



Nazari's English Language Learning in Afghanistan: A Case Study of Challenges and Solutions

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Abstract

This study presents a case analysis of a senior EFL student (*pseudonym: Nazari*) at Helmand University, southern Afghanistan. The research investigates his English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning history, the challenges he encountered, and the strategies he applied to overcome them. A qualitative dominant mixed-methods design was employed, and data were collected through interview, learning style questionnaire, oral and written performance assessments. The interview data were analyzed using thematic analysis, while the learning style questionnaire was analyzed through frequency approach, and performance data were evaluated using analytic rubrics. Findings highlight the role of self-motivation, kinesthetic learning preferences, and informal learning resources such as learning videos and social interaction in fostering language learning especially in the EFL context. Challenges included limited access to resources, time management constraints, and lack of extrinsic motivation. The study concludes with teaching implications and recommendations for supporting EFL learners in Afghanistan and similar contexts. This case contributes to understanding language learning in resource-limited environments, emphasizing learner autonomy, motivation, and context-driven strategies.

Keywords: Language Learning History, Learning Styles, Oral Skills Assessment, Written Skills Assessment, Motivation and Learning Resources.

Introduction

This paper is a case study of a senior undergraduate student of English language and literature department at Helmand University, a southern province of Afghanistan. Nazari is 24 years old. He was born and raised in Helmand province. Pashto is his father's first language and Dari as his second language while his mother's first language is Dari and acquired Pashto as her second language. In addition, Nazari can communicate and knows Urdu language which is mostly acquired through watching TV shows and learning videos. The participant was selected to examine the learning trajectory of a senior undergraduate student in EFL context.

This case study is organized and focuses across four main sections such as; (1) language learning history, (2) identifying learning styles and preferences, (3) oral skills, and (4) written skills performance assessments of the participant. Instead of writing a separate literature review section, this paper integrates relevant studies into each main section's finding in discussion. Doing so ensures that Nazari's perspective and experiences are directly compared with findings from research in Afghanistan and similar EFL contexts. Embedding the literature in this way keeps the focus on the learner's lived experience while also situating it within broader academic discussions on EFL learning, motivation, learning styles, and language skills assessment (Yaseeni, 2024). This approach links Nazari's journey to regional research and offers insights for improving EFL teaching and learning in Afghanistan and similar EFL contexts.

Learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) in Afghanistan is a complex process due to sociocultural, economic, and infrastructural challenges. In Helmand province, learners often struggle with limited access to learning resources, insufficient technological support, and lack of external motivation. These barriers hinder effective EFL learning, raising questions about how students in such contexts develop language proficiency despite constraints. This study examines the challenges faced by an Afghan undergraduate student in his journey of learning English and explores the strategies he employed to overcome them.

The objectives of this study are to:

Explore Nazari's language learning history and experiences in learning English as a foreign language.

Identify the challenges he encountered during his EFL learning journey.

Identify his oral and written skills performance.

Provide methodological implications and recommendations for EFL teaching in Afghan contexts.

This study addresses the following research questions:

What is Nazari's history of learning English as a foreign language in Afghanistan?

What challenges has he faced in his EFL learning journey?

This case study is significant because it provides a detailed understanding of how one Afghan EFL learner from Helmand province developed English proficiency despite limited educational resources, weak internet access, and minimal exposure to authentic English-speaking environments. The study specifically highlights the role of intrinsic motivation, self-directed learning, and kinesthetic learning preference in sustaining long-term English language learning in a resource-limited Afghan context. In addition, it demonstrates how informal learning resources such as learning videos, blogs, and peer interaction can support the development of listening, speaking, vocabulary, and communicative skills outside formal classrooms. The study also contributes to EFL and applied linguistics research by presenting context-specific evidence from Afghanistan, a setting that remains underrepresented in language learning research. Finally, the findings provide practical implications for Afghan EFL teachers, curriculum designers, and educational policymakers by emphasizing the importance of context-sensitive teaching approaches, communicative activities, authentic materials, and learner-centered instructional practices.

