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RESEARCH PAPER

Teaching English as a Second Language to the Students in a Rural Area of Pakistan: Challenges and its Remedies

[1]Saba Tufail, and [2]Sibtain Aslam*

1. MS Scholar, Department of Linguistics and Communications, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Lecturer, Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Management and Technology, Sialkot Campus, Punjab, Pakistan

| ***Corresponding Author** | sibtain.aslam@skt.umt.edu.pk |

ABSTRACT

This study explores how sociocultural elements and scaffolding techniques help teach English as a second language, including its challenges and remedies. Teaching English is not an easy task, especially in rural areas. It is an established truth that teaching English in schools and colleges in Pakistan is not enough for learners to achieve communicative competency. The study in hand is mixed method in nature. The data is collected quantitatively and then evaluated qualitatively. The researcher uses experimental research, including a pre-test and post-test design. Moreover, Lev Vygotsky's Sociocultural framework provides a theoretical basis for this research. The findings reveal that learners' speaking skills were enhanced and polished significantly. It emphasizes the importance of supportive speaking skill enhancement and suggests that English language teaching instruments should be language-oriented. However, there are still some challenges that need to be solved. This paper recommends that policy makers, textbook writers, and teachers improve their methods and strategies for teaching and promoting English effectively.

| **KEYWORDS** | Challenges, English, Remedies, Rural Areas, Second Language |

Introduction

Along with Urdu, English has now achieved the status of court, education, research, and an official language in Pakistan (Mehboob, 2009; Kiran, 2010). English is one of the many languages that have been frequently spoken in the past decades (Kitao, 1996; Wierzbicka, 2006). It is considered an archaic language. Even though it is considered the most critical and significant language now, it is a bitter reality that when it comes to teaching the English language, it is unsatisfactory. The learners lack communication skills as they cannot provide communicative competency.

English education cuts a sorry figure in Pakistani schools; it does not yield fluent speakers of the language, which should ideally be the primary goal of teaching a language (Kiran, 2010).

Several factors are considered the main reason behind this type of English language teaching, which is full of faults. These factors include an unsupportive curriculum that lacks student attention, overcrowded classrooms, and an ambiguous examination system (Kiran, 2010; Ahmed, 2004). However, the main criticism is faulty language teaching approaches and methods. The main problem is that English is not considered a language but a subject in Pakistan (Kiran, 2010). As a result, there is no particular emphasis on

improving learners' speaking skills. Many learners in our country can still not speak English effectively and confidently, even though English is taught from grade one to graduation as a mandatory subject (Coleman, 2010). So, it becomes a hindrance when learners try to explain and express themselves in the target language and communicate effectively. As a result, they suffer when it comes to communication skills.

There is a similarity between the concepts presented in the ESL and the works of Vygotsky. In the area of ESL, by keeping in view the studies carried out in the past years, it is established that language is a social phenomenon, a social endeavor in its very essence, and should be learned collaboratively (Lantolf, 2003; Mendelson, 2010; Putman, 2011). Apart from this view, the same concept can be found in the works of Vygotsky (1896–1934). His works introduced the concept of language learning, which is social and where learners work collaboratively to attain a particular goal (Lantolf & Poehner, 2008; Gibbons, 2002 & 2003).

Within the framework of sociocultural context, a meaningful concept is created to help the learners start a discussion to take turns in the development of thoughts and ideas. Then, it takes them toward creating complex discourse, or what may be called extended stretches of language (Gibbons, 2002, p. 15).

To teach English as a second language in a rural area of Pakistan, this article uses experimental research in which the students of 9th and 10th grades are engaged in a collaborative learning setting. This would be helpful for their communication skills. So, to analyze and measure the improvements in the learners' language proficiency, the pre-and post-test strategies are also implemented.

