

Exploring English Language Teaching-Learning process at Intermediate Level: The Case of District Bannu

Ihsan Ullah Khan*, Abdul Hamid Khan†

Abstract

This study aimed at exploring English language teaching-learning process at intermediate level in District Bannu, in order to know how much the students were empowered. The research design used in this study was qualitative research design. Data was obtained from English language Classrooms through observation. In order to study the matter in-depth; an interview was taken, both from the teachers as well as students. The data was analyzed after converting the field notes into themes and sub themes. Data revealed that monologic teaching was prevalent in majority of the classrooms, with no or very little space for the students to interact in English language. Dialogic pedagogy may prove to be a better alternative for the teaching methodologies in vogue.

Key Words: *Dialogic teaching, Monologic teaching, Qualitative research design*

Introduction

English has acquired the status of an international language. It is the language of commerce, medicine, communication, electronic and print media worldwide. Keeping in view the importance of the language,

*PhD Scholar Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology,
Assistant Professor; Department of English and Applied Linguistics,
University of Science and Technology Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,
Pakistan. (ihsanlakki@yahoo.com)

†Head of the Department of Linguistics and Literature; Qurtuba University of
Science and Information Technology, Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa,
Pakistan.

efforts have been made in Pakistan for the promotion of the language but the desired results have not been achieved yet. Still many students in the country face difficulty in learning the language. Multiple reasons are responsible for this situation, for instance, students' aptitude, classroom environment, syllabus design and teaching-learning process. The researcher has observed that the most crucial factor among them is the teaching-learning process. In monolingual societies like Pakistan, classroom is the only place where students get an opportunity to communicate in the target language. According to Nawab (2012), English Language teaching in Pakistan is not producing desired results as teachers are using traditional approaches to teaching, which are outdated. One of the big challenges in ELT in Pakistan is the dearth of professionally trained teachers in the country. Rahman (2003), is of the opinion that teachers have no role in the curriculum development in Pakistan. According to him, the process of curriculum development is carried out at a higher official policy making level. It is observed that teaching methods in vogue, for teaching English language, is either grammar-translation or direct method. In both the cases students' voices are not given any importance by the teachers. In the researcher's opinion situation will become better if students' voice is also given equal importance. In this connection the adaptation of 'dialogic pedagogy', derived from Bakhtin's 'Dialogism' (1981, 1986) may prove to be a better option.

It is observed that students at Intermediate level in District Bannu face difficulty to communicate effectively in English language. Teachers put their hard work but their hard work, in majority of the cases, seems to be misdirected. Traditional methods of teaching English are practiced in majority of the ESL classrooms, where most of the students are passive listeners. English Language, like all other languages, can also be learnt through natural process. Students' failure to communicate effectively in second language (L2) may be attributed to the teaching-learning process in English language classrooms of the

district. This study explored the teaching methodologies currently in vogue in English Language classrooms of District Bannu, in order to know whether students are provided with opportunities to practice the language or not.

Research Methodology

Research Instruments

In order to get knowledge about teachers' practices inside the classroom, classroom observation was made. Observation enables a researcher to collect data in a distinct way. It guides the researcher not to rely on what people say they do, or what they think. Observation is more direct way of collecting data. Instead of depending upon others' views, it ensures to get first-hand information, by witnessing events through his/her own eyes. In Social sciences two kinds of observation research is used. Systematic observation is first of these two. The origin of systematic observation lies in social psychology particularly it studies the interaction in settings such as school classrooms (Flanders 1970; Simon and Boyer 1969). The second kind is participant observation. Participant observation is one in which the observer personally participates in the day-to-day lives of the people under study. This participation is either open, in the role of researcher, or in some disguised role. S/he observes things that happen, questions the people, listens to their views, for specific time period (Becker and Geer 1957: 28). One of the three possibilities of the participation is participation as an observer (Denscombe 2007, p. 218). In this case the identity of the researcher is openly recognized. In order to understand the issue thoroughly, an interview of teachers and students was also taken.

Sample

In order to observe the teaching-learning process in English Language classrooms, the researcher visited colleges in District Bannu. The researcher had visited 15 colleges when the stage of 'saturation' reached. Here lies the difference between qualitative and

quantitative researches. In quantitative research there is pre-determined sample size, while in qualitative research the process of data collection is stopped when the stage of data saturation is reached (Kumar, 2011, p. 176).

Data Analysis Technique

Data in this study was collected through observation and interview. Data from observation was collected in the shape of field notes. These field notes were arranged and coded. Coding is the process of organizing the data by bracketing chunks and writing a word, which represents a category, in the margins (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). On the basis of this coding themes were generated. These themes were then presented through narrative passages to convey the findings of the analyses. Finally, an interpretation of the data collected was made.

