

Learning and Teaching English in Pakistan: Predicaments and Solutions

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ABSTRACT The basic aim of this study is to highlight the current situation of learning and teaching English in Pakistan. The qualitative observation method has been adopted to collect data from different state run schools in Pakistan. The study is divided in to two parts that is, learning problems and teaching issues. The study has attempted to unearth the language learning problems of the students based on observation method. Since the qualitative observations are descriptive ones so there are no numbers involved. The findings of the study indicate that social, academic and administrative issues are on the top of the list to make English learning a difficult task. The study recommends that language teachers should come forward equipped with practical skills in order to make their performance better to teach the language classes.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a territory of multi-cultures and multi languages. Around the country, about 70 languages are spoken but English owns a high and prestigious ground in Pakistan. Language stands for an ornament for every nation. It turns out to be greatly facilitating. One major advantage has been found that it accelerates socialization and makes it convenient and possible to happen. Today across the world, the number of non-native speakers of English is far more than the native speakers.

Purpose of the Study

Pakistani education system is being run like a factory. According to Sivasubramaniam (2006), schools are considered production units, course work and contents are production schemes, students are taken as crude material and sometimes as customers, teachers are unit managers or manufacturers of educational items etc. so is the case in Pakistani milieu. The purpose of this research is to spotlight the problems and obstacles in the course of teaching and learning English in Pakistan.

Objectives

- ♦ To highlight the problems students come across in learning English.

- ♦ To find out the issues English teachers have to face in teaching English.

Literature Review

Khan et al. (2017) conducted a study on the causes of failure in learning English in Pakistan. They found many factors behind this poor performance. Teaching English was a dilemma, they found.

Khan and Khan (2016) investigated the English learning obstacles and found that large size of the classes also creates trouble in learning and teaching English in Pakistan. The syllabus has been designed without having a needs analysis of the learners. The syllabus needs a thorough revision and modification including creative activities.

Yasin et al. (2014) investigated students' and teachers' attitude and their perceptions about using multimedia in language classrooms. The study indicated that both the learners and teachers had favorable attitude and positive perception about the use of multimedia technology. They appreciated its use to a considerable extent and considered multimedia as effective tool in making the classroom lively and learning teaching experience a success.

Bashiruddin and Qayyum (2014) have highlighted the existing profile of English teachers

in Pakistan. The results indicate gaps in the form of challenges of English teachers' careers. The study found that in most of the cases, teachers did not hold relevant academic qualifications to be regarded as competent English language teachers. This study recommended that pre service and in service training was needed, and there was also a need of rectification in the hiring practices of teachers.

Bilal et al. (2013) investigated the L2 learners' problems in speaking English in rural territories of Pakistan and found that the way English is taught in schools is also problematic. The study suggested that the element of creativity should be made a part of English syllabus.

Nawab (2012) concluded a study in the northern areas of Pakistan and found that the teaching of English was also like other compulsory subjects. He found that behind this regrettable situation is the lack of relevant teaching qualifications. There is a lack of trained and competent language teachers in Pakistan as Nawab (2012) believes. There is lack of professional training opportunities and teacher resources.

Farooq et al. (2011) studied the factors that affected the learners' academic performance in learning English. They termed these various factors as student's personal learning factors, family background factors, peer factors and institutional factors. The study found that the home environment has a great effect on their academic performance. They study further discusses that for the academic success of their progeny the educated parents should facilitate them with a suitable environment.

Coleman (2010) mentions, "English teachers – especially in government schools – tend to teach the language through the medium of Urdu or a local language because their own competence in English is poor or because they have so little confidence in their own competence" (p. 17).

The real issue with the teachers is that they themselves do not know the intricacies of English language particularly the spoken skill (Shamim 2008). In most of the contexts teaching English is usually equated to translation into L1 (Urdu).

METHODOLOGY

The data were collected through observation method where information has been sought

by direct observation. Observation method is usually a systematic approach of linguistic data collection. Observation may involve a prolonged engagement in a social situation. The researcher got first hand and primary information by personally visiting different institutions both in rural and urban areas. Observation is a method of gathering data by observing behavior and noting the physical features in their natural setting. In order to avoid the personal biases, the researcher observed the learning and teaching environment and noted the situation with observation sheet. The data were interpreted by descriptive observation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the researcher's observation have been presented in the following section. First the learning problems have been discussed and afterwards the teaching issues have been pointed out.