The objective of teaching and learning English as a second language in a rural area is to improve the students' speaking ability during their school years and improve their communication competency. Providing a temporary platform or scaffolding language teaching approach to the learners is highly appreciated to achieve the said purpose and when the effective and proficient language teaching and learning context is concerned (Wells, 2000; Gibbons, 2002). Furthermore, speaking skills are the most ignored language skills in our English teaching context, so their development is considered the most important (Kauser, 2011; Akhtar, 1997; Amina, 2010). The reason behind this is that the learners are not adequately and wholly guided when it comes to using the English language for communicative purposes in an effective way. As a result, students lack the ability to communicate proficiently and effectively in the English language, and they find themselves unable to express their thoughts and ideas in the target language despite having already learned English as a mandatory subject during their educational period for many years.

Literature Review

A child's cognitive development has always been debatable among educationists and researchers (Gibbons, 2002). There are two main ideologies, keeping in view the educational goals and the particular ways in which those goals could be achieved, and they have existed alongside each other since the belief in the private educational system was developed (Wells, 2000). In the very first ideology, the students or learners, more appropriately, are perceived as empty vessels. It is the role of teachers to fill these empty vessels with knowledge, education, and information. Contrary to this, the second ideology has completely different beliefs about learners. In the second ideology, learners are considered the primary source and center of learning processes, and in these processes, they individually work and come up with knowledge (Gibbons, 2002, p. 6). However, both

of these ideologies faced criticism for some particular reasons. These concepts are criticized by considering the phenomenon and concept of second language learning (Cummins, 2000).

The main reason behind the criticism is that no matter whether the learners are considered empty vessels or individuals with productive minds, they are labeled independent and self-contained people who construct their knowledge (Gibbons, 2002, p. 7). Several educationists and researchers (Wertsch et al.) are not fully satisfied with the individualistic notion of learning (ibid) and have presented a different and distinctive concept of cognitive development.

Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934) was mainly interested in the cognitive development of human beings and the interpretation of learning in entirely social terms (Ratner, 1991). According to Gibbons (2000, p. 8), the development of human beings is considered an "intrinsically social rather than individualistic" process that depends upon a person's own cultural and social experience. Opposing past contemporary philosophies in which the main focus was internal or external experience, Vygotsky conceptualized development as transforming socially shared activities into an internalized process (Mahn & Holbrook, 1996, pp. 191-206).

According to Vygotsky, there are two cultural levels at which individuals develop their cognitive and learning abilities. The first one is between people, known as "inter-psychology," and the second one is inside the child, called "intra-psychology" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 75).

Cultural settings provide learners with different opportunities to acquire knowledge, gain better thinking skills, and work as a thinking tool. Such social and cultural settings help them decide what to think and how to think. First, they should rely on those more experienced and knowledgeable people and then be responsible for their learning (Lev & Wenger, 1990). So, it is proven that the element of culture facilitates the learners' twofold opportunity regarding their intellectual development.

The concept of human learning, which is sociocultural, is considered a new gateway for many new research projects for educators and researchers. The main reason for this is that, for research in the field of teaching and learning, in the past decades, this concept has been a central point of interest for its particular theory and related implications (Steiner & Mahn, 1996, pp. 191-206). After that, in the mid-1980s, Vygotsky introduced his theory of sociocultural approach to second language acquisition (Frawley & Lantolf, 1984, 1985; Zuenger & Miller, 2006). Moreover, in the mid-90s, research was fundamental and gained momentum (Miller, 2006).

Scaffolding is about the temporary but essential nature of a mentor's assistance (Maybin et al., 199, p. 186). Burner, Wood, and Rodd first introduced or coined this term. Scaffolding or temporary language learning strategies are among the most helpful tools in enhancing and increasing learners' command in second language learning, most prominently in learning English (Gibbons, 2002; Walqui, 2006).

When the learners are provided with the needed context, which encourages them to start, create, and maintain the desired result of the task, they are automatically required to produce more comprehensible, coherent, and grammatically improved discourse (ibid., p. 15). In this teaching and learning process, teachers and students work as active members, thus making this process a collaborative endeavor. However, the teacher's role is

considered more knowledgeable because they help improve the learners' competency through working in the Zone of Proximal Development.

