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Document Analysis of English Language Course Outlines in Pakistani Universities: Exploring the Needs of Undergraduates in the EFL Context

^a Kiran Dadabhoy, ^b Zehra Habib

^a PhD Scholar, Department of Education, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan

^b Associate Professor and Senior Fellow, Department of Education, Institute of Business Management, Karachi, Pakistan

Email: zehra.habib@iobm.edu.pk

ARTICLE DETAILS	ABSTRACT
History: Accepted 23 April 2021 Available Online June 2021	<i>Being proficient in English opens several doors of opportunities all over the globe and this ability is especially important for students who are about to enter their professional lives. The main objective of this qualitative research was to analyze the Basic English course outlines of private Pakistani universities to examine the inclusion of skills-based strategies for the effective teaching and learning of English language skills at the undergraduate level which was conducted through document analysis. Another purpose of this study was to explore the needs of undergraduate English language students regarding their English language course for which a questionnaire was administered. The findings of the document analysis showed that the content of the English language outlines mostly included grammar and focused very little on language skills necessary for the development of proficiency. The responses of the undergraduates in the questionnaire clearly expressed their weaknesses in English skills and the need for developing proficiency. Based on the findings, this study recommends developing an effective skills-based English language course outline for the undergraduate level.</i>
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Corresponding author's email address: zehra.habib@iobm.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Increase in globalization has led to people in various regions of the world to communicate in English language as it is recognized and accepted as an international medium of communication. It is termed as the first global lingua franca and is most widely used around the world in the fields of trade and commerce, research, medicine, education, tourism, diplomacy, advertising, mass entertainment and international communications (Chen, 2011). In the current world, the importance of English cannot be denied and one of the main qualities of a successful global member is proficiency in English language. This factor improves the opportunity of better employment, access

to international research and information and increases mobility among many others (Pennycook, 2016).

In many countries English is seen as a fundamental mean for social and economic progress and is viewed as an important factor for the enhancement of individual and national welfare. This is the main reason nations want their upcoming generations to be well versed in English and are willing to invest heavily to achieve this objective. These countries are leaving no stone unturned in their efforts to develop teaching and learning environments with modified pedagogies to help their upcoming generations for developing English language proficiency (Rose, 2019).

The way English is learned in different parts of the world is a major factor which influences the method used to teach it (Harmer, 2007). In countries where it enjoys the status of a second language an individual will learn it as a native language which is used to communicate on a daily basis while in countries where it is considered as a foreign language it is learned and taught only in educational institutions. This status of the English influences the selection of content, teaching methodologies and assessments heavily (Sabirova & Khanipova, 2018). In Pakistan English is considered a foreign language as it is not generally used for daily communication but is taught in Pakistani educational institutions (Mahboob, 2017).

In Pakistan, there are various streams of education which include private, public and the Madressah system. Learners belonging to upper class backgrounds are able to get education which is at par with international standards and those coming from lower class backgrounds are educated in Urdu medium institutions (Haidar & Fang, 2019). In addition, Shamim (2011) states that English is given a higher status than Urdu which is the national language. She highlights that English is linked with the elite in urban areas and is therefore considered as the language of the rich and powerful. Irfan (2017) elaborates that English is used as the language of instruction in many educational institutions belonging to the upper class at all levels. It is a compulsory subject from elementary to Master level in all public schools and private English medium schools.

Several Pakistani graduates are of the opinion that English is not taught effectively especially in universities which is the main reason they experience difficulties especially in the beginning of their professional lives. The courses designed for English at the tertiary level do not include skill-oriented objectives or learning outcomes and lack skills-based assessment procedures which help to estimate the learning of language skills (Sharjeel & Qazi, 2012). The Pakistani higher educational institutions should discover ground-breaking ways in compliance with skilled methods of teaching English language skills to meet the need for proficiency in the English language in higher education professional settings. This goal can be achieved by launching steadfast and competent methodologies enabling learners to perform in the fast paced contemporary and advanced world (Irfan, 2017). These amendments in the English language curriculum should focus on improving all the four skills equally. It is imperative for the social and economic benefit of learners that the current English curriculum should include skills-oriented methods and strategies to raise teaching and learning standards (Shabbir & Ibrahim, 2016).

