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## **A Study of the ELT Teachers' Perception of Teaching Language through Literature at the Higher Secondary School and Degree Levels in Pakistani Milieu**

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### **Abstract**

In Pakistan, ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels do not provide ample opportunities for the fulfillment of governmental objectives (Hafeez, 2004). Over the past two decades and because of the influence of linguistics as a discipline there has generally been felt the need for revising the existing ELT courses at both the levels.

The present study was designed with the intent to find out the soundness of such a generally observed and overtly done criticism of ELT courses at the target levels.

The methodology, we used, was centered on the teachers' perception of ELT courses at both the target levels. The data collected were primarily quantitative in the form of a short survey. The structure of the survey was based on a short questionnaire of 9 items asking for teachers' perception on these courses.

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10 : 5 May 2010

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The questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 226 English teachers who were actively involved in the teaching of English both at the higher secondary school and degree levels across the country.

The results, obtained through the SPSS Statistics Version 17 analysis showed that the teachers were least satisfied with the courses they were teaching. According to their perception, the content of ELT courses predominantly carries literature components, lacks opportunities for teaching the four language skills and, therefore, needs to be revised.

The study suggested that future ELT curriculum designers should think about the inclusion of local culture in the curriculum, make the courses need-based, and bring in internal harmony in these respective courses in terms of focusing on teaching language through literature.

## **Introduction**

Over the past two decades, there has generally been a common desire among ELT experts to look for a meaningful balance to help achieve most of the set objectives in the curriculum of English for academic purposes in Pakistan. Usually, this urge refers to the balance between language and literature in ELT courses. For instance, recently Siddiqui (2007: 166) insists on, “A more balanced approach is required in our curriculum, i.e. a productive blend of language and literature”.

The reason behind this urge is simple.

At present, unfortunately in our schools and colleges, we come across mainly literature based text-books in ELT courses at different levels. “The syllabi at various levels lay least emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Most of the textbooks are literature-based. As in many other developing countries, the emphasis is on ‘classics’ or a ‘high caliber’ literature” (ibid, 2007: 151). As most of the writers and editors of the textbooks have the background of literature only, they consider English to be English literature only. Siddiqui criticizes them as he maintains, “Their passion for literature is manifest in the course-books designed by them which expose the students to ‘great literature’ without helping them to improve their basic language skills” (ibid, 2007: 151).

This extra emphasis on literature has invited a lot of criticism from a group of active teachers in general and ELT experts in particular. They simply consider literature to be a luxury which most of our learners in Pakistan cannot afford as they are not usually equipped with the basic language skills which are essential for using language as a tool of communication.

## **Governmental Objectives for ELT**

At the outset, it seems apt to see what objectives generally government sets for ELT courses and to see whether the prescribed ELT courses offer room for the materialization of these objectives. Afterwards, the nature and value of the governmental provision in terms of the content of ELT courses at higher secondary and degree levels will be analyzed in the light of teachers' viewpoints.

Broadly looking at some of the governmental objectives reveals that learners are expected to use language contextually after completion of their ELT courses. Hafeez (2004) sums up some of the main governmental objectives of ELT courses at different levels in Pakistan in the following way:

- The learners are expected to learn the language for using it in communication.
- The learners are expected to develop their listening skills so that they can understand the language in formal and informal context.
- The learners need to develop their speaking skills so that they can communicate in formal and informal context.
- The learners need to develop their reading skills so that they can comprehend different types of texts.
- The learners are expected to develop their writing skills so that they can write different things such as writing reports, essays, letters etc.

## **Language Skills in the Pakistani ELT Program**

The traditional four language skills involved in the expression of purpose and meaning, and in the creation and interpretation of messages, provide the basis for the general ELT courses' design (White, 2000). This straightforward theory generally helps the syllabus designers to involve the development of these language skills in learners as their core objectives. Now the question arises whether or not this theoretical framework of the general ELT courses in Pakistan is made a practical reality.

