

Teaching Spoken English in Pakistan: Issues and Options

¹M. Nadeem Anwar, ²M. Ihsan, ³Zafar Hayat, ⁴M. Pevez

nadeem.anwar@uos.edu.pk

Abstract

Command in spoken English is need for learners of English in Pakistan. The opportunities to learn spoken English through the government educational system is limited hence a large number of students take language courses in private institutions to enhance their spoken English. This paper reports the investigation of how the English language instructors in different institutions address the various issues regarding teaching spoken in Pakistan. The data were collected from 80 English language instructors through survey from public as well as private institutions. The questionnaire was used as a tool to collect the information regarding the issues in teaching spoken English. Results revealed the poor understanding of spoken communication among learners which is reflected in speaking courses that don't address key parts of formal as well as informal communication. The study recommends a review of the difference between communication and conversation as the assumption for defining spoken English. It also suggests the provision of standard learning activities and opportunities to augment the teaching and learning practices of spoken English in Pakistan.

Keywords: spoken English; English in Pakistan; Teaching speaking; Training speaking teachers

Introduction

Currently, there are about 7000 languages spoken in the world and half of the world's population speaks only ten of them. English is the single most dominant language among those ten. It has borrowed words from 350 other languages. Nearly three-quarters of English lexicon are actually classical or romantic in their origin (Crystal, 2003). There are about 375 million first language speakers and the same number is of foreign/second

language speakers across the globe (Graddol, 1997).

Whereas in Shakespeare's time the number of English speakers in the world was thought to have been five to seven million people (Crystal, 2008). In the reign of Elizabeth-1 (1603) and in the beginning of Elizabeth-2 (1952), the numbers of English speakers increased almost fiftyfold around 250 million. In some countries English is now the language most widely taught in some countries as a foreign

^{1, 2, 3, 4}University of Sargodha, Pakistan

language and as a second language in certain countries. It is also used as the medium of instruction in most of the countries (Crystal, 2008).

English has become an international language and the language of science and technology around the globe. In Pakistan, English is taught and learned as a foreign language.

Lewis, (2009) said that there are 72 living languages in Pakistan while (Rehman, 2010) argued that there are only 61 different languages spoken. In Pakistan 11% people speak English out of 180 million (Bolton & Raza, 2008). Urdu is the mother tongue of just 8% people in the country (Rahman, 2010).

English has got the status of official language in Pakistan as well as the medium of instruction in most of the educational institutions particularly in higher education. Despite having studied English in schools, colleges and universities where English is the medium of instruction, the Pakistani students are unable to speak a few sentences fluently and accurately (Bilal, Rashid, Adnan & Abbas, 2013). It is a matter of fact that the speaking skills of students are completely ignored while teaching English in these institutions (Kannan, 2009).

Rational of the study

There are several motives behind learning English in Pakistan. People learn English for the purpose of communication, study and business in foreign countries where English is used as a lingua franca (Kannan, 2009). The ability to communicate accurately in different situations for different purpose i.e. traveling, at work, doing business, conducting research and getting education is necessarily to be fluent to fulfill the purpose (Rahman, 2010).

Numerous attempts have been made to recognize the functions of speaking. Richards, (2008) having studied (Brown & Yule, 1983) concluded that the interactional functions of speaking are threefold; talk as interaction, talk as transaction and talk as performance. Talk as interaction means ‘conversation’ and it fulfills the purpose of social function like exchange greetings, engage in a small talk etc. Talk as is transaction means making oneself clearly understood. The focus is on what is said or done. Talk as performance refers to the public talk, the talk that transmits information before the audiences etc.

Reasons to Learn English in Pakistan

The learner’s intention to develop their skills in speaking English is for certain reasons. Firstly, they want to get material benefit and good career. Secondly, their

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purpose behind learning English is to enable them to complete their courses of higher education successfully (Goh, 2012). Some adults have the requirements to take English classes basically to acquire a certification which can be used for promotion purposes at their employment. Their inspiration to be expert in speaking skills in English may be low because of overwork and family duties. There is another reason that they may have had little contact with English since they left secondary school. A third group of learners are those with a genuine ambition to learn to communicate in English. The individuals from this group are learners who may want to work abroad or to live in English speaking countries. The others may learning English to get success for international English language proficiency tests for example, IELTS and TOEFL etc. and develop their spoken English or their general level of proficiency in English (Warsi, 2004).

