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Challenges of Teaching English in A Multi-Lingual Setting: A Survey at Government Secondary Schools of Muzaffarabad

ABSTRACT

The major focus of this study is to highlight the problems that are faced by the teachers while teaching English to the secondary level students of Government schools in Muzaffarabad which is the capital of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, a northern part of Pakistan. This is a region of various languages and teacher has to teach in the classroom having a blend of students with various linguistic backgrounds. Though being a multilingual is advantageous over monolingual, but it is challenging for the teacher to teach English in a multilingual setting. This study aims to look at the challenges of teachers while teaching English in this situation. Questionnaire and observation checklist was used for data collection and analyzed through excel sheet. Purposive sampling was used to select 10 teachers, including 5 males and 5 females, from 6 different Government schools of Muzaffarabad. The findings of the study show that in a multilingual classroom negative attitude of students towards English is the biggest challenge for the teachers to cope with. Students cannot concentrate on stress, intonation and pauses when English, a stressed-time language meddles with the syllable-timed language like Urdu. Along with that underdeveloped skills of students that are required in order to learn a language is yet another big hurdle for the teachers. Teacher faces time and curriculum coverage pressure. Furthermore, pedagogy and examination system does not meet the requirement of current age. It is suggested that lesson planning is helpful in minimizing half of the problems that are highlighted in the current study, so teacher should plan it before entering the classroom and there should be innovation in the teaching styles and students' assessment criteria. There should be a practical use of English in the classrooms. Homework should enhance the learning capacity of students.

Keywords: ELT, Multilingual Setting, Strategies, Challenges, Factors

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Introduction

Muzaffarabad is the capital of Azad Kashmir's Pakistani territory and a versatile city in respect of its multi-linguistic and multi-ethnic trait, the people of the region use number of local languages such as Hindko, Pahari, Kashmiri, Gojri, Punjabi and Urdu for the sake of communication. Besides these languages English is also used and a person who knows to speak English can be generally analyzed as a competent and learned fellow, and it is a matter of common observation in Pakistan that the doors of eminent educational institutions are open for the students having a strong grip on English Language. So English is being taught as a compulsory subject and learnt from Grade 1 and onwards up to higher level of education in the schools (Shoukat & Ghani, 2015) and failure in English implies a failure in the entire examination. Despite of the colossal contributions and hard work of English teachers; the annual grades of the students are persistently below par. The pass proportion of secondary level students in English is barely eighteen to twenty percent. Specifically, if we talk about in the context of Muzaffarabad, it is difficult to implement in the society and same is the case with teaching techniques. Khan et al. (2017) designate coaching of English similar to a dilemma. Somewhere issues lie due to which results in English are disappointing. The present study with the following objectives is a torch light in finding and highlighting those problems faced by English teacher while teaching in a multilingual setting with an attempt to provide ample solutions.

Research Objectives

- To identify the problems met by the teachers during the teaching practice of English in a multi-lingual setting.
- To examine the attitudes of teachers towards their classroom in the multi-lingual situation.
- To examine the strategies applied by the teachers to handle these challenges while teaching English to multi-lingual students.

In Government schools of Muzaffarabad, a language teacher has to deal and confront with its interference with other local languages spoken by students in the classroom. Multilingual school rooms are no longer easy to handle (Lemmer & Squelch, 1993). This study goes for searching and removing these stumbling blocks on the way of teaching and learning English language. Furthermore, the study will be notable not solely for the instructors and students, but additionally for the curriculum planners and faculty administrators. It will not only turn out to be constructive and helpful for concerning; but additionally, inspire them to establish corrective measures

for the solution of the issues faced by English teachers and students. It will additionally provide guidelines for the instructors and students in the process of teaching and gaining knowledge.