Results

The data obtained from ESL classroom observation in District Bannu indicates that very little or no opportunities are there for students to interact in L2. Except one college, almost all the English language classrooms of the district are teacher-centered. Monologic teaching is prevalent in all these classes with no opportunities for the students to interact with them or with their class mates. Practically the teachers did nothing to improve students' communicative competence in L2. Various teachers had various reasons for adopting the monologic teaching, but majority of them agreed on one point that they were short of time. About the passive role in the classroom students remarked that they were busy all the time in writing the meaning of difficult words and had no opportunities to interact. A student remarked: *Our whole attention is towards writing the meaning of difficult words. In this business we don't have time to think about asking question from the teacher or start a discussion.* Another student added: *We have made the conception that it is more than sufficient for us if we can translate a passage from English to Urdu at the end of the class.* (Interview, 18/9/17).

In majority of the colleges GTM is used by the teachers. This method is practically doing nothing to improve students' oral as well as written communication. The only activity, they were indulged in, was writing the meaning of difficult words, either in their note books or on their text books. The teachers created no room for the students to interact with their class fellows or with the teacher. They had their own reasons for adopting GTM in their classroom. A teacher remarked: *Students' opinion is based on the notion that only thing they can get from English Language classroom is learning the meaning of difficult words in Urdu. So anything extra is resisted by them.* Many students showed their interest to communicate in L2 but due to lack of guidance they could not do that. A student at GDC Sikander Khel Bala reported that: *we wish we could communicate in the language, but discouraging environment and lack of practice hinder the process.*

Direct Method of teaching ensures teaching in the target language. A teacher makes no use of the native language and explains the difficult concept in the target language. It is better than the GTM as, at least, students do not listen any single word from their native language. This method was used only by Mr. Amjad Khan, a subject specialist. According to him, he preferred this method as GTM did not serve his purpose. His fifteen years long experience told him that Direct Method was better than GTM. About the method a student remarked: *we faced problem in the beginning as the lecture was in English and we had come from Urdu medium schools, but with the passage of time we adjusted with the teaching.* Replying to the question why they were sitting silent throughout the session, a student replied: *I have a great desire to speak the language but I am afraid that I shall commit mistakes.* Lagowski and Vick (1995) are of the opinion that it is the responsibility of a teacher to encourage students and make efforts to solve their problems. This encouragement may be shown in the shape of rewards and prizes.

According to Jagodzinski (2009), the conventional approach, adopted by the teachers for teaching English, in which students get information passively should be replaced by strategies which are problem solving and student-centered. According to Murray & Brightman (1996), interactive approach of teaching is student-centered and it greatly improves the educational process and critical thinking of the learners. Mr. Nijat Ullah Shah, subject specialist, took the researcher to his class and provided chair at the back of the class. He wrote the title of the lesson, 'The Farewell Sermon', on the white board and started recapitulating the previous knowledge. He asked 'Wh' questions and students gave answer, one by one. This practice lasted for five minutes. After that he started reading the last paragraph on page 4 of the text book. He did code switching while explaining the ideas but encouraged students all the time to talk. The students were very active and reacted quickly when they were asked questions by the teacher. On one occasion the teacher explained a sentence in Urdu and asked the students to translate his explanation in English. One student rose and tried to explain it in English. After the completion of two paragraphs in this fashion, he instructed his students to form pair and underline at least three words in the lesson which were new for them or they did not understand their meaning. The students completed the task in five minutes and, according to the instructions of the teacher, started presenting their tasks one by one. Same procedure is also supported by Frederick (1981). According to him specific time should be given to the students in pair or in group to complete the task and select a person to present the task before the class. The teacher explained the meaning of difficult words when he was asked. This activity lasted for five minutes. About the method a student explained, *in the beginning it was extremely difficult for me to pick what the teacher was saying. Even at one occasion I thought of changing the college, but with the passage of time things got better.* According to Doyle (2008), for most of the students, environment in the learner-

centered classroom is quite new. It will prove to be a fruitful departure from the traditional teaching, but teachers must guide and help them in getting familiar with the new environment. Another student replied, *it was difficult, in the beginning, as we were not used to utter a single word before others, but when I saw my class fellows I muster up courage to interact.*

