

Student Teachers' Achievements in English Language Learning: An Assessment of a Distance Teacher Education Program in Pakistan

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Received September 12, 2020; Revised October 22, 2020; Accepted November 29, 2020

Cite This Paper in the following Citation Styles

(a): [1] Sarfraz Aslam, Atif Saleem, Huma Akram, Ali Usman Hali , "Student Teachers' Achievements in English Language Learning: An Assessment of a Distance Teacher Education Program in Pakistan," *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 8, No. 12, pp. 6770 - 6777, 2020. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2020.081242.

(b): Sarfraz Aslam, Atif Saleem, Huma Akram, Ali Usman Hali (2020). *Student Teachers' Achievements in English Language Learning: An Assessment of a Distance Teacher Education Program in Pakistan*. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 8(12), 6770 - 6777. DOI: 10.13189/ujer.2020.081242.

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Abstract The choice of the most appropriate method for learning and teaching any foreign language is of vital importance. This study aims to investigate student teachers' achievements in English language learning. A quasi-experimental research design was used to compare and identify the effective English language teaching method in a distance teacher education program at the university level in Pakistan. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were conducted to follow up on the experimental findings and enlighten the distance tutors' English language teaching practices. A sample of sixty student teachers enrolled in the B.Ed. Program of Allama Iqbal Open University Pakistan was randomly selected and divided into a control group (CG) and experimental group (EG). Furthermore, eleven distance tutors were also interviewed. Pre-test and post-test were used in both groups. Findings revealed that the grammar-translation method (GTM) is not encouraged for English language teaching; however, it is still in practice at the university level in Pakistan. Moreover, tutors reflected that the English language syllabus could be modified to meet modern needs. Furthermore, communication on the part of the learners also needs to be addressed. The examination system should not focus only on writing skills, but also on evaluating all language skills, including reading, speaking, and listening.

Keywords Assessment, Distance Teacher Education, Grammar-Translation Method, Communicative Language Teaching

1. Introduction

A critical component for teachers learning to teach comes from their experiences in teacher education institutions [1]. The quality of distance teacher education graduates is questionable in Pakistan, as they cannot deliver professional lessons to their students [2]. Education helps science and technology in constructing machines. It also enables individuals to know how to keep the machines running. Education is dependent on language; however, it is essential for communication between human beings in different societies. It can, therefore, be said that education depends on language for its development.

Teaching any foreign language, such as English, is quite different from teaching native languages. Teachers should virtually understand many elements to make the learning process effective and operational. One of the important elements is the teaching method; a language teaching method is a master plan for a program or a systematic demonstration to teach a foreign language [3-5]. With an

appropriate method, teachers make students feel comfortable, happy, and not bored while they are learning a language. By doing so, the lessons' goals can be achieved perfectly. Language is a set of strategies that helps humans to communicate, interact, and exchange their ideas and thoughts with each other. Humans have to be representative of their respective civilizations. Language plays a vital role in providing humans with the chance to communicate and represent particular cultures [6]. Therefore, the method is a significant part of teaching ESL/EFL.

Foreign language specialists have introduced different innovative practices for learners. Public teachers in Pakistan are not fully aware of contemporary teaching developments, and they usually practice grammar-translation methods (GTM) during the teaching-learning process. Students must follow the rules to achieve accuracy, which may hinder the successful communication process [7].

The GTM has been in Pakistan for decades. This method depends on grammar and reading ability to help in comprehension in both oral and written translation. The students who use this method, however, become experts in reading and writing, but still have low abilities of listening and speaking. Because of this disadvantage, many experts do not prefer this method. It is also widely acknowledged that this method has been the sole reason behind the transfer of literature to the current generation. As a result, this method realizes its importance when national languages are treasured. Also, it helps individuals to understand modern knowledge related to science and technology, as well as enriching our language. Therefore, the development of this method is of prime importance today [3,8,9].

The other important method is CLT, which is characterized as teaching the English language directly. CLT is a method that excludes translation to a great extent [10]. CLT can be used to teach foreign languages [11]. Modern languages are taught through discussions and conversations, rather than complicated grammar. The process starts by establishing an understanding of the language by pointing to objects or through action-oriented learning. Language teaching processes have widely favored CLT compared to any other method in developing communicative competence [9].

