

## TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING: A NEOPHYTE IN PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*This article presents the current picture of the ELT scenario in Pakistan and its pedagogical perspectives. English is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan from class One to Bachelor's degree, yet most of the students are unable to communicate in English confidently in real life situations. Pakistani ELT system has confined the learners and teachers to the prescribed syllabus based on Grammar Translation Method. The number of failure in English is on the increase as compared to all other subjects. One of the major reasons of dropping out from schooling is also the obscurity about English language. The study advocates that instead of struggling with the traditional PPP (Present, Practice, and Production), language teachers should practice TBLT (Task Based Language Teaching) which is one of the most recent and pragmatic approaches in ELT. The article suggests that innovation in ELT is the paramount need of the time by implementing TBLT and deracinating PPP. TBLT is a learner-centered approach and dominating in the most of language curricula around the globe.*

**Keywords:** ELT, Pedagogical, Grammar Translation Method, Task Based Language Teaching

### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents the role and status of English language in Pakistan in pedagogical perspectives. Various issues in English Language Teaching (ELT) and some specific characteristics of Pakistani English as a variety are also described in brief. Since the independence of Pakistan in 1947, English was declared as the official language with a promise that it would be replaced with Urdu (the national language) with due course of time. But with the changing of the governments, policies also kept on changing in Pakistan (Rahman, 2003). It was stated in the constitution of Pakistan in 1973 that the role of English would be decreased; conversely its status is achieving significance day by day in every walk of life all around Pakistan. Previously English was a mandatory subject from class six to graduation i.e. from grade 6 to Bachelor level since 1947. Recently in 2009, government of the Punjab has approved another law that English will be taught in public schools and institutions right from class one as a compulsory subject to Bachelors level (Zahid et al., 2014). The medium of instruction of teaching mathematics and science will also be English. It is obvious that instead of diminishing the status of English language, practically it is always gaining importance in Pakistan. English in Pakistan is taught as a compulsory subject that is mostly literature based and not as a language i.e. functional usage is almost ignored. Pakistani students know about English but they rarely know about the English language itself. It is mainly due to various factors such as prescribed literature based syllabus, teaching methodologies and teaching-learning environment in which ELT is practiced. According to British Council in Pakistan (2010) the educational system and ELT in Pakistan is the one among the least developed in the developing countries (OBE, 2010). Hence a massive step is required to revitalize the existing scenario to be competitive with this ever changing and ever growing world.

## **BACKGROUND**

English came to Indian subcontinent in 1599 with a group of British merchants who established the British East Indies Company (Mahboob, 2013). The English people ruled the Indian subcontinent almost from 1858 to 1947 and had a long lasting effect on the entire culture and values of the local population. After independence in 1947, Pakistan declared English as the official language that would be replaced by Urdu (National language) with the passage of time (Rahman, 2003). Pakistan is ethnically and linguistically a heterogeneous country, so the nationalist policy makers desired to bond Pakistan with one national language i.e. Urdu that was an identity marker of the Muslims in united India (Rahman, 1996). As Hindi was the language associated with the Hindus in India. English, being the language of the elite was declared as the official language of Pakistan. As a result Urdu and English both became privileged and preferred languages dominating all the regional languages e.g. Punjabi, Pashtu, Sindhi and other local languages. Later on Urdu and English both became the language of media and education in Pakistan. Urdu turned into the language of masses and English as the language of elite class and language of military and judiciary (Rahman, 2003; Mahboob, 2013).

English started flourishing day by day and it has dominated all other languages in Pakistan. Now it is essential and a compulsory tool for communication not only in Pakistan but all over the world. English language is expanding and progressing all over the world as an international phenomenon to fulfill the ever increasing and diverse communicative needs of the people living around the globe. It has emerged as the most important and widely used language all over the world. No doubt English has achieved the most leading position of “Lingua Franca” of our epoch and is regarded as the key to success in various fields of life all over the world (Kachru, 1990). It is the richest language in respect of vocabulary and has developed a vast range of ever expanding as well as ever nourishing literature regarding every sphere of life. Now English is the license to success and parents, in Pakistan, desire their children to be proficient in English for their successful future. The status of English, owing to its association with the elite class of Pakistan (Rahman, 2002), has helped in making it as the most influential language. English, in Pakistan, is the language of power, courts, media and military in comparison with Urdu and other regional languages of Pakistan. Comparatively English press is more influential having more freedom and Urdu press remains circumspect with the middle and working classes. Almost same is the case with the medium of language in electronic media (Aryes, 2003).

