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Effect of Teachers' Academic Qualification on Students' L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

Umar-ud-Din, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

M. Kamal Khan, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Shahzad Mahmood, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Abstract

This study reports the analysis of the performance of the English Language Teachers (ELTs) and Teachers with Formal Education (TFEs) at secondary level in public high schools. The study shows that ELTs have positive influence on the performance of the students in the final examinations conducted by the board of intermediate and secondary education. We collected the data for present study from three different public schools where ELTs and TFEs were teaching in parallel. The results of the students in their final exam conducted by the board were collected. The results show that those students who receive instruction from the ELTs show better results in the final examinations as compared to those who receive input from the TFEs. The study suggests that the practice of inducting qualified English language teachers at secondary level should continue.

Introduction

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

Umar-ud-Din, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate, M. Kamal Khan, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and Shahzad Mahmood, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Effects of Teachers' Academic Qualification on Students' L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

235

The quality of education is directly related to the quality of instruction in the classrooms. It is a fact that the academic qualifications, knowledge of the subject matter, competence, and skills of teaching and the commitment of the teacher have effective impact on the teaching learning process (National Education Policy 1998-2010). Quality improvement in education depends upon proper training of teachers. The teachers cannot play any of the roles unless properly trained (Yadved and Singh, 1988).

Teaching is an art. It can be refined by training and practice. The availability of competent teachers is central in the reconstruction of the educational system. English has acquired the status of a global language (Crystal, 1997). Keeping in view the growing need and importance of English language in every walk of life, English is made a compulsory subject in Pakistan from the very beginning of the academic career. This increasingly necessitates good quality initial preparation for non-native speaker teachers in the school system.

Commenting upon the place of English language in Pakistan, Baumgardner (1993:43) said: "English in Pakistan is used as an official and second language. It is spoken and used by a relatively small but extremely influential portion of country's population in the domain of government administration." Thus, in Pakistan English language is widely used by the elite and the ruling class. Most of the official correspondence and documentation takes place in English. For the ruling elite and the bureaucracy (highly educated), English is the second language. Very few Pakistanis have the privilege of acquiring English as the first language. Majority of the educated community learn English as a foreign language.

English Teaching and Learning in Pakistan

English is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to graduation level. In the elite public and private schools (Cadet Colleges, Beaconhouse School System, City Schools, etc.), English is taught as a compulsory subject and also the whole teaching learning process is carried out in English language. In other words, English is also the medium of instruction in these schools.

This enables the students of these schools to learn English in an environment where most of the interaction between the teacher and the students is in English. As a result, the students of these elite schools are more proficient in English and perform well in the final examinations.

In the Urdu or vernacular medium schools, however, the teaching of English is done somewhat differently and the proficiency in the language is somewhat inadequate. The traditional grammar translation method is favourite with the teachers and there is hardly any exposure to English language inside or outside the class. Most of the activities in the class are done in the vernacular or the mother tongue. Even English language is explained through Urdu or the vernaculars. The focus of the teaching learning process is how to secure good grades/scores in the final examination. The students resort to memorization and cramming.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

236

10 : 7 July 2010

Umar-ud-Din, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate, M. Kamal Khan, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and Shahzad Mahmood, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Effects of Teachers' Academic Qualification on Students' L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

The teacher is the facilitator of examinations rather than of learning. The students memorize, translate and retranslate and, finally reproduce the crammed information or knowledge in the final examinations. No creativity is witnessed on the part of the students from these vernacular medium schools.

Also, the performance of these students is not as good as compared to the students from the English medium or elite schools. Sarwat and Khursheed (1994:130) made the observation that the students of vernacular schools generally fail in the subject of English.

The reason is that the teachers themselves are not qualified or competent enough to teach English efficiently. This causes poor results in English eventually leading to highest failure percentage in English at matriculation, intermediate and BA examinations. Thus English becomes the biggest hurdle (particularly for the students from rural areas) in the way to getting higher education and the key administrative posts. In its annual report, Federal Public Service Commission (1998:36) reported that English language as the medium of expression in the CSS examination is depriving the students of Urdu medium institutions to compete their counterparts from English medium institutions.