English Teachers in Pakistan

English teachers have not relevant qualification to teach English in Pakistan. The quality of English language teachers in Pakistan has been a concern of government all the time. (Government of Pakistan, 2009). The problem always lies in the training and qualification of teachers. It is the need of the hour to

enhance quality of English language teachers in Pakistan (Memon, 2007; Shami & Hussain, 2006).

English language teachers in Pakistan do not focus on content and methodology due to lack of training and relevant qualifications and focus on to prepare students only to pass the examination (Parveen & Bhatti, 2009). Government of Pakistan is taking serious steps for the improvement of the quality improvement in English language teaching (Batool & Qureshi, 2007). According to a global survey of English teachers from 89 countries found that more than 21% of the teachers were not qualified to teach English (Emery, 2012).

English teachers cannot offer learners the opportunities to enhance their verbal abilities. The teachers teaching spoken English classes do not have proper knowledge of the way of communicative ability is enhanced and the use of open classroom activities. The learners are not encouraged to practice their communication in English both inside and outside of classroom (Kannan, 2009).

English Language Teaching Methods

Authentic material and teaching methodology matters a lot in English language teaching. The course materials at Elementary and secondary School

necessarily address the reading of text, a little focus on pronunciation and limited vocabulary learning, while at Higher Secondary School keep on focusing on reading skills, language structure, and vocabulary learning with little focus on speaking skills. Listening is practically missing in the syllabi and speaking is limited to an instructor (warsi, 2004). This is a post method era of teaching methodology in theory. The communicative language and task-based instruction are in vogue to make learners communicatively competent. Task can enhance speaking skill in English (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

There are no short tasks to present language works in Government schools. Consequently, spending sixteen years of English learning unless students have taken extra courses in a private institution, they have no speaking fluency and accuracy in English. It is not an exaggeration to claim that students who complete secondary school are unable to present himself or herself in English or to utter a couple of basic sentences fluently. To create pragmatic competence in English many beginner learners take courses in private institutions. (Bilal, Rashid, Adnan & Abbas, 2013).

The reading material used as a part of syllabi is usually prepared by regional

standards, unapproved and does not fulfill the requirement of famous international courses for example IELTS British council, IELTS Australia and TOFEL etc. However studying English at private institutions a few instructors use private material books to teach youngsters (Bilal, Rashid, Adnan & Abbas, 2013).

English Language Teaching Profession

English instructors in can be classified into four groups relying upon the way of their duties: (Sadeghi & Richard, 2005).

- i. Those teaching at public schools.
- ii. Those instructing at private organizations/institutions.
- iii. Those instructing at colleges and universities.
- iv. Those teaching/tutoring privately.

Teachers in Public Schools and colleges

Subject specialists in government schools are recruited by Punjab public service commission and trained by Directorate of staff development Lahore from time to time. The qualification of English instructor in Pakistan is at least B.A and B.Ed. at school level and M.A and M.Phil. in English at college and university level. The instructors teach prescribed course books and material that is prepared by Punjab text book board for schools and higher education for colleges and

universities. There is a rarity of language labs in public schools and colleges (Warsi, 2004).

The situation at school level is quite the same that teachers teach endorsed course books keeping in view the examination of Boards. The syllabus is the synonymous of rote the list of vocabulary items and certain rules of language structure to prepare them to pass the final examinations of the year. Most of the teachers in Pakistan does know how to teach English but are appointed as English teachers. Most among them have the degree in English but are reluctant to speak English (Shamim, 2008).

Coleman, (2010) maintained that English teachers especially in government schools are attuned to teach English with the help of national as well regional languages because they are also poor in English and diffident to speak before the class.

PEELI report British Council, (2013) averred that 62% of the private school teachers and 56% of government school teachers scored the lowest possible bands in test. The teachers of English concentrate on grammar and translation of language and oral competency is ignored (Ghafoor, 1998).

Nawab, (2012) conducted a research in Chitral and concluded that teaching of English in Pakistan is not different as to

teach the other subjects like history and social study etc. The teachers of English are lacking relevant qualification and training.