As summarized by Hafeez above, according to the governmental objectives of the teaching of English language at both the higher secondary school and degree levels in Pakistan, the learners are expected to improve all their language skills namely speaking, reading, writing and listening.

Unfortunately, a cursory look at ELT curriculum suggests that there is hardly any time offered to provide any space in the syllabus, methodology and examination etc. to execute all these objectives stated above. Mainly ELT curriculum in Pakistan is designed by

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10 : 5 May 2010

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incorporating foreign classical literature into it without paying heed to the provision of room for the fulfillment of the target objectives.

### **The Aim of This Paper**

Now, in order to investigate the validity of this over-generalized observation, it seems imperative to take an in-depth look at ELT courses. For this, the present study was undertaken with a belief that the teachers' perception would help analyze the value and nature of the content of ELT courses at the higher secondary and degree levels. Besides, the study was undertaken with the assumption that the above governmental objectives of ELT generally would keep failing until and unless teachers and students are provided with practical opportunities in the form of course content and suitable strategies of teaching/learning.

Thus, in this paper, we simply aim at analyzing the value and nature of the content of ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels. Unlike, some previous studies on the evaluation of ELT curriculum in Pakistan undertaken from the viewpoint of the researchers (Mansoor, 1993, 2005 and Siddiqui, 2007), we intend to analyze the value and nature of the content of the current ELT courses in the light of those teachers' perception who are actively involved in the process of teaching these courses. We feel it is important to ask the teachers themselves because they, being important stakeholders, are closest to the process and most involved in the present context. Again, it is evident that teachers who are teaching these courses may come forward with their firsthand feelings, observations and suggestions on the courses which previously have not been duly acknowledged and analyzed.

Teachers' input would enhance the validity of the simple methodology used, irrespective of the findings, for the study on ELT courses in two ways. One, the perceptions of the active teachers on the value and nature of the content would be based on their day to day experiences of teaching the content of ELT courses. Secondly, like any other sector, education in Pakistan too is based on a highly bureaucratic and hierarchical set up. Due to this, the teachers generally do not have their say on curriculum issues. Providing an opportunity to them to express their perception on ELT courses and analyzing their perceptions will help improve ELT methodology in Pakistan.

### **A Brief Critical Review of the state of ELT Curriculum in Pakistan**

English enjoys premier status besides 69 living indigenous languages in Pakistan (Zuberi, 2005 as cited in Rasool, 2007). It continues to be the language of power and government in this country ever since independence in 1947 (Rahman, 1998, 2002). As an emblem of its popularity, English Language is a compulsory subject from class I in all formal

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 5 May 2010

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educational institutions in Pakistan (Jalal, 2004). However, the spread of English, with an associated increase in the teaching-learning of the language to a growing number of learners in Pakistan, has led to a number of issues and challenges for adequate provisions for teaching-learning the language across all formal levels of education (Shamim, 1998; Jalal, 2004; Cameron, 2003). These issues and challenges are compounded at higher secondary school and degree level when English is taught as a compulsory subject without much thought given to the needs of the learners for using English at these levels. These academic issues can be briefly discussed under the following three subheadings which more or less are interrelated:

### **The Issue of Classical Literature in Pakistan**

ELT courses at the higher secondary and degree levels in Pakistan have always been permeated with classical literature. Siddiqui (2007) cites an example from a higher secondary school level English book carrying S. T. Coleridge's poem 'Youth and Age' wherein words and phrases used like *Ere*, *woeful*, *'Tis*, *thou*, *thou art*, *thy*, *Vesper*, *hath*, *wert*, *aye*, *Masker*, *hast*, have got nothing to do with the practical needs of the learners. The learners rather find themselves completely lost when they come across such archaic words and phrases. At times, this leads to expected low motivation level for teachers and learners as well as other contextual factors, such as large classes, that impede effective teaching and learning of the language (Mansoor, 2005).