### **English in Pakistan**

Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural society having four provinces responsible, independently, for the management of education as per constitution of Pakistan (1973). This study is limited only for the Punjab province. It is the most densely inhabited and the most prominent as well as the most developed province of Pakistan. Government of Punjab approved in 2009 that the official medium of instruction in the whole province for public institutions would be English from Class One to Class Twelve. Tertiary level education by the universities is already practiced in the English medium of instructions all over the Pakistan in higher education. The Punjab province has a total of 57,418 government schools comprising primary (Grade 1 to 5), middle (Grade 6 to 8), high (Grade 6 to 10) and higher secondary (6 to 12) schools (British Council’s PEELI Project, 2013). Other than government schools there is a huge number of private schools in the province. All the schools are bound to follow the government sanctioned and prescribed textbooks provided by the government owned Punjab textbook board as annual examination of class five and eight are conducted inclusively by Punjab Education Commission for the all schools.

### Current Status of ELT in Pakistan

Pakistan has many languages and ethnic races with six major and over 57 minor languages in terms of number of speakers. However, the languages of the domains of power, corporate sector, media, courts, military and education are mainly Urdu and English (Rahman 1996). Urdu, spoken by almost 7% of the population, is the national language, while English is the official language. According to Rahman (2003), elite class of Pakistan has an influence in the continuance of English because it differentiates them from the working class. Table 1.1 below demonstrates the status of languages in terms of speakers' percentage in Pakistan according to the national census conducted in 2001:

**Table 1.1 Language in terms of Speakers' percentage in Pakistan (Census, 2001)**

S.No	Languages	Percentage of Speakers
1	Punjabi	44.15
2	Pashto	15.42
3	Sindhi	14.1
4	Siraiki	10.53
5	Urdu	7.57
6	Balochi	3.57
7	Others	4.0

Bapsi Sidhwa (1988:7) a famous Pakistani female novelist writes about the linguistic diversity in Pakistan as: *“Although I speak Gujrati at home and am relatively fluent in Urdu and understand Punjabi, English is the language I choose to write in. I dream and think in all four languages. I feel perhaps in common with most trilingual or bilingual writers, fortunate in having access to these languages. I am free to take what I wish from the riches each offers the earthy gusto of Punjabi, the poetry and delicacy of Urdu, the comedy and farce of Gujrati, the wealth of choice which makes for exactitude in English, and the body of meaning encapsulated in any of the words of these South Asian languages and juggle them to my advantage.”* Infact it is not the case with Sidhwa (1988) only, as the whole society in Pakistan is a multilingual speech community interacting in at least more than three languages in daily life.

Globalization and ever changing situation of the world have convinced the government of Pakistan to acknowledge the significance of English language as it has emerged as an international language of trade, commerce and technology (Rahman, 2003). Baumgardner (1993) and Talat (2002) have built the foundation of a serious academic analysis and description of Pakistani English (PE) as a non-native variety of English. The Pakistani variety of English is a variety of English in its own right and not just a stage on the way to more native-like English. PE has developed its own linguistic and cultural identity. Words from Urdu and indigenous languages of Pakistan are often used in English where no equivalent or appropriate English word exists. Besides these borrowings, English in Pakistan can be identified by certain distinctive features of grammar, word-formation and lexical variations

(Baumgardener, 1998). Figure 1.1 depicts the geographical linguistically diverse map of Pakistan by Bolor (2009).



