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INVESTIGATING THE CHALLENGES FACED BY ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS AT THE UNIVERSITY LEVEL

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Abstract

English language teachers face numerous challenges while delivering lectures on English language courses at the university level. They impede the teachers' ability to impart English education effectively. This research study explored the challenges that English language teachers face in imparting English courses at the university level in Lahore city. We used a qualitative research approach and purposive sampling technique that comprised a total of 20 interviews with 10 male and 10 female English language teachers. All the interviews were conducted physically in person based on a semi-structured questions guide. To ensure the reliability of the responses the transcripts of the interviews were shared with the participants for reconfirmation of their responses. The results of semi-structured interviews revealed several challenges that include insufficient facilities, lack of training opportunities, students' lack of interest in English courses, rigid curriculum, inappropriate assessment procedures, and the lack of diverse cultural experiences/knowledge are the major challenges that are creating an ineffective and disengaging language learning environment in the classroom. The study concluded that imparting an English language course needs sincere efforts from English language teachers. Specifically, teachers who are trained and have the command of effective and reflecting teaching skills. Thus, it is essential for English language teachers as well as Government officials, and policymakers to comprehend and plan effective strategies to address these challenges that are linked to English language skills.

Keywords

English Language, English Language Teachers, English Courses, University Level



1. Introduction

It is well known that English language teachers face various challenges while teaching English courses. The most prominent challenge that they encounter is differing language proficiency levels and the presence of language barriers among students (Wang & Brown, 2018). In international and multicultural classrooms, students with varied linguistic backgrounds cause considerable differences in their level of English proficiency (Liu & Johnson, 2020). Consequently, teachers spend a lot of time trying to overcome these language obstacles, which can take away from the time they have to teach the English course and engage students in meaningful ways (Hughes & Clark, 2019). Another primary obstacle that teachers confront in government universities is the large number of students which reduces the effective interaction with students (Turner & Davis, 2022). According to Mitchell & Johnson, (2017) in overcrowded classrooms, it could be difficult for teachers to provide each student with the individualized attention they require, and teachers may find it difficult to meet each student's specific learning needs. Lee, & Smith, (2021) stated that this restriction frequently interferes with the professors' ability to promote in-depth conversations and prompt feedback, further hurting the learning experiences of the students. Students' understanding of the English subject may suffer from a lack of individualized attention, which can have a negative impact on learning outcomes and academic achievement (Scott & White, 2020). Moreover, Garcia & Turner, (2018) suggested that the prevalence of technology among students also presents a challenge for English teachers. Students

are exposed to digital distractions more frequently due to the excessive use of cell phones and social media. According to Adams & Hall, (2021) using digital gadgets excessively in English classrooms can cause students to lose focus. The use excessive use of these electronic devices is alarming because they could cause students to miss important material during lectures, which would ultimately affect how well they do academically on assignments and tests. Researchers and educators have raised serious concerns about the poor quality of the English language in a variety of educational settings (White & Allen, 2021). According to existing research studies, students who are experiencing an ineffective teaching methodology in English classes are unable to participate in English language learning activities successfully. The effect of such unpleasant experiences on the growth of linguistic competence is emphasized (Clark & Scott, 2018; Mitchell & Hall, 2020). Similar to this, the issue of English teachers' motivation has been noted as having a significant impact on language learning outcomes (Parker & Turner, 2019) According to Thompson & White, (2022) students' attitudes and interests are affected when teachers themselves lack motivation and excitement for teaching English courses. Students display decreased participation and engagement in school activities as a result, which limits their language development. Researchers and educators have investigated a variety of ways for the classroom development of the English language in order to solve these difficulties (Garcia & Lee, 2017). The importance of fostering a welcoming and accepting learning environment has been emphasized (Johnson & Davis, 2021). The detrimental effects of bullying

can be mitigated, and language learning experiences can be improved, by encouraging a sense of community and respect among pupils. Additionally, the use of interactive and innovative teaching methods helps in boosting students' enthusiasm and interest in learning the English language (Adams & Hughes, 2019). Students' curiosity and active involvement in the learning process are stimulated by activities that incorporate active participation, group work, and multimedia resources (Brown & Williams, 2020). Although, it is acknowledged as a crucial step towards enhancing language instruction to engage in professional development opportunities for English teachers (Smith & Johnson, 2018). Workshops and training sessions are used to provide teachers with the skills they need to design engaging and efficient language learning experiences (Maja, 2023). Additionally, teacher collaboration promotes the sharing of knowledge and expertise that helps in improving overall educational efficacy (Lee & Chan, 2023). The environment in which learners are immersed has a significant impact on their ability to learn a language, and research has underlined the importance of the linguistic context in influencing language acquisition (Malkawi *et al.*, 2023). It has been demonstrated that exposure to a rich linguistic environment, characterized by frequent encounters with native speakers and abundant language input, improves language proficiency (Tarrayo *et al.*, 2023). On the other hand, learners who have little exposure to language and a constrained linguistic context may have difficulty in improving language proficiency (Kumayas & Lengkoan, 2023). Another major challenge is related to the heterogeneity of pupils' language proficiency levels (Ubaydullayeva,

