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PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF PAKISTANI EFL TEACHERS' EXPERIENCE AT UNDERGRADUATE LEVEL

Rashid Hussain¹, Shazia Sultana², Ayesha Bukhari³, Huma Rauf⁴

^{1,4}University of Central Punjab, Pakistan

^{2,3}National University of Modern Languages, Pakistan

E.mail: ¹rashid.hussain@ucp.edu.pk, ²Ssultana@numl.edu.pk

³Ayesha.bukhari@numl.edu.pk, ⁴huma.rauf@ucp.edu.pk

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ABSTRACT

Teaching English as a foreign language is not less than a challenge in a country like Pakistan. Due to the mixed ability students in every language class with different social and linguistic backgrounds, the Pakistani EFL teachers face a challenging milieu in their classes. For that, the EFL teachers have to adopt appropriate teaching strategies to deal with the students. Considering the phenomenon, a research gap, this study aimed at phenomenologically analyzing the experiences of Pakistani EFL teachers who are teaching at undergraduate level in different universities of Lahore, Pakistan. More specifically, the study focused at drawing out the frequently adopted techniques that the sampled EFL teachers use to resolve the issues. For this study, purposive and criterion-based sampling was done out of two Lahore based universities. Five teachers from each of the universities (National University of Modern Languages and University of Central Punjab) were sampled for conducting the semi-structured interviews. The participants were given a freewill to talk about the phenomenon in the way they experienced it. After the data was collected through interviews, the data explication process was accomplished by neglecting the uncommon themes and focusing the most frequent and common ones. Later, the thematically organized and explicated data was discussed in detail. As per the discussion over the explicated data, this study concluded that demography, motivation and schooling of the Pakistani English language learners are most important challenging factors in Pakistani EFL context. Moreover, the teachers use a variety of techniques to cater the multi-faceted and multi-layered EFL classroom context. The teachers also keep their students focused by motivating them through various effective ways. Considering their experiences, it is suggested to revise the teaching methods for the desired results.

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study:

English as a Foreign Language teaching is one of the most valued aspects of academia in non-English Speaking countries. With the inception of internet and colonial era, English language became lingua-franca across the globe. Communication is inevitable to run almost all type of matters on domestic and broader levels which is being done through English language among all the masses around the world for a considerable number of years. Facing such an unavoidable need of learning English, non-English speaking countries made 'learning English' compulsory for the students through completing various allied and major courses during their studies throughout. This is how, teaching English in non-English speaking countries is said to be Teaching English as a Foreign Language. Unlike ESL teachers (those English teachers who teach English in English speaking countries) EFL teachers need to use different strategies to deal with the challenges they face. TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) demands multiple prerequisites for its effectivity which majorly include professional quality of EFL teachers, number of students in a language class, students' schooling and the overall environment. Therefore, in a country like Pakistan where English is official language but it has a number of other factors that influence TEFL and its results.

Pakistani context for TEFL has some similar factors like other non-English speaking countries. As in Turkey, according to the policy, EFL teachers must be equipped with high skills and professionally advanced qualification, stated by Karakas (2012). An EFL teacher must have all the attributes that can inspire language learners. A language teacher must own the skills to identify the implicit problems of students. To understand the students' psyche and devise the appropriate strategies are the skills that a language teacher must own. In addition to this, according to Brosh (1996), an English language instructor must possess the necessary language abilities and expertise in areas such as linguistics, phonetics, grammatical use, and vocabulary, and also relevant pedagogy or methodology. Excellent language teachers have a deeper understanding of students, learning, and teaching, as well as the capacity to use both theoretical and practical knowledge in combination, actively involve students in critical reflection in class, and adapt to a variety of circumstances.

Precisely, the teacher beliefs and teaching capacity are two major aspects of pedagogy that can be impactful for both students and teachers' experiences. The history of contemporary EFL classrooms has shown that new ideas and approaches evolve in response to current demands and are aided by advances in adjacent fields. The demand for EFL skills has reached an all-time high as a result of increased international interactions and exchanges. Although Cognitive Psychology, Chomsky's linguistic rationalism, Context Linguistics, and other ESL theories exist, there is still much to be improved in ESL theories. There are still a number of issues with teaching procedures that need to be addressed.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the challenges that Pakistani EFL teachers face teaching at tertiary level?
2. What are the effective strategies used by Pakistani EFL teachers to deal with the challenges they face at tertiary level?