Material and Method

This study employed a qualitative-dominant mixed-methods design. The participant was selected through purposive sampling based on his extensive experience and perspective as an EFL learner. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent letter and the use of a pseudonym. Data were collected through interview, learning style questionnaire, oral and written performance assessments in four main sections of the study. Researcher positionality was acknowledged due to the prior teacher-student relationship, and efforts were made to minimize bias through systematic analysis procedures.

The interview protocol consisted of 16 open-ended questions to identify his language learning history. The interview conducted for about 36 minutes. In order to meet the study's aim, a semi structured interview was used for this section because the researcher needed to ask some more follow-up questions during interview as well as recording his voice for transcription. The interview data analyzed thematically following transcription.

In addition, a multiple-choices template questionnaire was used for identifying Nazari's learning style as second section of the study. These 16 questions were designed according to the VARK model which stands for the four learning preferences such as; Visual, Auditory, Reading & Writing, and Kinesthetic learners which is available at: <http://www.vark-learn.com>. The researcher gave him the questionnaire with a clear instruction and well explanation about the purpose and as well as way of working on it. As result, he chose honestly the answers which best explained his learning preference so the researcher could find his learning style by analyzing the data through Microsoft Excel Program's frequency approach.

In the third section, since there was an assessment of his oral skill performance, the researcher gave him a list of five topics and asked him to choose a topic from the provided list which is your interest and talk about it for a few minutes (3-5 min). He preferred to talk about the topic *A Healthy Relationship* and his speech was recorded for more than 4 minutes in order to assess his oral skill. In the fourth section, much the same as the oral assessment, the researcher gave him a list of five different topics and asked him to write a descriptive essay in at least one page about the one which is your interest BUT in the specified time by the researcher (15-20 min). As result, he wrote an essay of two pages about the *Impacts of Social Media in Society* successfully. Then his written skills performance was assessed in this section. Both oral and written tasks assessed using analytic rubrics focusing on fluency, accuracy, organization, and vocabulary. The researcher really appreciates the participant's hardworking in the whole data collection process for current case study's report.

Findings

The overall findings of this case study reveal that Nazari's English language learning journey was strongly shaped by intrinsic motivation, communicative learning practices, and the effective use of informal learning resources such as learning videos, blogs, and social interaction. The thematic analysis demonstrated that despite major contextual challenges including limited access to study materials, weak internet connectivity, time constraints, and lack of external motivation, the participant maintained persistence and self-directed learning strategies. The VARK analysis indicated a dominant kinesthetic learning preference, suggesting that the learner benefited most from practical activities,

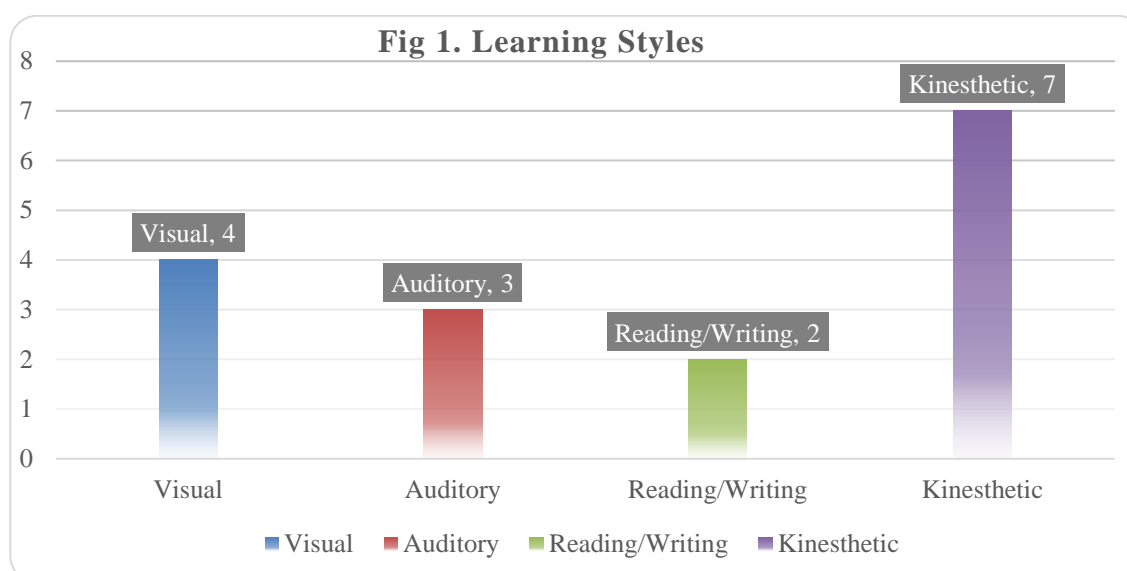
demonstrations, and real-life experiences. Furthermore, the oral and written performance assessments showed moderate English proficiency with strengths in communication, organization, and vocabulary use, although grammatical accuracy and fluency still required improvement. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of learner autonomy, motivation, supportive learning environments, and context-sensitive teaching approaches in EFL settings such as Afghanistan. Here, each of the four main sections of this case study is separately analyzed and reported.

