

Teachers' perspectives on role of institutional policies on ESL teaching

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Abstract

This paper examines the views of ESL teachers in Lahore about how policies embedded within institutions determine what they do as language teachers. Five themes were identified in this study using semi-structured interviews with 31 ESL teachers across multiple schools: curriculum and flexibility, resources, professional development (PD), policy communication and implementation, as well as teacher autonomy. The study results showed that the current institutional policies pose challenges for ESL teaching, including inflexible regulations and requirements, lack of materials or resources needed for effective instruction; insufficient professional development opportunities to support teacher training in second language pedagogy; ineffective communication regarding procedures and practices among various stakeholders, limited self-determined control over their classrooms. The findings of the study also point to a need for more fluid curriculum guidelines, improved resource allocation linked with staff development, better communication and trust between ESL teachers and mainstream classroom educators as well administrative personals with a greater level of teacher autonomy. The implications of these understandings for one segment of educational policy and, thereby a focus on ESL teaching, as well as the call for theoretically sound practice that is feasible in policies are part and parcel to what follows.

Keywords: ESL teaching, institutional policies, teacher perspectives, qualitative study.

Introduction

Given today's global world, the importance of English language cannot be understated. English operates extra as a bridge in-between diversified cultures and nations, because of its standing position and its overweening language usage for worldwide communication, business, science and know-how (Akram et al., 2021a, b; Irfan, 2021; Jalalzai et al., 2023a). Those who have the capability to read and write English, it is observed that you can access a whole lot of resources in terms of research as well as global networks (Malik & Pervaiz, 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023a). This opens up various alternatives of education and profession to them. As pointed out by Mahboob (2017), it is widely viewed as a necessary skill for purposes of personal and professional growth given that it increases possibilities in terms of job search opportunities at a wider scale while travelling across borders. It also supports cognitive functioning, and intercultural communication, which is then expected to be global citizenship and cooperation. The importance of English-speaking - and understanding being that the single most determinative advantaging leverage available in today's world (Rao, 2019; Ramzan et al., 2023b) The process of teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) is multidimensional, and it can be attributed to many facets from one country to another ranging from the proficiency level of teachers (Jalalzai et al., 2023b; Li & Akram, 2023; Ramzan et al., 2023c), motivation towards learning ESL by students (Al-Adwan et al., 2022; Jalalzai et al., 2023c), resource availability for ESL teaching and planning (Akram et al., 2020) educational policies implementation (Akram & Yang, 2021; Akram, 2020) in partnership with HDI index. We need high-quality ESL training now more than ever, as our society becomes increasingly globalized. Such control of the medium allows one to exploit a variety educational and professional resources (Al Asmari, 2015). Despite prolific research into strategies of teaching and related outcomes on learner (Abdeen & Albiladi, 2021; Ahsan et al., 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023d), the influence of institutional policies in crafting the ecology within which ESL is taught remains a less explored area.

Institutional policies capture the spectrum of standards, regulation and frameworks that define boundaries on educational practice conducted within an institution (Hudzik, 2015). These policies have the potential to shape and thus impact programs of English language instruction as they work through defining resource allocation (Dovers & Hezri, 2010), curriculum design (Roberts, 2015) professional development standards for instructors (Bouckaert & Kuhlmann, 2016). Conversely, poorly conceived or enacted policies can hamper the pedagogical process (Mathieson, 2019). The teaching process can be facilitated and developed in an enabling environment of good policies. In the educational context, where institutional policies are highly influential, it is important to understand how teachers perceive factors that such policies prioritize. Teachers are the key implementers of educational policies and their perspectives can be useful when judging how effective a policy is in practice (Akram & Li, 2024). They are the best executors of educational measures and requisites. The purpose of this research is to explore teachers' perceptions on strength and weaknesses about institutional policies associated with ESL instruction. In addition, the study aims to propose modifications that could improve ESL courses with regard to more comprehensive efficiency.

