

## Promoting Students' English Proficiency through Curriculum at the Secondary Level

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### Abstract

*The focus of the study was that secondary school students were not found proficient in English language and it was considered necessary to study this problem in the context of curriculum that required promoting all the four skills of student in English, which included listening, speaking, reading and writing. It is high time to have suitable curriculum of English, well elaborated through various proper textbooks. Textbooks are the visible, tangible and practical manifestation of the curriculum. The data was collected through an opinionnaire from school head and subject teachers of 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> classes in all the 104 sampled Government Boys' High Schools in five districts namely Abbottabad, Kohat, Mardan, Peshawar and Swat. The outcome of the analysis of data was that the textbooks used in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> classes have full potential to develop the overall skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Teachers of English are unable to teach enthusiastically to meet the needs of students due to their deficiency in speaking skills. Capacity building of teachers who teach English has to be ensured to facilitate them to promote all the needed skills of learning. It was suggested that in order to facilitate teachers to promote speaking skills by using Direct Method of teaching, the recruitment of those persons should be made in future, as teachers in English, who hold master's degree in English language.*

**Keywords:** Proficiency, Curriculum, Textbook, Secondary Schools, Students' Skills

### Introduction

Educationists are very keen to find the proper approaches which should help in promoting students' proficiency at the secondary level. Students are commonly found not proficient in English language, this proficiency depends on promoting the four basic skills of learners which are listening, speaking, reading and

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writing. For this purpose, the primary objective on the study was to find out from school heads and subject teachers whether the prescribed curriculum promotes these four skills. For this purpose the following key questions were framed out.

- i). Textbook of English is according to the mental level of students.
- ii). Textbook in the subject of English helps in developing the listening skill of students.
- iii). Textbook in the subject of English helps in developing the speaking skill of students.
- iv). Textbook in the subject of English helps in developing the reading skill of students.
- v). Textbook in the subject of English helps in developing the writing skill of students.

This process was further supported by classroom observation of teaching learning process to know ground realities. The study found that the curriculum has the potential to promote the above mentioned four skills but the flaw remained in the teaching learning process which did not promote speaking skills.

The delimitation of the study required to narrow down its scope to five representative districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, namely Abbottabad, Kohat, Mardan, Peshawar and Swat. As the results could be generalized to the entire province. However, Government Girls' schools as well as private sector schools could not be included in the domain of the study.

The availability of textbook should be treated as means not an end in itself. This teaching aid may work to fulfill the objectives set for the learners.<sup>1</sup> The textbook is the most important and reliable tool in the Asian educational setting. It assures the security and consistency equally favored and supported by teachers and parents. Moreover, Government can tight their control on the thoughts of the teachers.<sup>2</sup>

In the English textbooks mostly the functional part speaking English is controlled. They need specific attention to meet oral need of the learners.<sup>3</sup> More focus should be diverted to various drills to promote English language among the learners. He further stated that curiosity is the inborn quality of humans to know something about everything and dislike various blocks resisting in their ways. Therefore, organized fluency and comprehension work should be presented through textbooks engaging the students in purposeful activities to develop their communication skill.

Similarly, textbook of English language only works on encoding and decoding rather than the practical use of the learners necessary for the survival in the open market.<sup>4</sup> He further stated that it is the need of the time to evaluate the textbook by different evaluation methods so that different aspects are evaluated from different angles. The learners need and interest along with their teachers and administrators should also be given priority by making the material enjoyable for them.

These days, most of the second language professionals are trying their best to make sure an authentic and natural textbook which is easy to help learning English in natural setting and evaluate in the same manner. So, the syllabus is to be designed in such a way to improve learners' vocabulary in the easiest form.<sup>5</sup>

Rich literature is available on English language textbooks as a second language but very little work is seen over the syllabus of English.<sup>6</sup> These days, it is becoming the centre of attention which is the need of the hour. Therefore, syllabus should be preferred.