Kazmi [6] argued in detail that English is one of the most badly spoken, read, and written languages. One example in this regard could be the Pakistani saying, "my heart is garden-garden." Similarly, a teacher with a tight schedule may tell his students, "You should know I am not vacant at the moment. Please come behind when I am empty." As far as the English accent is concerned, the English language somehow gets the same treatment. For example, during a lecture on plague, a teacher may define the concept with the following words to the students: "plagoo* [plague] is a disease that is quite vagoo* [vague]. A student would argue,

"With due respect, sir, the words palgoo* and vagoo* are pronounced as palag* and vag*, respectively," and the teacher would reply apologetically, "I apologize, young boy, merely a slip of tango* [tongue]."

It is not only punctuation, but also inadequate comprehension that has affected the Pakistani English language learners. Before the partition of the subcontinent (India and Pakistan), an English man asked his Indian servant to saddle him the horse, and the person saddled his master. The English language is comprised of a variety of expressions, and it is strange to the extent that the American press and the British news service have to translate English into English so that expressions are accurately conveyed.

English can either take the role of a second language or the foreign language [12]. As a second language, all subjects are taught using this language. However, as a foreign language, it is taught as one subject. No matter which variant is used, the common aim is to achieve proficiency in the language [13].

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Distance education is one of the significant forms of education in Pakistan. According to the National Accreditation Council for Teacher Education [14], more than half of the country's teaching forces are produced through distance education in Pakistan. Allama Iqbal Open University (AIOU) is the largest Open University in the country. Moreover, the Higher Education Commission [15] replaced all old teacher education programs throughout the country and implements the new teacher education road map. However, the quality of distance teacher education graduates is not up to the mark in Pakistan, as they are unable to deliver professionally [2].

Unfortunately, modern methods of testing and evaluation have not been given enough attention within the educational system to improve the standards of English language teaching in Pakistan [6]. Furthermore, there is also a lack of clarity amongst students regarding the role of the English language in their educational careers. That may lead to negative attitudes about language in society.

The primary goal of learning a language is to read literary works written in the target language. CLTs' explicit goal is effective communication [9]. Communication methods establish a direct bond between experience and expression [16]. The conditions for teaching English in Pakistan are not conducive to teaching and learning English. Pakistan's English teaching methods have not lived up to the desired goal—namely, communication skills [17].

Competency tests, including grammar questions, force students to consider grammar, not only help them to pass, but also help them master the target language [18]. GTM had been used for a long time, which led to the incompetence of English-speaking users in Pakistan.

Pakistani learners could improve their communication skills with CLTs to show greater motivation among learners. Teachers are willing to incorporate communication activities into their classrooms [19].

Raissi et al. [20] conducted a qualitative study and found that, according to the Malaysian Ministry of Education, all Malaysian secondary schools will teach English through CLT. The researchers concluded that other language teaching techniques were less effective than CLT.

Zohrabi et al. [21] conducted a quantitative research study. They concluded that the teacher-centered process was active in teaching English as a foreign language to improve grammar learning in Iran. They added that, in the Iranian language teaching system, the actual focus on teacher learning is more acceptable and suitable.

Zeeshan [22] researched to find out what public school teachers' attitudes were towards CLT and GTM in Quetta, Pakistan. The researcher concluded that these teachers showed a strong tendency toward CLT compared to GTM.

Although many studies have been done on English language teaching, we found a few studies indirectly related to distance teacher education. This assessment study on English language teaching at the university level in Pakistan undoubtedly brought about new facts to help the students and the teachers to a greater extent. The following two research questions guided this study:

RQ#1. Which English language teaching method is more conducive to the university level for future teachers in Pakistan?

RQ#2. How do AIOU tutors interpret their English language teaching practices to student teachers?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Settings

This study was comprised of two phases: (I) quasi-experimental and (II) interviews. This study was conducted during a mandatory workshop of the teacher education program (B.Ed.) of AIOU. This workshop is mandatory for student teachers, and it happens once a semester, at the end of the semester and before final written exams. The total workshop time was four weeks, six hours a day. One hour out of the six daily hours was allotted for the experimental study, and the remaining time was used as per the workshop schedule. Before this, the researcher received permission from the workshop coordinator and consent from student teachers and distance tutors.

2.2. Participants

For the experimental phase, the sample was selected randomly from students enrolled in the teacher education program (B.Ed., four years), who were then divided randomly into two groups. Each group consisted of 30

(30*2=60) student teachers. The mean age of the students was 22.5 years, and 45% of the sample were females. Almost 83% of the participants were engaged in different types of jobs, including private tutoring up to the primary level, and they were enrolled in distance teacher education programs to fulfill their educational needs along with their job to support their families.

Moreover, eleven registered AIOU tutors, including five female tutors, were purposefully selected for interviews. It was confirmed that every tutor had at least three years' experience as a tutor for the teacher education program. To fulfill research ethics, participants were given pseudonyms such as P1, P2, up to P11. The purpose of the interviews was to follow up and explore the experimental findings, further enlightening distance tutors' teaching practices.