2022). Therefore, in university classrooms, students' language backgrounds and proficiency range from basic to expert levels, and teachers frequently face a formidable challenge in engaging and meeting the requirements of all students. It may be challenging for teachers to maintain a balance between the demands of meeting each student's unique linguistic needs and upholding an organized and demanding curriculum (Jaya *et al.*, 2022). This variation can impede the teacher's ability to provide each student with the individualized attention and feedback that is necessary for language development and success (Rezeki & Ibrahim, 2022). Furthermore, another set of challenges is posed by the English curriculum's complexity itself (Zhao & Lai, 2023). Therefore, English teachers' lesson plans must be well-organized and cohesive, addressing all aspects of the curriculum while promoting critical thinking and intellectual development in students. Additionally, keeping abreast of the most current developments and best practices in language instruction and incorporating them into the curriculum is essential for delivering an engaging and effective learning environment (Wahyuningsih & Afandi, 2020). Furthermore, there is a research gap in understanding the innovative effective teaching strategies and most recent developments in university English curriculum (Halim & Hashim, 2019) Although it is important to keep up with pedagogical developments, empirical studies analyzing the effects of technologies and innovative teaching methods are limited. Our research will address these research gaps and provide explicit information on the English curriculum by highlighting the challenges faced by university teachers.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To explore the challenges faced by English language teachers in imparting English courses at a university level.

2. Research Methodology

2.1 Research Design and Sampling

The study used a qualitative research approach that involved primary data collection from English language teachers through semi-structured interviews. We used a purposive sampling technique to select the 4 universities and English language teachers. Wherein at stage one, 2 public and 2 private universities served as the sampling unit, and at stage two, 10 male and 10 female English language teachers were the sampling units. The study participants comprised 20 English language teachers at the university level.

2.2 Research Instrument

To pursue the objectives of this research study, we used a semi-structured interview guide as the data-gathering instrument. The research instrument comprised two sections. The first section consisted of demographic questions about the English language teachers that provided information regarding gender, educational qualification, and work experience. The second section included nine open-ended questions regarding challenges that English language teachers face while implementing

the English curriculum. All the interviews were conducted physically by visiting the universities.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

All the interviews were conducted physically in person with 20 English language teachers. The interviews were conducted in natural settings within the respective university representing a higher educational level. All the interviews were recorded with informed consent. The authors also shared the purpose of the research with English language teachers. After conducting the interviews, the final transcripts of the interviews were shared with all interviewees to ensure the reliability of the responses.

2.4 Data Analysis

All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to maintain accuracy. We used a thematic method to the transcripts data in order to carefully review the patterns and themes of the challenges that English language teachers face while imparting the English courses. All themes were organized in order to get a thorough understanding of the perspectives and experiences of English language teachers. Excerpts and Quotations from the interviews were used to illustrate and support the emerging themes. To maintain the reliability of the data, all themes were double-reviewed and improved. The demographic information of study participants such as gender, qualification, and work experience are calculated and presented in table 1.

Table 1: Demographic information of English Language Teachers

Characteristics of the Respondents	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender		
Male	10	50
Female	10	50

Qualification		
Master's degree	1	5
MPhil	12	60
PhD	07	35
Work Experience		
5-10 years	4	20
10-15 years	3	15
15-20 years	8	40
Above 20 years	5	25

3. Results

Table 1 presents demographic information for the English language teachers that participated in the qualitative component of the study, which shows that 50 % of the English language teachers were male, and 50% were female. The majority of those English language teachers (60%) had an MPhil degree, and 35% had a PhD degree. Four out of twenty English language teachers (20 %) had 5-10 years of teaching experience, while 8 out of 20 (40%) had 15-20 years of teaching experience.