At secondary level, there are two groups of teachers who teach English to the students. One group consists of teachers without a formal language qualification or expertise. They are not subject specialists. They are graduates (minimum qualification) with B. Ed. (Bachelor of Education) Or M.Ed. (Master of Education). These teachers will be termed as teachers with formal education (TFEs).

The other group, introduced by the Punjab Government in selected high schools in the year 2002, is that of English Language Teachers (ELTs). ELTs have masters degree in English language or/and literature and B.Ed. or TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language). ELTs were introduced in the government high schools with the purpose of improving the standard of English language teaching and learning at secondary level. So far no attempt has been made to evaluate the performance of these ELTs. Hence, the study is designed to know how far ELTs, in contrast to their counterparts TFEs, have been successful in promoting effective teaching learning atmosphere and enable the students to secure good grades in English in the secondary school certificate examinations conducted by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), Lahore.

Objectives of the Study

Following are the objectives of the study:

- The study is designed to investigate the effect of teachers' academic qualification on students' academic achievement scores in English at secondary level. Academic achievement in the present study is the performance of the secondary school students in the

subject of English in the annual examination conducted by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE).

- The study will find out the relationship between secondary school teachers' academic qualification and students' academic achievement at secondary level.
- To suggest measures that have greater impact on students' academic achievement.

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present study is:

There exists significant difference between the competence of ELTs and TFEs with respect to the teaching of English language.

Research Question

Based upon the hypothesis, following is the research question:

- Is the lack of qualified English Language Teachers at secondary level the cause of low academic achievement scores in English by the students?

Background to the Study

Language teaching has been the primary focus of applied linguistics. Formal instruction does not work in vacuum. School environment, teacher qualifications, curriculum and instructional approaches, and many other factors interact to produce growth in student academic skills and knowledge. There is sufficient empirical evidence that suggests that the achievement of school children relies substantially on the teachers they are assigned. Classroom based research is valid enough to determine whether the learners are receiving appropriate content instruction or not. Pennington (1989:7) says that the quality of teaching must be considered in determining what results can be expected. McMillan (2003:7) describes the importance of classroom assessment in the following words: 'What is needed is an understanding of how assessment and instruction are interwoven, with new conceptions about what assessment is and how it affects learning'. He further states that teachers make decisions about classroom management based upon the achievement gains. Thus we can say that findings about the relationship between teacher characteristics and student academic achievement scores are important in determining the policy about the teachers as stated by Aenny (1976) that great teachers are defined in terms of their impact on students' achievement scores.

Teacher characteristics are more strongly related to students' achievement than school effects (Kilplinger: 1997). Fuller and Clark (1994) remarked 'what really matters is the teachers' knowledge of the subject'. Elaborating the importance of teacher knowledge as

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

238

10 : 7 July 2010

Umar-ud-Din, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate, M. Kamal Khan, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate and Shahzad Mahmood, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate

Effects of Teachers' Academic Qualification on Students' L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

criterion for producing better results in the teaching learning process, Fawns and Nance (1993) state that ‘teacher knowledge , reason and judgment rather than teaching behaviour should be emphasized as the basis of an account of exemplary teaching’. Lafayette (1993) has shown strong correlation between the subject knowledge of the language teacher and the learning outcomes. He argues that a sound command of the target language gives the teacher a high degree of confidence to meet the requirements of the learners ultimately affecting their performance. Wilkins (1974) is of the view that a poor command of English language puts the teacher in a critical situation due to the unpredictable nature of the classroom situation. In communicative language teaching the knowledge of the target language is of paramount importance.

Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1989) describe their observation that if the teachers do not have a practical command of the target language, their poor knowledge of the English sound system, grammar and vocabulary, and poor communication skills, will fail them in performing effectively. Cullen (1994) suggests that communicative language teaching methodology requires the language teacher to have higher level of proficiency in the target language. Thus, with changing trends in the teaching learning process result in particular must be a criterion for a successful language teacher.

In a research conducted by Goldhaber and Brewer (1997), it was found that those mathematics students who received instruction from a teacher with advanced or master’s degrees in mathematics, achieved higher scores as compared to those students whose teachers had no advanced degree or degrees in non-mathematics subjects. In order to investigate whether same relationship holds true for English language teaching or not, the present research was conducted.

