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Measuring the Achievements of English Language Learners – A Study of the Learners of Punjab in Pakistan At the Secondary Level

Mamuna Ghani, Ph.D.

Anser Mahmood, Ph.D. Candidate

Muhammad Akram, Ph.D. Candidate

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Mamuna Ghani, Ph.D.
Anser Mahmood
Muhammad Akram

Abstract

Learning a foreign language is really an uphill task in the true sense of the word. The present study serves the two purposes i.e. on one hand, it shows the learners' achievements based on a test (paper) prepared by BISE (Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education) Sargodha, and on the other hand it explores the pattern of the test (paper) to check the students' potential to learn a foreign language.

1. Introduction

There is no doubt tests are important tools which serve a variety of purposes. A classroom teacher mostly depends upon the achievement tests for measuring the progress of his students in his subject area. The present study is based on an achievement test in the subject of English. English language learning is a craze in Pakistan. But in the student community it seems to be a phobia. Most of the students do not like English language. The present research shows the test pattern and achievement of the learners in the subject of English.

Achievement tests are used to measure the present level of attainment of a testee in a particular subject area. They may also be used to give an index of the present educational or academic status of a testee (Taiwo 1995: 23-24).

An achievement test provides a better chance to assess the attainment of knowledge in various subjects of teaching. They attempt to measure the knowledge, abilities and skills that are the focus of direct teaching in schools.

Measurement is the process of quantifying the degree to which someone or something possesses a given trait (L. R. Gay 1991).

2. English in Pakistan

English is used as an official and second language in Pakistan. English is taught as the compulsory language in Pakistan. English language teaching has been text based in Pakistan.

The teaching of English in Pakistan has been text based since the beginning because the British government policy was to create a class natives who would act as a buffer between the ruler and the ruled as also the link between the two (Akram & Mahmood 2007)

English language teachers in Pakistan must approach teaching English as a Second Language from the perspective of applied linguistics. Increase in the number of language teaching institutes and academies along with increasing amount of people to learn English language clearly shows the importance of English.

English in Pakistan serves a gateway to success, to further education and to white-collar jobs. It is the language of higher education and wider education and not the home language of the population except in the upper strata of society where it is spoken as a status symbol (Ghani 2003:105).

Table 1: Medium of Education in Pakistani Schools/Colleges

| | Madrassas (N=131) | Sindhi medium schools (N=132) | Urdu medium schools (N=520) | English-medium schools | | |
|---|----------------------|--|--------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| | | | | elitist (N=97) | Cadet college (N=86) | Ordinary (N=119) |
| 1. What should be the medium of instruction in schools? | | | | | | |
| Urdu | 43.51 | 9.09 | 62.50 | 4.12 | 23.26 | 24.37 |
| English | 0.76 | 33.33 | 13.65 | 79.38 | 67.44 | 47.06 |
| Mother tongue | 0.76 | 15.15 | 0.38 | 2.06 | Nil | 1.68 |
| Arabic | 25.19 | Nil | 0.19 | Nil | Nil | 0.84 |
| No response | 16.79 | 37.88 | 16.54 | 5.15 | Nil | 8.40 |
| 2. Do you think higher jobs in Pakistan should be available in English? | | | | | | |
| Yes | 10.69 | 30.30 | 27.69 | 72.16 | 70.93 | 45.38 |
| No | 89.31 | 63.64 | 71.15 | 27.84 | 29.07 | 53.78 |
| NR | Nil | 6.06 | 1.15 | Nil | Nil | 0.84 |
| 3. Should English-medium schools be abolished? | | | | | | |
| Yes | 49.62 | 13.64 | 20.19 | 2.06 | 12.79 | 5.88 |
| No | 49.62 | 84.09 | 79.04 | 97.94 | 86.05 | 93.28 |
| NR | 00.76 | 2.27 | 0.77 | Nil | 1.16 | 0.84 |
| Note: The results do not add up to 100 in some cases because those choosing two or more languages have been ignored. Source: Rahman 2002: Appendix-14. | | | | | | |

A Pakistani learner is motivated in learning English for:

- 1- Studies Abroad
- 2- Greater job opportunities
- 3- Social, Missionary or Military purpose
- 4- Trade and Commerce
- 5- Academic purposes

The educationist pleads teaching of English as a window on the world. The politician wants English because of inter and intra communicational needs with different linguistic regions of the country as well as with the world outside.