LITERATURE REVIEW

As proved by its formal and informal rankings in various nations, the worldwide spread of the English language has been the most magnificent example of linguistic expansion ever (De Swaan, 2013; Edwards, 2009; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Phillipson, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Wardhaugh, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2006). English is currently the most widely used foreign language for intercontinental communication, with twenty percent of the world's population using it (Crystal, 2004). The massive expansion of the English language began with the British Empire's colonisation of African and Asian countries, followed by American dominance. Indeed, ex-colonies continued to use English as their second or official language shortly after gaining independence in order to reap the benefits it provides to people, particularly the ruling class, as well as their newly established countries in the global market (De Swaan, 2013; Edwards, 2009; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997; Phillipson, 1996; Portes & Rumbaut, 2006; Wardhaugh, 1987; Wierzbicka, 2006). Following the first spread of English through the creation of the British Commonwealth, the second stage of the occurrence was assisted by the emergence of America. Following World War II, the English language began to flourish in even non-colonized nations as a result of sociopolitical and economic trends. Then, as the lingua franca of commerce, media, science, and technology, it gradually surpassed French as the language of world diplomacy. As a result, English was adopted into education systems all over the world, including in historically monolingual nations like the Middle East, Far East, and various European countries, with the goal of offering interconnectedness in such sectors. Formal foreign language instruction based on scientific learning theories began during and after WWII, with important innovations in language teaching, and was followed by subsequent advancements in the 1970s and 1980s (Cooper, 1989; Yule, 2016).

Effective Factors in TEFL

The term "communicative competence" refers to a broad concept that incorporates all of the abilities required to communicate successfully using both spoken and nonverbal language, stated by Bachman & Palmer (1996). So, the most important factor among all is communicative competence of language teachers. Normally, the language learners cannot understand the instructions given by the instructors due to the expression that a teacher uses. Therefore, it is important to convey a point in an easiest possible way. Language ability is separated into two categories, according to Bachman and Palmer (1996): organizational knowledge and pragmatic knowledge. Grammatical knowledge, which is needed to work at the word and sentence levels, and textual knowledge, which deals with the more complicated aspects of text, make up organizational

knowledge. Functional knowledge, which accounts for the capacity to communicate and comprehend intents, and sociolinguistic knowledge, which allows language users to successfully communicate within a socio-cultural environment, are two types of pragmatic knowledge. Learners' intermediate system of assumptions about the structure and operation of the target language that they build up in their minds as they work toward communicating with a closer-to-standard form of it is referred to as interlanguage, explained by White & Brown (2003; 2007). The instructors' teaching and feedback are critical to the learners' effective transit through these interlinguistic stages, a process that may be viewed as a language-learning counterpart of Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development, argued by Vygotsky (1978).

The development of a learner's communicative ability in a foreign language is heavily influenced by their native language, since it molds their interlanguage, particularly in its early stages. The native language effect is the name for this effect. Although the native language both aids and hinders with the acquisition of other languages, according to Brown (2007), the interfering element is frequently more immediately observed in class.

The conditioning forces that control the relationships among the component aspects of the teaching and learning process, i.e., teachers, students, technique, and subject matter, are referred to as factors (Abad & Maturana, 2010). Internal elements are subjective and relational; they originate in individuals and determine their roles and interactions in the classroom. Perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes of pupils and teachers are among them. López (2010) found in recent research that:

(...) teachers' attitudes mirror their perceptions. To be more precise, one's attitudes toward an invention are a product of one's perceptions (and, in some cases, misunderstandings) about it. (...) Similarly, their views are reflected in their actions. A positive attitude toward innovation, for example, is likely to be reflected by cooperative behaviour, whereas an ambivalent or negative attitude is likely to be reflected by non-cooperation or even resistance. 100 Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Facultad de Ciencias Humanas, Departamento de Lenguas Extranjeras Abad or negative attitude is likely to be reflected by non-cooperation or even resistance. (Page 64)

External influences, while relevant, are outside the control of teachers and students to a greater or lesser level. Class time and space, institutionally determined curriculum, educational policies, and socio-cultural milieu are only a few of them.

