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**THE MODERATING ROLE OF EXAM-ORIENTED CULTURE IN  
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INNOVATIVE LEARNING AND  
ENGLISH AND LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY IN HIGHER  
EDUCATION STUDENTS**



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**Abstract**

*This research paper explores the impacts of innovative learning practices on English language proficiency among students at higher educational institutions, with a special focus on the issue of exam-oriented academic culture. The quantitative cross-sectional study design used data from 289 undergraduate students at universities in Sindh province. The hypothesized relationships were tested using Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM). The outcomes suggest that innovative learning methods, typified by the use of technology, student-centered learning, and active learning, have a significant positive impact on students' English language proficiency. Moreover, culture-based on exams expresses a high direct effect on the language results. Nevertheless, the influence of the exam-oriented culture on moderating the relationship between innovative Learning and English proficiency is not significant. These results suggest that, although innovative pedagogy can benefit language growth, its success can occur without examination-based academic settings. The paper identifies the importance of aligning pedagogical innovation and assessment practices to support the sustainable development of the English language in higher education.*

**Keywords:** *Innovative Learning, English language proficiency, exam-oriented Culture, higher education, technology-enhanced learning*

## **Introduction**

Becoming a proficient speaker of English remains a challenge in higher education, particularly when a rigorous testing system shapes how teachers work. Recent research in education has revealed that emergent forms of learning, such as using technology as a teaching tool, collaborative learning, and placing the student at the heart of the lesson, may contribute to improved student performance in language (Gallifa et al., 2021; Smith, 2024). Language proficiency goes beyond grammatical accuracy, vocabulary acquisition, communicative effectiveness, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to apply language proficiency skills in real-life situations (Murti and Baso Jabu, 2022).

Digital tools, active participation, and the promotion of creativity are used to create innovative learning environments that meet the needs of all types of learners. According to recent research, technology-assisted instruction not only enhances students' language acquisition but also their independence and problem-solving skills (Johnson, 2023; Li & Hafner, 2024). To prepare graduates for academic and professional environments in the global context, higher education institutions (HEIs) employ new pedagogical approaches to enhance proficiency in English.

Despite such advances, innovative learning might not be effective in an exam-oriented culture. In such cultures, high-stakes examinations, memorization, and performance indicators are viewed as more significant than innovativeness and critical thinking (Ahmed, 2022). Students in systems founded on tests might invest more in preparing for tests than in using language in a meaningful way, thereby restricting their opportunities to learn through the way of doing and communicating in

real ways. The interaction between an exam-oriented culture and innovative learning is important for enhancing English language results in higher education.

## **Literature Review**

### **Innovative Learning and English Language Proficiency**

Innovative Learning in English language instruction is usually related to a learner-centred approach that promotes interaction, practice, and the efficient use of technologies. One of Mathur's (2022) arguments is that innovative pedagogy shifts the focus from passive knowledge delivery to active knowledge building. Li and Hafner (2024) also add that online platforms, artificial intelligence, and joint online classrooms would significantly increase student interest and communication skills.

High-technology learning environments are flexible, adaptive, and resourceful, allowing students to practice language skills outside of class. These environments have been shown to improve listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities by providing real-life input and instant feedback (Johnson, 2023). This fact causes the creation of the following hypothesis:

H 1: There is a positive relationship between the English language proficiency of HEI students and innovative learning.

### **Exam-Oriented Culture as a Moderating Variable**

An examination-oriented culture makes examinations more important. Students' performance is usually measured using standardized tests. Assessment helps maintain academic standards at a high level, but excessive reliance on tests may lead to a decrease in students' willingness to try new things, work independently, and use creative language (Ahmed, 2022). In his model of motivation, Dörnyei assumes that motivational conditions based mainly on extrinsic rewards, such as grades, can negatively affect intrinsic motivation, which is also essential to language acquisition.

Recent studies indicate that exam-oriented systems can also prevent the adoption of new learning practices that encourage surface learning strategies, e.g., rote memorization, over in-depth learning and communicative skills (Smith, 2024). Creative activities are less significant to students when they perceive tests as the primary objective, which could make them less effective at helping students learn a language. Therefore, this research hypothesis is:

H 2: Exam-oriented culture moderates the relationship between Innovation learning and English language proficiency.

Achieving proficiency in the English language is a thorn in the flesh in higher education, especially when an inflexible assessment system has influenced teaching and learning. In modern research on education, the importance of innovative learning methods, including technology-enhanced teaching, collaborative learning, and student-centered learning, is predominantly discussed as a means of achieving better language outcomes (Gallifa et al., 2021; Smith, 2024). Language proficiency is not limited to grammatical correctness and vocabulary knowledge, but also communicative competence, cultural sensitivity, and the opportunity to use language skills in real situations (Murti and Baso Jabu, 2022).