3.1 Results of the Semi-structured Interviews

The main themes that were derived from the analysis of the interview data are as follows:

3.1.1 Theme 1: Ensuring the English Language Quality

A general lack of proficient English language teachers was pointed out as a main challenge for poor quality English teaching methodology. English language teachers said that government rarely provides professional English language training programs. And most of the foreign English training platforms ask for heavy costs for registration. Another disadvantage of poor English language quality is a lack of government funding and support. Here is what different faculty members said:

Teachers try to maintain quality, for this purpose, they need the use of multimedia, audiovisual aids, teachers' regular training as well as technology to make sure the quality of the foreign language. As it was taught through traditional methods that bored the students and could not gain their attention for their learning. So, the main issue was the use of conventional methods adopted by the teachers teaching the English language. Research and Institutional organizations in Pakistan should develop some strategies with the purpose to the increase opportunities and facilities for English language teachers. This also includes opportunities for national/International professional English training programs free of cost and performance-based promotions, etc.

3.1.2 Theme 2: Lack of Motivation for English Teachers

English language teachers rarely receive any incentive or appreciation from concerned authorities. Students at university do not show their interest and enthusiasm for English courses. Therefore, English language teachers felt less motivated. Here are the responses from different English language teachers:

Most teachers asked for the need analysis that was not undertaken before the initiation of the designing phase. A teacher pointed out that teacher lacks communication skills and they need funds to overcome issues of supervision of English language course implementation of language students. Most teachers pointed use of technology as a grave challenge while teaching the language; problems like changes in syllabus, presence of large classes, teaching methods, lack of quality teaching literature as well as lack of teachers' refresher training were causing the hurdles in getting quality of teaching. Teachers too, lost their interest to maintain a class environment that may prove supportive to increase the quality of teaching the English language.

3.1.3 Theme 3: Development of the English Language

Students' lack of interest in English language courses is considered a primary factor at the university level and is linked with the norm of rote learning based on the drill method rather than meaningful learning. The pupils initially try to memorize English language topics by heart, but they are unsuccessful since English is grammar-based and with specific rules and application-oriented. Some representative quotes are listed below:

We were not accustomed to holding cultural as well as communicative activities regularly, so students became uninterested in the process of learning quality. Moreover, the natural flow of language is possible in the natural environment. I use a mix of interactive activities and specifically designed worksheets. Students are encouraged to participate in group discussions, role-plays, and debates to improve their speaking abilities. These activities provide them with practice expressing their

thoughts clearly and confidently. Regular writing assignments and feedback sessions are offered to improve writing abilities, with an emphasis on grammar, vocabulary, and general coherence. Comprehension activities are used to improve listening abilities. Varied books tailored to the interests and talents of the students are given as reading assignments, inspiring them to discuss and analyze the material. By utilizing these techniques, it is hoped to foster the establishment of a dynamic and all-encompassing learning environment for the English language.

3.1.4 Theme 4: Validity of English Curriculum

The curriculum is theory-based and there is less emphasis on practical work. English is a practical subject where students learn, and practice such as speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In Pakistan, most teachers emphasize reading and writing skills which often lacks the practical application of speaking and listening in a real-life situation. Here is what different English language teachers said:

University curricula are inappropriate and theory-based since they might not be adequately prepared students for challenges in the real world. There is a need to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical work. Teachers are looking for curricula that give students the knowledge and experiences they need to succeed outside of the classroom. Students can be equipped with the skills they need to confidently manage the complexity of the professional world and make significant contributions to their areas of interest by reevaluating and adopting a more experiential and industry-aligned curriculum. English language curriculum and textbook are not aligned and lack to

fulfill the requirements of society. During the phase of curriculum development, the need for analysis of students, teachers as well as society was not taken into consideration by the government.

3.1.5 Theme 5: Immeasurable Students Learning

The majority of teachers do not properly utilize effective assessment procedures, which causes huge gaps in the assessment of student language competency. To ensure that English language teachers have the knowledge and abilities to appropriately assess their students' language capacities and to promote more thorough and effective language assessment procedures:

Poor assessment practices and the difficulties in effectively assessing student language proficiency reduce the efficiency of language teaching. Measuring students' true language ability and giving them personalized help is crucial for achieving a successful and empowering learning experience. This can only be done by improving assessment procedures and empowering the learning experience.

3.1.6 Theme 6: Learning Language from the Environment

In Pakistan, the majority of the student's native language is their mother tongue such as Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki. There is a need to develop students' interest in English subjects. So, they may embrace English as a useful tool for international communication. And that might open up a world of chances for their future success by cultivating a welcoming and accommodating learning environment. Here is what different English language teachers said:

The environment in which pupils learn a language

is crucial in shaping their linguistic abilities and cultural awareness. While parents are not committed to providing a positive learning environment at home for their children. In a non-English-speaking nation like Pakistan, mastering the English language is extremely difficult. Although English is taught to children in classrooms, a significant barrier is created by the widespread habit of switching to the regional language outside of the classroom. It is crucial for society and communities to support regular English usage outside of class hours in order to foster language proficiency. By empowering students to communicate successfully in a globalized society and removing language obstacles, we can play a crucial part in encouraging and celebrating the use of the English language.