This criticism implies that instead of classical literature, use of more modern literature may be more appropriate and may well cater to the learners' linguistic needs. To be more precise, for instance, instead of classical literature, perhaps, literature written by post-colonial writers may be more relevant, for it will be relatively more contextual and contemporary on one hand whereas on the other as it is generally written in simple English. It may well be more easy to comprehend and manipulate for learning.

### **The Issue of Foreign Culture**

The second issue is more or less related to the first issue. It is the prevalence of non-indigenous literature in ELT courses in Pakistan. Unfortunately, a coherent approach associated with effective language teaching (i.e. language curriculum in relation to values, context, content, etc.) has hardly ever been followed up while designing courses for ELT in Pakistan. For instance, a critical look at the courses available for ELT at both the higher secondary school and degree levels reveals that most of them are either imported or books of English writers from developed countries which are meant to be used for learners whose native language is English (Mansoor, 1993).

Besides, these courses apparently lack cohesion in terms of given content and set objectives to serve as an influential force to help students learn meaningfully at both the respective levels. Thus, the lack of local materials for academic purposes coupled with deficient harmony in these courses vis-à-vis meaningful content has led to the teaching and learning of English being regarded with suspicion by the local ELT experts like Mansoor (1993, 2005), Siddiqui (2007), and Shamim (1998).

It is also felt by some pressure groups that the current ELT provision leads, on one hand, to undue influence of western culture on the learners and an alienation of their own culture (ibid.). As a result, despite the highly positive attitudes and high motivational intensity to learn-teach English exhibited now and then by the learners and teachers in Pakistan, the position and status of English in our educational set-up remains pointless (Siddiqui, 2007).

### **The Issue of Need for Reorganization of ELT**

The third issue is related to the realization of the need for reorganization of ELT in Pakistan. To reemphasize the less-than-perfect state of ELT in Pakistan, the findings of a study conducted by Tribble and Shamim (2005) indicate the urgent need for the reorganization of English Language teaching at higher levels as well. They maintain that special focus is required on teacher development and call for the provision of adequate materials and resources for implementing curricula that aim to address the needs of students for studying through the medium of English in higher education. The expectations of the employers in terms of candidates' English language skills, both spoken and written, in a highly competitive job market, further underline the need for offering relevant and high quality English language programmes in higher education institutions in Pakistan.

Similarly the findings of Mansoor's (2005) study conducted at Aga Khan University also suggest that students and teachers are not satisfied with the availability and quality of their present English department in degree awarding institutions. In addition, her study highlights the need to develop text-books and materials in keeping with local needs and culture.

### **Methodology**

In this paper, we have investigated the correctness of the above stated observations on the effectiveness of ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels. The methodology we used was centered on the teachers' perception of ELT courses at both the target levels. The data collected were primarily quantitative in the form of a short survey. The aim was to see through the teachers' first hand views on ELT courses they teach at both levels. Moreover the data hopefully were to clarify whether or not there exists some sort of usefulness in the target level ELT courses in Pakistan. The sole use of the survey

Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)

10 : 5 May 2010

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A Study of the ELT Teachers' Perception of Teaching Language through Literature at the Higher Secondary School and Degree levels in Pakistani Milieu

method can be justified by our focusing on teachers' perception only regarding the courses.

The structure of the survey was based on a short questionnaire of 9 items asking for teachers' perception on the courses they teach. The questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of 113 English teachers who were actively involved in the teaching of English both at higher secondary school and degree level across the country. The results, obtained through the analysis done on SPSS Version 17, were tabulated in frequencies and percentages. In addition we have applied normal Z-test to see whether or not the consulted teachers were satisfied with ELT courses they teach at target levels.

## Findings and Discussion

This section examines and discusses the combined results based on the four basic aims:

- How far do the teachers think the current ELT courses they teach are literature or language based?
- To what extent do the teachers think that the content of the current ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree level courses carry room for teaching four language skills?
- Are the teachers satisfied with the current ELT courses they teach?
- What do the teachers suggest to improve the teaching and learning of English language in terms of the content of the ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels in Pakistan?

In the following section, each of these questions will be addressed.