The innovative learning environment will be created to address the requirements of the diverse learners with the integration of digital tools, active engagement, and creativity. According to recent research, technology-based instruction can not only help learners acquire a language but also make them more autonomous and develop problem-solving skills (Johnson, 2023; Li & Hafner, 2024). In the quest to equip graduates with the skills necessary to succeed in the academic and professional

world globally, growth in English proficiency using novel pedagogical approaches has become a priority in higher education institutions (HEIs).

Although these developments have been made, a culture of exam orientation can ruin the success of innovative learning. These cultures are characterized by high-stakes exams, memorization, and performance-based statistics, all at the cost of creativity and critical thought (Ahmed, 2022). Exam-based systems can make test preparation a priority for students and deprive them of the chance to engage in actual communication and experience. Awareness of exam-oriented Culture and its interaction with innovative learning is thus required to enhance achievement in the English language in higher education.

### Methodology

The research design adopted by this study was quantitative and cross-sectional. Students from various higher institutions in Sindh province were used to gather data using a probability sampling method. An online and offline distribution of a structured questionnaire yielded 289 valid responses. The scale was a five-point Likert scale with the options of strongly disagree and strongly agree. Individual cases of English language proficiency were based on CEFR-related scales (Kaewwichian & Jaturapitakkul, 2018). The Technology-Rich Outcomes-Focused Learning Environment Inventory was modified and used to measure innovative learning (Magen-Nagar and Steinberger, 2017). The items were adapted to measure Exam-oriented Culture.

**Table 1. Reliability and Convergent Validity**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>C R</b>	<b>AVE</b>
English Language Proficiency	0.947	0.948	0.758
Exam-Oriented Culture	0.943	0.943	0.744
Innovative Learning	0.920	936	0.683

All constructs had very high internal consistency, with Cronbach's Alpha between 0.920 and 0.943 and composite reliability coefficients of 0.947 and above, indicating stable and reliable measurement. It was also thought to have convergent validity with the AVE values of English language proficiency (0.758), exam-oriented culture (0.744), and innovative learning (0.683), all of which exceeded the cutoff of 0.50, indicating that the construct is appropriately capturing the variance of the indicators. Taken together, these findings demonstrate that the measurement model is reliable and convergent, and it can be used as a suitable tool for future structural model analysis (Fornell & Larcker, 1981; Hair et al., 2019).

**Table 2. Discriminant Validity Assessment Using the Fornell–Larcker Criterion**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>English Language Proficiency</b>	<b>0.870</b>		
<b>Exam-Oriented Culture</b>	0.801	<b>0.863</b>	
<b>Innovative Learning</b>	0.740	0.738	<b>0.826</b>

**Note:** Diagonal values (bold) represent the square root of AVE. Off-diagonal values represent

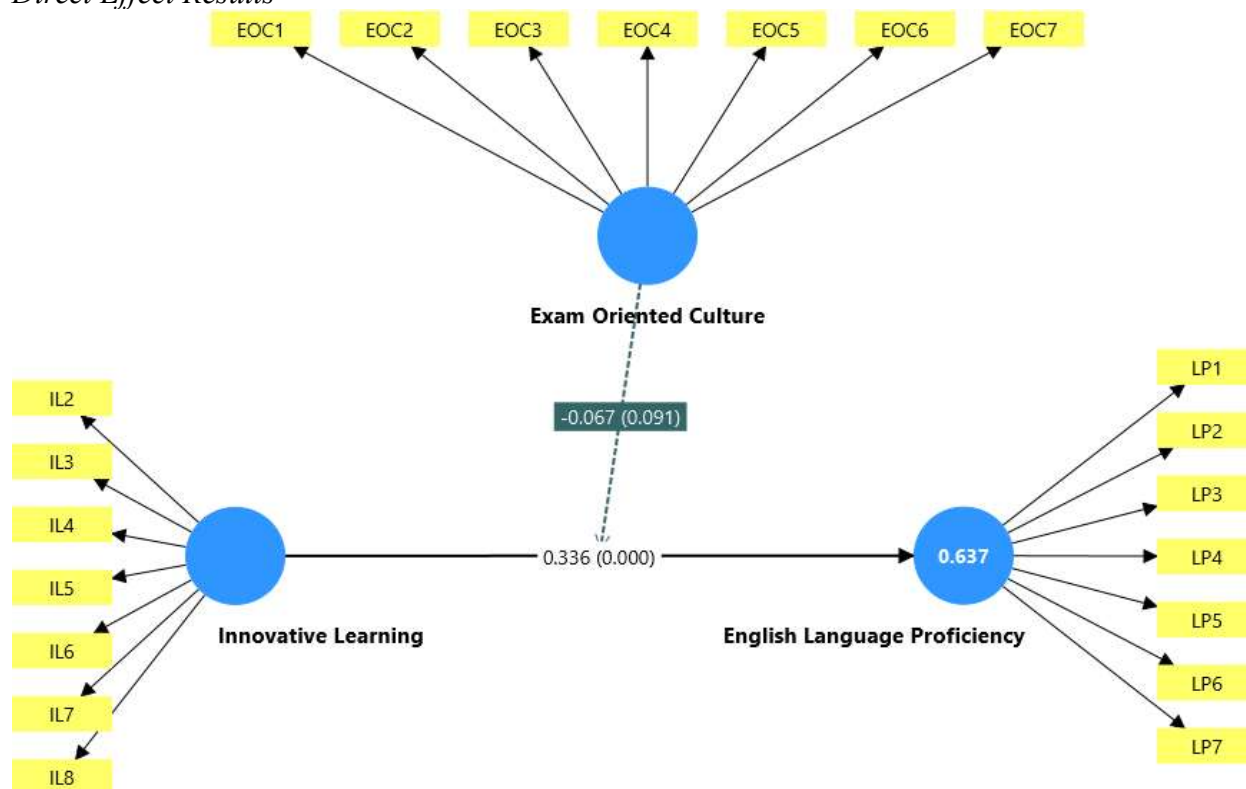
The Fornell-Larcker criterion is used to test the discriminant validity by assessing the square root of each construct against the correlation to the other constructs. The validity can be determined by measuring the diagonal value of the variance greater than all the other off-diagonal values in the same row and column.

