



## CURRENT ISSUES IN HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH TEACHING IN PAKISTAN: AN EXPLORATORY SURVEY

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### **ABSTRACT**

*There has been much debate in Pakistani ELT publications and newspapers regarding the advantages and drawbacks of English education in Pakistani high schools. A huge bulk of these views is centered upon unreliable and unsystematic proofs. The goal of this study is to collect baseline quantitative data from Pakistani high school English instructors, including their backgrounds, training and preferences, challenges faced by them in classrooms and the impact of 1994 Ministry of Education Course of Study Guidelines on teaching practices. English teachers of ten general and ten vocational high schools were asked to answer a 26-questions survey for the study, having an overall return rate of 23%. The findings reveal that the teachers' expected answers varied evidently depending on their college major and also the volume of their prior team-teaching experience.*

### **Introduction**

English is used as second language and official language in Pakistan. It is also considered as medium of instruction in all Pakistani educational institutes and it is also taught as compulsory subject in post colonization period. Amano (1990) states that the exam system has become intensely engrained in the society in general as well as in the secondary level education system inside which both students and instructors operate in a historical consideration of the advancement of Pakistani universities' entrance examinations having English as a major subject. Students compete fiercely for the admission to the few elite national universities, which is virtually entirely determined by the entry exams marks. According to White (1987), achieving good marks in the admission exam is crucial for both students as well as parents.

It's not unexpected; however, that Pakistani high school English instructors are under immense pressure to prepare their students for such examinations. Unfortunately, the English subject that has generally been assessed at college level entry exams has inclined to be passive and discrete-point (Brown & Yamashita, 1995), an emphasis that appears to aid propagating the strong dependence upon grammar-translation instructional approach at high school level English classrooms (Widdows & Voller, 1991), and also memorizing and repetitious learning (Tinkham, 1989). The Academy of Educational Planning and Management (AEPAM) was founded in 1982 as an independent Ministry of Education Organization, and in 2005 it was designated as a Ministry of Education's "Subordinate Office". AEPAM is now a 'Subordinate Office' of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, following the eighteenth Amendment, Bill passed by the Parliament in the year 2011. Although, in 2006, the Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Federal Education released an updated Course of Study Guidelines that, for a very first time in Pakistani history, puts an emphasis on developing a student's communicational competence of English as a prime aim at high school level English learning. But, how much impact these standards have on classroom practices? What problems do Pakistani high school teachers' face? What exactly the instructors do in the classrooms? The current study aims to find out the answers of these questions.

### **Instrument**

The authors designed the questions for an initial version of a survey consisting of two pages, centered on their extensive experience in high school classrooms of junior and senior levels, working as in service English teacher trainers, and also working as curriculum developers in Ministry of Education. Questions regarding providing data about their background, education, and experience were asked to the participants in the designed teacher survey, prior to asking particular questions regarding their attendance at teacher training

seminars during their jobs, their classroom work, and experience with Verbal Communicative classroom settings. It was tested on pilot study and then amended with the help of the input provided by eight English high school instructors teaching in District Gujrat, Pakistan. The questionnaire's finalized form included 26 questions, also containing numerous open-ended questions.

To ensure the maximum probable return rate, every effort was put to confine the designed survey on 2 sides of one A-4 sheet. Even though survey's Urdu translation was also discussed, all participating high school instructors during pilot testing agreed that the 2 page version in English was sufficiently brief as well as concise for sending out without the need of translation.

**Subjects and Method**

Every full-time Pakistani English teacher working in a public high school in Gujrat district was asked to fill out the survey. Because it was discovered that teaching practices and behaviors at vocational high schools had a significant difference as compared to those at general high schools, which prepare the students seeking admission to two and four-year degree programs in college and universities. The survey's responses have been divided and comparison has been done along these lines. A total of 1,720 survey forms were mailed to ten vocational and general high schools. Even though, it would have been ideal to use a diversified random sample of instructors from all over the Gujrat district. A list of all tutors from the targeted vocational and general high schools was compiled. A short covering letter from the researchers was included in each survey outlining the survey's objectives, along with a shipping fee paid envelope in order to send the answered surveys back.