Several Pakistani students are not proficient in English due to the way it is being taught. This is because traditional methods of teaching which do not include skill-oriented methods are being promoted. The four language skills require practice to be developed but opportunities are not provided for development (Manan, 2016).

In Pakistan, the main reasons for low English proficiency include teacher centered classrooms and passive learning because instructors practice traditional methodology in their language classes (Mahboob, 2017). Particularly, listening skill is neglected at all academic levels and also is not practiced at home because it is not used in daily communication. Therefore, it is necessary that listening practice should be provided to students in the classroom for development of the skill. Similarly, the speaking skill is not given its due space in the English curriculum at all academic levels especially in Pakistani universities (Jabeen, 2013). Reading skill is found in the content of nearly all English language curricula but strategies for effectively gaining proficiency in the skill are limited. English writing skills are practiced the most, especially at the university level, but even for this skill, focused strategies for effective development of the skill are lacking (Sharjeel & Qazi, 2012; Irfan, 2017).

The key reason for ineffective English teaching in Pakistani higher educational institutions is that teachers who design English language course outlines stress on content and assessment rather than on effective development of language skills. In addition, language learning tools/strategies are not included in the curriculum for the effective development of English. Moreover, assessment procedures do not include evaluation of all the English language skills for effectively estimating the level of proficiency developed in learners (Yasmin & Sohail, 2017; Manan, 2019).

Another significant reason for the ineffective development of English skills is that while developing English language curriculum, needs of students, which are very important, are not considered when designing the syllabus, teaching methodologies and assessment procedures (Lodhi & Akash, 2019). Needs analysis is an effective method which helps to recognize and assess requirements of students. In the field of education, it assists the educators to develop language curriculum for courses based on the needs and interests of the students. Needs analysis helps to connect learning very closely to teaching and assists practitioners to make available resources for learners easily (Grier, 2005; Long, 2005).

The objective of this study was to analyze the Basic English Language course outlines for the undergraduate level in private Pakistani universities. The purpose of conducting document analysis was to examine the extent the outlines that were promoting the proficiency of language through skills-oriented strategies. The next goal was to examine the needs and expectations of Basic English language undergraduate students. An open-ended questionnaire was used for this purpose. Following are the research questions:

- To what extent do English language course outlines of private Pakistani universities consist of skills-based strategies to develop proficiency in all four skills at the undergraduate level?
- What do Pakistani undergraduate students need and expect from the English language course?

2. Literature Review

2.1 English Language Skills

The key objective of teaching English is to familiarize students with the four language skills. Listening is a very significant language skill as it develops organized communication and allows the movement of sound and recognition (Tyagi, 2013). The listening skill requires practice and is very important especially for students to achieve good results and build a strong professional career (Le, 2019). To acquire effective listening skills, learners must be able to focus on what is being said, whether it is in the form of lectures, following instructions, notetaking, or communicating with

instructors and peers. Skills based tasks should be implemented for general and specific listening which will assist in efficient notetaking and comprehension (Wah, 2019). In addition, Newton and Nation (2020) say that the speaking skill in language learning enhances the ability for effective conversation, involving accurate pronunciation, correct vocabulary, articulation and understanding. This is not an easy task therefore proficient speaking sometimes becomes a difficult task for learners. Oradea (2012) explains that English language speaking developed through practice, increases the probability of success in academic and professional lives. He adds that the speaking skill can be enhanced with practice such as drills via questions and answers amongst students for improving communication abilities.

Effective reading contributes to better comprehension because the readers motive is to recognize and comprehend the intention of the writer and understand a written text (Amin, 2019). Furthermore, Appari (2017) explains that reading should be developed as a task which is enjoyed by the students and this can be achieved if the instructors introduce strategies moving from easy to difficult texts. Reading skills must be well developed in the readers through productive and continuous practice. Durga and Rao (2018) explicate that writing skills convert thoughts into language and related skill-oriented strategies promote the learning of the skill. Not only does this need clear instructions by the teacher but students require continuous and targeted practice. Students should be allowed to write about their experiences, ideas and hobbies to encourage development and sequencing of written texts. Teachers should motivate students by welcoming their ideas and hard work. The learners should be introduced to writing strategies which will assist in developing the skill.