Methodology

We collected the results of Secondary School Examination for the years 2006, 2007 and 2008. The examinations were conducted by Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Lahore. We selected those three schools where both ELTs and TFEs were involved in the process of English language teaching to secondary school classes (10th grade students). Three ELTs and seven TFEs results were collected from these schools.

The comparative analysis of the results by ELT’s and TFE’s was made to know as to who is producing better results. The results obtained were divided into three categories, i.e., number of successful candidates, candidates obtaining 80% and above marks, and candidates obtaining 70% to 80% marks in the board examinations. The comparison of results was made on the basis of the results of a group rather than individual performances by the students or the teachers.

In order to know about the perceptions of the teachers about teaching learning processes, interviews were also conducted. The questions asked were structured. The questions were based on the classroom concerns taken from Pica (1994) which she referred elsewhere as “the ten most wanted list in language teaching”, (Pica, 1989).

Many of the questions (annexure) focus on the nature of language taught and learnt in the classroom environment, instructional strategies and pattern of classroom organization. Other questions relate to the language used in the class, grammar instruction, role of teacher and students and different instructional materials used in the class.

Delimitations of the Study

To keep the study feasible in terms of material resources, it was delimited to:

- The public high schools where ELT’s and TFE’s are teaching.
- The results of 2006, 2007 and 2008 Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination conducted by Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE), Lahore were collected from the respective schools.
- The reading comprehension and writing skills of the students were evaluated since the SSC examinations measure only the reading and writing components of the language teaching learning process.
- The data collection for the study was restricted to District Okara only.

Findings and Discussion

In order to make the analysis comprehensive and authentic, average performance of the groups (ELTs and TFEs) for past three years (2006, 2007, and 2008) was measured. The results of three consecutive years give us greater insight into the methodology employed by ELTs and TFEs during their interaction with the students in the classroom. The data collected produced the results as shown in the following table:

Table 1: Showing the collective results of ELTs and TFEs for three years (2006, 2007, 2008)

	ELT	%ag e	TFE	%ag e
Frequency (Number of Students Appeared)	372		668	
Number of Successful students securing 33% or above marks	312	83.87	501	75
Number of Students obtaining 80 % or above Marks	33	10.58	24	4.8
Number of Students obtaining Marks from 70 % to 80 %	65	20.8	52	10.37

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

10 : 7 July 2010

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Effects of Teachers’ Academic Qualification on Students’ L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

The following figure also gives a good insight into comparative analysis of the performance of the ELTs and the TFEs during the past three years:

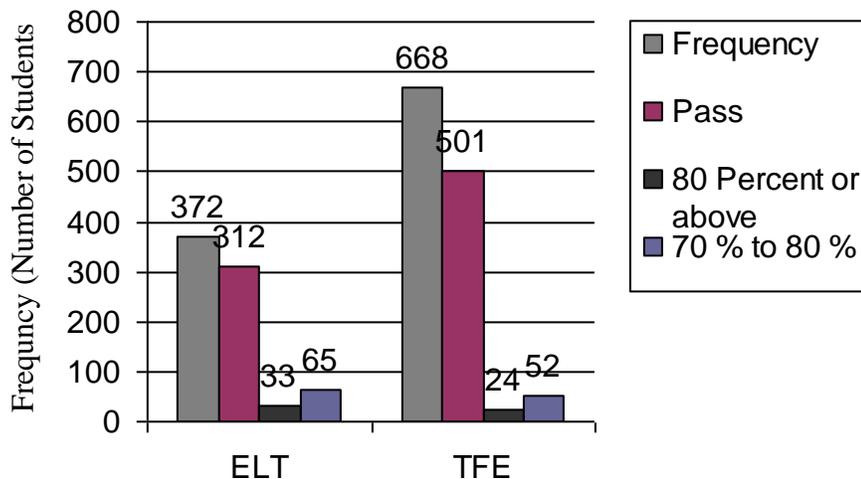


Figure: Analysis of Results (2006, 2007,2008)

During the last three years total 1040 students appeared for SSC exam from these schools. Out of 1040 students, 813 (78.17%) students were declared successful based on their minimum academic achievement score 50 out of 150. Apart from this, the pass percentage of the students who received instruction from ELTs is 83.87% (312 out 372 students) which is significantly higher as compared to that of those who received instruction from TFEs which is 75%.