**Results and Discussion**

**Return of the survey**

As shown in Table 1, the overall return rate of the survey was merely 23%. Because this is such a small response rate was achieved, it should be stated right away that the 23% of instructors who did respond to the survey might differ in certain major ways from those who didn't respond. That is, the outcomes provided here might or might not apply to instructors who did not answer.

**Table 1: The Overall Return Rate of the Survey**

	No. of schools in Gujrat district	No. of teachers in Gujrat district	No. of surveys returned	Return rate
General high school	318	1638	380	23%
Vocational High School	16	77	19	24.6%
Total	334	1715	399	23%

This poor return rate could be due to a number of factors. Even though the instructors who did help in the pilot testing of our survey did specify that an English-only survey form (having an Urdu covering letter) would be the best, as the Gujrat district's average English teacher was indeed daunted by the need to fill and respond to a survey in English. Some more instructors might have responded after receiving a bilingual one.

**Teacher age**

Among the first aspect that the data analysis revealed, while the male: female instructor ratios at vocational and general high schools were nearly same (46 percent male and 54 percent female), significant disparities were there in the instructors' average age at each kind of school (see Table 2). Merely 22 percent of English teachers in *general* high schools had an age of 35 years or less, but 60 percent of the English teachers in *vocational* schools had an age of 35 years or less.

**Table 2: Age of Teachers**

Age	General high school teachers	Vocational school teachers
20-35	22%	60%
≥36	78%	40%

One reason regarding the younger average age of *general high school* instructors could be that *general high school* teaching jobs are often looked at to be more prestigious as compared to *vocational* teaching jobs. When it comes to promotions and wage increases in Pakistani education system as well as in other Pakistani society’s sections, age is a significant reason (Evanoff, 1993; Amano, 1990). Teachers are expected to request for promotion to the higher posts as they grow older as well as gain greater influence inside the system. The answers of question 3 in the survey (in Table 3) somewhat support this theory, indicating that the *general* instructors spend longer years on their respective jobs as compared to their vocational colleagues (only 23 percent of the *general* instructors had lesser than 10 years’ experience in teaching as compared to 60 percent for the *vocational* instructors).

**Pre-service teacher training in Pakistani universities**

**Table 3: Pre-service Teacher training**

	General high school teachers	Vocational school teachers
0–10	23%	60%
≥10	77%	40%

The apparent lack of formal training instructors in Pakistan has historically been regarded to be a long-standing issue in Pakistani education (Rohlen, 1983; Amano, 1990). This appears to be the scenario for high school English instructors that should teach EFL in an environment when students have minimal familiarity with English outside of the classroom. Merely 7 percent to 13 percent of the Gujrat area high school English instructors who responded to the survey confirmed that they majored in TESL or TEFL while studying in the university, as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Teachers’ Major subject in Education**

Major	General High School	Vocational School
English literature	55%	63%
Education	0%	16%
Linguistics	0%	9%
TESL/TEFL	13%	7%
Other	32%	5%

In Pakistan, EFL teachers usually specialize in English literature during college; a pattern which is evident in Gujrat district, where 55 percent (general) and 63 percent (vocational) teachers stated majoring in literature. Most literature departments do not require prospective English teachers to teach any extra courses for second language acquisition theory, ESL methodology and procedures, or testing. Beyond studying mandatory English literature department subjects as well as clearing a written exam, the only other main criteria to become an English teacher is just the completion of practice teaching of 2 weeks, generally done alongside some other instructors having an English literature major degree.

Probably not so unexpectedly, Figure 1 shows that 85 percent of instructors having major in English literature said they were not well equipped for college duty as English teachers. Those having specialized in Linguistics also indicated a significant amount of unhappiness with their training at college level as well. This could be because many linguistic departments in Pakistan teach most of their subjects through the Pakistani medium and place a greater emphasis on historical instead of applied linguistics. Even though a large percentage of instructors having education majors were also unsatisfied, but the rate was substantially lesser as compared to the ones having literature and linguistics majors, this is possibly attributed to the

largely applied as well as practical characteristics of education based subjects.