Orlich, Harder, Callahan, Trevisan, and Brown (as referenced by Maturana, 2011) define strategies as well-thought-out plans for achieving certain objectives. Learning strategies are intentional actions or procedures that students use to complete a task or solve a problem (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990). Teaching strategies are well-informed, well-thought-out approaches that govern instruction.

They are structured collections of concepts, according to Cole (2008), that emerge from instructors' experiential or educational knowledge but also have significance in a specific setting.

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Theoretical Framework

Although many notable philosophers such as Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and Husserl employed phenomenology in a variety of ways in their studies, but it may also be used to refer to first-person's experience. Immanuel Kant was the first to use the term phenomenology, which is derived from the Greek 'phainein,' which meaning 'to emerge.' Because the phenomena are produced by a cognitive subject, a human being, Kantian phenomenology is founded on constructivist philosophy. The subject builds what it knows in the constructionist perspective, and the subject knows what it constructs in the phenomenological view, which are not appearances but have appearance in consciousness (Rockmore, 2011).

Participants' lived experiences with a phenomenon are investigated in phenomenological research. To convey the breadth of this work, it is necessary to define the word "lived experience." In a phenomenological investigation, van Manen (1990) offered the following comparison to explain the nature of lived experience. According to van Manen's comparison, teacher A, who has no prior teaching experience and is starting her first day on the job, would have a different experience than teacher B, who has 10 years of expertise. During the lecture, the experienced instructor ignores the presence of the pupils, but the novice teacher is aware of the students' gaze. According to van Manen, the new teacher is continuously mindful of her own first-day-of-school experience. The skilled instructor, on the other hand, is completely unconscious of her actions throughout the lecture since she is used to lecturing and performs more naturally. This comparison depicts a lived experience by contrasting two people's reactions to the same incident. Because it indicates the teacher's sentiments on the first day of class, the lived experience might be a beginning point in phenomenological research. As a result, phenomenological research begins and ends with lived experience, which should be a meaningful and substantial encounter with the phenomena (Creswell 2007; Moustakas, 1994. van Manen, 1990). The goal of phenomenological research is to get to the heart of an individual's lived experience of a phenomenon while determining and defining it (Cilesiz, 2010).

METHODOLOGY

Research Participants

The paradigm of this phenomenological study is qualitative in nature as detailed semi-structured interviews were analyzed. In phenomenological studies, the prerequisite of considering a group of people as population is homogeneity, Cresswell stated (2007). Participants are referred to as 'co-researchers', stated by Moustakas (1994), since they are included in the meaning of the phenomenon's essence with the researcher. The principal researcher's purpose is to raise awareness of the co-researchers' position and function. As a result, researchers should tell co-researchers on how they fit into the research goals and questions at the start of the project. EFL teachers of two higher education institutes – National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Lahore Campus and University of Central Punjab (UCP), Lahore, Pakistan, were considered as population. Participants in phenomenological studies must be those who have similar experience of a particular phenomenon. According to Cresswell & Moustakas (2007; 1994) the individual with substantial experience of the phenomenon must be preferred for the investigation. Therefore, for this study, purposive and criterion-based sampling was used by selecting five EFL teachers from each of the universities. Cresswell (2007) explains that such sampling technique enables a researcher to verify the responses of participants by the set parameters. In this regard, criterion-based sampling helps a researcher to decide prudently the criteria for sampling which definitely strengthen the rigor in such studies. Hence, for this study, the EFL teachers with the following criteria were selected:

- a. relevant degree or certificate
- b. minimum three years' experience
- c. adaptable teaching style
- d. demographic, cultural and linguistic knowledge
- e. communicative ability in at least three languages (English, Urdu & Punjab)

Procedures and Tools

For the data collection purpose, semi-structured and in-depth interviews were conducted. Cresswell (2007) suggests that in-depth interviews with participants must preferably be used to gather data for a phenomenological analysis. Whereas, according to Marshall & Rossman (2006), the meanings of any particular phenomenon that several participants experience and share in common are possible through phenomenological in-depth interviews. Alongside the interviews, participants' data regarding their experience, qualification, teaching style, linguistic knowledge, communicative ability and demographic was also collected. Interviews were started with greetings and some general questions so that the participants could get relaxed, as suggested by the experts of phenomenological studies. However, for keeping the participants focused on the research objectives, some questions were structured which were oriented on the questions of this study. According to Seidman (2006), it is vital to establish rapport with the participant during the research.