2.2 Importance of Skills Based Strategies

For the effective learning of listening, speaking, reading and writing, skills-based teaching is very important and should be present in the English language curriculum. A strategy is a focused effort aimed to attend and develop learning (Hou, 2018). Skills based strategies facilitate the understanding of a task and is specifically essential for language learners (Nguyen & Gu, 2013). Currently, English is considered as a means to progress and has dominated several political and official areas in numerous developing countries for a long time (Naved, 2020). Due to the leading position of English around the world, many globally recognized educational institutions are now trying to develop English language proficiency of students by using skill-oriented strategies.

2.3 English Language in Pakistan

In Pakistan, English language courses offered at the University level are generally at the undergraduate level but there are also a few in postgraduate programs in particular disciplines such as social sciences. Several Pakistani universities do not teach and assess learners keeping in view all the four skills of English language. Undergraduate English courses are generally devised by the English department of a variety of universities and the outlines are developed by the teachers for teaching and testing the learners. This encourages non-skill-oriented teaching methodologies resulting in learners' lack of English language proficiency (Rind & Kadiwal, 2016).

After traditional teaching takes place, written assessments are conducted which are inappropriate for evaluating the development of proficiency in the language (Sharjeel & Qazi, 2012). Additionally, such assessment procedures make students feel that they only need to clear the written examinations. Mahboob (2017) says that the necessity for proficient pedagogical strategies to promote English in universities cannot be disregarded particularly in times when there is an

enormous need for skilled graduates in the employment sector.

3. Methodology

The first objective of the current qualitative research was to examine the Basic English language course outlines as regards to skills-based teaching strategies. Another goal was to investigate undergraduates' needs and expectations regarding their Basic English language course

The first step of collecting data included attaining undergraduate English language outlines to analyze if the content consisted skills-based teaching. These outlines were collected from 14 private Pakistani universities and used for the purpose of document analysis. In qualitative research, document analysis provides insight to the problem being investigated and Document analysis is an imperative component of most mixed method researches as it provides deep insight to the research problem and is a means to triangulate data effectively (Bowen, 2009). It also helps to choose relevantly, evaluate and synthesize data found in documents and build up themes and categories. (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Another qualitative tool, an open-ended questionnaire was administered to 80 undergraduate students who were enrolled for the English language course (prior to its commencement) for the purpose of data collection. The goal was to identify undergraduate students' needs and expectations of the Basic English course and to analyze their understanding of skills-based teaching. Open ended questionnaires possess a greater potential to generate in depth and thorough responses which set high standards of qualitative research (Allen, 2017). They permit the participants to recollect experiences, articulate understandings in a better fashion in comparison to close ended questions provide time and space to answer without restraint (Krosnick, 2018).

4. Sample Selection and Participants

For the purpose of exploring the needs and expectations of undergraduates, a total number of 80 students enrolled in the English language course of a private university with homogeneity of educational qualifications (12th grade) were selected as participants. To achieve this goal purposive sampling technique was used. Omona (2013) explains that the purposive sampling method is one in which participants possess particular characteristics representing the targeted population and comprise a realistic homogeneity in order to carry out a fair analysis.

5. Data Collection and Analysis

5.1 English Language Course Outlines

The 14 course outlines were investigated using a course outline guide adapted from Prince Edward Language Curriculum (2008), to determine if the course outlines comprised all the four language skills. The guide has four sections comprising of objectives, outcomes, skills-based strategies and assessment. Keeping in view the criteria of the guide, coding was conducted for every English language course outline individually. Each outline was coded using the strategies suggested by Saldana (2013). The process of coding according to Saldana (2013) is one where explicit codes are allocated to significant characteristics of raw information. Additionally, as suggested Saldana (2013) themes were generated and a constant comparative analysis method developed by Corbin & Strauss (2008) was used to establish patterns that were repeated in all the outlines.

5.2 Open Ended Questionnaires

For analyzing data from questionnaires Saldana's (2013) strategy for coding, was used. In the

first step questionnaires were thoroughly read to develop familiarity with the information provided by the respondents. The process of identification, color coding and repeated words and responses lead to generating codes and assisted in determining important information. An idea was formed by collecting these codes under which the main wordings were given categories. Lastly, suitable themes which described the data completely were derived from these codes.