Language Learning History (Interview Result)

The thematic analysis of interview following the transcription reveals that intrinsic motivation, communicative learning, and informal resources played major roles in Nazari's English language development despite contextual challenges. First of all, multilingual background of the participant show that he grew up in a multilingual family where Pashto and Dari were actively used. Exposure to Urdu through media also contributed to his language awareness. Also, the learner repeatedly emphasized self-motivation as the main factor in his English language learning journey. In addition, using informal learning strategies by the participant like learning videos, blogs and communicating with peers helped him to improve English language skills. Major challenges against learning of the participant included lack of study materials, weak internet access, poor timing, and insufficient external motivation. Moreover, the participant focused more on listening and speaking than grammar learning which is a communicative orientation for him. In this section, the participant says about the supportive environment of his class where teachers and classmates corrected mistakes politely and supportively, which positively affected learning. Finally, the participant believed that language learning is closely connected with culture and communication.

Learning Style (VARK Questionnaire Result)

Since each person prefers to learn something through his own learning styles and ways, this section identifies the learning style and preference of the participant. The VARK questionnaire was analyzed using the frequency approach in Microsoft Excel program. Figure 1 shows that the participant preferred a dominant kinesthetic learning style. Kinesthetic preference indicates that the learner prefers practical activities, demonstrations, and learning through experience.



Oral Skill Assessment Result

This section provides an analysis of Nazari's oral skills performance based on the transcription of his oral skill assessment through an analytical rubric which focuses on fluency, accuracy, organization and vocabulary. Table 1 shows the criteria, score from 5 in each criteria's performance and the analyze report of the participant's oral skills.

Criteria	Score /5	Analysis
Fluency	3	Speech was understandable but included hesitation and fillers.
Accuracy	3	Some grammatical errors were observed.
Organization	4	Ideas were logically organized.
Vocabulary	4	Appropriate vocabulary related to relationships was used.

Nazari demonstrates strong awareness of the core elements of A Healthy Relationship (the title which he talked about). However, his oral proficiency shows some minor weaknesses in fluency, grammar, and formality. In the Afghan EFL context, where authentic input and communicative opportunities are limited, interventions such as structured speaking practice, input enhancement, and exposure to authentic models are necessary. With targeted support, his oral skills can improve significantly.

Written Skill Assessment Result

The same as oral skills assessment of the participant, this section also provides an analysis of Nazari's written skills performance based on his written essay an analytical rubric which focuses on fluency, accuracy, organization and vocabulary. Table 2 shows the criteria, score from 5 in each criteria's performance and the analyze report of the participant's written skills.

Criteria	Score /5	Analysis
Fluency	4	Essay ideas flowed sufficiently.
Accuracy	3	Grammar and punctuation errors existed.
Organization	4	Essay structure was clear.
Vocabulary	4	Topic-related vocabulary was appropriately used.