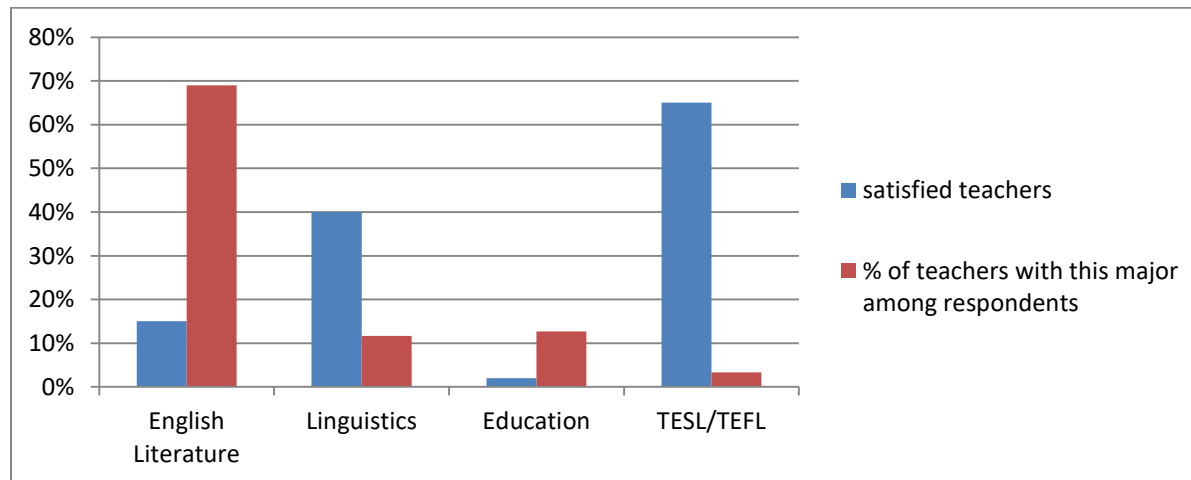
The substantially lesser TESL/TEFL majors had significantly different outcomes, with 65 percent believing they were properly prepared for their respective tasks as English teachers.

Even though it is really hard to assess or summarize the outcomes of open ended questions through a graph/chart, this must be acknowledged that when participants were questioned to mention about other college subjects taken by them relevant to teaching English, huge number of answers suggested that educators did feel a requirement going elsewhere along with university learning in order to study more regarding English teaching.

**Table: Satisfied Teachers with Majors**

Major	satisfied teachers	% of teachers with this major among respondents
English Literature	15%	69.00%
Linguistics	40%	11.70%
Education	2%	12.70%
TESL/TEFL	65%	3.30%

**Figure 1: Satisfied teachers with Majors**



Although a small percentage of teachers specifically mentioned the extra college subjects they did take (as the question asked), most instructors who answered this question mentioned all non-university relevant activities in which they participated for becoming extra competent regarding effective English teaching. There were a lot of teachers resorted to self-study using books, periodicals as well as the newspapers’ educational sections. More than a dozen instructors said they have attended private graduate level TESL workshops, seminars, or certification courses, according to the survey. A number of participants said they went to locally held teaching seminars and several also attended Spoken English classes.

**In-service teacher training**

Even though it’s evident that the majority of English teachers who replied the survey didn’t believe they were sufficiently prepared for teaching English when they were in college. This was believed that it’s also necessary to examine their reactions to occasional in service teacher training options. Largely, it was discovered that *vocational* teachers weren’t only more expected as compared to *general* teachers to join in-service seminars (shown in Table 5), but they were also more expected to join a greater amount of seminars (both held privately and at public level).

**Table 5: In-service seminar attendance rate**

	general high school	vocational high school
% of teachers attending seminars	9%	2%
Average no. private seminars attended	0%	0%
Average no. public seminars attended	9%	2%

There are various probable reasons for *vocational* teachers' increased attendance rates. The first is that *vocational* teachers have greater challenges in the classroom as compared to *general* educators. In Pakistan, *vocational* schools have far greater delinquency rates as compared to *general* schools; according to statistics (for instance, see Rohlen, 1983). In light of all the current media attention on issues of bullying, aggression, deteriorating moralities, and rising rate of suicides in students of Pakistani secondary schools, *vocational* teachers must be joining these seminars to learn how to more effectively deal with delinquency issues faced by their students.

It's also possible that vocational students have lesser motivation for studying English in secondary school because the large percentage of them go on to vocational jobs that don't require them to use English post-graduation, and consequently don't have an imperative necessity to do preparation for the English portions of college entry exams. Many vocational school teachers, from the experiences as teacher trainers that we have, expressly say that they are going to in-service training seminars hoping that they could find new approaches to cope with the deficiency of student inspiration. Another possible reason could be the grammar-translation technique of teaching English.