As a result, the researcher may cultivate a positive relationship with each subject. During the inquiry, the researcher might also relate his or her personal experiences with the phenomenon. For example, in the phenomenological interview portions, researchers might relate their own experiences with the phenomenon as needed to help participants feel more at ease giving information about their experiences. Therefore, interview questions were structured to gather information about their experience of the phenomenon – teaching English as a Foreign Language in Pakistani context. Interviews were transcribed on the same day and were verified by the participants as well to avoid any discrepancy between their responses and transcriptions.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations in research are of primary importance to establish maintain the impartiality and reliability. Research ethics demand that research must be conducted considering the fragile factors of the participants and the community that is directly or indirectly involved in research. A few inevitable factors that must be taken in to ethical considerations are: identity of the participants, due respect of the opinions shared by the participants and unbiasedness in every aspect and on all levels. Keeping such factors in mind, the researchers made sure to set certain parameters to get the participation. Therefore, all the participants were briefed about the purpose of collecting the data in form of interviews. They were explained the purpose of research and the importance of their participation in terms of contribution to this research, to the academia and to the society as well. The participants were also given pseudonyms (i.e., P1= Participant 1) for keeping their identity undisclosed. They were also requested to fill a consent form that contains all the details and surety of not sharing or using the gathered data for any other purpose except this study.

Data Explication

The gathered data in the form of interviews was transcribed at the first. The transcribed interviews were also checked by the participants for the cross verification. Later, the initial coding was done to transform and divide the data into chunks and phrases. For the further refinement, considering the similar experiences of the phenomenon by the participants, axial coding was executed. At this phase, altogether different ideas were excluded and common shared experiences were axially coded. Those ideas were later divided into various categories. A chart was designed for the better and concise presentation of data explication. Finally, the categories were changed into three meaningful themes that contain further three sub-themes. After the data explication and presentation of the chart a detailed analysis was done considering all the factors. The researchers, considering their observation and own linguistic, academic, social and cultural knowledge related to this research and literature review, discussed all the major and sub-themes in detail.

DISCUSSION



Figure 4.1

Above chart shows the explicated themes that the participants frequently talked about in common. Almost all the participants majorly talked about demography, motivation and schooling as the major factors that influence the teaching (and learning) English as a Foreign Language in Pakistani context at the undergraduate level. The analysis of major and sub-themes after the explication of the data is categorically given below.

According to the participants, demography is the primary factor that influence EFL teaching. The demographical background of EFL learners at the tertiary

level pose various challenges for us, reiterated by the participants. The learners having various L1 practices give entirely different level of output. The Punjab, a province that contains most of the population of Pakistan, has most diverse community sharing different languages and cultures. Although, most of the languages and dialects are identical to each other but still the phonetic, lexical, morphological and syntactic characteristics are not the same. The learners coming from various cities, backgrounds and social settings do not equally understand and proceed English as a Foreign Language. Their speech organs are habitual of producing sounds of their first language that becomes a hindrance when they speak English. Moreover, Urdu as a lingua franca in Pakistan also proves to be a challenge for students when they write something in English because many a times, they borrow the Urdu expressions and resultantly they end up with a wrong or “Urduized” English expression. The participants also added, it is a linguistic fact that every language has some expressions which cannot be translated into any other language properly. If those expressions are translated word to word, the intended sense cannot be conveyed.

Secondly, the medium of communication, in almost all the areas of Pakistan, is normally local languages. The same social practice affects the EFL learners which in result become a challenge for the EFL teachers. Not only outside of the educational institutes rather within the premises of schools, colleges and universities, students communicate in local or national languages. This is how, due to the lack of practice, language learners cannot perform well in their EFL classes. Time constraints restrict the EFL teachers to the syllabus only. Therefore, the performance of EFL students and their participation during language classes cannot be improved until the educational institute restrict students to communicate in English.