Literature Review

The coaching of English becomes more challenging when executed in a multi lingual setting. As indicated by Mamane (2017), teaching English to a crew of students from different background is becoming an outstanding issue. Multilingualism is the phenomenon that is present in any society in shape of various languages" or "It is a skill that is required by a speaker to interact in various languages" which is a natural condition of a man according to Flynn (2016) as cited by (Aronin, 2019). These various languages are usually acquired naturally through the interaction with people speaking different languages in a natural setting or these languages are learned in the schools through planned and regular instruction in a formal setting (Dahmani, 2013). Griva and Chostelidou (2012) worked with 120 language teachers in order to get data about the views related to multilingualism and teachers reported its positive consequences in the classroom. Majority of them are of the view that children should be engaged to learn a foreign language at kinder level. However, Lartec et al. (2014) citing many other researchers (Maclaughlin, 1987; Ndamba, 2008; Cummins, 1981) noted that a child must have a full control on his/her mother tongue before start learning any other language. De Angelis (2011) also reported in one of his study that languages should be nurtured separately. Although teachers admit the fact that certain advantages are associated with multilingualism but in order to learn languages effectively, it is better to learn only one language at a time. We all know that language is a fence between social groups which sometimes obstruct the process of communication and the development of friendly relationships (Larouz, 2013). Education system that promotes multilingualism gives chances to its students for a wider range of socialization by making them able to interact with classmates, neighbors, and other people from outside world having same second or third languages, therefore multilingualism is a big advantage (Webb, 2000) with the similar findings of Mwololo (2008) and University of London Institute of Education (ULIE) also confirmed this research.

Multilingualism provides a deep perception for understanding of different cultures and experiences hence a multilingual becomes multicultural in nature (Barasa, 2005). But many studies have already come up with opposite results and revealed that teaching using the mother tongue in the early grades enhances children's ability to learn better as compared to the use of a second or foreign language (UNESCO, 2003; Rai et al., 2011). It has also been reported that children will be deficient in academic

performance, and repeat classes or drop out from school due to a high failure rate if they are taught in languages which are different from their home language or mother tongue (Yadava, 2007; Awasthi, 2004) as cited by Khadka (2018). English not only runs in the educational and professional sector of Pakistan like a blood in a body but in other nations as well (Ahmed & Rao, 2012). So, it plays a critical role as majority of our educational structure relies on this language and no profession is complete without English. Hence many researchers (Rehman, 2008; Shamim, 2008) termed the learning of English as a social symbol.

To start with a fact that English is not our native language and there are always difficulties in adopting and implementing what is foreign to us, so English being a foreign language faces the same scenario. Therefore, students come up with exhaustion consequently making the learning process like mounting on the mountain (Akram, 2017), which also hinders the process of teaching and to motivate students towards learning English is yet another big challenge for the teachers. Stress to communicate, peer pressure, fear of committing mistakes etc. shut down the mind of learner to learn anything new (Horwitz et al. 1986). As reported by Marwan (2016) that majority of students are nervous and frightened while learning English and this anxiety yields grave problems for teachers in the class like negative mind set up of students for learning. In this regard Khan et al. (2018) agrees with Mubarak (2011) that teachers should strive to create a suitable learning environment.

There are varieties of English language and English teachers have to face obstacles in teaching it (Matsuda, 2002), to a variety of students sitting in the classroom. According to Oxford (2001), this picture becomes worse when the students have to retain difficult expressions in a company with grammar rules and ultimately, they develop certain opinions about the nature of learning English subject.

Along with that the process of teaching cannot be preceded by adopting a single procedure. As highlighted by Cook (1993) that it is unable to drive the learning process of second language in a natural setting, so to operate such learning and dealing with diversity requires creativity, extra effort, diligence and courage on the teachers' part.

Ahmed et al. (2013) reported in their study that the teachers teaching English at Government schools do not meet the required qualification to teach this subject effectively and consequently they fail in transferring correct pronunciation to their students. This one is a serious problem found in Government institutions that should be resolved by improving the recruitment procedure of teachers

Similarly, Abongdia & Foncha (2015) examined the effects of training on teaching practices and whether they are helpful for the teachers to tackle with the problems related to teaching and learning when they enter the profession. The study came up with the consequences suggested that although teaching

practices are beneficial for their profession; but hiring them in schools at the end of the year is one of the biggest issues. The study further suggested that universities should come forward to take care that these schools are supporting their teachers and students. Similarly, Haider (2014) in his study points out the habit of rout learning does not allow students to create something new by their own and it becomes difficult for a teacher to stimulate the students towards conceptual study. And to make the concepts clear, Farooq et al (2012) proposed that teacher should teach the contrast of syntax between first language and the target language.