2.3. Research Instruments

An English language university teacher designed a pre-test and a post-test according to the level of students; a pre-test was given to each one of the groups in order for comparisons to be drawn between the two before the intervention. At the end of the intervention, a post-test was carried out for the two groups. The process aimed to evaluate the extent of achievements by students.

The pre-test and post-test were designed with an equal level of difficulty. The four units were subjected to teach before initiating the experiment. All tests were accompanied by MCQs (multiple choice questions), matching items, creative writing, and the translation of a passage into Urdu selected from a textbook related to a mix of learning domains. The tests were prepared by using pre-selected units for the four B.Ed. (Part 1) English compulsory (Core 1, course code 1423) units. During the current study, tutors taught these four units to both groups, and then we evaluated their learning.

2.4. Process and Selection of the Tutors for Experimental Study

To obtain the most effective results, it was essential to identify the right individuals for the job. Thus, two expert tutors were selected voluntarily. In addition, it was ensured that the two tutors were of equal levels of qualification, experience, and capabilities. The tutors identified for the experimental study were well trained in English language teaching.

2.5. Reliability and Validity

For content validity, it is essential to note that the test elements were found in the text relating to the units already being taught to the respondents of the sample. In order to determine the coefficient of reliability, the Spearman-Brown prophecy framework was utilized. The coefficient of correlation was identified as 0.75. Leith and

Taylor [23] cited that Campbell and Stanley (1963) have determined a few crucial elements that affect the internal and external validity of the experimental design. In terms of internal validity, eight key factors should be focused on, which include history, maturation, testing, instrumentation, statistical regression, differential selection, experimental morality, and lastly, selection maturation interaction. The positive effects of these factors depend significantly on the degree to which these elements are controlled. If these are not well controlled, they may result in the confounding of independent variables, as elaborated in the final test scores.

As far as external validity is concerned, Leith and Taylor [23] cited that Campbell and Stanley (1963) identified four key elements, factors have the potential to damage external validity. The group under observation is treated with an independent variable, which is a robust experimental design. It was also possible, however, that testing and interaction might have affected the experimental variables, as discussed in [24]. Additionally, it was ensured that testing and interaction were not able to affect the experimental design. For this purpose, a post-test was used in parallel with the pre-test, so those achievements could be measured.

2.6. Data Collection and Analysis

Pre- and post-tests were conducted to measure the intelligence level of students before and after treatments. The groups were categorized as the experimental group (EG) and the control group (CG). The experimental group went through the CLT approach, while the CG went through the GTM. The study continued for four weeks, and, after this period, a post-test was conducted in order to evaluate the achievements of the respondents. All the quantitative data were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics by employing SPSS Version 24.

Qualitative data were collected through semi-structured interviews from distance tutors after the analysis of

experimental data. The next process that followed was the coding of the qualitative data, where they were grouped according to the themes based on the relevant topics of the study. This process was followed by breaking down some of the transcribed texts into categories of different levels including words, phrases, and sentences. Some of the interview data were used verbatim to highlight what was expressed by interviewees on the issues discussed, at the same time interpreting the meaning of the results by reflecting on the impact of the findings.

3. Findings

From the statistical analysis, the findings are as follows:

3.1. Quantitative Findings

Table 1. Overall Achievement in Pre-Test and Post-Test by CG and EG

Segment	Group	N	M	SD	SD(E)	t value	Sig.
Pre-test	CG	30	28.50	7.45	1.85	.49	.656
	EG	30	30.87	7.90			
Post-test	CG	30	27.15	5.09	1.07	-3.7	.009
	EG	30	30.33	5.08			

*0.05 significance level, **0.01 significance level

As shown in Table 1, no significant difference was found in the pre-test, while significant difference was found in the score of CG and EG in the post-test (M = 27.15, SD = 5.09) and (M = 30.33, SD = 5.08), [t = 1.07, P = 0.009, two tailed]. The EG outscored the CG in achievement after the treatment of one month. The detailed achievement scores in pre-tests by the two groups are given in Table 2.