In learning, social interaction is considered significant, and SLA holds that through their involvement in the dialogical interactions, learners are dragged towards the way to "reach beyond what they are unable to gain alone" (Gibbons, 2002, p. 8). This dialogical intercourse developed during the process of working collaboratively in order to achieve some goal or task. This distance between the ability of a learner to do something when he or she is not provided with any essential support or help and what he or she can do when supported by a knowledgeable person is known as Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development. He claimed that learners can achieve their full potential if they are supported by experts and backed up in a specific context for a particular purpose.

When the students have learned the level of understanding or the required skills, the teachers either stop supporting them or reduce the amount of support they provide.

Scaffolding language teaching is believed to be developed from Vygotsky's two beliefs. First, learning becomes possible by participating in meaningful social and collaborative experiences. On the other hand, the second belief is that the scaffolding process is possible only through the Zone of Proximal Development (Stuyf, 2002; Walqui, 2000).

During the past few decades, the teaching of the English language has been criticized because of its lack of effectiveness in promoting speaking skills competency among learners and because of its status as a second language (Malik, 1996; Amina, 2010; Ahmad, 2004). Several factors contribute to this criticism, such as an unsupportive teaching environment, densely packed classrooms, and an unsupportive curriculum. However, the main reason is that the teaching strategies are highly unproductive (Malik, 1996 & Ahmad, 2004). They do not concentrate on the speaking fluency of learners, not even on the enhancement and development of it. So as a consequence, the learners lack the confidence to speak in the target language, even though they have been studying English for many years.

Regarding improvement in speaking skills, the collaborative learning environment is considered more effective and helpful in many ways. First, the learners listen to multiple languages, increasing their input. In the same way, learners are encouraged to reflect understandable and comprehensible strings of expressions and speech in the form of output. Secondly, the language developed during a meaningful task is considered contextualized.

By considering the practical nature of teaching English as a second language in rural areas of Pakistan, it is believed that the development and acceptance of teaching and learning English will be helpful for both teachers and learners. It will provide them with an environment that will guide and facilitate their development of fluency and competence in communication and speaking skills. This research article explores how sociocultural elements and scaffolding techniques help teach a second language, as well as the challenges that are the problem in the way towards achieving success in promoting and teaching English as a second language to students in rural areas of Pakistan and the remedies through which we can address them.

Material and Methods

In order to discuss the research questions, the researcher employed the experimental research method along with pre-test and post-test strategies, along 'with the single subject design in which the students were given different tasks and their performance was assessed. The pre-test was carried out as a starting point of the research to become aware of learners' commands, such as fluency and competence in the English language, for communication. After that, with a teaching plan of six hours each week, an experimental teaching method was employed for one month. Then, the post-test was conducted after the experimental teaching plan to critically examine this research's results.

The students (only girls) of a public school were the participants. A total of 30 students, consisting of 15 from 9th grade and 15 from 10th grade, were used for this study. Single-subject research is considered a control, quantitative experimental research approach in which study participants serve as their control (Gast, 2010, pp. 13-14). The collected data is presented in tabular form and interpreted and examined qualitatively.

The models presented by Gibbons (2000) in Scaffolding Language Scaffolding Learning: Teaching Second Language Learners in the Mainstream Classroom, the activities given below were specifically created and designed to evaluate the communicative skills of the learners during the pre-test and post-test:

- Picture description
- Group discussion
- Dialogue presentation

In order to ensure the active participation of each learner, the tasks and opportunities for proper involvement in these tasks were given to every participant. They were assigned different roles to learn how the English language can be used for practical communicative purposes. During the language-developing period, the necessary support was provided, including the availability of related expressions and vocabulary for the task. They were also allowed to ask for and give explanations and clarifications in the activities, such as dialogue presentations, at every level where it was needed and mandatory.