**Table 3. ( $R^2$ )**

Construct	$R^2$ Value
English Language Proficiency	0.637

The value of  $R^2$  indicates that the predictors are used to explain the variation of about 63.7 percent in English language proficiency. The substantial values of the model were 0.50 or above, which is regarded as a significant value in PLS-SEM research, that is, the model has high relevance to predictive capabilities (Hair et al., 2022).

*Direct Effect Results*



**Fig 1. Path Analysis**

**Table 4. Direct and interaction Path Coefficients**

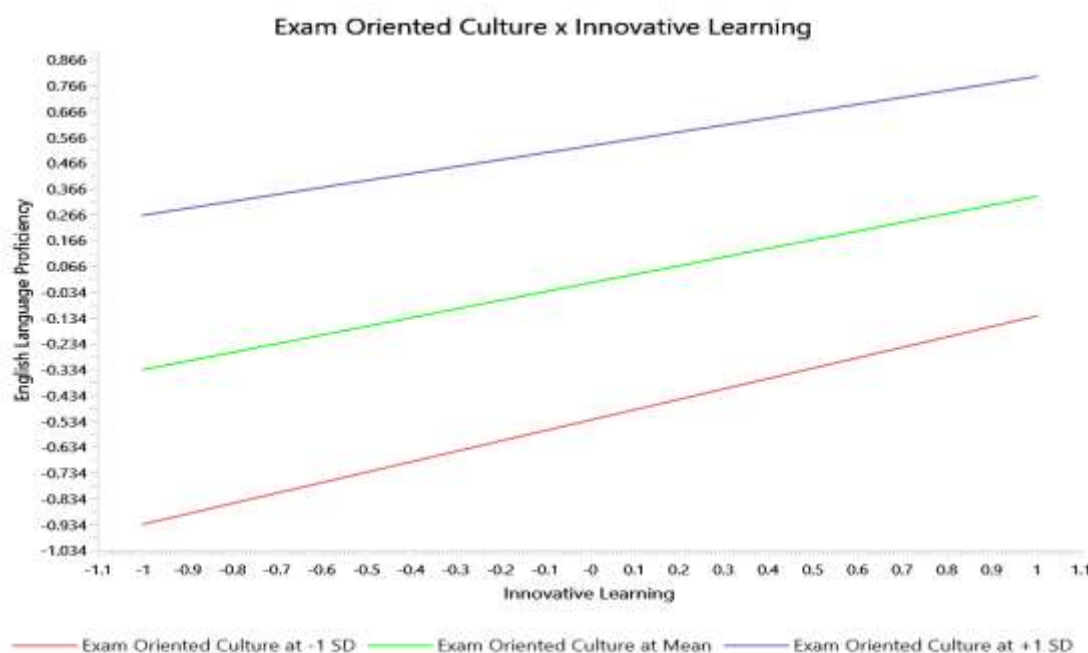
	$\beta$	99% Confidence Interval	P value	Conclusion
Exam-Oriented Culture -> English Language Proficiency	0.531	[0.404, 0.653]	0.000	Supported
Innovative Learning → English Language Proficiency	0.336	[0.199, 0.460]	0.000	Supported

English Language Proficiency				
Exam-Oriented Culture	x		0.091	
Innovative Learning	->	-0.067	[-0.169, 0.037]	Rejected
English Language Proficiency				

Note: Research Hypotheses Significant at  $p < 0.01$ ,  $p < 0.05$ .