Teachers in Private Schools and colleges

Teachers at private institutions apply somewhat better teaching methodologies. They instruct foreign syllabuses with specific techniques like direct method. The instructors are better qualified and get short trainings occasionally at prestigious language institutions. They teach O'level and A'level syllabi. In spite of their competency and grip on foreign syllabi they don't try to make speaking a piece of their assessment. Listening and speaking both are overlooked. (Shamim, 2007)

Generally, these are labelled English-medium schools. These English medium private schools, on the other hand, are relatively expensive and less in number as compared to the other two categories; hence they provide education to a small section of the population. Nonetheless, in recent years, the number of private schools has increased dramatically (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, Vishwanath, & Zajonc, 2007). The reason of their attraction is their claim to offer "English medium" education, even though in reality these claims may not come true (Bashiruddin & Qayyum, 2014).

Teachers at Universities

Some of the university English teachers in Pakistan hold PhD degree in English literature and few are seeking degrees in English literature. The English teacher in Pakistan is supposed to teach English language and he/she should be required to do PhD either in linguistics or TEFL (Shamim, 2008). In Pakistani universities it is observed that English literature is focused and linguistics is ignored yet. The students opt for English literature courses. Having been studied literature courses they are weak particularly in listening and speaking skills in English (Bashiruddin & Qayyum, 2014).

Private English Teachers

Private English teachers are those who also work part time at different institutions. Some teachers altogether teach English privately. Their client often has special needs such as preparation for an examination, an overseas trip or for work assignment. The private teachers are young motivated and they charge relatively high rate fees for their services (Shamim, 2008).

Bashiruddin, (2009) explored the classroom practices of two teachers of English. One teacher belonged to the private sector, while the other was from the public sector. The public school teacher had a Master's degree in Political Science, but was interested in learning

English, therefore opted to teach English when she joined as a teacher. The teacher from the private school had Master's degree in English, but was not really interested in teaching profession in general. This teacher became a teacher by chance and felt that her Master's degree was not helping her in classroom instruction.

Statement of the Problem

English being the language of science and technology is likewise used as a medium of instruction in tertiary education in Pakistan. English is taught as a foreign language in Pakistan. There are different teaching methodologies and technique to teach English in Pakistan. Among the four noteworthy skills the speaking and listening are ignored in Pakistani institutions. The Speaking skills of the students even at secondary, graduation and post-graduation level are extremely unsatisfactory. Even the students are unable to introduce them in English properly. The present study would highlight the issues of spoken English of instructors at intermediate level in Pakistan.

Objective of the Study

The major objective of the study was:
To explore the problems of instructors regarding spoken English in Pakistan.

Research Questions

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1-What are the problems in teaching spoken English in Pakistan?

2-What are the options to enhance spoken English of Pakistani students?

Significance of the Study

The study would contribute a lot in English language teachers training programs to include speaking component as a part of assessment. It may be useful for master trainers to train English teachers in four major skills of listening, reading, writing and speaking. It would also be useful for the heads of English departments, policy makers and curriculum developers while devising and implementing language policy. This work would also help students to overcome communicative problems in English. This study would attract the ample attention of ELT researchers to investigate the problems of Pakistani instructors.

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive and the exploratory in nature and the data were collected through survey method.

Participants

Eighty English instructors/teachers (40 male and 40 female) were selected as sample of the study through purposive sampling technique.

Instrument of the study

The researcher developed the questionnaire in the light of related literature for the purpose of data collection. The questionnaire was consisted of 17 items which were measured through five-point Likert type scale ranging from 'Not at all challenging' to 'extremely challenging'. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Only percentages of the responses were calculated for this purpose. Major results of the study have been presented in the following table.

Table 1***Perceptions of English Instructors Regarding Typical Problems in Teaching Spoken English in Pakistan***

Sr #	Statements	Not at all Challenging	A Little Challenging	Challenging Enough	Very Challenging	Extremely Challenging
1	Enhancing fluency in speaking	20 %	20 %	30 %	10 %	20 %
2	Dealing with mixed proficiency levels students	10 %	40 %	30 %	20 %	0%
3	Motivating students to express their feeling in English	10 %	30 %	40 %	20 %	0%
4	Providing interesting practice activities	40 %	30 %	10 %	10 %	10 %
5	Encouraging weaker students to speak	20 %	40 %	10 %	20 %	10 %
6	Developing accuracy in speaking	10 %	30 %	20 %	30 %	10 %
7	Dealing with lack of background knowledge of English	10 %	20 %	20 %	20 %	30 %
8	Teaching speaking to a large class	30 %	30 %	10 %	20 %	10 %
9	Using difficult topics for speaking	10 %	40 %	20 %	20 %	10 %
10	Lack of ideas on certain general topics	20 %	50 %	10 %	20 %	0 %
11	Teaching beginning student	40 %	30 %	20 %	10 %	0 %
12	Lack of student interest in learning	10 %	20 %	20 %	30 %	20 %
13	Teaching appropriate use of forms	30 %	20 %	30 %	10 %	10 %
14	Finding engaging speaking activities	40 %	10 %	20 %	10 %	20 %
15	Maintaining use of English during the lesson	20 %	30 %	40 %	10 %	0%
16	Teaching idioms and phrasal verbs	10 %	30 %	30 %	30 %	0%
17	Using technology in the classroom to teach speaking	10 %	40 %	10 %	10 %	30 %