Teachers views are of profound importance in educational research, since teachers provide the practitioner view on how policies turn into classroom practice (Ayesha 2022). According to Akram et al. (2022) – teachers have the capacity to speak to what policies mean in practice and where any disconnects between policy intentions and classroom realities exist. Their challenges and recommendations can be utilized to inform better policy making (Ali, 2015). That way, policies can be both theoretically correct in a practical and functional audit (Ghonsooly & Ghanizadeh, 2013). The overarching purpose of this study is to reveal the importance of institutional policies in ESL teaching through teachers' lens. By unveiling the perspectives of teachers, this research will be relevant to the ongoing debate on how ESL education can be increased. In doing so, it should also contribute toward emphasizing the need to better structure institutional policies in line with what ESL teaching demands and reality calls for pursuit of these main objectives.

1. To examine how teachers make sense of institutional policies on their ESL teaching practices. Second, it seeks
2. To pinpoint issues in the implementation of such policies is given to ESL teachers

Review of Literature

In ESL programs in schools, teaching–learning practices (i.e., teachers' teaching approaches and students' learning strategies) are influenced by a variety of factors. These factors include teaching, examination, curriculum, learning materials, teaching aids, duration of class, size of class, teacher student ratio, and so on (Cheung & Hennebry-Leung, 2023; Getie, 2020; Jalalzai et al., 2023d). On the other hand, these variables are not immune to the influence of structural factors. In the context of this investigation, the term "structure" refers to the organization that is responsible for the operation of the schools (also known as the school management or administration), while the term "structural influences" refers to the policy and practice influences that are exerted by the institution. The aforementioned characteristics, as well as the teaching–learning strategies that are implemented within the ESL program, are shaped by the policies and practices of the institution (Ramzan et al., 2023d; Thao & Mai, 2022). According to Carrillo and Flores's 2020 research, it is essential to have a comprehensive understanding of the role that institutional factors have in shaping teaching and learning methods. Both the teaching and learning methods at the school level

in general (Khanam et al., 2022; Noor et al., 2021) and the ESL programs in particular (Wen & Kim Hua, 2020; Le & Le, 2022) have been the subject of a number of studies that have investigated the institutional influences. In these studies, the term "institutional culture" is used to refer to the influences of institutions. The culture of the institution has been investigated from a variety of perspectives for research.

The researchers Rind and Kadiwal (2016) found that there is a connection between the culture of an institution and its standing in the field of ESL education. According to the findings of Fotovatian (2018), the size of an institute can be a significant institutional influence that has a significant impact on the manner in which students interact with a program. In a similar vein, Holzweiss et al. (2016) establish a connection between assessment and institutional culture. They argue that different approaches to evaluation on various programs are related to the culture of the organization. In his discussion of the connection between the usage of English and institutional culture, Daniels (2012) points out that there are not many distinctions in the quality of English that is generated in two different institutional cultures; nonetheless, there are differences in the means in which it is created.

Another association between the admittance requirements for students and the culture of the school is revealed by Morest and Jenkins (2007). They believe that the implicit understanding of an institute determines who can be considered "legitimate" students inside a given program within a certain school. They use Bourdieu's (1990, page 56) concept of "habitus" to support their claim. This study was motivated by the work of Ashwin (2009), who utilized the Bourdieusian structural approach to conceptualize the influence of macro-structure (i.e. the influence of policies of an educational institution on the structure of the ESL programs) on the micro-structure (i.e. teaching-learning practices) in schools. He believes that by utilizing the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus, field, and capital, it is feasible to take into consideration the positions that various institutes hold in the area of ESL instruction, as well as the ways in which these positions influence the habitus of the institutions themselves. It was from the works of (McDonough, 1997) that this concept of institutional habitus was taken. Institutional culture is distinguished from institutional habitus by McDonough (1997), who defines the idea of institutional habitus as a link between institutions and the larger socio-economic milieu. She believes that this link is what differentiates institutional habitus from institutional culture. She contends that the construction of institutional habitus is a complicated blend of agency and structure, and that it may be regarded as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behavior as it is mediated through an organization (McDonough, 1997). She asserts that this is the case. In addition to this, she asserts that the habitus of an institution is developed over the course of time and builds its own history. In his article from 1997, McDonough makes the argument that the development of institutional habitus is connected to the position that each institute holds in the sphere of higher education.