6. Findings of Document Analysis

Course outlines were analyzed based on the adapted document analysis guide comprising of four criteria namely the objectives, outcomes, skill based English language teaching strategies and assessment of all the four skills. In the 14 course outlines two did not have any course objective which was the first criterion of the guide. Out of the remaining 12 outlines, six comprised course objectives while 6 had course descriptions. These sections of the outlines mainly consisted of objectives related to promoting grammar and its correct usage. Only in some of the outlines a few objectives had reading and writing skills mainly related to vocabulary development and academic writing. Only one outline consisted of a listening objective while two comprised of the speaking skill. It was observed that in all the 14 course outlines grammar was focused under this criterion and skill building was given very little importance.

The next criterion in the document analysis guide was that of learning outcomes. Only six outlines comprised of some learning outcomes which were focused on the acquisition of grammar and the promotion of reading and writing. Speaking skill was found in only three outlines whereas only one outline consisted of the listening skill under this criterion. Thus, under the criterion of outcomes, it was found that reading and writing skills were given some space but it mainly focused on the development of grammatical abilities. Speaking and particularly listening skills were not given due importance in the learning outcomes as listening was briefly found in one outline and speaking was reflected in brief in the outcomes of three course outlines.

The third criterion of the document guide was the skill-based strategies which emphasized instructional activities that endorse the improvement of all the language skills. It was found that only six outlines consisted of this criterion and only one of these outlines had all the four skills. Six of them comprised vaguely present reading and writing skills, only two included speaking and listening was only found in one of the outlines under this criterion. It was also observed that this segment comprised mostly grammar related content for example, usage of correct verb tenses and sentence construction.

The final criterion was assessment of the skills which was used to estimate the performance of the undergraduates. Six of the course outlines did not comprise any assessment segment while eight out of the 14 Basic English language outlines included an assessment section. The assessment sections in these outlines consisted percentages for participation in class, assignments, class tests, midterm assessments and final examination. It was observed that only one of these sections included the listening skill scores and two of the outlines had included the scores of speaking activities held in the classroom. In all the outlines that comprised of assessment segments, the class tests, midterm tests and finals only assessed the reading and writing skills focusing on the assessment of grammar in written tests.

Analysis of the documents showed that language skills and strategies for the development of all the four skills were not given their due space in Basic English course outlines at the undergraduate level. Even though the skills of reading and writing were found, appropriate

strategies to develop these skills were not included. Only one outline consisted of the listening skill and three of them included speaking but these also did not comprise of focused strategies for the enhancement of these skills. Excessive emphasis on grammar and grammar related exercises were the feature of these outlines which stood out the most. Table 1 displays the number of the language skills in each criterion of the guide used to examine the Basic English Language outlines.

Table 1: Skills found in the criteria of the document analysis guide

Criteria	Listening Skill	Speaking Skill	Reading Skill	Writing Skill
Objectives/ Descriptions	1	3	6	6
Outcomes	1	3	6	6
Strategies	1	2	3	3
Assessment	1	2	8	8

7. Findings from the Questionnaire

An open-ended questionnaire was administered to the 80 undergraduate students enrolled in the English language course. The five main questions of the questionnaire were related to the expectations of the undergraduates regarding developing the four language skills through the course. The responses provided by the students in the questionnaire were coded and categorized using methods suggested by Saldana (2013). A main category drawn from responses estimated that most of the undergraduates wanted to gain proficiency to effectively communicate in English which would as a result augment their self-confidence. The students were aware that they had weak English communication skills and sought after enhancing their capacity especially for being able to study the other courses offered in the university. The second aspect highlighted by the responses to the questions that the undergraduates lacked awareness of developing proficiency in listening. The undergraduates who had some knowledge regarding the importance of the listening skill only recommended listening to teachers and fellow students in class as ways for improving listening skills.

Through their responses however, the students recognized their being deficient in speaking capabilities and desired to improve due to this course. Many students through the responses in the questionnaire recommended basic speaking activities such as broad-spectrum classroom discussions, talking to native speakers to appreciate specific and also highlighted speaking independently about a variety of subject matters in class which they thought were important for improving speaking. Although the undergraduates did not specify any particular strategies, they suggested that they should be actively allowed to speak out their opinions in real life classroom situations.