The general teachers prefer this strategy, which is still frequently employed in Pakistan (Widdows & Voller, 1991), as it largely reflects discrete-point, passive nature (Brown & Yamashita, 1995) entry exams questions at college level. This is quite easy for teaching with no prior training required because it's an instructor led methodology that doesn't necessitate the teacher's ability to communicate in English. Therefore, *general* instructors might have a feeling of less need of in service training as compared to *vocational* instructors, which are more willing for exploring the communicational teaching strategies as well as methods since they aren't bound by entry exams requirements. The point that vast bulk of seminar sessions mentioned by instructors are relevant to communicational language training and teaching, provides additional evidence for this way of thought (as shown in Table 6).

**Table 6: Most popular topics for in-service seminars**

Respondents	Topics
216	ways of communication
111	reading
90	spoken
45	teaching in groups
23	writing skills

Survey reveals that *vocational* and *general* teachers did give quite similar, largely positive overall rating to training's helpfulness and quality provided at official in service seminars, this point is worth noting that official seminars received significantly higher ratings as compared to private seminars in each case. The most plausible answer is that the large percentages of official seminars have compulsory attendance requirements. Regardless of the requirements or preferences of individual English instructors, principals and head English instructors usually pick who would be attending these seminars

It must also be mentioned that *general* as well as *vocational* instructors have quite limited chances of attending in service seminars.

### Communicative competence in the classroom

A new set of directions from the Ministry of Education (MoE) have come into place in recent times. It is the very first time, these directions, initially issued in 1989 (Ministry of Education, Science and Culture), stress and put an emphasis on the improvement and enhancement of students' communicational abilities in English as a main objective and aim of education in English classrooms of Pakistani high schools. According to our poll, 36 percent *vocational* teachers as well as 39 percent *general* teachers have studied the directions/guidelines. When the teachers were inquired about their utmost significant classroom objective, startling 77 percent *vocational* and 68 percent *general* teachers said that developing students' communicational abilities was the utmost important objective and purpose.

Even though this appears to be an encouraging group of answers, it's possible that few teachers have answered these questions because they believed that they should (i.e., trying to tell the surveyors which they did want to hear), or that a strangely big percentage of the 23 percent of teachers who answered to the survey supported communicational methodologies to language teaching, distorting the data abnormally. In fact, a number of other researches show that traditional, translation-oriented methodologies are currently used in most Pakistani classrooms (for example, see Law, 1994, 1995; Shimizu, 1995; Miller, 1995; Hino, 1988). Moreover, when questioned regarding which pressures had the most impact on their teaching approaches, the foremost response for both school types was to teach textbook content.

**Table 7: Largest pressures on classroom teaching**

General High Schools	Vocational Schools
Emphasis is on content	Emphasis is on content
To make parents happy	focus to make the students get ready for entrance exams
focus to make the students get ready for entrance exams	To follow (MoE) guidelines

If one believes that the (MoE) directions are operationalized through Government of Pakistan-approved textbooks, and instructors feel obligated for teaching these textbooks' content, communicational language teaching must flourish. Regrettably, Government of Pakistan-approved textbooks don't always reflect the Course of Study Guidelines. According to Knight (1995), there is a significant gap among the framework and repetition-based tasks and practices similar in Government of Pakistan-approved textbooks and communicational aims outlined in the Course of Study. To put it another way of Canale & Swain's (1980) Communicative Competence Model, perceived classroom teaching practices by Pakistani English instructors stress on Government of Pakistan-approved textbooks' usage for building students' syntactic ability almost to the omission of any effort for growing and improving their socio-linguistic, discourse, or strategic competency (Browne & Evans, 1994).

When it is considered that the large percentage of English instructors aren't given any proper teacher training, which just 34 percent *vocational* and 33 percent *general* teachers in our questionnaire stated that they make their peculiar lecture plans, and also each Government of Pakistan-approved textbooks has a teacher's guidebook having comprehensive lecture plans putting emphasis on translation as well as practice centered teaching methods, it's not startling that there is a large gap among the communicational objectives of the directions and practice centered teaching methods.