The field of ESL education is home to a variety of types of capital, including economic, cultural, and social capital, which can take on a variety of symbolic forms. These forms of capital are generated or maintained by each institute. The conventional method in which economists use the term "capital" is fundamentally different from the way in which Bourdieu conceived of or conceptualized capital. Social standing, honor, respect, and acknowledgment are all components of a larger concept that Bourdieu refers to as symbolic capital. Economic capital is just one component of this larger concept. In the context of a culture, the value that institutions possess is referred to as symbolic capital. The concepts of what constitutes reasonableness are shaped by the methods that organizations go through in order to either build or keep their capital. In her research

on the ways in which schools in the United States influence the college choices of their students, McDonough (1997) argues that institutional habitus plays a role in the following way: (1) an institute's sense of its students' expected identities; (2) the courses that the institute will offer; and (3) which progression routes constitute reasonable uses of the capital that students have developed.

Methodology

With reference to that background, we set out to investigate teachers' views on the influence of policy as activity in ESL teaching. This was addressed by following the approach of Magaldi and Berler (2020) through qualitative research- in-depth interviews with ESL teachers from different schools of Lahore. The aim was to study teachers' experiences and views in depth, which is why this approach has been used. While sixteen students of B.Ed (Hons) and Masters were selected as sample, sharing CRs reading across 31 ESL teachers of different schools from Lahore to participate in the study. The selection of teachers was carried out by purposive sampling to achieve diversity in the next phases, resulting from different types of schools: public and private (semi-private) The aim of this diversity was to capture a variety types and sources institutional policies

Data collection

Semi-structured interviews approach was selected for the purpose of data collection. This approach was preferred as it allows flexibility to ask questions, allowing interviewer for depth on particular domains of interests and also enabling Participants their freedom in expression (Magaldi & Berler, 2020). An interview guide was constructed, comprised of open-ended questions to promote lengthy answers concerning the experiences and attitudes held by teachers toward institution policies regarding ESL instruction. The interview guide was piloted with a few teachers to get feedback on the questions and ensure they were clear.

All interviews lasted 45 to 60 minutes and took place in a quiet, private location that helped maintain participant confidentiality while minimizing distractions during conversations. The interviews were all audio-recorded with the permission of participants, a method that not only ensured accurate transcription but also allowed for the detailed and precise analysis. Field notes were also taken as well, from the interviews to pick up on non-verbal cues and context information that might be relevant.

Data analysis

Data analysis was thematically conducted. The interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim and the transcripts read several times to become familiar with the data (Routledge 2012). Based on the research questions and common themes identified in a preliminary review of the transcripts, an initial coding frame was established. After we developed the first thematic framework, all data were coded with this structure and additional codes added as new themes emerged. This way, after coding was done, themes could be grouped Into larger categories in line with the research objectives.

A few precautions were implemented to assure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the results. Triangulation was conducted using triangulating the results from each type of schools in order to find common themes and deviation (Flick, 2018). Second, we performed member checking by presenting the initial findings to a group of participants (or draw kind) in order. Finally peer debriefing was utilized by having the findings and analysis process to two colleagues analyzed for other perspectives or important insights.

Results

The interviews with the teachers generated a range of perspectives on how institutional policies as perceived to play out in ESL teaching. These thematic areas illustrate the experiences, problems and solutions of these teachers in establishing ESL through more participative policy formation and administration.