Fig. 1. Geographical representation of Languages in Pakistan (Bolor, 2009)

Proficiency in English language serves as the gateway to success for all respectful and white collar jobs along with success in higher education (Ghani, 2003). Pakistani students' needs for learning English are primarily for multidimensional purposes such as travelling abroad, higher studies, reading advanced technical literature and access to international books and journals (OBE, 2010; Shamim, 2008). One of the major needs is for international communication and for intercultural exposure to fulfill the diverse requirements.

The government of Punjab has ordered to switch medium of instruction from Urdu to English right from grade-1 in 2009 i.e. from primary to higher secondary level as the universities are already educating in the English medium of instruction. This decision has brought a long lasting controversy and debates among the educators, writers, administrators and all other stake holders. As education system in Punjab was already outdated, this shift of medium of instruction from L1 (mother tongue) or national language i.e. Urdu to English has a negative impact mainly on the untrained teachers and students along with parents. There is a major problem with learning and teaching of English at all levels in Pakistan due to various reasons for example; dearth of ELT trained teachers, low level of motivation towards learning of the English, shortage of quality textbooks, traditional examination system and many other elements that contribute to depict English as the most difficult subject in Pakistan (Ahmad et al., 2011).

As a matter of fact, most of the failure ratio in the English subject at any level of education in Punjab and all over the Pakistan is very high as it can be easily verified from boards and universities websites during result declaration. The pass percentage of English (Compulsory) in BA from University of Punjab, Lahore was 33.34 and for English Literature it was 25.49 in 2013 (Punjab University Result Gazette, 2013). It shows the eye opening situation and true outcome of traditionally Grammar Translation Method based ELT in Punjab. This state is worsened at MA English level with occasionally pass percentage of MA English in many Pakistani universities does not touch the double digit figure, just to mention the result gazette of the Karachi University (a well reputed Pakistani university. According to result gazette in

2012 pass percentage in MA English was just 3.19 % as only 18 students passed out of 565 candidates and it turned down to only 3% in 2013. This situation entails the inferior pedagogical standards of ELT in Pakistan and it demands an innovation in the ELT in Pakistan. One of the major reasons of dropping out from schooling is also the difficulty to cope with English. This is the reason for ever increasing English tuition academies and a mushroom of so called English medium institutions in the province, that are not producing efficient ESL learners but they know the tricks of examination system and enable their students to get through without any real comprehension of the English language.

It is evident too as from the various advertisements in the dailies from PPSC (Punjab Public Service Commission: a government body responsible for the recruitment of teachers / lecturers and many other public sector jobs, [www.ppsc.gov.pk/jobs](http://www.ppsc.gov.pk/jobs)). Most of the advertisements still state that applicants having M.A English in third division are eligible to apply. Same is the case at FPSC (Federal Public Service Commission, [www.fpsc.gov.pk](http://www.fpsc.gov.pk)) and in other provinces of Pakistan. Where as it is not the case with Masters of any other subject.

Recently, the government of Punjab has invited many national and international organizations in order to boost up the English and computer literacy rate in the province. It is due to the fact that International NGOs and donor agencies realize English as the De facto language for international communicative needs (Habib, 2013). There have been MoUs (memorandum of understanding) for the uplifting of ELT standards in Punjab, Pakistan among the GoP (government of Punjab) and national as well as international NGOs such as; DFID (Department For International Development) and British Council (Zafar, 2015).

Another milestone to heighten the standards of education in the largest province of Pakistan (Punjab) is the British Council's PEELI project i.e. Punjab Education and English Language Initiative, 2013–2018. PEELI aspires to guarantee that by the end of 2018 all the students admitted in the schools all over the Punjab will be facilitated with high quality English Language teaching that will be equivalent to the international standards. But the ground reality is almost complex as the real reason behind downfall of ELT standards is the wrong methodology of teaching English (Ghani, 2003; Rasool, 2007)

## **ELT PROBLEMS IN PAKISTAN**

English is taught in Pakistan under complex conditions which are odd and outdated to be far from being satisfactory. Still centuries old teaching methodologies (such as GTM and PPP) are in practice in the education of Punjab which do not meet the needs of ESL pedagogy in 21<sup>st</sup> century. Some of the weaknesses in the program of teaching English are:

Mostly teachers themselves do not know the purpose for which they teach English other than to enable their students get through in the examination. They do not bother about the real comprehension of the English language. Grammar Translation Method is followed emphasizing rote-learning and memorization of abstract grammatical rules (Ghani, 2003). Communicative aspect of the language has been ignored both by the teachers as well as by the writers of the prescribed textbooks. English is taught only as an examination subject and neglecting any aspect of English language as a tool for communication. This shows a lack of planning for which this teaching-learning situation is carried out in Pakistan (Habib, 2013).