Discussion

In District Bannu, majority of the teachers used GTM for teaching English Language. The teachers believed that the method was convenient for the students. Unfortunately, students' convenience was kept in mind by the teachers, but their needs were totally ignored by them. The students were merely silent listeners. According to Chang (2011), in GTM major portion of the time is spent by teachers in translating the text into native language while students listen to them passively or taking notes of their lectures. Students at this stage are unaware about what is good and what is bad and the same is expressed by a student in the interview. A teacher is a driver; hence s/he should drive rather driven by the novices. Many students showed their interest to communicate in L2 but due to lack of guidance they could not do that. Merely clarification of the concepts should not be kept in mind by the teachers, being English language teachers, many responsibilities lie on their shoulders. Unfortunately, English language teachers are not clear about their goal. Problems would be solved, to greater extent, if English language teachers become clear about their responsibilities and planned their activities accordingly. The classroom observation indicated diverse problems, reported by the teachers. But, regardless of the nature of their problems, one thing was made clear and that was the teachers had accepted their defeats. No hint of extra efforts or endeavors, on the part of English Language teachers, was seen in the classrooms of the district. No spark was observed, in majority of the classrooms, among the teachers to do something extraordinary. Even private colleges, which highlight the "English Medium institution" in

their advertisements, show no difference. Parents, aware of the importance of English Language, get admission for their children in English Medium institutions with the view to improve their communicative competence. Unfortunately, their desires are not fulfilled in the private institutions too. The one and only trend prevalent in the district is to keep in mind the desires of the students rather their needs. The excuse on the part of the teachers that their students have no base of the language is not a solid and acceptable one. Students' base can be formed even at this very stage if the teachers make sincere efforts. Base of the students, in L2, is not formed by school teachers on various pretexts. Teachers at college level blame school level teachers for their inefficiency. Students' poor performance in L2 communication is attributed to the negligence of the school teachers and is made an excuse by the college teachers for following GTM. This blame game continues, and at the end of the day, students get nothing. GTM is preferred by many students as they want only clarification of the ideas and nothing more. Al Refaai (2013) conducted a research on the role of GTM in King Khalid University, Saudi Arabia. He concluded that in order to improve the learners' communicative skill GTM is not sufficient rather the old methods should be replaced by the modern ones.

Direct Method was used by Mr. Amjad, subject specialist, for teaching English Language. In his class, students remained silent throughout the session and did not utter even a single word in L2. He provided no opportunities to his students to communicate in the target language. According to Perrine et al., (1995), teacher should encourage those students who have academic difficulties. The teacher told that in the beginning he provided opportunities to his students to communicate in L2 but had to shun the practice due to students' lack of interest. His excuse does not seem convincing. A teacher, introducing a new technique of teaching L2, must be very much

patient. He must be close observer of all the happenings inside the classroom. If students are making disciplinary problems, it means that something is wrong with the technique. In such a situation the teacher must revisit his/her activities and re-plan them. Teaching–learning process can be improved if effective steps are taken by the teachers. One of such steps is the invitation of observer to the class. Sometimes teachers do not see any problem in their teaching methodology on their own. In such a situation, an observer can prove very helpful. S/he can observe and point out the drawbacks, if any, to the teacher. It is better if the observer is your colleague and English Language teacher (Keig, 2000; Webb and McEnerney, 1995).

Interactive Method of teaching is student-centered and proves very helpful in improving students' communicative competence in L2. Unfortunately, only one teacher, Mr Nijat Ullah Shah, followed Interactive Method of teaching English in the district. In the interview he disclosed that main factors, responsible for the selection of that method, were his experience and the in-service trainings in the field. According to him, students' communicative competence develops when they are given opportunities to interact with the teacher and class-fellows. He is very much right in his stance as every language is learnt by children through practice. According to (Kumar, 2003; Pavlou & Kambouri, 2007), it is imperative for the teacher to have communication with the students in order to know about their performance and the extent to which they have understood the content.

Conclusion

Most of the classes, the researcher visited, in the district were teacher-centered or monologic. Most of the talk-time in ESL classrooms was utilized by the teachers. Students were completely silent throughout the lecture. The only activity, the students were indulged in, was writing the meaning of difficult words in their note-

books or on their text books. Interestingly, the same practice was followed by the teachers in the renowned private sector colleges. Parents pay heavy fee by sending their children to such institutions, with the expectations that their children would communicate perfectly in L2. Unfortunately, students are not provided with any kind of opportunities to practice the language. One of the main reasons presented by the teachers, for utilizing maximum of the talk-time was shortage of time. They were short of time and the courses were very long, so they could not provide opportunities for students to take active participation in the classroom activities. Students did not participate in the classroom discussion as, according to them, they were afraid to commit mistakes. In addition, very little or no time was left with them, after they wrote the meaning of difficult words.

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