Methodology

The present study is a survey of government secondary schools established in the city Muzaffarabad Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The study is quantitative in nature because of the use of quantitative approach to conduct it. Purposive sampling aided to gather a sample size of 10 Government secondary school teachers in Muzaffarabad, out of which 5 were females and remaining other 5 were males. The researcher used structured questionnaire and classroom observation checklist as a research tools to collect the data. For this purpose, three lessons of each teacher were observed in order to employ observation checklist based on 20 points for identifying the classroom practices during the teaching process. During the observation, the researcher checked the points or items mentioned in the observation check list. Foster (1996) holds a view that no other procedure can provide such details as that provided by observation. The data gathered via observation is more likely to be accurate as it avoids relying on what participants tell about their teaching through questionnaire or interview. It is more authentic and accurate in a way that researcher does not rely only on the views of participants but observe the real happenings with his/her own eyes. Classroom observation checklist was designed by using Danielson's Framework for Teaching (2011) to measure teachers' classroom performance. Both the questionnaire and observation checklist were structured on five-point Likert scale and all the questions included in both tools were close ended. The gathered data was systematically entered on the excel sheet for the sake of analyzing it. The reason behind using Microsoft excel for data analysis is that it creates your data automatically into tabular or graphical form, which is a great way to summarize, analyze, explore, and present your data. So it is quick and handy.

Results and Discussions

The analysis of data is carried out in two parts. The first part is based on the results of the questionnaire whereas the second part is based on the results of classroom observation check list.

It was revealed from data that majority of teachers believe multilingualism has a positive influence on learning. But still it is problematic for 80% of the teachers taking part in this study. All the teachers strongly agreed with the statement that if their school and home language is same, it becomes easy for the students to digest difficult things.

The major focus of this study is to highlight various problems faced by the teachers in multi-lingual classrooms, so the first and major problem in this context is the problem that the English teacher faces in the classroom is the negative attitude of students towards the language and 70% of the teachers reported that majority of their students do not like to study this subject as English is not their mother tongue. And according to Juan (2006), the learners' negative attitude towards English poses a tremendous barrier for effective teaching. This negative attitude emerges from the fact that learners have limited competence in the language therefore preventing them from actively participating in classroom activities.

During the observation sessions, it was found that there is a use of mother tongue by the students in the classroom which is problematic for the teacher because of its interference with the target language. The sound system of any target language can be badly affected by the sound system of our native language. As the sound as well as spellings system of the native language has a tendency to distort the word structure of a target language, resulting in deformation of the learning track (Mansoor, 2010). So, a situation where multilingualism prevails, it is difficult for the teacher to make their students familiar with the system of sound and spelling of English language.

The data gives us a clear picture that the qualification of most of the teachers suits the secondary level students to teach them English but they cannot use English in real life situations inside and outside the classrooms. So, it conveys the impression that either the teacher did not get any training or they are unable to gear up the strategies which are required to teach English. One of the genuine issues that lie with the teachers is that they not only find this language complex but are unaware of the complexities related to this language and they are weak in speaking skills. (Shamim, 2008).

Mostly GTM is employed in the classrooms. As majority of students studying in Governments schools belong to rural background, so teachers take the support of Urdu or any other regional language to teach English as Coleman (2010) pointed out poor competence of teachers in English or having their lack of confidence in using it as the major reasons of using GTM in the classrooms.

As evident from the data that there is no one to ask for listening and speaking skills, so English is not practically used in the classrooms. Although reading practice is provided in greater amount, but majority of the students cannot read properly because of underdeveloped reading skills. Furthermore, students cannot pay attention to stress, intonation and pauses as English is a

stressed- time language and different from regional or Urdu language.