Thirdly, the literacy rate in Pakistan is still needs to touch its peak. Due to the lack of education, most of the common people cannot provide learning and enabling environment to their kids at homes. The EFL teachers are of the view that all the learning process cannot be completed during class time. Learning language is not only about learning rules or expressions rather it is more about applying those rules in real time contexts to practice language. If students do not practice English at their homes, they will never be able to learn it quickly. In closed settings, a student can only learn limited expressions that indeed are not sufficient for an effective communication. This is one of the major factors that becomes a hindrance in perfectly enhancing the learners' English communication skills. As a matter of fact, this hurdle can be eliminated by the right educational policy, sufficient budget and its implementation in true sense. Albeit the facts and suggestions that have been mentioned regarding literacy, the schooling system (primary and secondary education system) in Pakistan also proliferates the students who lack skills. Students are concerned with their grades that they get by cramming different topics which are important for their exam point of view. In broader spectrum, they put wrong efforts, time and money to get a piece of paper called credential to get promoted to a next grade. The next most frequently mentioned challenging factor is schooling of the EFL learners. The participants stated that at the undergraduate level, whether they are teaching English grammar or any other skill relevant to English as a Foreign

Language, they always realized that the students do not have a considerable background knowledge of English language. This phenomenon is evident of the bad schooling or overall primary and secondary education system.

First of all, the pedagogical factor was taken into the consideration while the participants were talking about the theme 'schooling' of the EFL learners. The participants, based on their observation, concluded that the English teachers at school level do not practice advanced pedagogical skills and strategies to teach English. Most of the times and in many of the schools, the traditional Grammar Translation Method is preferred to adopt. The students in this way do not learn English in natural or communicative way. Like for any other subject, the EFL learners also try to memorize rules and uses of English language to pass it as a course for promoting to the next class.

Secondly, the curriculum that is designed for primary and secondary level students or EFL learners is not up to the mark. The course packs or books majorly focus on grammar rules and English writing skill that has significance in terms of exams. Therefore, the students keep on memorizing the grammar rules to get themselves pass through the exams. Although, recently English books have been revised and improved but the traditional teaching methodology of school teachers still make it ineffective. The EFL teachers who were selected for the interviews, mentioned this phenomenon frequently that at school and academy level, English teachers do not teach in English. Most of the EFL teachers at school level use Urdu as a medium of instruction instead of English. Consequently, the students cannot develop listening and speaking skills by practicing. Similarly, their English comprehension is also not good because of the overall educational structure as they have to cram it instead of understanding the text.

The other major explicated theme is motivation level of the students about which the participants frequently discussed in their interviews. They talked about the students' interest and focus during the language classes. The participants claimed that their students do not concentrate on the lecture and do not take interest in participating actively in the class activities. There are a number of reasons behind such behavior of the students that the EFL teachers talked about. They think that the students usually do anything due to any materialistic reason or immediately receivable solid reward which of course happens due to their past practice. They prepare themselves only for exams not for improving any of the skills.

According to the axially coded data out of the interviews, there can be three major motivations for the EFL learners which include culture, job and personal interest. The EFL teachers suggested that we need to develop an English-speaking culture at least in educational institutes. Students must be officially forced to communicate only in English instead of any other language within the premises of an institute. In this regard, students themselves can set certain boundaries so that they can practice language more and more. It is observed that after the completion of the course, when students appear in any interview for a job, they realize the real importance of English language skills. Therefore, it has been rightly pointed out that job is one of the biggest motivations for the EFL

learners. Not only for hunting a good job rather for a sustainable growth in job as well, it is something inevitable in today's times. In addition to the job factor, culture also makes EFL learners to learn or acquire language from environment. All the schools in non-English speaking countries provide an enabling culture to their students for teaching them English. Furthermore, personal interest is also one of the motivational factors that becomes a strong reason for students to learn any language. Albeit, this factor is found in very few students but it has profound impact on those who own it. The students who prefer learning more than one language or those who innately have a linguistic inclination, perform far better than those who have some kind of objective or external motivation. Subjective and internal motivational factors are always strong in nature.