The importance of text book as it needs to present real, authentic and purposeful activities to learners. She also suggested that each book should have a set of video dramas to snatch learners' interest by producing real life situation for understanding the target language.<sup>7</sup>

These days the word "Standard" is used in curriculum development which is a tool used for the improvement of desired outcomes based on the objectives of the course or lesson.<sup>8</sup> This standard shows clear cut expectation from teachers, learners, community and educators.

An overview based on research studies and theories of curriculum of English took cognizance of the development of syllabus and contents that promote different skills of students. But, unfortunately, the concern of teachers and their training in English language are not taken care of adequately due to which things do not go in correct direction. Above all, the curriculum developed by the responsible and concerned agencies is not passed on to schools and therefore, teachers do not know the objectives and outcomes of planned curriculum. As a result, teachers always demand full representation on curriculum planning committees. In developed countries teachers are provided guidelines and they themselves design the curriculum that suits the needs and requirements of society and learners. The curriculum bureau is located at Abbottabad (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa) and majority of English

teachers do not know who suggest and approve the curriculum of English for them.

### **Methodology**

A descriptive study describes and interprets what is, it is considered with conditions or relationship that exist, opinions that are held, processes that are going on, effects that are evident, or trends that are developing. It is primarily concerned with the present, although it often considers past event and inferences as they relate to current conditions. The study determined the status of phenomenon under investigation. The information was largely based on literature review, which included a study of research theses, journals, books, articles and other sources available to the researcher. The data were given both quantitative and qualitative treatment. The quantitative data were reflected in the tables with figures, percentages and further supported by graphs. The analysis was further made validated with the help of statistical measure. The qualitative data were placed under different patterns as well as in narrative form. The conclusions were drawn from the analysis of data and findings, which made basis for making recommendations.

The primary data were obtained through an opinionnaire administered to Principals/ Head Masters and Subject Teachers of Government Boys' High Schools in five sampled districts namely Abbottabad, Kohat, Mardan, Peshawar and Swat of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. The secondary data were obtained from office documents and review of literature from which indicators were also drawn for development of instruments. The instrument demands Opinionnaire which is also called attitudinal scale. The Opinionnaire contained statements on which opinions were required under five point Likert scale such as 'Agreed', 'Strongly Agreed', 'Undecided', 'Disagreed', and 'Strongly Disagreed'. The second tool of the study was the development of checklist for classroom observation on the basis of items selected from literature review.

The population of the study comprised all the 345 Principals of Government Boys' High School and 690 Subject Teachers as well as students of 9th and 10th classes located both in rural and urban areas in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Table 1 below illustrates the population of the study.

Table 1: District wise sample of Principals/Head Masters and Subject Teachers in Govt Boys' High Schools by urban and rural areas in 2012-13.

District	Urban		Rural		Total	
	P/HM	SST	P/HM	SST	P/HM	SST
Abbottabad	7	14	59	118	66	132
Kohat	5	10	42	84	47	94
Mardan	14	28	63	126	77	154
Peshawar	29	58	48	96	77	154
Swat	8	16	70	140	78	156
Total	63	126	282	564	345	690

Table 2: District wise sample of Principals/Head Masters and Subject Teachers in Govt Boys' High Schools by urban and rural areas in 2012-13.

District	Sample@30%	
	P/H.M	SST
Abbottabad	20	40
Kohat	14	28
Mardan	23	46
Peshawar	23	46
Swat	24	48
Total	104	208

Source: Annual Statistical Report of Government Schools (2012-13) Elementary and Secondary Department of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

#### *Tools of the study*

The opinionnaires both for Principals and Subject Teachers contained five items with five options based on Likert's five-points scale. The quantitative data were analyzed with the help of Tables. They were interpreted with the help of simple and complex statistical measures such as percentages; Chi square and Odd Ratio duly validated by experts in Statistics, i.e. Mr. Qamar Zaman Chairman Department of Statistics, University of Peshawar and his colleagues. The qualitative data were also discussed and described in narrative form. For the purpose of analysis of data only 'agreed' and 'disagreed' responses were taken into consideration. 'Undecided' responses were not taken into account as the results were to be based on majority of responses. 'Agreed' and 'strongly agreed' were combined. Similarly, 'disagreed' and 'strongly disagreed' were also merged.

