

LEARNING DIFFICULTIES AND STRATEGIES OF STUDENTS AT HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN PUNJAB

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Abstract

The present study was designed to investigate the problems faced by students in Learning of English at Higher Secondary Level. The study was limited to higher secondary level. This study was carried out at District Okara and Bahawalnagar in Punjab, Pakistan. It was observed that in recent times the governments of Punjab, Pakistan provided a lot of facilities including free training programs for the teachers at higher secondary level but the Teaching and learning of English is not up to mark. The participants of the study were 80 students including 40 male and 40 female. Students were administered questionnaires. Through analysis of the data, it was found that teachers had no proper training of teaching English, proper facilities were not provided and curriculum was not according to the needs of students. These reasons hindered the teaching and learning process of English.

Key Words: Difficulties, Students, English, Punjab, Pakistan

1 Literature Review

English has become the need of day. If we want good reputation in educational society and want to get good job we should have command on English. But it looks dream when we visit to the students even at higher secondary school level. The students of higher Secondary School are unable to comprehend and unable to speak English as they should according to their educational standard. There are many reasons for their ineligibility. Top of the all are lack of educational atmosphere, their interest, socio economical background, gender difference, shyness, and lack of confidence etc.

Ahmad et al. (2011) conducted a research program on the nature of difficulties in Learning English by the Students at Secondary School Level in Pakistan. The main purpose of their research was to find out the difficulties of 645 secondary school students of Federal and provincial governments including 8 schools from provincial Govt. & 8 from Federal govt. Test was used to collect data which was later analyzed by SPSS 17.0 software. The study revealed that the students of provincial govt. schools faced more difficulties in learning grammar and English as second language as compare to Federal government school.

Akram & Qureshi (2012) conducted a research in Burewala & Vehari on the topic of Problems in Learning and Teaching English Pronunciation in Pakistan. Teachers were asked to fill in the questionnaires; data was analyzed by SPSS software with basic statistics. The research proved that

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students needed special training especially in recognition of sounds and difficulties in production and expression of these sounds. The research concluded that to improve pronunciation of students, teachers should be aware of their weakness and strength regarding English pronunciation, and they should present themselves as role model for the students.

Bilal et al. (2013) conducted a research about Problems in Speaking English with L2 Learners of Rural Areas School of Pakistan. Questionnaire was used to point out the problems. Data collected from fifty students both male and female from high and higher secondary level. Students were found to have problems in speaking Skill. In Pakistan, even after studying English from eleven years, they still faced lack of confidence. They learnt English to write a critical appreciation of the writers of their syllabus to pass the examination and our examination system has not any oral skill test. The correction of English syllabus is very important because it taught only forms of linguistics but fails to develop student creativity. The study suggested that a planned syllabus with trained teachers and speaking environment in school is very essential to overcome these problems.

Writing also involves full attention of the writer with rhetorical and linguist capabilities. Lack of research creates difficulties in the process of teaching and learning writing skill. Writing involves the topic determination, Editing, revising etc. It is considered that eclectic approach is more beneficial than the genre approach because it provides opportunity to individuals' own creativity. English language itself has a lot of irregularities and it also becomes the cause of difficulties for learners of 2L. Interference of first language also puts influence on the second language learning. Grammar is very important to create correct sentences but lack of the use of correct grammar and lack of vocabulary creates hurdles to learners. Farooq et al (2012) also conducted a survey about Opinion of Second Language Learners about Writing Difficulties in English Language. They selected four colleges in Lahore, two colleges with one twenty four male students and two colleges with 121 female students. Data collected by questionnaire and the study revealed that students found problems in spelling, vocabulary and in grammar. The current study also suggested that teachers should teach the difference of syntax between L1 and L2. The reason of these problems was the traditional style of teaching grammar and lack of practice as well. Teachers at primary, middle, secondary or higher secondary level have lack of knowledge about applied linguistics so cramming is increasing day by day.

Haider,G.(2014) conducted a mix method research An Exploratory Study Of Organizational Problems Faced By Pakistani Student Writers With Learning Difficulties (LD) In EFL Writing. Data were collected from one hundred students' writers at intermediate level by questionnaire. Ten students and five teachers were interviewed to explore the organizational problems in writing essays. It was found that students had lack of confidence and motivation with problems of writing anxiety. They were not motivated but forced to memorize and if they developed their skill, they would surely keep away from plagiarism. Writing with organization had relation to semantics and coherence in lines and thought. In Pakistan teacher is active while students are just passive listeners in classroom. The large size of the class creates a distance between teacher and student. Socio-economic is also the cause of learning difficulties in Pakistan because children depends on their parents and have the fear of punishment if they expand their needs and not to fulfill their expectations.

These above mentioned difficulties create problems to students not only in their academic success but also to their professional progress.