### Oral communication classes

As dictated by the guidelines of Ministry of Education (MoE), it's obligatory for every first year high school student to study an English course as part of their curriculum. There was no significant change regarding the emphasis on spoken communication among students. To pass this course, emphasis has been given on written communication only. Conversely, instructors of public schools were given directions and guidelines in every new policy to emphasize on verbal communication.

Apart from students who must take board examinations, English medium private schools are permitted to prepare their specific curriculum for all high school levels. Verbal communication has also been given

considerable attention in such schools where different English courses are taught to students. It appears to be a very favorable development, and numerous researches have demonstrated that students in such institutions perform well regarding verbal communication. For verbal communication, see the table below.

**Table 8: Outcomes of Oral Communication**

	course for written English	course for spoken English
Private general High schools	75%	25%
Government general high schools	0%	0%
vocational high schools	50%	50%

Despite the requirements for verbal communication being provided, just 9 percent of *general* teachers and no *vocational* teacher mentioned teaching it, as evident in Table 12. One probable reason for teachers to avoid this subject is a deficiency of self-belief in their competence to teach speech and debating because of an insufficiency of proper training in these subjects.

**Table 9: Teaching activities for speaking skills**

Focus	General High schools	Vocational Schools
1) Grammar explanation	7.6	5.7
2) Language drills	16.2	8.9
3) Use of audio tape	2.6	0
4) Review of old material	8.1	3.1
5) Pair and group work	10.2	13.5

### Conclusions and Implications

Among the most significant outcomes of this survey is that some of responders who have major in TESL/TEFL and education as undergraduates, definitely felt better equipped for the various difficulties they might come across as English instructors as compared to the ones having a major in English literature or linguistics. If indeed this survey’s findings in Gujrat district are representative of approaches practiced by English teachers across Pakistan, and also if (MoE) actually has a belief that emphasizing on the development of communicational abilities of students is a major objective of new Course of Study Guidelines, then the problem of instructor discontentment regarding merit and quantity of pre service training which was taken by them in college (specifically among the ones having a specialization in English literature) would need to be resolved. At the minimum, it appears that designing the undergraduate programs which will consequently allow and enable potential teachers to specialize in TESL/TEFL might effectively prepare them for the numerous issues they would encounter working as high school English instructors.

Even though instructors appeared to like the seminars they did attend, domestic budgets allocated for the purpose of in service training are still inadequate and not enough for having considerable impact on making instructors to be able to deal with challenges regarding teaching Verbal Communication (speech and debating). If implementing the new Course of Study Guidelines is regarded to be a main objective, a lot more attention must be paid to how to best make available the resources to the teachers which they require in order to perform successfully in the classrooms. Anyhow, the study shows that there are significant variances regarding the degree of experience, as well as classroom requirements and objectives, among *vocational* and *general* instructors in Gujrat district, and thus in-service seminar designers will do better to tackle these variances.

One more finding from this study is that (MoE)-approved textbooks do have a significantly influential impact on stated teaching attitude. It's viable that if attempts were done in order to boost and motivate textbook writers for adhering to the revised Course of Study Guidelines more thoroughly, classroom teaching practices would follow suit.

Despite the fact that this survey is restricted to high school teachers from a single district having a response rate of just 23 percent, we are certain that the findings warrant additional research. If contact information of all Pakistani high school instructors can be obtained, a follow-up survey administered in Urdu as well as English along with a stratified random sample of instructors from each district will greatly improve the generalization of the findings presented in this paper.

Even though it was hard to assess or even describe so many answers obtained from the open ended questions in this survey, diversity as well as range of answers demonstrated that well-conducted qualitative research work in this field is also needed. For instance, an in-depth case study in order to compare a limited count of English literature teachers with the ones having specialization in TESL, or one comparing *general* English teachers with *vocational* English teachers, will indeed give a much clearer picture of such teachers' everyday activities, worries, and difficulties.

During the last ten years, the Pakistani secondary English education system has seen significant changes and is presently at a critical phase. Regardless of its declared purpose of improving students' communicational English skills, secondary English education still faces numerous challenges. What is done regarding research, instructor training, and textbook development over next few years might very well decide whether the next Course of Study Guidelines will find Pakistani students enter twenty-first century having an emphasis on improvement and development of their communicational abilities in the most spoken language of the world, or it would be a return to more grammar translation.

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