The utmost purpose of any teacher is to enable students to pass the examinations as expertise in language skills is not a priority both by the teacher and the taught. Teachers do not keep in view the basic aim of language acquisition and the functional usage of English. The prescribed books usually do not mention the goals and objectives of the textbooks (Shamim, 2008). In this way teaching is carried out with a narrow and limited aim just to pass the examinations. Punjab Public service Commission (PPSC) invites the applicants having



Master in English literature without any professional degree in pedagogy for Lecturers job in colleges and for teaching in schools.

To worsen the situation candidates having Masters in ELT, TESOL, TEFL or Applied Linguistics are not treated as equivalent to an MA English Literature. As these programs are still very new Pakistan and only few private universities are running these programs. There is a huge criticism on the linguistic competency of the teachers in Schools and colleges all over the Pakistan (McNicoll, 2013).

Prescribed textbooks do not guide the teachers about the goals and objectives of the lessons. As teachers are already incompetent, the situation is worsened with the substandard and prescribed books. There is no particular policy to upgrade the textbooks, even after decades books remain the same. In this situation how the status of English language teaching in Punjab can be uplifted? The current English textbook of class eight was first published in 1989 by the Punjab Textbook board Lahore, Punjab (a government body) and still it is continued in the schools without any changes and up gradation. It is just one example to point out the outdated system of ELT in Punjab. Many other books of PTBB i.e. Punjab textbook board are in practice since many decades before and text book of intermediate English is an example in this regards.

Overcrowded and large classes also add to worsen the existing problems as teacher's major dilemma is to handle large classes and classroom management. Therefore teachers are inclined to pin point the important questions from the examination point of view just to get through by selective study without completing the prescribed syllabus. There is an external examination system up to intermediate level in Pakistan. The examination system also facilitates rote learning and the examinations are based on memory driven system and not on the skills driven (Rasool, 2007). There is no test of the listening, reading and speaking skills as the examination tests only the literacy skills i.e. writing and reading are focused and oracy skills are altogether ignored. Furthermore, those who achieve high grades in English in these examinations cannot speak or write in English confidently during the interviews for job and in competitive examinations for superior services in the province of Punjab. The examination system, from which they were familiar, was merely a test of written language and a test of memorization abilities. Examinations do not test the analytical and critical skills as they are based on memory driven tests. The examination system gives advantages to those who have a good memory and can cram the material irrespective of being understood (Ghani, 2003).

According to Rasool (2007) the quality of education is continually on the turning down tendency that is mainly due to lack of qualified teachers, inadequately equipped laboratories and outdated curriculum fulfilling very fewer needs of the ever changing scenario around the globe. It demands a massive change to raise the standards of ELT in Punjab. To change one's behavior means to change one's thinking styles and it is very difficult as well as time consuming endeavor. Dorney (2005) has illustrated that "language learning is ultimately a highly interpersonal enterprise, involving relationships between learners and teachers, therefore, understanding the psychology of these relationships and of the agents involved in them is half the battle."

Teachers will have to be more flexible along with all the stakeholders to improve the situation of ELT in Punjab. Gone are the days of teacher authoritative methodologies, now the whole system will have to switch over to a more learner centered approach. Instead of prostrating to the traditional PPP i.e. "Present", "Practice" and "Production", the authorities should activate TBLT which is the most recent and most practicable approach as it has become part and parcel in most of the countries around the globe (Carless, 2009; Willis and Willis, 2007; Nunan, 2004; Hu, 2013; Ellis 2003).