Tariq et al (2013) conducted a research about difficulties in learning English as a second language in rural areas of Pakistan. They worked on Government Secondary School in rural areas of Tehsil Sargodha. They took 60 students aging 13-18 years from grade 10th. They used questionnaire to conduct a survey and collected data about different factors which affect in learning English in rural areas. For this purpose they distributed 20 questionnaires among students. The study revealed that learning was possible only when environment was suitable. The study concludes if parents support and encourage learning, it would incorporate an urge to learn English. The research also proves if the students belong to an educated family.

Hassan & Sajid (2013) conducted a research about ICTs in learning: Problems faced by Punjab province Pakistan. They collected data into two forms, i.e. Interview from administrators, Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) coordinators initially 20 school administrators ICT through interview. In second form researchers distributed 220 questionnaires among randomly selected teachers. 600 questionnaires among students of private and NGO based schools. They used sequential mixed method design. They analyzed interview qualitatively. They found that most of the participants had positive perceptions about integration of ICTs into their teaching and learning. Many difficulties were revealed by administrators and ICT coordinators. Possible problems to the investigation of ICTs and many of these difficulties were verified by the teachers and students. Later on however, there were some problems which were not certified by the teachers and students.

Teevno (2011) conducted a research about challenges in teaching and learning of English at secondary level class (x). He worked on the population of 11 English teachers including 7 male and 4 female, 70 students including 40 male and 30 female and also; 6 English experts including 4 male and 2 female. He involved teachers and students in focus group discussion and administered questionnaires and experts were interviewed. The study concluded that Teachers had no proper training in teaching English. It also revealed that proper facilities were not provided and curriculum was not up to the needs of the students. According to research, these reasons create flaws in teaching and learning process.

2 Objectives

1. To find out the difficulties of the students in learning English at higher secondary schools in Punjab.
2. To find out the perceptions of the students about strategies used by the English teachers at higher secondary level in Punjab.

3 Methodology

The current study was descriptive in nature. Mix-methods of research was applied. For quantitative part questionnaire was used as research tool and data were collected from District Okara and District Bahawal Nagar in Southern Punjab, Pakistan. Target Population of this research was male and female students of higher secondary schools in Punjab, Pakistan. The researchers narrowed down to the population of two districts (Okara and Bahawalnagar) where from 80 students were randomly selected to collect data. The collected data were analysed on SPSS version 21 and results were shown in mean, standard deviation and standard error.

Table 1 showing Difficulties of the students in learning English

Statements	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
		Statistics	Std. Error	
Does mother tongue create problems in learning English?	80	2.13	.12	1.09
Is there any oral test in your examination?		1.18	.13	2.71
Can you speak English with your fellows?		.96	.10	1.84
Do you think that syllabus of English is based on only learning by heart?		2.01	.10	.97
Do your teachers encourage you when you write in English?		1.80	.11	1.03
Do you think that your parents have interest in your learning English?		1.96	.09	.84
Can you solve your grammatical issues?		1.09	.12	2.15
Do you think that you study English as subject not as language?		2.10	.12	1.08
Your society discourage you for English language learning?		1.19	.13	2.26

Statement 1 in the above table shows that mean score is 2.13 while standard deviation is 1.095 which reveals that mother tongue creates lot of problems in learning English. Statement 2 shows that mean score is 1.18 while standard deviation is 2.71 which shows that there is less oral examination at higher secondary level. Statement 3 shows that mean score is .96 while standard deviation is 1.84 which tells that most of the student at higher secondary level cannot speak English with their fellows. Statement 4 show that mean score is 2.01 while standard deviation is .971 which reveals that syllabus of English is based on learning by heart. Statement 5 shows that mean score is 1.80 while standard deviation is 1.036 which shows that teachers encourage the students when they write in English. Statement 6 shows that mean score is 1.96 while standard deviation is .849 which shows that mostly parents have interest in learning English of their children. Statement 7 shows that mean score is 1.092 while standard deviation is 2.15 which reveals that students at higher secondary level cannot solve their grammatical issues. Statement 8 shows that mean score is 2.10 while standard deviation is 1.086 which shows that most of the students are agree with the statement that they have read English as subject not as language. Statement 9 shows that mean score is 2.26 while standard deviation is 1.199 which reveals that our society encourages students in English language learning.

Table 2 showing Perceptions of the students about strategies used by the English teachers

Statements	N	Mean		Std. Deviation
		Statistic	Std. Error	
Are you satisfied with your teacher's method of teaching?	80	1.98	.110	.98
Do teachers employ authoritative style?		2.09	.108	.97
Do you understand your teacher easily?		1.90	.108	.96

Do your teachers give you opportunity to speak English?		1.07	.120	2.01
Does your teacher speak English with you?		1.89	.115	1.03
Do you think that your teacher helps you for learning English?		1.99	.112	1.00
Does the teacher use interesting materials to improve your English?		1.04	.116	2.41
Do they like to guide you after your class time?		1.06	.119	2.34
Do you think that present syllabus is useful?		2.42	.128	1.13

