalpur systematically employ Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence (VLI) strategies to cultivate speaking proficiency. The data reveals that a majority of learners favor structured and social engagement; specifically, 57.3% of participants reported attending English-language clubs, while 56.6% maintained a conscious focus on grammatical rules during speech. These behavioral patterns align with Oxford's (1990) classification of social and metacognitive strategies, where learners intentionally manage their cognitive load to improve accuracy. By engaging in activities such as mental rehearsal and summarizing read/heard material (52.0%),



learners demonstrated a conscious sensitivity to language structure. This strategic approach to internalizing receptive input for productive use is consistent with Thornbury's (2005) view of speaking as a multifactorial process. Furthermore, recent empirical evidence supports these findings, suggesting that the adoption of learner-oriented higher education through personalized instruction results in better knowledge sustainment and higher academic performance (Contrino et al., 2024; Du Plooy et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2024). The high level of engagement in socially mediated interactions—such as debates and language groups—further aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) Social Constructivism and modern plurilingual approaches, which mobilize a student's entire linguistic and cognitive repertoire to achieve communicative goals (Albuquerque & Moore, 2024). This suggests that oral development among these graduates is an organized, reflective process. Ultimately, these results define VLI not merely as an innate trait, but as a deliberate pedagogical tool. As argued by Armstrong (2009) and echoed in recent research on multimodal pedagogical strategies (Mañeru Rodríguez, 2025), such intentional engagement serves as a primary driver of speaking competence, providing the necessary "scaffolding" for learners to move beyond rote-based instruction toward authentic communicative fluency.

RO2: Pragmatic Application and Frequency of VLI Strategy Use

The frequency analysis of Section Two reveals that graduate-level ESL learners in Bahawalpur demonstrate a proactive and pragmatic approach to Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence (VLI) strategy use. Contrary to the assumption that learners in restricted linguistic environments might avoid high-stakes interaction, the data shows a significant preference for authentic engagement, with 60.7% of participants actively seeking opportunities to converse with native or highly fluent speakers. This suggests a high level of "Willingness to Communicate" (WTC), as 52.0% of



learners reported making an effort to speak even when unsure of their accuracy. These results align with Oxford's (1990) taxonomy of social and compensation strategies and are further supported by recent studies indicating that learner agency and identity are primary drivers in navigating oral communication barriers (Albuquerque & Moore, 2024). The high frequency of "Mental Rehearsal" (52.7%) and "Auditory Exposure" through podcasts (50.7%) indicates that learners are employing metacognitive self-regulation to prepare for real-world application. This synthesis of internal preparation and external interaction is consistent with Lightbown and Spada's (2013) assertion that environmental factors are critical in activating cognitive strengths. Modern research also suggests that multimodal tools, such as AI-driven speaking assistants and digital podcasts, act as crucial "linguistic affordances" that bridge the gap between academic theory and practical fluency (Mañeru Rodríguez, 2025). However, the data also highlights areas of lower frequency, such as "striving to use word nuances" (45.3%). This suggests that while learners are eager for interaction, they may struggle with the finer pragmatic subtleties of the language. As noted by Shamim (2011) and recently echoed in the work of Raman et al. (2024), this can be attributed to the specific ESL context of Pakistan, where exposure to nuanced, naturalistic English is often limited to formal academic settings. Ultimately, these patterns confirm that while VLI engagement is high, its pragmatic application is a sophisticated process moderated by individual effort and the available sociocultural affordances within the Bahawalpur educational landscape.

RO3: Perceived Effectiveness of VLI Strategies

The findings for Research Objective 3 provide empirical evidence that Verbal-Linguistic Intelligence (VLI) strategies are perceived as highly effective for enhancing speaking competence,



particularly in the domains of fluency and error correction. The highest level of perceived efficacy was reported in active feedback-seeking (57.3%) and the use of reading materials to boost fluency (54.7%). These findings resonate with Thornbury's (2005) assertion that successful speaking requires a "lexical-grammatical" balance; here, learners explicitly noted that a focus on grammar rules leads to more accurate speech (52.0%) and that vocabulary expansion is key to precision (46.0%). Recent research on personalized higher education further validates this, showing that when students target specific linguistic strengths, it leads to significant knowledge sustainment and performance gains performance (Contrino et al., 2024; Du Plooy et al., 2024; Naseer et al., 2024). Furthermore, the perceived value of practicing pronunciation to improve intelligibility (51.3%) aligns with the phonological sensitivity described by Lightbown and Spada (2013). The data also confirms the importance of Vygotsky's (1978) social mediation, as half of the participants (50.0%) perceived debates and discussions as essential for fostering confidence and fluency. This is echoed in modern multimodal pedagogical studies, which suggest that interactive, high-engagement tasks facilitated by digital tools significantly improve oral participation and content acquisition (Mañeru Rodríguez, 2025). However, a notable challenge was identified in the "organization of thought," with only 43.3% perceiving writing as a helpful precursor to speaking, and only 44.0% feeling effective when explaining complex concepts. This suggests that while VLI strategies are excellent for surface-level fluency, there remains a gap in cognitive-linguistic depth at the graduate level. This "depth gap" highlights a critical need for integrated, plurilingual approaches that help students mobilize their entire cognitive repertoire to handle complex academic discourse (Albuquerque & Moore,



2024). Ultimately, the high efficacy ratings—specifically the 52.0% who agreed that intentional strategies noticeably enhanced overall skills—validate Oxford's (1990) Strategy-Based Learning model. As advocated by Richards (2006) and recently emphasized in South Asian contexts by Raman et al. (2024), the strategic inclusion of these tools is vital for overcoming the "plateau" often found in the ESL classroom, providing the necessary scaffolding for the spontaneous communication required at the graduate level.

Conclusion

This research investigated the usage and perceived effectiveness of verbal-linguistic intelligence (VLI) strategies on the speaking proficiency of graduate-level ESL learners in Pakistan. Grounded in the synthesis of Gardner's (1983, 2011b) Multiple Intelligences Theory, Oxford's (1990) Strategy-Based Learning, and Vygotsky's (1978) Sociocultural Theory, the study demonstrated that students actively employed a diverse repertoire of strategies—including lexical expansion, mental rehearsal, and grammatical monitoring—to transform passive linguistic knowledge into fluent oral expression. While socially interactive techniques, such as debates and discussions, were highly valued for boosting confidence, their frequency was often moderated by environmental constraints and language anxiety. Ultimately, the findings revealed that linguistic development is a conscious, reflective process rather than a passive phenomenon. This highlights a pedagogical necessity to integrate intelligence-based strategies and interactive environments into ESL curricula to better align with the communicative objectives of learners across the Pakistani educational landscape.



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