### Data Analysis

This section presents the interpretation, discussion and results of the data collected from the respondents, both the Subject Teachers and the Headmasters/Principals. The following opinions/questions were asked from the participants about the textbooks for the subject of English through an opinionnaire.

Table 3: Textbooks of English is According to the Mental Level of Students

Designation	Disagree	Agree	Total	Chi-square	P-value
Principal/HM	31	56	87		
SST/Subj. Teacher	46	137	183	3.186	0.074
Total	77	193	270		

A result generated in the form of cross tabulation revealed that majority of respondents (193) agreed to the statement 'textbook of English is according to the mental level of students'. A chi-square test was applied to find the association between the designation of the respondents and their opinions about the statement that the 'textbook of English is according to the mental level of students'. The result of  $\chi^2$  was found insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which indicated the absence of association. But, the odd of principal was 1.649 times as compared to SSTs towards the 'textbook of English is according to the mental level of students'. Alternatively, the odds of SSTs were 0.61 times as compared to principal towards 'the textbook of English is according to the mental level of students'. The results of the analysis are further depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Textbooks of English is According to the Mental Level of Students

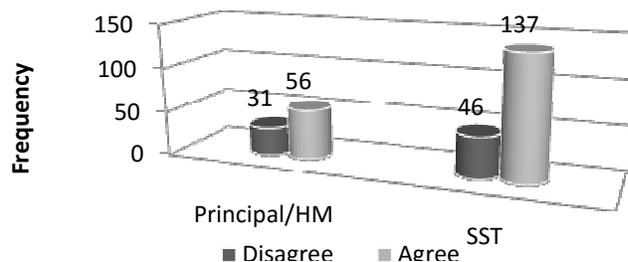


Table 4: Text books of English Helps in Developing Listening Skill of Students

Designation	Disagree	Agree	Total	Chi-square	P-value
Principal/HM	9	89	98		
SST/Subj. Teacher	13	188	201	0.713	0.398
Total	22	277	299		

A result generated in the form of cross tabulation revealed that majority of respondents (277) agreed to the statement 'the textbook of English helps in developing listening skill of students'. A chi-square test was applied to find the association between the designation of the teachers and their opinion about 'the course in the subject of English helps in developing listening skill of students'. The result of  $\chi^2$  was insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which showed the absence of association. But, the odds of principals were 1.462 times as compared to SSTs towards 'the course in the subject of English helps in developing listening skill of students'. Alternatively, the odds of SSTs were 0.683 times as compared to principal towards 'the course in the subject of English helps in developing listening skill of students'. The results are further elaborated with the help of Figure 2.

Figure 2: Textbook of English Helps in Developing Listening Skill of Students

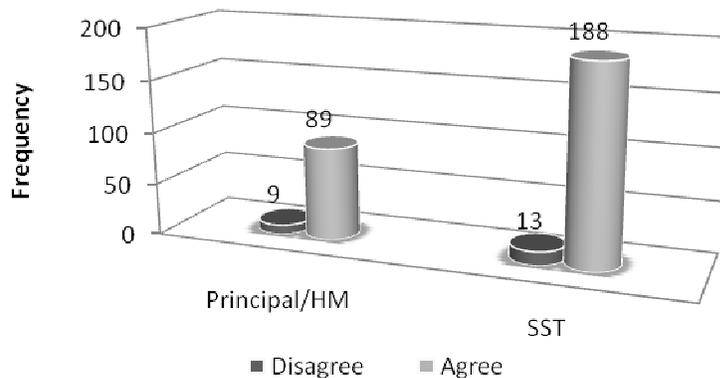


Table 5: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Speaking Skill of Students

Designation			Total	Chi-square	P-value
	Disagree	Agree			
Principal/HM	16	79	95	0.008	0.927
SST/Subj. Teacher	33	158	191		
Total	49	237	286		