1. Material and Flexibility of Course Design

Extremely rigid ESL curriculums were mentioned by multiple teachers and referenced to problems with the objectives being driven by institutional policies. They also raise alarms about the standardized curriculum failing to cover the wide range of linguistic backgrounds and learning needs that students come in with. The standardized norms (which in other contexts are a useful check on quality) mean that teachers sometimes cannot use their skills to address individual student needs, which have the potential instead of hindering language acquisition. A few teachers also said that less specific curriculum guidelines - ones which offer more leeway to adapt the material based on students' needs and classroom observations - would make ESL teaching better fit their individual contexts. A teacher stated,

New policies which permit such changes must be in place to allow for a curriculum that is more appropriate to accommodate the wide range of abilities and previous educational experiences our students have.

2. Resource Availability

One major area that appeared is the access of resources. School teachers kept on saying that the policies of institutions do not always ensure sufficient delivery of teaching materials, technical tools and didactic resources. My own resources supplement the limited materials given by my schools. This lack of resources would be seen as a major barrier to providing effective ESL education. Teachers suggested aligning policy for the allotment of adequate and suitable ESL resources to inform their teaching. According to a teacher,

There are not enough technology-based resources and modern amenities to motivate the students in a better way for learning.

3. Professional Development

In fact, panelists seemed to mention the need for lifelong learning in response every interview prompts. Teachers also argued that system-level policies mandating teacher professional development programs and seminars often do not meet their needs because such opportunities are irrelevant, inadequate, or inappropriate for TESOL teachers. A good number of teachers believed that ESL instruction was so specialized in available methodologies and its every day challenges, that on the spot training is necessary. Among the options they favored was regular, targeted professional-development; workshops, seminars and team-designed learning opportunities that reflect up-to-date ESL teaching methods. Few of the teachers stated,

Professional development opportunities are not specific enough and do not meet the unique needs of ESL teachers" More focused training is called for.

We never really get to go for ESL teaching workshop that highlights the current best developments in techniques. It hampers the scope of developing apt teaching skills.

4. Implementing Policy Cues

Faculty concerned that institutional policies being conveyed and enforced in inconsistent ways, or not at all. This sentiment was echoed by many who said there was a lack of clear communication with their school administration regarding policy changes and expectations. This led to confusion and lack of uniform enforcement. Teachers also said some policies were rolled out without

adequate consultation or thought given to how they would work in practice. Teachers indicated that policies should be made with the input of educators, and clearly communicated to everyone involved. In addition, feedback loops would also be used to regularly evaluate the effect of policies and modify them as needed. According to teachers,

We experience a yawning chasm in which policies are explained to us But this information is typically not shared until after they are in effect, leaving everyone else trying to figure out what the heck has happened.

Policies can be enforced that are not adequately discussed or thought through in the classroom.

5. Teacher Autonomy

The idea of autonomy for teachers was centered in the talk as well. Teachers commented that stringent policy constrained their ability to engage in embodied decision-making such as educational practice and classroom management. While several teachers commented that they wanted greater professional autonomy to experiment and adjust their teaching styles in ways more suitable for individual students. Policies that trusted teachers to be professional and allowed them the freedom to experiment with pedagogy, they said. At the heart of this belief was that more autonomy would result in more innovative and efficient methods for teaching ESL. According to some teachers,

Policies just need to find ways for them [handing over power] " - Source Please free us to do so, and we can advocate more strongly for student-centered and data-based practices!

Discussion

Discussion

These two studies highlight various ways institutional policies impact ESL teaching at the level of teachers. The suggested rigidity of the ESL curriculum that was highlighted through teachers in this study is matched with previous research emphasizing a one-size-fits-all style of teaching and learning (Shieh & Reynolds, 2021; Ramzan et al., 2023f). Consequently, Tshering (2023) sees a curriculum that is able to accommodate itself and respond more flexibly with regard to the multi-lingual or mixed cultural make-up of our English as Second Language learners as crucial in such ESL syllabus design work. The flexible curriculum guidelines that the teachers are asking for reinforce this idea; enabling teacher to alter and adapt the curriculum will achieve better student outcomes (Irfan, 2021).