Statement 1 in the above table 2 shows that the mean score about the satisfaction of the students towards their teachers' methods of teaching is 1.98 while std. deviation is .98 that clearly tells that most of the students are satisfied with their teachers' methods. Statement 2 shows that mean score is 2.09 while standard deviation is .97 which reveals that teachers apply authoritative style in teaching. Statement 3 shows that mean score is 1.90 while standard deviation is .96 which reveals that most of the students understand their teachers easily. Statement 4 shows that mean score is 1.07 while standard deviation is 2.01 which shows that teachers do not give opportunity to students to speak English. Statement 5 shows that mean score is 1.89 while standard deviation is 1.031 which reveals that most of the teachers speak English with students at higher secondary level. Statement 6 shows that mean score is 1.99 while standard deviation is 1.00 which shows that teachers help students in learning English. Statement 7 shows that mean score is 1.04 while standard deviation is 2.41 which reveals that teachers do not use any type of interesting material to improve English. Statement 8 shows that mean score is 1.06 while standard deviation is 2.34 which shows that teachers do not guide students after class time. Statement 9 shows that mean score is 2.42 while standard deviation is 1.139 which reveals that present syllabus is useful for learning English.

4 Discussion

This study explored the basic problems of students at higher secondary level in learning English. Analysis of the data revealed that the mean score for mother interference is 2.13. that is evidence being one of the major problems of the students that plays a vital role as interruption to the learning of English is that they are interrupted by mother tongue while learning English. Mean score for studying English as subject not as language, is 2.10 which means that most of the students at higher secondary level study English as subject. That is why students are unable to speak English the reason is that they are more interested in passing the examination instead of learning the language as tool. Third major problem is that syllabus of English is content based learning the mean score for which is 2.01. It revealed the fact students spend their time in reading books learning stories and essay by heart. They learn grammatical rules for correction purposes. Much of their time wasted in translation from English to Urdu and from Urdu to English. It is observed by the mean score 1.96 that parents have interest in their children's learning English. Because English is international language and parents considered the importance of English language and they also know the worth of English as an international language that is why they focus on learning English. Mean score 1.80 reveals that teachers encourage students when they write in English because they want to improve students writing skill and cognitive thoughts. Mean score for oral test is 1.18 which reveals that there is oral tests are not conducted in higher secondary schools. Mean score .96 reveals that students cannot speak English with their fellows. The reason is that there is lack

of English speaking environment. Mean score 1.09 reveals that 2.15% students cannot solve their grammatical issues because English is foreign language and students are unfamiliar with grammatical rules. Mean score 1.19 reveals that society discourage the students because they still have grudge against English language. They still take it as the language of The English.

Regarding the perception of students the study explored the facts about the existing situation. The mean score about the utility of the present syllabus is 2.42. The mean score is highest it is because reading the current syllabus helps them to get good marks. If they go out of syllabus they lose their numbers which ultimately hinders them to improve language skills. Mean score about the statement that teachers are authoritative, is 2.09. This also reveals that teachers are very strict and teachers apply teacher centered approach. The result is that the students become passive learners and their creative ability is damaged. Mean score 1.99 reveals that teachers to some extent help them in learning English but their main focus is just to pass the examination and achieve the objectives of syllabus. Mean score about the understanding of the teachers by the students is 1.90 which shows that students are unable to understand their teachers because in Pakistan there is traditional application of authority which creates unfriendly environment and gape between students and teachers which affect understanding of the students to teachers. Mean score about the teachers' communication in English with students is 1.89 which shows that the teachers rarely speak English with their students because, there is no professional training for language learning skills. Mean score about the opportunity of speaking English is, 1.07 which reveals that teacher did not give opportunity to speak English because of the lack of spoken environment and unfriendly atmosphere. Mean score about the guidance of teacher after the class time is 1.06 which reveals that teachers most of the teachers do not give extra time to students to help them in improving

English as they are not interested in students. Teachers considered that only class time is their duty time after class time students are not their responsibility. Mean score about the use of language material such as AV Aids in the class, is 1.04 which shows that teachers do not use AV aids in the class to enhance the English learning abilities of students. Lack of availability of AV aids is the major problem in Pakistan. Lack of professionals to handle these AV aids is also one of these causes.

5 Conclusion

The study concludes that students are facing many problems in learning English. There are many issues which create problems like mother tongue interference discouragement from society teacher interest etc. To solve these problem teachers training is necessary society must be aware about the importance of English and syllabus should be upgrade and students should encourage when they do any work related to English learning.

The study concludes that in Pakistan students are facing many problems in learning English language such as native language, lack of guideline, limited resources and so on. To solve these problems there is need of refresher courses of teachers, syllabus should be revised and students should be encouraged by the society and teachers. Teachers should adopt interesting methods to teach English language.

6 Suggestions

English is not our mother language, they face problems like interference of native language, lack of suitable environment, syllabus design which increase cramming etc. So there is the need to pay attention to these problems. Syllabus should be upgrade according to their needs and goal. Teacher's training is also required. Teachers should be cooperative and try to teach in friendly atmosphere so that students don't feel shyness or fear in the class.

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