A result generated in the form of cross tabulation revealed that majority of respondents (237) agreed to the statement 'the course helps in developing speaking skill of students'. A chi-square test was applied to find the association between the designation of the teachers and their opinion about the 'course helps in developing speaking skill of students'. The result of  $\chi^2$  was insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which indicated the absence of association. But, the odds of principals were 0.970 times as compared to SSTs towards the 'course helps in developing speaking skill of students'. Alternatively, the odds of SSTs were 1.03 times as compared to principal towards the 'course helps in developing speaking skill of students'. The results obtained are also diagrammatically presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Speaking Skill of Students

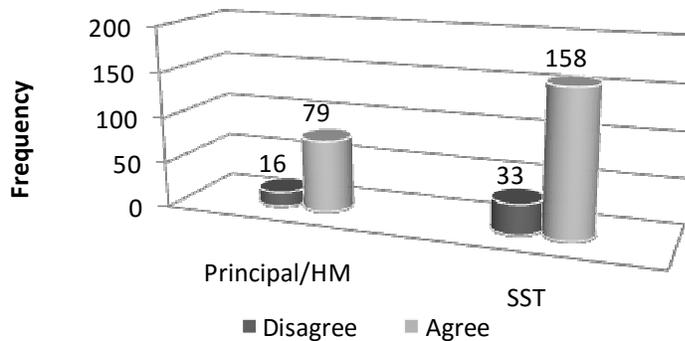


Table 6: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Reading Skill of Students

Designation			Total	Chi-square	P-value
	Disagree	Agree			

Principal/HM	3	101	104		
SST/Subj. Teacher	7	199	206	0.058	0.809
Total	10	300	310		

A result generated in the form of cross tabulation revealed that majority of respondents (300) agreed to the statement 'the course helps in developing reading skill of students'. A chi-square test was applied to find the association between the designation of the teachers and their opinion about the 'course helps in developing reading skill of students'. The result of  $\chi^2$  was insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which indicated the absence of association. But, the odds of principals were 0.844 times as compared to SSTs towards the 'course helps in developing reading skill of students'. Alternatively, the odds of SSTs were 1.184 times as compared to principal towards the 'course helps in developing reading skill of students'. The results of the analysis are further explained with help of Figure 4.

Figure 4: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Reading Skill of Students

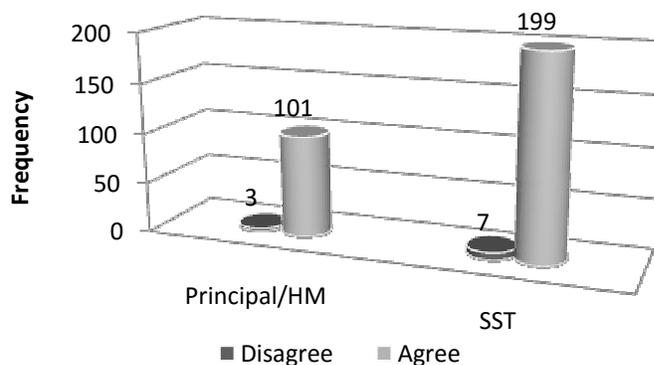


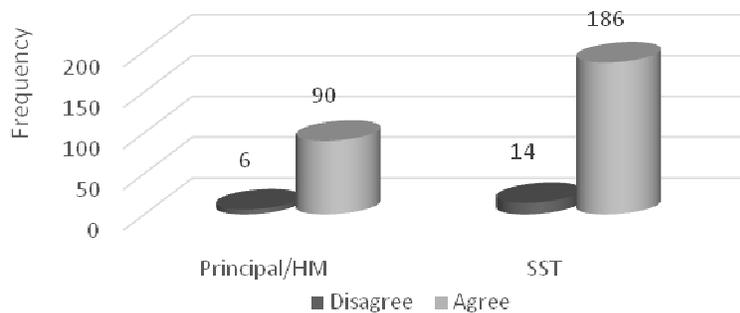
Table 07: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Writing Skill of Students