Similarly, the individual achievement gains by the students of ELTs are also significantly higher than those of TFEs. 10.58% (33 out of 312) successful students by ELTs succeed in securing A+ grade that is 80% or above marks in the subject of English. In contrast, only 4.8% (24 out of 501) get A+ grades in English. The number of students who got marks from 70% to 80% also varies significantly between the two groups of teachers. 20.8% students of ELT group fall into this range whereas 10.37% students of the other group succeed in obtaining marks from 70% to 80%.

It is quite obvious from the above results that ELTs are taking lead over the TFEs as regards the performance of the students in the subject of English in the examinations conducted by the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education. Whether it is the question of number of passing students or that of higher gains, TFEs fail to compete with their counterparts (ELTs). The results suggest that ELTs prove to be successful in motivating the students to

learn more and are better at using teaching learning strategies appropriately keeping in view the needs of the students.

When interviewed, both ELTs and TFEs agreed to the view that the traditional grammar translation operates well in Pakistani classroom settings where classes are of mixed ability and generally over crowded. Both were convinced to make use of variety of instructional materials other than the prescribed text books. They complained about the lack of access to such helpful sources. ELTs believed in more interactive learning by involving students in different activities conducive to learning whereas the TFEs focus has been absolutely the text book.

As regards the use of the mother tongue in a foreign language classroom, the ELTs were against it and were of the view that the use of target language builds greater confidence among the students in the long run, thus affecting their performance. The TFEs themselves were not that much fluent in English. So they tried to justify the use of mother tongue in their classes. When we asked one of the principals of these schools as to who is good at teaching English to the students, he remarked that ‘good English teacher is that who has good command over the subject ... has correct pronunciation and spellings. I can see that English teachers are doing well in discharging their duties’.

Pedagogical Implications

The present study suggests that there exists significant difference between the competence of TFEs and ELTs as regards the teaching of English language at secondary level. The study implicates that teachers’ knowledge about the subject to be taught certainly affect their teaching attitude and eventually the performance of the students. Teachers are vital in determining the students’ achievement. Achievement tests can be used to evaluate the teaching programmes.

Average performance of the group facilitates in determining the success of the teaching programme. The study also suggests that the introduction of the ELTs at secondary school level is a good step towards the improvement of the quality of the instruction of English language at secondary level. This policy should be continued and implemented with greater force to improve upon the performance of the students in this particular subject.

Conclusion

The study aimed at identifying potential difference between the competence of ELTs and TFEs with respect to students’ achieving good scores in the subject of English at secondary level. The results clearly indicate that provision of qualified ELTs at secondary level certainly affect the performance of the students in the examinations conducted by the board.

The knowledge of the subject is directly proportional to the students' academic achievement scores. The availability of qualified teachers will result in better learning outcomes.

In the light of the findings of the present article, it is suggested that English language teachers should be properly trained. They should keep themselves abreast with the current researches in the field of language teaching research so that they can have better idea about the basic factors involved in language teaching like the role of student's motivation, age and aptitude etc. The fields of second language acquisition and English language teaching must be given importance by the universities and higher education department. They should also promote research in these areas.

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- Language in India www.languageinindia.com 243
10 : 7 July 2010
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- Effects of Teachers' Academic Qualification on Students' L2 Performance at the Secondary Level

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Annexure-A

Following ten questions about the beliefs of the teachers were asked during the survey:

1. Does the use of mother tongue hinder second language learning?
2. Are both comprehension and production important for language learning?
3. Should students drill and practice new forms, vocabulary and structures?
4. Is group work helpful in second language learning?
5. Should grammatical instructions be given attention in the class?
6. Does error correction assist the L2 learning?

7. Should accurate pronunciation and accuracy in production be given importance?
8. Should fluency be given any importance in language learning?
9. Does the use of instructional materials help language learning?
10. Should the teacher be facilitator and participant in language classroom?

Umar-ud-Din, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English Language and Literature
UMT, Lahore,
Punjab, Pakistan
umariqra@yahoo.com

Muhammad Kamal Khan, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English Language and Literature
UMT, Lahore
Punjab, Pakistan
mkkamazai@hotmail.com

Shahzad Mahmood, M.A., M.Phil., Ph.D. Candidate
Department of English Language and Literature
UMT, Lahore
Punjab, Pakistan
thetararok@yahoo.com