Findings

Table-1 shows that four items were found not at all challenging by a considerable number of respondents i.e. ‘Providing interesting practice activities (40%)’,

‘Teaching beginning students (40%)’ and ‘Finding engaging speaking activities (40%)’ and (100%) instructors found these tasks challenging to them. Whereas,

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majority of the respondents found these four tasks along with 'encouraging weaker students to speak', 'Teaching speaking to a large class', 'Lack of ideas on certain general topics', 'not at all challenging' or 'Maintaining use of English during the lesson' and 'Using technology in the classroom to teach speaking' a little challenging.

Results in Table-1 also reveal that six out of seventeen tasks i.e. 'Dealing with mixed proficiency levels students' (0%), 'Motivating students to express their feeling in English' (0%), 'Lack of ideas on certain general topics' (0%), 'Teaching beginning student' (0%), 'Maintaining use of English during the lesson' (0%) and 'Teaching idioms and phrasal verbs' (0%) were not found extremely challenging by the English instructors.

It is evident from the data that all the (100%) instructors found these tasks challenging and maintained diversified opinion on their magnitude of being challenging. Their opinions ranged from 'a little challenging' to 'very challenging'.

It was found that all the teaching tasks were considered as challenging (ranging from 'a little challenging' to 'very challenging') except 'engaging in speaking skills'. None of the instructors confirmed these tasks as 'not at all challenging' and

six (2, 3, 10, 11, 15 & 16) of the tasks were not supported by the respondents as 'extremely challenging'.

Discussion

The main purpose of this study to identify the problem confronted by instructor in teaching speaking The conditions in which English is taught and learned in Pakistan are not conducive for English learners and instructors. The main factors of these conditions are diverse by their very nature. Results of the present are supported by a number of studies. For example, Warsi. (2004) found that lack of technology, mother tongue interference, teacher's irrelevant qualifications and inappropriate curriculum are the major hindrances in improving speaking skills in Pakistani private and public institutions.

Akram & Qureshi, (2010) concluded that learning pronunciation is very difficult for Pakistani instructors to teach and. Fluency. They maintained that the teacher should improve their weaknesses in teaching and serve as a role model to teach pronunciation. Shamim. (2007) found that large classes are the main issue for Pakistani instructors to teach English effectively.

Shamim, (2007) also found that mother tongue interference is a major problem to teach and learn English in Pakistan. Teachers apply grammar translation

method and mother tongue interference is also a major problem for effective learning of English language. (Sadeghi & Richards, 2008) concluded in the same study in Iran that the language proficiency of teachers, their teaching methodology and their use of teaching technology is not satisfactory in the classroom while teaching spoken in Iranian classrooms.

However another major issue needs to be addressed on top priority basis is that the instructor should select the material carefully and deliver it skillfully in the classroom. Additionally, the educational module developers and instructors have confused or inadequate understanding of spoken English and the particular kinds of speaking. It is likely that they will be confused about the content and methodology for teaching different kinds of spoken language to trainees. The English instructors in colleges and master trainers preparing activities need to exclude superfluous material from the syllabi and devise the tasks for

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communicative material in English pedagogy to train the instructors.

The research by Ihsan, (2016) in the department of education, University Sargodha concluded that the task-based instruction is a good method to enhance speaking skills of students at all levels. It is the best method for instructors to offer real life activities in the classroom and engage learners to exercise these activities in the presence of instructor. Some out-of-class activities offer a more considerable scope of accessibility for language use and second/foreign language acquisition. The tasks offer learners opportunities to apply certain parts of semantic, communicative, and thoughtful minded skills to learn communication.

It is suggested that these new learning strategies through task-based instruction should be applied in the classroom to enhance learner's experiences of spoken English that would be unique, original and significant to their communicative needs.

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