Moreover, pre-test data analysis was used to examine the learners' current speaking skills and communicative competence, and then the experimental classes were conducted for one month. The research was conducted and planned very carefully and eagerly to discover the challenges and difficulties of teaching English as a second language to students in a rural area and its remedies. The learners were provided with temporary tasks that will help and encourage them to acquire the skills, help them work collaboratively, and make them able to control the learning scenarios. To provide scaffolding to the learners, clear illustrations were given to the students along with multiple languages, which will provide them with large-scale exposure. This exposure and demonstration then work as the basis for the learning process. Before implementing the experimental teaching plan, a pre-test method was prepared and implemented at the initial level of this research to assess the participants' current performance.

Results and Discussion

This experimental study explains the effectiveness and significance of teaching English as a second language and its practical establishment in our context, so its results are essential. The initial stage of this research was pre-test data analysis, which explains the problems that the learners were facing regarding speaking skills. They were facing a

lack of relevant vocabulary, which hindered the completion of the task. The main issue highlighted here was that the learners lacked fluency in speaking and encountered pauses and halts during utterances.

Due to their lack of knowledge about the basic structure of language, the learners could not coherently present their ideas and expressions. Their pronunciation was also a problem for clear understanding. As it is established that no emphasis is given on speaking skills in traditional classrooms (Kiran, 2010), learners were utterly unaware of how to work in groups and engage in fruitful and meaningful interactions. As a whole, participants' performance in the pre-test results was unsatisfactory and limited as well.

Compared to the pre-test results, learners improved their performance in post-test results. They completed the tasks with related expressions and vocabulary. Their communication skills became smooth and fluent. They could also control their language structures with minimal pauses and halts. They were given an improved learning environment, which helped them complete different tasks. The learners were able to engage in the group discussions and perform effectively. The exposure to several languages during task completion and the multiple scaffolds provided by the researcher helped the learners achieve fluency in their spoken skills.

Table 1
Scores of Learners In Pre- Test Activities

Assessment Rubric	Female Learner's Performance Total Numbers Of Learners 30																				
	Picture description					%	Group Discussion					%	Dialogue Presentation					%
	0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4	
Task completion	9	10	9	2	0	27.5%	10	8	2	10	0	27.5%	10	8	2	10	0	25%
Fluency	8	9	2	10	1	32%	10	7	10	2	1	30.8%	10	7	10	2	1	28.3%
Comprehensibility	6	10	9	2	3	38.3%	10	9	4	1	6	36.7%	10	9	4	1	6	31.7%
Vocabulary	7	7	9	6	1	37.5%	9	6	9	4	2	34.2%	9	6	9	4	2	34.2%
Pronunciation	9	6	8	2	5	36.5%	8	5	8	1	8	39.2%	8	5	8	1	8	35.8%
Language control	5	9	8	3	5	44.2%	6	7	9	3	5	41.7%	8	9	8	2	3	35.8%
Overall percentage						36%						35%						31.8%

Pre-Test Results

Before implementing the experimental teaching, a pre-test method was implemented at the initial level of this research to assess the participants' current performance. The results of this pre-test are given in tabular form, which evaluates the learners' performance and speaking skills.

The results obtained from the pre-test were observed to be restricted and unsatisfactory. The participants were hesitant and confused, and the language they used to communicate was mainly tricky to understand. They could not complete the tasks and explain themselves in the target language in an incomprehensible way.

For example, in the picture description activity, the participants only have to describe the things present in the picture in a comprehensible way. Even this easier task appeared difficult for the learners. Even though more attention is always given to learning grammar in teaching, the language structure produced by learners was entirely at fault,

and they did not have any control over the basic language structure. Many participants could not describe and explain the picture understandably. It was not only their pronunciation, which was faulty and weak, but they were also facing a lack of appropriate vocabulary in order to describe the picture. So, the overall results achieved from this activity based on learners' performance were not up to par.

The next activity was group discussion. In this particular activity, the participants were required to start and develop a conversation and then continue the flow of the discussion to complete the task. They mostly lack control over the language and related expressions, which could support their continuity of tasks. The learners could not elicit the expected results as they did not know how to work in groups effectively. The results of this particular task were unsatisfactory.