### How do the teachers think that the current ELT courses they teach are literature or language based?

The analysis of the teachers' perception on the nature of ELT courses provides evidence that the ELT courses in Pakistan are perceived to carry predominantly literature components despite the fact that majority of the learners experienced serious difficulties in understanding an alien literature. 55.4% of the teachers consulted in this study felt that the focus in their course was more on literature than on language.

**Table 1: Are the ELT courses literature or language based?**

Response	Frequency	Percent
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Literature Based	126	55.4
Language Based	58	25.8
Literature and Language Based	32	14.4
Other	10	04.4
Total Respondents	226	100

This simple analysis is quite important to highlight the problem with ELT courses at the target levels. Mostly, the learners at both levels are required to study all genres of literature including short stories, poems, essays, plays and novels. This study substantiates Siddiqui (2007)'s contention about the content of ELT courses. He asserts, "...this extra emphasis on literature has invited a lot of criticism from a group of practicing teachers and linguists" (ibid: 163).

The extra emphasis on literature in ELT courses has been there for a long time in Pakistan. Since independence in 1947, only classical literature has been permeating ELT courses in Pakistan. But the advent and popularity of linguistics as a discipline across ELT domain of late has necessitated the debate for inclusion of language based ELT courses. Still, as reflected in the teachers' perception in this study, the ELT courses predominantly carry literature at the target levels. It seems thus a matter of serious concern for the future ELT curriculum developers to plan according to the needs of the time.

**To what extent do the teachers think that the content of the current ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels courses carry room for teaching four language skills?**

The analysis of the survey questionnaire provides evidence that the teachers feel that there is insufficient room in the curriculum for the teaching of listening skills. In this survey, only 21.9% (16.9 + 05.0) of those teachers who replied to the questionnaire felt that there was sufficient provision (See Table 2). The picture is similar for speaking skills. Only 06.8% of the respondents felt that there was sufficient room in the curriculum for the teaching of speaking skills (See Table 3). We have a similar story for reading and writing skills as well. 26.9 % (18.8 + 8.1) of the respondents feels that there is sufficient room for teaching reading skills (See Table 4), and only 38.7% (29.7+9.0) feels that there is sufficient room for teaching writing skills (See Table 5).

**Table 2: Provision for teaching Listening Skills in the Content of ELT courses**



Response	Frequency	Percent
25%	68	31.3
50%	54	24.0
75%	38	16.9
100%	12	05.0
Less than 25%	14	06.0
No Response	40	16.8
Total Respondents	226	100

**Table 3: Provision for teaching Speaking Skills in the Content of ELT courses**

Response	Frequency	Percent
25%	114	49.6
50%	32	14.4
75%	16	06.8
Less than 25%	22	09.8
No Response	42	19.4
Total Respondents	226	100

**Table 4: Provision for teaching Reading Skills in the Content of ELT courses**

Response	Frequency	Percent
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25%	46	21.5
50%	78	36.5
75%	40	18.8
100%	20	08.1
Less than 25%	12	04.9
No Response	24	10.2
Total Respondents	226	100

**Table 5: Provision for teaching writing Skills in the Content of ELT courses**

Response	Frequency	Percent
25%	52	23.1
50%	48	21.4
75%	68	29.7
100%	20	09.0
Less than 25%	06	02.3
No Response	32	14.5
Total Respondents	226	100

The main reason for the teachers' perception that ELT courses at the target levels do not provide sufficient room for the teaching of the four language skills is probably that there is too much of a focus on literature in the curriculum.

A further reason for these findings could be the large classes that teachers have to cope with as mentioned by Mansoor (c.f) as well. Because the classes are large in terms of student strength, a great deal of teachers' time is spent in organizing the learners, taking the attendance, etc. The third obvious reason for the present findings could be the defective educational system in Pakistan, especially the lack of adequate number of trained teachers. Indirectly we also mean that the teachers are not well trained in Pakistan. Due to this reason as well, teachers are unable to effectively mould their teaching according to the

prescribed curriculum objectives. Yet another weighty reason that may hamper the teachers from even thinking to adapt ELT courses at the target levels for teaching all the four basic language skills is, of course, their focus on making the learners get through the examinations that the latter are to take. Usually examinations in the English language at both levels predominantly demand the learners to display effective writing skills only.