Designation	Disagree	Agree	Total	Chi-square	P-value
Principal/HM	6	90	96		
SST/Subj. Teacher	14	186	200	0.058	0.810

Total	20	276	296
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A result generated in the form of cross tabulation revealed that majority of respondents (276) agreed to the statement 'the course helps in developing writing skill of students'. A chi-square test was applied to find the association between the designation of the respondents and their opinion about the English textbook in developing writing skill of students. The result of  $\chi^2$  was found insignificant ( $p > 0.05$ ) which indicated the absence of association. But, the odds of principals were 0.886 times as compared to SSTs towards the statement 'course helps in developing writing skill of students'. Alternatively, the odds of SST were 1.129 times as compared to principal towards the 'course helps in developing writing skill of students'. The diagram in Figure-5 further depicts the results of the analysis.

Figure 5: Textbooks of English Helps in Developing Writing Skill of Students



### Discussion

The importance of productive skills of students in English language is of real importance. Due to foreign language it is very difficult in the current scenario for teacher of English language to develop speaking skills of students at the secondary level, reason being that teachers themselves are not exposed to such type of practices during their training in teacher training institutes.

English language has long been a part of our schools' curriculum. Throughout their academic years, students learn the language because a great part of their curriculum is devoted to English. It is obvious that most of our students are exposed to English even before they start their secondary level education.

In spite of the fact that our students spend a lot of their time learning English, yet there are concerns over the decline in its proficiency, particularly in spoken English. This is a debatable issue for educators, parents and community as well. During discussion the students face problems in the class and they perform poorly as well while presenting their task.<sup>9</sup> Academic speaking skill is often neglected as compare to other skills.<sup>10</sup> For such purpose conducive learning environment is of great importance for participation in discussion. Similarly, academic reading is also widely used skill and is essential for students to utilize at various levels.

In summary, it is recommended to provide the students an environment which offers more opportunities to use English. Teachers should enhance develop their methods teaching to produce interest. They should try to motivate and encourage students who have low confidence in using English outside the classroom.

The existing structure of teacher education is not fruitful as it does not provide opportunities for teachers' professional growth. The inadequate teacher training programmes are full of hurdles for career development of teachers and quality of teacher training is always ignored. In-service teachers' training Programme has no connection to raise teachers' morale.<sup>11</sup> Teachers are engaged to get their students passed in maximum by any mean irrespective of classroom interaction, which are the soul of modern day educational practices in Pakistan. More stress is given to memorization and rote learning. Teachers transfer the contents of curriculum to the students through different teaching methods. There are different modes and strategies that teacher uses to ensure that students learn accurately and effectively.

English is being taught as a second compulsory language after Urdu in Pakistan and it hardly occupies an international position enjoyed by any other language. There are two schools of thoughts: one is in favour of English and the other is against English. Both of them are extremists. They become sentimental rather than logical on the issue. Apart from sentimental considerations either in favour or against English, the fact remains that the study of English as a second language is indispensable for Pakistani youth, who want to reap the full fruit of modern education and technology.

### **Conclusions**

The study revealed that the course of English was relevant to the needs of the students of 9th and 10th classes. It was also found that the prescribed textbooks have the potential to develop the listening, speaking, reading and writing skills of students. It was also observed that students were not fluent in oral English reason being that the teachers of English themselves were not good in using Direct Method. It was need of the day that teachers should be given complete training in order to equip them with the necessary skills and only then they can help the students in developing their speaking skill through Direct Method, in the subject of English. One of the important suggestions was that without using Direct Method in teaching, students will remain deficient in spoken English. It was unfortunate that teachers did not use different teaching strategies that suited different learning styles of students. It was imperative that teachers should use different teaching methodologies in order to overcome the problem in promoting speaking skills of students. It was recommended that the subject teachers responsible for teaching should have master's degree in English.

## Notes & References

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