Similar to the building of speaking abilities, the undergraduates could only suggest some strategies for improving their reading aptitude. They expressed the need to practice reading of long and short texts, reading aloud to enhance fluency and reading comprehensions. The undergraduates articulated their desire to build vocabulary, read effectively and were also willing to work hard at home for developing effective reading skills.

It was found that among the language skills, the most stress was laid on developing the writing skill by the undergraduates. The desire for writing English accurately was visible in the responses given by the students in the questionnaire related to the development writing capability. The students suggested a number of ways to improve the writing skill such as paragraph and essay writing practiced by them in school which they also wanted to be implemented in the university. Data indicated that they wanted this skill to improve the most as they knew that examinations would be in the written form and if they wrote well, they would achieve higher scores.

8. Discussion

Findings from document analysis indicate that in private sector Pakistani universities, development of English language skills is neither emphasized upon nor included in the objectives of the outlines. To help learners build a particular skill, language learning activity must be focused on the development of that specific skill. To gauge the extent of development in proficiency, practice of one particular skill must be focused (Kecira & Shllaku, 2014).

Analysis of Basic English language course outlines of private sector Pakistani universities clearly demonstrated a lack of skills-based strategies for developing language proficiency. On the contrary, literature accentuates effective development of proficiency through skills-oriented strategies (Karimi & Dastgoshadeh, 2018; Le, 2019). According to Scrivener (2011) the key objective of English teaching and learning is to improve proficiency in students related to the four skills of the language as these are essential of language for sound training in EFL courses, and require to be strengthened (Scrivener, 2011). Skill-oriented language teaching and testing strategies are an important part of contemporary curriculum for English language and practice is required in all four skills for future professional development of students. Educationalists should emphasize on instruction which is strategy based so that learning strategies attain prominence in the curriculum and instructors are prepared for efficient training (Kaplan, 2001, Siegel, 2013).

Globally, educational institutions are emphasizing on enabling the students through skills-based strategies to develop English language skills. This is a strong indicator that English language curriculum/course outlines in Pakistan must also include skills and strategies for the effective learning of English language especially at the university level. Although the responses from the students in the questionnaire clearly showed the eagerness of students to develop the ability to communicate in English, they were unable to pinpoint any effective strategy to help them achieve this goal. The students were also unaware that listening was a skill and were surprised at the idea that it can be taught and developed through practice. This is because of the flawed teaching and learning methodologies used to teach English in Pakistan where generally focused listening is not taught at any academic level (Ahmed & Arif, 2020).

9. Conclusion

After analyzing the course outlines it was found that the course outlines were not promoting the effective development of English language skills in private Pakistani universities at the undergraduate level. Skills based strategies which contribute majorly towards building language proficiency were lacking and the course outlines were encouraging content-based teaching, grammar related practice and assessments dominated by written assignments, class tests and examinations. Analysis of the English course outline at the undergraduate level established the non-inclusion of skill-oriented strategies which could be the reason for undergraduate not developing effective

English language abilities.

Data from the questionnaire showed that the undergraduate English language students wanted to develop confidence to use English language and wanted to achieve this goal through the English language course being offered at the university level. The students revealed that they had weak English language skills were weak and wanted to learn and practice to improve their language skills. Many students wrote about their desires regarding active participation in class, submission of standardized assignments and higher performances at the university level. They acknowledged that these aims would only be attained if they gained proficiency in English because all the courses offered were in English language.

10. Recommendations

It was observed that English language course outlines of private universities in Pakistan are not skills based. Therefore, it is recommended that skill oriented English language strategies must be integrated within all objectives, learning outcomes, content and assessment procedures of the outlines to ensure the effective promotion of skills-based learning at the university level. Secondly teacher training courses in Pakistan should not be based on the traditional model of language teaching, instead, professional development for English language teachers should rethink approaches included in training and should focus on familiarizing teachers with strategies to teach English as a foreign language. This purpose can be achieved by providing professional development to English language instructors at all levels. (Ahmed, 2016). It is also recommended to conduct the same research in the public sector universities of Pakistan and make appropriate changes where needed.

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