Table 2. Detailed Achievement in Pre-Test by Two Groups

Test segments	Group	N	M	SD	SD(E)	t. value	Sig.
Words/Meanings/Idioms	CG	30	5.55	1.95	.43	.98	.382
	EG	30	5.20	1.80			
Letter Writing	CG	30	3.46	1.77	.64	.83	.489
	EG	30	3.29	1.91			
Comprehension	CG	30	4.60	1.59	.57	.32	.847
	EG	30	4.54	1.89			
Essay Writing	CG	30	3.41	2.71	.79	-0.9	.974
	EG	30	3.30	2.50			
Speaking	CG	30	1.70	.96	.33	.11	.987
	EG	30	1.61	.89			
Grammar	CG	30	2.64	1.04	.34	.83	.445
	EG	30	2.85	1.07			

Table 3. Detailed Achievement in Post-Test by Two Groups

Test segments	Group	N	M	SD	SD(E)	t.value	Sig.
Words/Meanings/Idioms	CG	30	5.75	.95	.39	.98	.382
	EG	30	5.90	1.10			
Letter Writing	CG	30	4.46	1.07	.54	.83	.489
	EG	30	4.49	1.11			
Comprehension	CG	30	5.60	1.29	.47	.32	.000*
	EG	30	7.54	1.09			
Essay Writing	CG	30	4.41	1.71	.69	-0.91	.000*
	EG	30	6.30	1.50			
Speaking	CG	30	3.70	.56	.30	1.11	.009*
	EG	30	4.69	.69			
Grammar	CG	30	4.94	.54	.34	1.83	.006*
	EG	30	3.85	.97			

*0.05 Significance level, **0.01 Significance level

Table 4. Overall Intelligence Score in Pre & Post-Test by Two Groups

Test	Group	N	M	SD	SDE	T value	Sig.
Pre-Test	CG	30	106.35	17.95	4.09	.71	.655
	EG	30	105.44	11.04			
Post-Test	CG	30	106.95	12.77	3.02	-3.23	.039
	EG	30	108.54	7.75			

There was no significant difference shown in Table 2 ($\alpha = .05$) in the English proficiency and achievement scores of CG and EG in the pre-test. The detailed achievement scores in post-tests by the two groups are given in Table 3.

Table 3 shows a significant difference between the achievements of CG and EG after the post-test, comprehension ($M = 7.54$, $SD = 1.09$) [$t = .32$, $P = 0.000$, two tailed], essay writing ($M = 6.30$, $SD = 1.50$) [$t = -.91$, $P = 0.000$, two tailed], speaking ($M = 4.69$, $SD = .69$) [$t = 1.11$, $P = 0.009$, two tailed], and grammar ($M = 4.94$, $SD = .54$) [$t = 1.83$, $P = 0.006$, two tailed]. The EG showed better achievements than the CG in comprehension, essay writing, and speaking, although the CG was better than the EG with grammar.

Table 4 indicates that a significant difference was found between the CG and the EG's intelligence scores after the post-test, with EG ($M = 108.54$, $SD = 7.75$) and CG ($M = 106.95$, $SD = 12.77$), [$t = -3.23$, $P = 0.039$, two tailed]. EG students had a higher score than the CG students.

3.2. Qualitative Findings

Perceptions of Tutors Regarding Theory and Practice

Eight out of ten interviewees agreed that CLT is a learner-centered approach, and that GTM is a teacher-centered approach. Two respondents differed in their opinions, and had many reservations about the CLT

approach. P11 commented:

"It is not an easy task to implement CLT for teaching in Pakistan, because, since GTM is independent in practice, we do prefer GTM as a teaching method. Through GTM, students learn more with the help of their native languages. CLT is a good approach, but most of the teachers prefer GTM. Even during our teacher training, our trainers also used GTM; no doubt it caused a lack of communicative skills, however, it enhanced writing with correct grammar use."

Quality Teacher Training

There's no doubt that teacher training is one of the essential factors regarding methodology. Teacher training is a continuous process. After induction, teachers are provided with subject training and refresher courses; however, master trainers do not provide actual courses, and they use their own strategies rather than a methodology taught to them. GTM is the most often used during this training, and there is less of a focus on CLT. P4 commented:

"A few years back, I participated in a departmental training as a subject specialist. I remember during the introductory session, we were asked to stick with the CLT approach, but later, during different sessions, the trainers mostly used GTM, and their focus was mostly on correct grammar writing. I also participated in a training organized by the British Council two years

back, even though most of the trainers were Pakistani, they used the CLT approach. At that time, I realized it's a more practical method than the traditional one. Since 2010, I have been working as a distance tutor for teacher education programs, but I do not remember that AIOU ever organized any specialized training for tutors."

Teachers' English Proficiency

All eleven interviewees unanimously agreed CLT is better than GTM, but that teachers' English proficiency was a problem that could be solved through proper training. P2, P6, and P9 commented on the importance of in-service training for teachers. P2 argued:

"Educational changes occur according to modern requirements, so authorities must provide continuous teacher training to cope with the latest demand. If I am proficient in the target language, I will be able to deliver up to the mark."