As far as reading comprehension is concerned, it is talk of a farce as how can these students comprehend what they cannot even read from the book. According to 90% of the teachers students' poor reading comprehension is yet another tiresome job for the English teachers to tackle with.

Although writing practice gets more weightage if we compare it with the listening and speaking skill but unfortunately writing practice involves only copying of text or dictation by the teacher as witnessed during classroom observation so, there is no concept of creative writing and students commit spelling as well as grammatical mistakes.

Results of classroom observation show that teachers do not follow any plan. Most of the teachers found practicing teaching without any planner with them which in a long run is problematic for them. Some of them are of the view that they keep it in their minds and do not shift it on a paper while few of them interestingly do not know the exact format of it.

Most of the contents of curriculum are not designed according to Pakistani culture and teacher also faces time and curriculum coverage pressure in the limited time period of 45 minutes as mentioned by all the teachers of the current study which gives rise to another issue that is selective study.

Our examination system forces the students to cram lessons. 9 out of 10 teachers report their students are in habit of cramming to pass the examination. For this purpose, they use different guide books to get through the exams. It only gives score to the rote learning of the students without assessing the actual competence that the student poses in using the language. Over all the system does not motivate the students to create something new and different with the power of their mind and imagination.

Furthermore, majority of the students do not take their study seriously. All the participants agreed with the statement that students do not perform well in home work tasks and as a result teachers have to suffer from its drastic outcomes in the class. Along with that their parents cannot teach them because of poor linguistic background, so duration of learning is less at home.

Another noteworthy problem for teachers is the approach and motivation of students to learn a language. Most of the students sitting in the classroom are shy and not ready to participate in the classroom activities as reported by 8 out of 10 teachers, may be because of peer pressure or fear of committing mistakes. And consequently, active and intelligent students manage to grasp the attention of teacher according 90% of the participant.

It was detected with the help of classroom observation that here is a use of different strategies from teachers' side in order to soothe down the learning process for their students.

Urdu language is frequently used for the sake of teaching another language English. However, drilling practice is employed in the classroom but still students cannot read properly because of the fact that teachers appointed in the schools also lack in reading skills and teachers' own pronunciation is not good enough to be presented as a model during drilling practice.

Teachers use grouping technique as well as pre-knowledge testing technique. Along with that teachers also motivate students to use cramming technique in order to get good marks in the examination.

Though homework is given to students but it is just the imitation of classwork so, there is only reinforcement of learning but no or little extension of learning.

Similar study was conducted by Rasheed, Zeeshan & Zaidi (2017) in Baluchistan with a quite different linguistic map i.e. Pashto, Baluchi, Brahvi, Persian, Urdu and Saraiki. There English is taught as a third language in Baluchistan. In the classrooms, the students were constantly using their mother-tongue with their classmates for communication purposes. The patterns and themes emerged from the data revealed lengthy as well difficult syllabus as a major challenge reported by all the respondents. And there is no trend of refresher courses and trainings for teachers to improve and equip themselves according to the need of the time,

Conclusion

It is a high time to realize that English is a language and should be taught as a language, but in our case, it is implemented and taken as a subject. Changing this scenario, can eradicate 70 percent of the problems associated with its teaching.

We are still stuck in the 19th century in respect of syllabus and teaching methodology of English language which require urgent improvement according to the current need and demand. Dhillon & Wanjiru (2013) states that teacher should nurture learning by creating a warm classroom climate where learners feel psychologically comfortable and are prepared to take risks in language learning strategies and for this purpose strategies such as peer teaching, role- plays and group word games can be helpful.

Proper planning with best A.V aids and strategies before entering the classroom is the key to start and drive it smoothly. It is not only energy saving but also helpful in time management. Adding listening and speaking activities will not only assist to grasp students' interest but also form basis to increase their vocabulary. Urdu should be used where it is required, but its frequent use will not serve the purpose.

All we can say at the end that there is a need to change the standing circumstances that is prevalent in the teaching practices of English. If these

circumstances remain the same, the standard of English will further collapse and teaching of English will be merely a waste of time and energy. For this purpose, the capacity of whole academic sitting needs to be buildup (Government of Pakistan, 2006).

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