## TASK BASED LANGUAGE TEACHING

TBLT is the most advocated by the world renowned SLA experts and ELT practitioners (Ellis, 2003, Nunan, 2004, Skehan, 2009, Willis and Willis, 2007; Samuda and Bygate, 2008). The major benefit of TBLT is that it focuses on all integrated skills instead of ignoring any one. Moreover it is a learner centered approach and teacher behaves like a facilitator and guide. It is very interactive and pragmatic method of teaching as real life tasks are rehearsed in ELT classroom to enable ESL learners as proficient users of English language outside the classroom (Willis and Willis, 2007).

Nunan (2004) differentiates TBLT and traditional ELT classroom following the conventional ‘PPP’ approach as TBLT is the most dynamic and pragmatic approach in ELT. Here language learners take active part during pedagogical tasks performance as task is the most fundamental unit of a lesson in TBLT (Ellis, 2009). Table 1.2 distinguishes TBLT from traditional ELT classroom as described by Nunan (2004).

**Table 2. Difference between traditional classroom and TBLT classroom by Nunan (2004)**

	<i>Traditional Form-Focused Pedagogy</i>	<i>Task Based Language Teaching</i>
S. No	Rigid discourse structure	Loose discourse structure
1	Teacher controls topic development	Students able to control topic development
2	The teacher regulating turn-taking	Turn-taking is regulated by the same rules
3	The teacher knows what the answer is to	The teacher does not know what the answer is to
4	Students’ responding role and performing a limited range of language functions	Students’ initiating and responding roles and performing a wide range of language functions
5	Little negotiate meaning	More negotiate meaning
6	Scaffolding for enabling students to produce correct sentences	Scaffolding for enabling students to say what they want to say
7	Form-focused feedback	Content-focused feedback
8	Echoing	Repetition

A pedagogical *task* can be defined as a language activity which (1) is focused on meaning, (2) features some kind of information or opinion gap, (3) asks learners to rely in their own resources, and (4) has a clear outcome that exceeds the use of language (Ellis, 2003). The basic goal of Task Based Language Teaching is to attempt to create natural language acquisition situations just like mother tongue environment. Proponents of TBLT emphasize that language exercises are unnecessary to learn languages, and that languages are best taught when they are used to convey meaning and transmit messages (Prabhu, 1987; Skehan, 2009; Robinson, 2011, Rahimpour, 2008). Teachers should create tasks containing functions, context, and integrated language skills to activate grammatical comprehension so that language learning should be just like learning L1.

## PRINCIPLES OF TBLT

Basically TBLT follows on the principles and effectiveness of experiential learning introduced by John Dewey (1859-1952) and real life situations are rehearsed in the language

teaching classrooms (Ellis, 2009; Hu, 2013). More recently in modern theories of learning TBLT is based on the constructive theory of learning. History of TBLT goes back to 1980s as it emerged out of the Communicational Language Teaching project in India by Prabhu (1987). The rationale behind its origination is the lack of performance in the target language production and other limitations of the traditional language teaching methodologies based on the structural approach following PPP (Presentation-Practice-Production) paradigm. The PPP approach is based on the behaviorist school of learning and learners are presented with chunks of language focusing on the abstract grammatical principles and rote learning of the target language structures (Ellis, 2003; Long and Crookes, 1993). Previously it was assumed that learners could only master a language if they memorized and practiced the grammar of the target language. It proved wrong in the long run as learners knowing only theoretical grammatical rules were not able to communicate fluently in the target language in real life situations (Krashen, 1985; Prabhu, 1987; Ellis, 2003).

The role of the learner's motivation, cognitive abilities and autonomy enjoy the central place in constructivism, which are also fundamental assumptions in TBLT (Robinson, 2011; Ellis, 2009). Wang (2011) asserts that constructivism emphasizes learners' autonomy, reflectivity, personal involvement and active engagement of the learners in the process of learning; practically same is the case with TBLT principles. When a learner undertakes a communicative task, he is inclined to make use of his existing linguistic resources in order to achieve an outcome. There is a concurrence both in TBLT and in the learning principles of constructivism (Ellis, 2003; Hu, 2013). TBLT asserts that language is best learned when focus is on meaning and it is contrary to the concentration on form i.e. grammatical structures of the target language based on the traditional linguistic or structural syllabus.