There is a very close positive influence of Exam-Oriented Culture on the English language proficiency indicating that the language performance of learners is highly influenced by the structured forms of assessment. This observation aligns with the available literature that has suggested the long-term effects of high-stakes tests on learning practices and performance (Lee and Butler, 2023).

Innovative learning also positively and statistically significantly impacts language proficiency, which means that the learner-centered and creative instructional methods support language proficiency. The outcome is consistent with modern studies that emphasize the importance of novel pedagogy to help students become more engaged with language (Zhang & Zhang, 2022). The interaction term will examine whether Innovative Learning moderates the relationship between Exam-Oriented Culture and English Language Proficiency. The confidence interval is not significant, which indicates that the moderation effect is not significant. This implies that Exam-Oriented Culture has no significant effect on English language proficiency when Innovative Learning is present. The same findings have been cited in recent research, which indicates that pedagogical innovation does not necessarily act in opposition to, but instead with, exam-based educational systems (Pham & Hamid, 2021).



**Fig 2. Moderation Plot**

The moderation plot shows that innovative learning is positively correlated with English language proficiency across all levels of exam-oriented Culture; the strength of this correlation depends on

the level of exam orientation. In particular, with the exam-oriented culture being high (+1 SD), the level of English language proficiency is consistently higher with innovative learning, suggesting a strong baseline effect. With a moderate change in English proficiency, innovative learning is positively related to increases in the mean of exam-oriented Culture. Conversely, with a low exam-oriented Culture (−1 SD), the level of English proficiency begins at a significantly lower point and grows more steeply with innovative learning, which also strengthens. This tendency indicates that innovative learning is most efficient for developing English language proficiency in situations where examination pressures are not as strong. Altogether, the non-parallel slopes confirm the significant moderating effect, as shown by the finding that an exam-oriented culture moderates the influence of innovative Learning on results in the English language (Hair et al., 2021; Hayes, 2018).

### **Discussion**

The findings of the current research prove the fact that the innovative learning practice positively and significantly impacts the English language proficiency of higher education students. Technological methods which involve an active interaction between the learners and technology seem to have a positive effect on the levels of communicative competence in the learners, as they promote the use of language which is meaningful and not memorization. The result confirms the previous studies that stressed the efficiency of innovative teaching in enhancing language performance.

The results also reveal that the culture of exams is a strong direct factor that affects English language proficiency. Systematic evaluation designs can advance disciplinary learning patterns that lead to language performance, especially in situations where examinations are a major factor in academic advancement. Nevertheless, excessive examination performance can hinder the possibility of genuine language use.

However, contrary to expectations, innovative Learning does not significantly interact with exam-oriented Culture to moderate the relationship between the two. This implies that innovative teaching and test-oriented systems are almost independent. Creative learning is useful in various areas of assessment, but it seems to have a greater effect in environments with less stress on examinations.

Overall, the research results indicate that greater consistency is needed between pedagogical innovation and assessment practices. Innovative learning facilitates language growth, but its potential can be realized only if assessment systems also focus on communicative competence and advanced linguistic abilities.

### **Discussion:**

The study has a limitation in its geographic focus on universities in Sindh province, which could limit the applicability of the findings. The exclusive use of a quantitative approach also does not allow an in-depth study of students' lives. The second future study can involve mixed-method or longitudinal studies to investigate how learning outcomes can change over time. It is also possible to expand the sample to include institutions in other provinces and to consider additional contextual variables, e.g., institutional policies and socio-economic backgrounds, to better understand the phenomenon.

### **Recommendations**

Teachers are advised to embrace moderate pedagogical models that incorporate the new learning

habits and align evaluation goals with communicative and higher-order competencies. Policymakers are to reevaluate assessment models to minimize the overuse of high-stakes tests and provide alternative assessment options, such as project-based and experiential learning. These reforms can establish learning conditions that will facilitate not only academic success but also significant language production.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has shown that innovative learning has a positive contribution towards English language proficiency among the students of the HEI, but the strength of this association is largely affected by an exam-oriented Culture. The advantage of innovative pedagogy is reduced in settings marked by examination pressures, because students are preoccupied with performance in examinations rather than with the use of real languages. The results indicate that the relationship between instructional innovation and assessment reform is critical in supporting the sustainable development of language in higher education. Innovative learning can be used more to the advantage of institutions by overcoming the limitations of the Culture of exams in developing English language proficiency and other global communication requirements.

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