Learning Problems

The outdated Grammar Translation Method is in practice even today and it is in use in many of the schools and colleges in Pakistan. 'English is taught through the grammar-translation method' (Rahman 2010). The teacher uses native language to give the meaning of new vocabulary items to the students so that they can memorize them. Teacher is considered an authority in the class. He is working actively throughout the time and the students are passive. The real strength and innovativeness of the students is marred and ended by the use of Grammar translation method. The focus is more on teaching the mother tongue than that of the target language. Pakistan could not assimilate these advancements and modernization and 'the GTM is still in vogue in many of the language teaching programs' (Warsi 2004).

Bilingual code switching is also a hindrance for English language learners. It assumes several shapes including modification of sentences and phrases pertaining to both the languages. The teacher instructs the students in their national language (Urdu). Teachers can use one language to teach then switch to the other language, compelling the students to listen attentively and make out both languages. The teacher uses code switching intentionally for the un-

derstanding of the students, it meddles with the structure of learning the target language. Code switching is a process that can be both beneficial and interfering the language learning, all it depends on the context and situation in which it is used (Skiba 1997).

The center of attention is not on novelty and innovativeness but chiefly on the reformation contents given by the teacher. Usually the students cram the information without any understanding of context and material of the lesson. They are compelled to follow the teacher driven instructions and not to do anything on their part. It brings about a standstill in the thinking process and the creativity of the students. Thus, "the students cram lessons, such as essays, from the guide books and get passing grades without acquiring any real competence in English" (Rahman 2010). There is no encouragement for the students to use their own mind and ideas to create something novel and are not developed to effort on their own. They have no sense of pragmatism and socio-linguistic indications taught to them in their lesson. So much so in MA classes, students are given the prepared material taken out of different assisting books. Students just cram this stuff and they are not taught to come out of their created production, based on their wit and wisdom.

Communication fears also rug the passage of learning English. The students face communication fears during fulfilling the task assigned and participating in activities. They come across dubiousness and confusions in learning process. Their feelings of reluctance, shyness and such other personal features hinder the learning of English successfully. No motivation, hesitation to be a part of classroom activities, to endorsement etc. are other problems hindering the learning of English.

The domestic problems of the students also obstruct the process of learning English. Sometimes their social background holds up their performance and learning English. In Pakistan, lack of communication and comprehensions between the students and teachers is of great magnitude. This is also a reason that students do not learn English properly.

The examination system has also proved to be a failure. It only tests the power of expression and cramming of the students. It has failed to test how far the students have become proficient in target language. It also casts aside the

checking of students' acquisition of language skills. The study is quite in line with Mustafa (2011) who argues that any language cannot bring reforms in Pakistani education system.

Flaws in material and old books lacking adequate topics in use do not have any thoughtful connection with the target language and are full of spelling mistakes and grammatical errors. Such worn out designs of the books cause monotony and boredom in that the contents are not in relation with the real world. The contents employed for the compilation of the textbooks are totally outdated and primeval. Such material is not compatible with the needs of modern age.

Urdu orthography is another issue regarding learning problems. Urdu orthography affects the procurement of English phonetics/phonology. According to Mansoor (2010), "there are concerns about the limited role of regional languages, lack of required materials in Urdu, and student difficulties in English". The system of sound and spellings of mother tongue deforms the structure of the word which misshapes the process of learning the foreign language (English).

In most of the state run institutions, the use of audio visual aids has not been introduced. Researchers and academicians wonder why the audio-visual aids are not used even in the age of technology and why teaching of English is being deprived of modern technology and techniques which are taken as norm today (Talaat 2002). All such techniques are not expensive. There are some cheaper techniques which can be deployed easily like overhead projectors but are rarely used. Many of the rural and urban teachers are still not acquainted with these techniques.

Another impediment in learning the target language is that the students bunk classes. Fear of punishment or being rebuked in the class prevents them from attending the class. They are punished by the teacher in case they do not perform well in the class.