3.1.7 Theme 7: Low productivity among English language learners

Most University teachers also felt that students usually took English language courses for granted and they do not understand the importance of English language courses for their careers or their relevance to society. Here is what different English language teachers said:

Our students like to read the text just as a mandatory need to cover the syllabus and to clear the exam. They are not interested in doing extra to get knowledge and develop a deep insight. Exams are significant milestones, but the real benefit of learning English is in lies students' ability with communication skills that go beyond academic success. Emphasizing holistic learning can unlock doors to lifelong learning and transform students into competent, confident, and culturally aware individuals.

3.1.8 Theme 8: Learning Skills from the English Language

The English language teachers provided several factors that are barriers to learning skills from the English Language. Unfortunately, some English language teachers only emphasize completing the course work over the instillation of critical abilities in students. Here is what they said:

The English language offers a wide range of valuable skills that go beyond textbook knowledge, yet many students are deprived of this extensive learning opportunity. Some university English language teachers, merely focus on completing the syllabus, only concentrate on finishing the coursework rather than equipping students with essential skills. In order to foster students' communication, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, English language teachers must give skill-building a higher priority than merely covering the curriculum. The time-consuming nature of the syllabus is sometimes used as a justification for ignoring worthwhile practice and skill development opportunities. A comprehensive strategy that encourages critical thinking, creativity, effective communication, and cultural awareness must be adopted by English language teachers if they are to fully realize the potential of English language learning. Students can successfully traverse the intricacies of the modern world and forge a path to

success and personal growth by concentrating on these transforming abilities.

3.1.9 Theme 9: Lack of sharing culture.

The inflexible curriculum makes it difficult for teachers to instill the value of cultural diversity in language acquisition. A more adaptable and inclusive educational strategy is required that will enable English language teachers to foster global citizenship and empathy throughout the language acquisition process in order to fully embrace the transforming power of cultural diversity. Here is what they said:

Due to inadequate exposure to varied cultural perspectives, language learners face significant challenges. Embracing many cultures fosters empathy, open-mindedness, and global citizenship in addition to enriching language proficiency. Students need to have authentic cross-cultural encounters if they are to develop well-rounded language abilities and contribute to a more connected and inclusive society. Language learning that takes into account cultural diversity aims to open up new perspectives, break down barriers, and create bridges of understanding between individuals from various cultural backgrounds. Our linguistic abilities are enriched and a sense of respect and empathy for all peoples around the world is cultivated by immersing ourselves in varied cultural experiences.

Table 2: Description of the themes used for the interviews.

Theme	Description
Ensuring the English Language Quality	Challenges in improving and maintaining language instruction, including effective and proficient teaching methods.
Lack of motivation among English teachers	Factors contributing to English teachers' low motivation and its impact on teaching performance.
Development of the English Language	Strategies to foster English language growth in various skills.

Validity of English Curriculum	Concerns about the appropriateness and relevance of the curriculum at the university level.
Immeasurable Student Learning	Assessments strategies and difficulties in accurately assessing student language proficiency.
Learning Language from the Environment	Importance of the language-learning environment and its influence on acquisition.
Low productivity among English language learners	Factors influencing students' productivity in language learning.
Skills Learned from the English Language	Broader competencies and skills acquired through English learning.
Lack of sharing cultural	Difficulties related to insufficient exposure to various cultural perspectives in the context of language learning.

4. Discussion

In this study, we used a purposive sampling technique and qualitative interview-based research to explore the challenges that English language teachers face while teaching English courses and language acquisition. According to the literature review, diverse teaching methods are crucial for language learning because it encourages empathy, open-mindedness, and global citizenship in students (Irkinovich, 2022). Our findings, however, imply that teachers frequently struggle to impart the worth of the English language for real-life situations because of the inflexible curriculum. English language teachers stated that due to the lack of professional training programs and availability of relevant audio/visual facilities in their classrooms, the desired outcomes are not fulfilling. The restrictions imposed by the required curriculum made it difficult for many English language teachers to use different teaching methodologies in the classroom (Liu & Johnson, 2020). They emphasized that they were forced to closely follow the curriculum, which left little room for exploring a variety of subjects or developing cross-cultural

understanding. According to Lee & Smith, (2021) English language acquisition includes the challenges such as insufficient support from parents and institutions, a lack of opportunities for professional development, and organizational constraints all are contributing factors to the low motivation of English language teachers and affect their ability to perform well in the classroom. In order to solve these issues, educational institutions must prioritize teacher well-being and provide the tools and training required to increase motivation levels, which will eventually improve teaching quality (Garcia & Turner, 2018). The interviewees emphasized the importance of diverse teaching methods with the purpose to promote the development of different English language skills, with a special emphasis on speaking, writing, listening, and reading skills. It was emphasized that methods including interactive exercises, customized drills, and exposure to actual language situations were successful (White & Allen, 2021). The development of well-rounded language abilities can help students better prepare themselves to speak effectively in a variety of circumstances.