The third task was a dialogue presentation, and the results remained unsatisfactory. For task completion, the learners need to create dialogic descriptions. They could not create a coherent beginning, middle, and end for dialogic discussions. They could also not convey their expressions coherently, effectively, and comprehensibly in the second language.

The results of all these activities were unsatisfactory due to the learners' irrelevant, inadequate, and limited responses.

Table 2
Scores Of Learners In Post- Test Activities

Assessment Rubric	Picture Description					%	Group Discussion					%	Dialogue Presentation					%

Assessment Rubric	Picture Description					%	Group Discussion					%	Dialogue Presentation					%
	0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4		0	1	2	3	4	
Task completion	8	9	6	2	5	40%	9	8	7	2	4	37.5%	9	3	9	1	8	33.3%
Fluency	8	9	3	7	3	49.2%	9	7	5	3	6	44.2%	8	7	8	4	3	40%
Comprehensibility	9	3	9	2	7	46.7%	8	7	8	4	3	46..7%	8	5	6	8	3	42.5%
Vocabulary	9	3		8	8	44.2%	4	8	9	4	5	39.2%	9	4	5	7	5	48.3%
Pronunciation	5	9	8	5	3	40.8%	7	8	6	3	6	40.8%	5	5	9	9	2	41.7%
Language control	3	5	9	4	9	52.5%	9	4	6	7	4	44.2%	10	7	4	2	7	40.8%
Overall percentage						45.6%						42.1%						41.1%

Female Learner's Performance — Total Numbers Of Learners 30

Post-Test Results

The post-test strategy was utilized at the end of this study plan. Unlike the pre-test results, the learners performed more confidently, competently, and fluently. The language used for the task was also elaborate and appropriate. The pronunciation of the learners was understandable. They also have a command of the basic grammatical structures. The majority of the learners were able to elicit desired results in a comprehensible manner. They described the picture with suitable and related vocabulary relevant to the scenes depicted in the picture.

In the group discussion activity, the learners could take turns fulfilling their responsibilities and effectively completed the given task. Although they performed well compared to the pre-test results, they still needed to complete the task more coherently and effectively.

Similarly, the learners become less afraid and confused when creating and generating new dialogues. They were able to provide clarifications and suitable expressions during the activity. So, as a whole, their performance improved compared to the earlier results.

Comparison Graph

● Pre – Test Percentage

● Post –Test Percentage
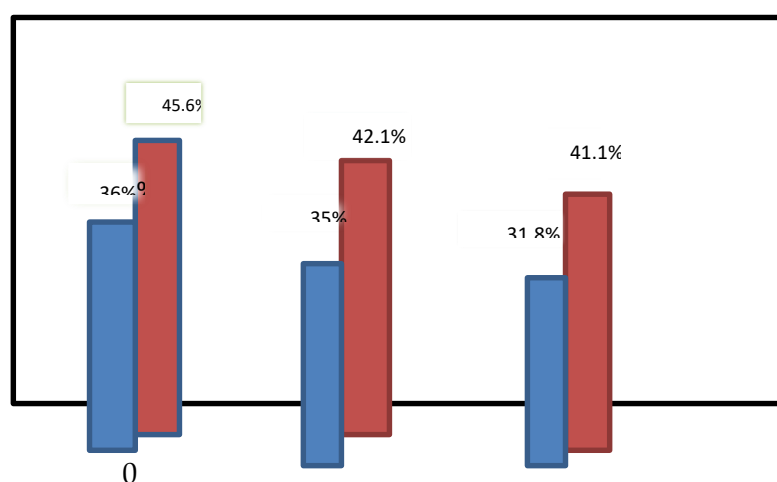
Challenges and Remedies

This research suggests that teaching and learning English as a second language in a rural area of Pakistan is efficient within our contextual limitations. However, there are still some challenges that must be addressed and remedied. The challenges encountered during this study and their remedies are given below:

Challenges for Policy Makers

In order to improve the teaching of English, it should not be treated as a subject but as a language. For this purpose, policymakers should guide the writers of textbooks to take serious steps to make it possible.