According to Baumgardner (1993:43):

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, law, the military, the higher education, commerce and mass media.

3. Method and Participants

The researchers personally visited the schools to collect the data. For the convenience of the researchers the study has been confined to Tehsil Sargodha only. There are so many secondary schools in Sargodha. For the study the following schools were selected:

- 1- Government Higher Secondary School Bhagtanwala Sargodha
- 2- Government Higher Secondary School Chak No. 88 S.B Sargodha
- 3- Government Secondary School Chak No. 71 S.B Sargodha
- 4- Government Secondary School Chak No. 75 S.B Sargodha
- 5- Government Secondary School Chak No. 47 N.B Sargodha

A large number of students are studying at secondary level so 25 students were selected randomly from parallelism. Thus 125 learners were included in this research work. They were given an achievement test to know about their knowledge of basic skills of English language.

3.1 Achievement Test:

The test has been prepared for measuring the achievements of the learners at secondary level in the contents of English books of secondary level from the syllabus provided by the BISE Sargodha.

1- Contents of English Book

| | | |
|-----|---------------|----|
| i- | Lessons/Poems | 48 |
| ii- | Exercises | 48 |

2- Contents of Grammar and Composition

| | | |
|-------|---|----|
| i- | Essays | 25 |
| ii- | Letters | 15 |
| iii- | Stories | 20 |
| iv- | Change the Voice/Narration | |
| v- | Fill in the blanks with suitable verbs and prepositions | |
| vi- | Re-arrange the words to make meaningful sentences | |
| vii- | Translation of English into Urdu | |
| viii- | Translation of Urdu into English | |

Table 2: The items in objective type were divided in following categories and why were these selected.

| Serial No. | Items | Purpose | Marks |
|------------|--------------------------------------|---|-------|
| 1 | True/False | To check thinking ability | 5 |
| 2 | Fill in the blanks | To measure reading and writing | 5 |
| 3 | Matching | To measure the vocabulary | 5 |
| 4 | Re-arranging | To measure the ability in understanding the structure of L2 | 5 |
| 5 | Change the voice | To measure grammar comprehension | 5 |
| 6 | Complete sentences with prepositions | To measure reading, writing and vocabulary comprehension | 5 |

Table 3: Subjective items were selected as following according to their purpose and marks.

| Serial No. | Items | Purpose | Marks |
|------------|-----------------------------|--|-------|
| 1 | Translate English into Urdu | To evaluate reading and translation comprehension | 15 |
| 2 | Essay writing | To measure writing, spelling, vocabulary and grammar comprehension | 15 |
| 3 | Story writing OR Letter | To measure the recall of a learner's mind | 10 |
| 4 | Summary writing | To measure the understanding about text contents | 10 |

| | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|---|----|
| 5 | Translate Urdu into English | To measure the reading and translation comprehension | 10 |
| 6 | Comprehension about book | To measure reading, writing and understanding about English | 10 |

4. Analysis and Results

The following data was gathered from the students and the given tables clearly indicate the results and percentage of the responses:

Table 4: Achievements in Objective Type Test:

| Serial No. | Items | Total students | Pass Students | Percentage |
|------------|--------------------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | True/False | 125 | 92 | 73.6 % |
| 2 | Fill in the blanks | 125 | 85 | 68 % |
| 3 | Matching | 125 | 71 | 56.8 % |
| 4 | Re-arranging | 125 | 49 | 39.2 % |
| 5 | Change the voice | 125 | 58 | 46.4% |
| 6 | Complete sentences with prepositions | 125 | 42 | 33.6% |

The table shows that majority of the students scored a high percentage in first three items. Items No. 4 & 6 indicates that students are weak in Re-arranging the words and sentence completion that need a great attention of the students as well as the teachers.