Participants expressed their worries about students' training for real-world challenges and demands and regarding the suitability and relevance of the university curriculum (Mitchell & Hall, 2020). To resolve this problem, it was suggested that the curriculum be continuously reviewed and improved in order to better meet students' requirements and the changing demands of the modern world. In another research study, Brown & Williams, (2020) investigated the difficulties of using appropriate assessment techniques and determining a student's level of language competency. The majority of the interviewees mentioned challenges that include the lack of adequate assessment tools and the challenges associated with quantifying the results of language acquisition. Adoption of a variety of evaluation strategies that take into account various language abilities and give students useful feedback was advised to achieve effective assessments (Parker & Turner, 2019). English language teachers emphasized the importance of the learning environment and how it affects language development. Brown & Williams, (2020) highlighted the importance of cultural immersion, exposure to realistic language situations, and the influence of social interactions on language learning. It was advised that inclusive and diverse settings be fostered by educational institutions and society, encouraging students to engage with many cultural perspectives, in order to create the best possible environment for language learning. To conclude, a more comprehensive and impactful language education journey can be fostered, benefiting both English language teachers and students by addressing factors causing teachers' low motivation, utilizing effective language

development strategies, ensuring curriculum relevance, improving assessment approaches, and highlighting the importance of the language-learning environment.

5. Conclusion

The results of this study highlighted a significant challenge in the field of English language education. The lack of facilities and resources for both English language teachers and students is a major cause for worry. Due to a lack of access to contemporary teaching methods and educational resources, the learning process as a whole is impeding, and the possibility for creative and interesting language training is constrained. Additionally, English language teachers' professional development is impeded by the lack of regular training sessions, which could result in the use of outdated teaching strategies. The lack of student enthusiasm for the English topic is another significant concern mentioned during the interviews. This lack of excitement may be partially related to the strict curriculum and inappropriate assessment methods used by certain English teachers. The overemphasis on rote learning and syllabus coverage stifles creativity and critical thinking, which results in disengaged students who don't fully understand the English language's practical implications. Furthermore, the lack of free workshops or courses makes it difficult for English language teachers to continue their professional growth. There aren't many possibilities to advance pedagogical knowledge and stay current with best practices, which could cause teaching methods to stagnate and demotivate teachers. The study also revealed challenges related to the lack of exposure to other cultural perspectives in the context of language

learning. Students' intercultural knowledge and global perspectives are impeded by the limited incorporation of varied cultural experiences in the language-learning environment. This deficiency prevents students from fully appreciating the richness of language as a means of intercultural dialogue and understanding. The results of this study highlighted the urgent need for extensive improvements in English language education. The difficulties of inadequate facilities and training opportunities for teachers, the encouragement of student interest in the subject, the revision of the curriculum and assessment procedures, and the promotion of diverse cultural experiences in the classroom are crucial steps toward creating a more effective and engaging language learning environment. A more enriching language education journey can be paved, and students can be given valuable skills to succeed in a world that is more connected and diverse by providing teachers with the tools and knowledge they need and encouraging students to develop a deeper appreciation for the English language.

6. Limitations

The study's findings provide insightful information about the challenges faced by English language teachers. However, there are a few limitations that must be taken into account. First of all, this study used a small sample size of English language teachers from particular universities or areas. The findings may not be as generalizable to a larger group of English language teachers as a result. Future research could take into account larger and more varied samples that include a range of educational institutions and demographics to strengthen the study's validity. Secondly, self-

reporting bias could have an impact on the information gathered through surveys and interviews. Participants may exhibit socially acceptable reactions or false portrayals of their own experiences or perspectives. Self-reporting bias is a prevalent drawback in qualitative research, even though anonymity and secrecy were assured. Furthermore, other influences can affect the study's results. The study might not have taken into account elements like shifts in educational systems, socioeconomic conditions, or cultural norms that could affect the challenges English teachers have when teaching the language. Lastly, the reliability and validity of the interview responses may be impacted by memory recall or participants' interpretations of the questions. The study's conclusions might have been strengthened by measures to increase the legitimacy of the interviews, such as performing member checks or triangulating data from other sources.

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