The schools give little attention to the improvement of speaking and listening skills. Currently, the importance is given to the reading-writing skills of the learners rather than their speaking and listening skills, which is a significant loophole in this regard. If equal attention is given to all four skills, then English can be treated as a 'language' rather than a 'subject.'

Challenges for Teachers

The role of teachers is vital in this regard. The teachers are the facilitators in the language learning process for the students. The training of teachers about how they can teach and what should be taught in the classroom is considered a hindrance to the teaching process. They should be aware of the importance of scaffolding to manage cognitively challenging learning tasks (Gibbons, 2002, p. 10) to make the learning process possible.

In order to complete the tasks, the learners should participate eagerly and enthusiastically. This approach is more challenging when it comes to our context, as the classrooms in Pakistan are fully and overly packed. Therefore, if teachers plan the tasks better and more carefully, making all the students work equally and according to their responsibilities, these challenges can be addressed far better.

In Vygotskian theory, social interactions are the key elements in language learning (ibid., p. 14). When the learners have instructions about what to do and how to do it, they can produce the language and expressions necessary to complete tasks (Gibbons, 2002, p. 24). The development of valuable conversations and discussions is mandatory to create a supportive environment for teaching English as a second language. In the same way, the activities created to improve the learners' communication skills should be cognitively appropriate to them (ibid.).

The textbooks do not contribute to improving speaking skills as no such activities are included. One way to solve this problem is for teachers to create such activities and involve the learners in working together in collaborative groups, which will enhance the speaking skills of the participants.

Challenges for Text-Book Writers

As mentioned above, the textbooks do not have any particular activities to promote speaking skills; the teachers should create such activities by themselves and involve the students in collaborative work.

Apart from the instructions, guidelines, and directions about implementing such tasks, the textbook should instruct the teachers to perform a valuable role for those without training in teaching English communicatively.

Conclusion

The current research is about how sociocultural elements and scaffolding methods can help teach a second language, the challenges encountered while teaching English as a second language to students in rural areas of Pakistan, and the remedies. The pre-test and post-test experimental teaching plans were employed in this research. A single-subject design with an experimental research method was employed. A quantitative approach was used to collect the data, and it was presented in tabular and graphic forms. Moreover, a qualitative approach was used to discuss the collected data for the present study.

The pre-test results highlighted the lack of learners' practical communicative skills. They were unable to control the language and unaware of the grammatical structures. The utterances they produced were filled with redundant pauses, and a proper flow of the discussion was missing. Their vocabulary was limited. Their word choices were irrelevant and limited. The findings of the pre-test were unsatisfactory.

However, the post-test analysis provided a better performance for the participants. They showed an understanding of and a better command of the English language. To illustrate, the pauses and faulty utterances, lack of knowledge about grammatical structures, irrelevant and inadequate use of vocabulary, and lack of flow in the discussion were reduced. Furthermore, in these post-test activities, they also produced accurate pronunciation.

The teaching of English as a Second Language carries many challenges; however, this will be helpful for the enhancement of speaking skills. However, the challenges should

be encountered wisely and carefully for this purpose. As evident from the post-test results, teaching English is not as difficult as it was. A supportive environment with scaffolding techniques and sociocultural elements is mandatory for this purpose. With the active participation of The teachers in what to teach and how to teach and the textbooks with particular activities for improving communicative skills, learners' communicative competency and fluency can easily be improved by teaching English as a Second Language.

Limitations and Future Prospects

This study is conducted in a public school in a rural area of Pakistan, and the research subjects are only girls. Moreover, this particular research revolves around the students of matriculation within a time period of only one month. Researchers who want to conduct similar research in the future can also include students (both girls and boys) from other classes. They can conduct similar research in an urban area, including the students of colleges or universities, within a broader period. They can also research the limited resources available in schools and colleges for providing a supportive environment for teaching and learning English as a Second Language.

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