The medium of teaching also increases the problems faced in learning the foreign language. There is class distinction in English medium schools. Some are for elite class and some are for middle or lower middle class (Rahman 2001, 2010). This class distinction does not allow the poor students to approach the elite class schools so learning of target language is not the same for all the students. According to Rahman (2010), elite

English-medium schools are established in almost every city of Pakistan by private entrepreneurs. Elite English medium schools offer better teaching of English language but their doors are closed for the poor students.

In teaching and learning English, teachers perform a notable role in arousing and inciting students' zeal for learning (Ellis 1994). English teachers are too found in facing many problems in teaching English. In a way, it can be said that teaching English in class may be less concerned with the promotion of English than the promotion of particular cultural knowledge ... by means of teaching English language (Pennycook 1994).

Teaching Issues

In Pakistan the class rooms are congested and overcrowded. Sometimes students are more or less 100 in number which troubles the teachers and the students to focus on the lesson. It really gets difficult for the teacher to manage the class and deliver the course contents in an effective and proper way.

A very short time (40-45 minutes per period) is given for teaching English. It really makes difficult for English teacher to precisely teach in this short span of time. It stands the test of a teacher because he cannot justify himself in this short span of time. The teacher either delivers the lecture or he gives the test to the students (Akram 2013). Teacher, in this situation, is always short of time to provide the course contents in the allocated time.

Teachers' roles are very authoritative in the class. Teachers take it for granted that the learners should obey their instructions. Teachers are supposed to act as advisors and helpers to the students but they don't seem to be. Pedagogy or teaching style in most of the institutions in Pakistan is authoritarian and commanding. The students are discouraged and snubbed if they ask anything more than once.

It is quite right that literature develops to some extent the cultural awareness. Literary language is more figurative than spoken language. There is no useful contribution of literature in teaching language rather than about language. Literature does provide the students with vocabulary and information about cultural values but it does contribute in the learning of grammar and other skills of that language.

Teacher training is very crucial element of academic teaching. In Pakistan, teachers use English literature to teach language. Vazir and Wheeler (2004) state that there two kinds of teacher training in Pakistan:

"Pre-service training for colleges or universities teachers and in-service courses for school teacher....Access to in-service education is severely limited and where available is offered on an ad hoc, individual basis. Courses are usually of short length, commonly lasting from one to three days. More important thing is that there is no explicit connection between in service part and standard of classroom teaching. Moreover, the prevailing attitude to the in-service education occurs in detachment to other administrators and does not make any cooperation with school high ups and other colleagues."

Many of the teachers use old and outdated techniques which are of no use in learning process and discard the process of learning. The teachers are at loss when they come across modern methods and teaching techniques.

Favoritism of students is also found in the local Pakistani settings. The teachers prefer their favorite students in studies; this becomes a stigma for the teacher and the institution. The work of the favorite students is equal to nothing but in exams they are favored out of the way. Even this is not proper for a teacher to favor the bright students because in this way other students feel neglected.

In some area, students are recognized by their caste which makes the teacher's professionalism doubtful. This doubts the honesty of the teacher with his profession. It creates class distinction. Some students begin to suffer from inferiority complex and cannot focus on their studies.

CONCLUSION

The government has set up the cluster centers to train and educate the teachers but the contents present in the training courses are not latest. Cluster centers distribute different equipment and stationary to the schools. It is no doubt a good effort on the part of the educational authorities but a lot more is needed. Particular tendencies spreading across Pakistan indicate that the influence of English on the people is increasing. Teachers should be well equipped with the modern skills to raise their performance level.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Here are some recommendations in order to overcome the problems in learning and teaching English:

- ♦ Teachers should take on a pupil oriented and inter active approach.
- ♦ Specialist and competent English teachers should be preferred to ordinary ones.
- ♦ Tutorials for spoken practice of target language (English) must be allocated to the classes.
- ♦ Teachers should be professional and polite.
- ♦ Teachers should avoid imposing things on students to do.
- ♦ The gap should be there between the teachers and students in order to control the rebellious feelings and attitudes of the students.
- ♦ A specific time should be allocated to extra-curricular activities with special regard to English debates and speeches.
- ♦ Modern techniques including audio-visual aids should be provided to every school and college.
- ♦ Teaching through literature can be useful at advanced level.
- ♦ Syllabus and curriculum should be redesigned including games and programs for English language learners.
- ♦ The study recommends that along with the pre service training mechanisms, in service training modules should also be nourished to meet the requirement of competent English teachers.

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