**Are the teachers satisfied with the current ELT courses they teach?**

The close-ended item of the survey questionnaire asked for the teachers’ satisfaction or otherwise with the current ELT courses they are teaching. Their responses gave a clear cut view that nearly 83% of the respondents felt that they were not satisfied with the current ELT courses they teach.

**Table 6: Are the teachers satisfied with the current ELT courses in Pakistan?**

Response	Frequency	Percent
Satisfied	24	09.5
Dissatisfied	182	82.7
Don’t know	20	07.8
Total	226	100

Table 6 also suggests that barely 09.5% of the teachers covered in this survey felt satisfied with the courses they teach. It is an alarming reality. It is, therefore, evident that the majority may ask for bringing in some improvements to the existing content of the courses.

We also tried to verify the teachers’ dissatisfaction vis-à-vis these courses by analyzing their responses inferentially as well. For this we applied Z test to see whether their responses approve of their feeling or not. If we hypothesize that

H0:  $\mu = 0$  i.e. the teachers who were consulted in this survey are satisfied with current ELT courses they teach

H1:  $\mu \neq 0$  i.e. the teachers who were consulted in this survey are not satisfied with current ELT courses they teach.

We took 5 % level of significance to test the above hypothesis

### One-Sample Statistics Z-test

	n	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Are you satisfied with the current ELT courses you teach?	226	1.87	0.421	0.038

$$Z = \frac{\bar{X} - \mu}{\frac{S^{\circ}}{(n^2)^{1/2}}}$$

$$Z = \frac{1.87 - 0}{\frac{0.421}{(226^2)^{1/2}}}$$

$$Z = 46.66$$

The tabulated value of Z is 1.96.

**Conclusion of the Z test:** As the calculated value of Z is greater than the tabulated value from Z-table, we reject the above null hypothesis (H0) and accept the alternate hypothesis (H1) viz. the teachers who were consulted in the survey are not satisfied with the current ELT courses they teach.

The hypothesis is statistically significant.

### What do the teachers suggest to improve the teaching and learning of English language in terms of the content of the ELT courses at the higher secondary school and degree levels in Pakistan?

The open-ended item of the survey questionnaire sought suggestions from the teachers included in the survey to improve teaching and learning of English language in terms of the content of ELT courses at higher secondary school and degree levels in Pakistan. The suggestions made by the teachers as to how things can be improved are shown in Table 7 below.

Response	Frequency	Percent
Equal importance to language and literature	52	21.2
The courses should focus on the learners' needs i.e. functional English	68	31.2
Listening and Speaking are important	26	11.4
Practical Use of Grammar	68	31.2
Curriculum should quench moral thirst of the learners	12	05.0
Total	226	100

**Table 7: Suggestions to improve the teaching and learning of English with special reference to Curriculum**

The analysis of these suggestions reveals that the teachers are relatively dissatisfied with the courses they are teaching, as these do not cater to the needs of the learners in practical life. Their perception that the present courses are mainly literature based may indicate a need for these to be integrated with the context based language oriented content to help learners make conversant and competent in practical life.

A similar sort of survey conducted in UK (2004) by CILT, the Association for Language Learning and the Independent Schools Modern Languages Association consider languages an essential element in the curriculum up to at least 16 (Retrieved on 14-03-10 from [www.cilt.org.uk/key/trends2004.htm](http://www.cilt.org.uk/key/trends2004.htm)). In the context of the present survey, Hafeez (2004), for instance, suggests that the content of ELT courses should stress the importance of providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempt to integrate such activities into a wider programme of language learning.