Workload

Teachers are bound to do other subject teaching and activities along with their specialty. It takes much time, so they are unable to adequately prepare. P10 commented:

"I am working as the principal of a private college; I also teach English to the senior class. I wish to prepare material according to CLT requirements, but, due to lack of time and other responsibilities, I mostly use GTM in the class. I always emphasize adopting the latest approaches."

Students' English Proficiency

Students enrolled in distance teacher education programs just finished the higher secondary school certificate (12 grades). Most of them are not proficient in English, and they mostly use GTM, but some students are outstanding at speaking and writing. P3, P10, and P11 commented almost the same thing:

"We observed that many students who are not proficient in the language always prefer traditional methods over CLT. Their understanding of language is not standardized, so sometimes they ask for tutors to tell them information in Urdu (native language) first and then in English. It seems their understanding of GTM is better than CLT."

Students' Willingness

According to interviewees, students' willingness to use CLT or GTM was essential in their choice of the teaching method. P6 commented:

"Students' enthusiasm can achieve excellent results in improving conditions. If they have the motivation to use the target language in the classroom, they will create a language use environment to improve the learner's communicative ability, and improve the enthusiasm of teachers."

Policy Bound

According to professional standards policy, teachers should be able to use simple English with the help of Urdu (the national language) in order to educate and learn effectively. P9 commented:

"We, teachers, follow the policy of the government, as mentioned in national standards. Through the natural language learning order—i.e., listening, reading, writing, and speaking—students can gradually communicate in English."

4. Discussion

In this study, we examined the student teachers' achievements in English language learning during their teacher training, as well as the comparative use of CLT and GTM. In addition, we investigated tutors' perceptions of their practices during English language teaching to student teachers.

Teaching methods are essential in improving student's learning [25–27]. The importance of the teaching methods used in the classroom is not emphasized enough. It has been observed that the experimental group performed with more strength as compared to the control group in terms of the post-test. CLT takes up the role of a planned and systematic approach towards instruction. The CLT method has also been termed as the natural method. This is mostly because it allows students to learn foreign languages simultaneously as they learn their native languages. CLT method can be used to teach foreign languages [11]. Ahmad & Rao [19] found that CLT is better than GTM. Language teaching processes have widely favored CLT [9]. The communicative approach establishes a direct bond between the experience and the expression [16]. It is very beneficial for the learners; once they finished their training, they have to join the professional life; they need a real context to become a useful part of society [28,29]. Studies conducted by [29] and [21] also supported the findings of this study.

Although CLT is an advanced and popular method of teaching a foreign language, GTM also has few advantages; it supports teaching through word-to-word between the national and the foreign language. Competency tests, including grammar questions, forced students to consider grammar not only to help them to pass them but also that help them master the target language [18]. GTM has been used in the country for a long time, however, which led to English language incompetence for learners in Pakistan [19].

Furthermore, this study found a surprising fact that the quality of distance education tutors of AIOU is not up to standard, and they did not get any professional training to teach graduate and postgraduate level student teachers. It is alarming. They could deliver efficiently and according to the needs of modern education if the university provides

them a proper training before the tutorship assignment; these findings are in line with [2, 30–32]. During the qualitative data analysis, it was realized that distance education has not been properly addressed at the level of policy makers.

5. Conclusions

The present study adds up our understanding of CLT as an advanced approach, more useful for language learners than the GTM. The communicative approach is highly recommended, however, only a few teachers are willing to practice this approach. Teacher training is one of the most critical issues in the country, although authorities still neglect this vital issue. Though AIOU is fulfilling the needs of the country and producing teacher education graduates, quality is still lacking in terms of English language teaching. Tutors appointed by the university are experienced in teaching and their subjects; however, they need proper training to teach distance teacher education students.

Moreover, tutors reflected that the English language syllabus could be modified to better suit modern needs. Furthermore, communication on the part of learners also needs to be addressed. The examination system should not focus only on writing skills, but also on evaluating all language skills, including reading, speaking, and listening. The research results revealed the importance of English language teaching methods for university students.

The research, however, has three main limitations. First, this study used a limited sample due to the geographical situation of the distance learners, so the findings of this study cannot be generalized. Second, we only included four-year B.Ed. students. Third, we did not collect any official certification regarding students' English language abilities. Nevertheless, the study has shed some light on the student teachers' achievements in English language learning through GTM and CLT.

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the organizers of the workshop and participants for their appropriate and constructive responses to this study.

Both authors 1 and 2, contributed equally to the study.

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