Nazari was given a list of five different topics and asked to write a descriptive essay in at least one page about one of his interests within a specified time by the researcher (15–20 minutes). As a result, he wrote a two-page essay on the Impacts of Social Media in Society. The essay he submitted was his writing's first draft. Nazari demonstrates motivation and emerging competence in essay writing as an EFL learner. His strengths lie in gathering ideas, attempting to structure essays, and employing a range of vocabulary. However, he requires significant improvement in grammar accuracy and the use of detailed supporting evidence.

Discussion

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is a complex process that is influenced by motivation, learning environment, learning styles, and exposure to authentic language input. In many foreign language contexts such as Afghanistan, learners have limited opportunities to communicate with native speakers of English in real-life situations. Therefore, many learners depend on classrooms, educational centers, learning videos, and online resources to improve their language proficiency. Research has shown that authentic learning materials can help learners develop listening, speaking, vocabulary, and pronunciation skills more effectively. These materials also create interest and increase learners' motivation toward language learning (Kabooha, 2016). In the case of Nazari, learning videos, blogs, and communication with peers played an important role in supporting his English language learning journey.

The use of learning videos and audiovisual materials has become one of the most effective strategies in modern EFL classrooms. Murshidi (2020) claimed that such materials help learners understand the target culture and improve their language skills through authentic communication. Similarly, Kabooha (2016) stated that language learning videos improve listening comprehension, speaking fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary acquisition because learners can hear native speakers using the language naturally. Bajrami and Ismaili (2016) also emphasized that visual aids increase learner interaction, autonomy, and classroom engagement in EFL contexts. In addition, Yawiloeng (2020) found that captions in visuals support significantly improve vocabulary learning among EFL students. These findings are highly relevant to Nazari's experience because he frequently used learning videos, documentaries, and native-speaker content as informal learning resources to improve his English skills.

Motivation is another important factor that strongly influences foreign language learning success. Hussain, Salam, and Farid (2020) argued that intrinsic motivation encourages learners to continue their efforts with determination and persistence even when learning

conditions are difficult. Likewise, Dahmardeh and Hunt (2012) described motivation as one of the strongest factors affecting successful language improvement. Highly motivated learners usually spend more time practicing language skills and searching for learning opportunities independently. Research also indicates that motivated learners are more willing to communicate and participate in language-learning activities. Nazari's progress, despite challenges such as limited resources and insufficient external encouragement, aligns with previous research that identifies self-motivation as a key predictor of language achievement (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2021; Hussain, Salam, & Farid, 2020). In Nazari's case, intrinsic motivation played a central role because he continued learning English despite limited resources, weak internet access, and lack of strong external encouragement from family or society.

Learning styles and learner preferences also affect how students learn languages effectively. Fleming and Mills (1992) introduced the VARK model, which classifies learners into visual, auditory, reading/writing, and kinesthetic learning preferences. According to this model, kinesthetic learners prefer learning through practice, movement, and hands-on activities rather than only reading or listening. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines kinesthesia as the sensation or perception of movement. Vincent and Ross (2001) further stated that kinesthetic learners understand information better when they physically experience or practice tasks. This resonates with Willis and Willis's (2007) advocacy for task-based learning that learners engage in meaningful language use through real-life simulations. This theory is closely related to Nazari's learning style because the VARK questionnaire identified him as a kinesthetic learner who prefers practical activities and learning through real experiences. His preference for communicative practice, interaction, and practical exposure supports the principles of kinesthetic learning.

Oral communication skills are another major focus in EFL research. Speaking proficiency requires fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary knowledge, and coherence. Derwing and Munro (2015) suggested that shadowing activities and prosody practice improve pronunciation and speaking fluency. Nation and Newton (2009) also highlighted the importance of fluency workshops, speaking clubs, and communicative classroom activities for building learners' confidence. In EFL contexts like Afghanistan, learners often face difficulties because they have limited opportunities to use English outside classrooms. Thornbury (2005) explained that discourse markers and structured speaking activities help learners improve coherence and organization during oral communication. Similarly, Hyland (2004) emphasized the importance of academic speaking practice and exposure to formal language use in improving learners' speaking performance. These studies are closely connected to Nazari's oral performance because his speaking assessment showed strengths in communication and idea organization but weaknesses in fluency, fillers, repetition, and formal language use.