Skehan (1996) and Carless (2009) differentiated **strong** from **weak** forms of task based language teaching. The **strong** TBLT form focuses more on meaning making in real life scenarios along with authentic and accurate performance of the tasks. The **weak** form of TBLT accommodates more flexible tasks for communicative teaching and language pedagogy (Hu, 2013). The roles performed by the language learners in TBLT are labeled as: participants, risk takers, listeners/speakers, storytellers, innovators and sequencers. They participate in group works or in pair/dyads during task cycle for successful L2 development.

The basic unit of a lesson in TBLT classroom is the task and various tasks are designed to facilitate the learners with real life communicative situations enabling them real communicators of the target language. It is a learner-centered approach, based on the constructivist school of learning and teacher plays the role of a facilitator of the communicative interaction among the learners (Ellis, 2009). During TBLT a language learner plays a dynamic role in the whole process of language learning as he takes active part in interactive and communicative activities throughout the task performance cycle to achieve an outcome (Skehan, 1996; Robinson, 2011; Ellis, 2003;). Samuda and Bygate (2008:69) defined task as ***"A task is a holistic activity which engages language use in order to achieve some non-linguistic outcome while meeting a linguistic challenge, with the overall aim of promoting language learning, through process or product or both"***.

Nunan (2004) has differentiated task classification as the pedagogical tasks and real life tasks. The pedagogical tasks mean the communicative activity performed in the classroom to achieve an outcome, basic purpose of pedagogical task is the rehearsal of real world all around. The real-world task means the real life interactive communication outside the classroom for example reserving an air ticket, job interviews and making new friends. The basic purpose of a task is not only to communicate but to achieve a purpose and an outcome



while focusing primarily on pragmatic meaning (Ellis, 2009). Figure 1.2 illustrates the framework of Task Based Language Teaching designed by Nunan (2004).



Figure 2. Framework for TBLT by Nunan (2004:25)

Willis and Willis (2007) have distinguished tasks in a broader sense as the rehearsal tasks and the activation tasks. Rehearsal tasks assist the learners to perform anything which requires the learners to attempt outside classroom. These are not exactly the same as the real-world situations but there is some kind of adaptation to fit in the classroom environment. Examples of rehearsal tasks are to search an advertisement in newspaper for a suitable employment or a job interview by a pair or group in the classroom. The activation tasks have nothing to do with real world situation and they are designed to stimulate and to improve integrated language skills. Here textbook adaptation by a skillful teacher facilitates the second language learners to improve target language learning (Ellis, 2003).

Prime objective of this article was to demonstrate the existing ELT scenario in Pakistan and to propose any recommendations to uplift the declining ELT standards. It is obvious that change and innovation are a basic step in the advancement of knowledge all over the world. The researcher being an ELT practitioner since more than a decade suggests implementation of TBLT in Pakistan to meet the international standards of ELT.

## CONCLUSION

If government of the Punjab has strong resolution to enhance the communicative aspects of English among the students then innovation in ELT at gross root level is the need of the time. Instead of wasting resources ambiguously, government should concentrate on overhauling the entire education system. Curriculum planners should be informed about the target goals and objectives of the ELT syllabus emphasizing the communicative aspect of language usage in real life situations. Similarly teaching methodology should be switched over to TBLT instead of traditional PPP. The examination system should be upgraded in such a way to be able to test all four skills of English language just like IELTS and TOEFL. There should be monetary incentives for the teachers undergoing through in-service training for learning how to teach communicatively in ELT classrooms. There should be an increased level of motivation on part of all the stakeholders involved in the teaching-learning process. As TBLT is in practice in various leading universities of the world, experts can also be called to start with the approach in Punjab. Provision of the audio and video ads along with allied facilities must be made available at the earliest.

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