Resource availability: The challenge of resource lack It is a typical issue in many ESL contexts. According to a study from Alkhaldeh & Khasawneh (2021), lack of resources — no or inadequate teaching materials, old books and the unavailability of technological tools can greatly violate ESL services. This study echoes the findings of these calls, as teachers were found to supplement school-provided resources regularly with their own. Abdelrady and Akram (2022), it is very important to offer the required resources once catering for ESL students, hence an engaging learning environment can be provided.

Literature on the teaching of pronunciation well-documented that continuous and relevant professional development for ESOL teachers is important to ensure quality outcomes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2014). Professional development opportunities that were discussed in this study reflected the frustration felt by many teachers at how generic these are, something Al Jarf (2021) also identified as being essential to ensure professional Development is targeted towards ESL teacher needs. In addition, Kohnke (2021) argues continuous, focused professional development will lead

to substantial positive change in how well teachers teach and the impacts upon students. This appeal for a more specific training on the part of teachers is consistent with the call for professional development programs that respond to current ESL teaching techniques and hands-on examples applicable in classrooms (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023).

Communication amongst the workforce and within institutional policy practise is crucial (Akram & Yang, 2021). The concerns of teachers in this study about inadequate communication and inconsistent policy application are congruent with previous research. Poor communication leads to misinterpretations and inconsistencies that effect teaching and learning (Abdullah Alharbi & Mohammed Hassan Al-Ahdal, 2024) Such clear, timely and consultative communication processes are important in ensuring policies reach the classroom (Haufiku et al., 2017) The teachers' advice for a direct line of communication and the regular feedback that was demanded again underscores how essential is it to involve educators in the design process, ensuring policy practicability and feasibility (Seraj & Hadina, 2021).

Teachers, in particular, placed a high value on teacher autonomy and many argued that teachers need to be granted control over the instructional decisions made. This is consistent with the findings by Kong (2022) regarding professional autonomy to be one of the determinants for teacher job satisfaction and efficacy. According to results from Pearson and Cabugsa (2022), having a high degree of teacher autonomy is related with more motivated teachers and novel pedagogical strategies. The flexibility for teachers to experiment and adapt needed materials could enhance the efficiency of ESL instruction by making it more engaging (Amini & Kruger, 2022). The results of this study are consistent with Han's (2020) notion that policy should be trusting the professional judgment and autonomy necessary to a teacher since each classroom is unique.

Thus, this study highlights the influence of institutional policies on ESL teaching as perceived by teachers in Lahore. These themes reflect the key areas where additional policy support is required for successful delivery of ESL education. Curriculum design that better matches the range of learners, access to sufficient resources, focused professional development responsive to their unique context, policy advocacy and implementation as well as providing more freedom for teachers can be an important first step in creating a stronger scaffold for ESL teaching. This, in turn informs educational policy broadly and its consequences with respect to ESL education creating the imperative that policies be theoretically sound yet practically based as well. These are the needs that, if addressed by educational institutions will help to improve both quality of ESL instruction and meeting teachers and students where they need it.

Conclusions

In summary, this study provides comprehensive insight into the teachers' perceptions of how institutional policies affect ESL teaching in Lahore. The analysis generated five major themes: curriculum adaptability and design; resource availability; professional development; policies' communication and implementation; and teacher autonomy. As to the first theme or aspect, institutional policies may help facilitate ESL instruction by providing school systems with the necessary flexibility to address students with diverse linguistic backgrounds and learning needs. Resources and teacher training should also be improved to enable new methods and teaching approaches. These aspects consideration will require a framework flexible and seek to promote cohesive, coherent ESL education. The final theme revolves around more autonomy for teachers and the adjustment of feedback. Teachers should be granted more independence and professionalism, and then the overall situation with ESL education should change to the better.

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