Table 5: Achievement in Essay Type Test:

| Serial No. | Items | Total students | Pass Students | Percentage |
|------------|-----------------------------|----------------|---------------|------------|
| 1 | Translate English into Urdu | 125 | 68 | 51.1 % |
| 2 | Essay writing | 125 | 56 | 44.8 % |
| 3 | Story writing OR Letter | 125 | 60 | 48 % |
| 4 | Summary writing | 125 | 46 | 36.8 % |
| 5 | Translate Urdu into English | 125 | 62 | 49.6 % |
| 6 | Comprehension about book | 125 | 53 | 42.4 % |

| | | | | |
|--|------|--|--|--|
| | book | | | |
|--|------|--|--|--|

The table shows the high score of the students in item no. 1, 3 and 5. The score in item no. 4 & 6 indicate that this area has not been given proper care and attention. That's why the students have shown a poor result in this regard. Item no. 2 of Essay writing is also not very convincing. It also shows a poor result that means the students have not been provided with the chances to show their own creative writing.

Table 6: Achievements in Grades:

| Serial No. | Grade | Remarks | No. of Students | Percentage |
|------------|-------|---------------------|-----------------|------------|
| 1 | A One | Outstanding | 5 | 04 % |
| 2 | A | Excellent | 9 | 7.2 % |
| 3 | B | Very Good | 15 | 12 % |
| 4 | C | Good | 19 | 15.2 % |
| 5 | D | Fair | 13 | 10.4 % |
| 6 | E | Satisfactory | 12 | 9.6 % |
| 7 | F | Fail | 52 | 41.6 % |

| | | |
|-------|----------------|--------------|
| A-One | 80 % and above | Outstanding |
| A | 70 % and above | Excellent |
| B | 60 % and above | Very Good |
| C | 50 % and above | Good |
| D | 40 % and above | Fair |
| E | 33 % and above | Satisfactory |
| F | Low than 33 % | Fail |

The results show that there is only 04 % of the learners who got 'A-One' grade, 7.2 % of the learners got 'A' grade, 12 % of the learners got 'B' grade, 15.2 % of the learners got 'C' grade, 10.4 % of the learners got 'D' grade, 9.6 % of the learners got 'E' grade. 41.6 % of the learners got failed in this test.

Table 7: Pass Percentage:

| | Students | Percentage |
|-----------------------|----------|------------|
| Total Students | 125 | 100 % |
| Pass Students | 73 | 58.4 % |

| | | |
|----------------------|----|--------|
| Fail Students | 52 | 41.6 % |
|----------------------|----|--------|

The above table shows the learners performance that 58.4 % of the students passed the examination and 41.6 % of students failed in the examination.

5. Conclusion

The study has been undertaken to find out the learners' achievements in the subject of English. The present study explores the students' learning of the basic skills of English language and it also measures the vocabulary and grammar comprehension of English language. The study clearly indicates that most of the students do not know the basic structure of the English sentences. They find great difficulty in change of voice and translation. The study shows that essay competition in English in schools is unsatisfactory. Both the students and the teachers realize the importance of English language learning.

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Mamuna Ghani, Ph.D.
The Department of English
(Applied Linguistics)
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
Pakistan
mamunaghani@yahoo.com

Muhammad Akram Ph.D. Candidate
The Department of English
(Applied Linguistics)
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
Pakistan
Muhammadakram80@yahoo.com

Anser Mahmood Ph.D. Candidate
The Department of English
(Applied Linguistics)
The Islamia University of Bahawalpur
Pakistan
chanser73@yahoo.com