Grammar and vocabulary development are also essential components of language learning. Ellis (2006) stated that focused grammar instruction and corrective feedback help learners notice grammatical forms and improve language accuracy. In many EFL contexts, learners experience grammatical transfer errors because the structures of their first language differ from English. Lightbown and Spada (2021) argued that such transfer errors are common among second or foreign language learners, especially in grammar and sentence structure. Vocabulary learning is equally important because vocabulary functions as a tool for communication and meaning-making. Schmitt (2010) stated that vocabulary

development can be improved through lexical notebooks, collocation exercises, and repeated exposure to academic vocabulary. Teng (2020) also found that videos with captions and vocabulary-focused activities support vocabulary acquisition among EFL learners. These ideas relate to Nazari's oral and written performance because he demonstrated some grammatical inaccuracies and repetitive vocabulary use despite being able to communicate his ideas effectively.

Writing proficiency is another important area in English language learning research. Effective academic writing requires organization, coherence, grammar accuracy, vocabulary precision, and supporting details. Oshima and Hogue (2007) stated that a good essay should contain an introduction, body paragraphs with supporting ideas, and a conclusion. Clear topic sentences and supporting examples are necessary for developing coherent writing. Lightbown and Spada (2021) also highlighted that grammar and vocabulary problems commonly appear in EFL learners' writing because of language transfer and limited exposure to authentic English input. In addition, academic writing requires learners to use formal vocabulary and correct punctuation to improve readability and clarity. Nazari's written assessment reflected these findings because he showed good effort in organizing his essay and expressing ideas, but he still experienced challenges related to grammar accuracy, more vocabulary precision, and paragraph development.

Overall, previous studies show that successful EFL learning depends on several interconnected factors such as authentic language exposure, motivation, learning preferences, communicative practice, grammar instruction, vocabulary development, and supportive learning environments. The literature strongly supports the findings of this case study because Nazari's English learning experience reflects many challenges and strategies identified in previous EFL research. His use of language learning videos, communicative learning, self-motivation, and practical learning approaches demonstrates how learners in resource-limited contexts can still develop English proficiency through persistence and adaptive learning strategies.

Conclusion

This case study explored the English language learning experience of one Afghan EFL learner from Helmand province and examined the challenges, learning preferences, motivation, and language development strategies involved in his learning journey. The findings indicate that the participant's English language learning was strongly influenced by intrinsic motivation, kinesthetic learning preference, informal learning resources, and the educational context in which he studied. The participant demonstrated resilience and persistence despite experiencing limited access to authentic materials, weak internet connectivity, lack of communicative opportunities, and restricted external motivation. His reliance on learning videos, self-directed learning, and communicative practice reflects adaptive strategies that may support English language learning in resource-limited EFL contexts such as Afghanistan. The findings further suggest that context-sensitive teaching approaches, communicative activities, and practical learning opportunities may positively support Afghan EFL learners, particularly those with kinesthetic learning preferences. Teachers and policymakers may benefit from integrating task-based learning, authentic audiovisual materials, peer interaction, and learner-centered practices into English language classrooms to increase motivation and language exposure. In addition,

supportive classroom environments and constructive feedback appear to encourage learners' confidence and willingness to communicate in English. However, this study was conducted as a single case study focusing on one participant only. Therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Afghan EFL learners or other educational contexts. Instead, the results should be interpreted as context-specific insights that provide a deeper understanding of one learner's English language learning experience in Helmand province. Future research may involve larger samples, different provinces, and multiple case studies to explore broader patterns of English language learning challenges and strategies among Afghan EFL students.

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

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