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10 : 5 May 2010

Zafar Iqbal Khattak M.A. Ph.D. Candidate, Saiqa Imtiaz Asif, Ph.D. and Bashir Khan Khattak, M.A.

A Study of the ELT Teachers' Perception of Teaching Language through Literature at the Higher Secondary School and Degree levels in Pakistani Milieu

In other words, the learners at the target levels do not learn English language subconsciously because the academic and social milieu does not support absorption of the target language naturally. Hafeez, therefore, stressed that, in order to fulfill their needs, the learners be equipped with some formal opportunities to learn the target language in an instructional setting through a well planned and meaningfully organized curriculum. The teachers stressed the introduction of functional aspects of language teaching instead of focusing on literary and abstract usage of language in the courses. However, the teachers who formed part of this survey did not reject the importance of literature as relevant content in ELT courses outright, as nearly a quarter of them suggested the need for giving equal importance to both language and literature at the target levels ELT courses. Here, we think they hinted at the need to using literature for language teaching as it has been postulated by many a researcher like (Kelly and Krishnan 1995, Gilroy and Parkinson 1997, Belcher and Hirvela 2000, White 2000, Hanauer 2001, and Kim 2004). Their research recognizes the importance of integrating literature into language teaching.

### **Other Missing Strategies**

Besides, there are certain other grounds as well that add to the precarious state of the teaching and learning of the subject of English in Pakistan. One of these is the absence of true reflection of the needs of the learners in ELT courses at both the levels. Their needs call for the introduction of practical or functional aspects of English whereas they are needlessly fed with complex grammatical and alien literary components, e.g. the use of phrasal verbs, translation into English (grammatical) and 'The Little Willow' a story by Virginia Woolf (literary).

Secondly, as per the perception of the majority of the teachers, the dissatisfactory provision of the current ELT courses indirectly reveals the fact that the vast majority of the learners at these levels cannot feel at home while going and getting through their respective literature based ELT courses. These learners generally face difficulties while taking on non-contextual and imported ELT courses mainly because of the fact that they cannot feel subconsciously being attached to them. Instead they toil consciously with little success. For instance, the learners at the higher secondary school level feel alienated when they take on the short stories like 'The Doll's House', 'The Red Shoes,' etc. and similarly at the degree level, the learners have difficulty to deal with the short stories like 'A Conversation With My Father' and 'A Shadow in the Rose Garden'.

Finally, and most importantly, some of the governmental objectives of the teaching of English Language generally will definitely fail until and unless the set objectives meet practical opportunities for their materialization. The analysis of the perception of the teachers included in this short survey reveals that unfortunately, there is hardly any

adequate time offered to provide any space in the syllabus, methodology and examination etc. to execute governmental objectives. Siddiqui (2007) reinforces the teachers' perception when he categorically states that the syllabi at various levels in Pakistani ELT education, lay least emphasis on listening and speaking skills. Contrarily, most of the textbooks of English are literature based. The apparent result is that the writers/editors of these literature based books expose the learners only to great literature without helping them to improve their basic language skills.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The analysis of the comments and perception of the teachers on the value and nature of content of ELT courses they teach reveals that the teachers consider the content of ELT courses does not cater to the needs of the learners in practical life. They suggest introducing new ELT courses focusing on the practical needs of the learners. These new ELT courses should promote the academic and employment language needs for the learners who may pursue their higher studies. These should offer academic and practical skills that learners can use in pursuing their studies as well as building their careers after graduating from colleges. Moreover, the content and the process of learning need to be structured and integrated in such a way as to help realize the standards for key competencies through spiral progression with a major focus on development of language skills rather than on content.

To conclude, the inclusion of local culture in the curriculum, making the courses need-based, and bringing in internal harmony in these courses in terms of focusing on teaching language through literature should be the key targets of future ELT curriculum designers.

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Language in India [www.languageinindia.com](http://www.languageinindia.com)  
10 : 5 May 2010

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A Study of the ELT Teachers' Perception of Teaching Language through Literature at the Higher Secondary School and Degree levels in Pakistani Milieu

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