To deal with the above-mentioned challenges, the EFL teachers used various effective strategies and techniques which are discussed herewith.

Effective Strategies used by the Pakistani EFL Teachers:

There are a few effective strategies that the sampled Pakistani EFL teachers use in common. According to the participants, they prefer engaging their students in different language activities so that they can teach indirectly through communicative and interactive milieu. One of the participants stated, "I tried to incorporate practice-based writing in my course of Basic English Writing. I focused on making the students understand the role of language and how they can interact with language in a whole new light by coming to terms with its varied cultural and historical significance. Some other helpful strategies were engaging students in creative writing and focusing more on increasing language input by listening and reading rather than just focusing on grammar or structure of the language." The EFL teachers asserted that adhering with only one strategy or language teaching methodology is not sufficient. As curriculum and/or content must be designed considering the demographical factors, the teaching methods should also be aligned in the same way.

The participants said that the EFL learners take interest if we use A/V Aids during our lectures because it lessens the monotony. Pair work, group work, using worksheets and auditory techniques proved to be effective for teaching English. A participant stated, "I rather adopt eclectic approach instead of using one technique and teaching method for a heterogeneous class." Compendiously, using varied and flexible teaching methods and techniques affects the students in a positive way. Instead of teacher-centered class, one must make it student-centered. Students must be taught according to their ability; and in a mixed ability class, the real challenge is catering all the students according to their potential and background knowledge considering other challenges mentioned above. For executing such an ideal way of teaching there are some pre-requisites that must be provided before the commencement of any language class. The major pre-requisites are minimum number of students (20 to 25) in a language class and sufficient time with an inevitable factor of flexibility of changing the content according to the students. Indeed, without managing these pre-requisites no technique will work effectively.

CONCLUSION

This research aimed at phenomenologically inquiring about the challenges faced by Pakistani EFL teachers at undergraduate level and the strategies that they use for dealing with the challenges. After the data was collected through semi-structured interviews, it was explicated to draw out the major and sub-themes for the phenomenological analysis. The analysis shows that there three major challenging factors while teaching at undergraduate level in Pakistani universities which include, demographical background, schooling and motivation source of the students. The students with different demographical backgrounds, cultural values and sociolinguistic influences cannot be taught with the same uniform teaching method. As per the interviews, the EFL teachers prefer using various techniques to cater the mixed ability students having different backgrounds. In such situation, only those teachers are successful who have considerable exposure of different cultures, languages and sociolinguistic factors. In addition to this, schooling of the students is also one of the most important challenging factors to the Pakistani EFL teachers. Not all the students are provided the best schooling due to many reasons. So, the students do not have similar level of background knowledge about English language. The students who get their early education in government schools, do not have appropriate English language proficiency. The major reasons for such phenomenon are outdated curriculum, Urdu as only medium of instructions in English language class and monotonous as well as ineffective teaching method like Grammar Translation Method. Having such students in class is a real challenge in itself because it is difficult to keep the balance between covering syllabus suggested by the Higher Education Commission and improving the overall language skills of the students with mixed ability even when the time is not sufficient. Finally, the motivation source is a factor that is a real challenge for the Pakistani EFL teachers. According to the interviews, the Pakistani EFL teachers work hard for keeping their students motivated and focused. They use different motivation sources to keep them concentrated during the class. The students only want to learn English language because it is something with the help of which they can get a good job and achieve other future endeavors. Therefore, keeping the students motivated is something very important to get the desired results.

Future Implications

More detailed studies can be conducted considering focusing on each of the sub-themes explicated for this research. One may focus on the EFL learners to inquire about their experiences while learning English at the tertiary level. The challenges or the strategies that real work for the challenges faced by the students might really helpful for the EFL teachers to be more effective during their EFL classes.

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APPENDIX

Informed Consent Form

Title of the study: **Phenomenological Analysis of Pakistani EFL Teachers' Experience at Undergraduate Level**

Sampling Criterion Checklist:

1. I have Masters or MPhil degree in Linguist or ELT
2. I have minimum three years' experience of teaching undergraduate students at un sity level
3. I have adaptable te ng style
4. I have demographic, cultural and linguistic wledge
5. I have communicative ability in at least three languages (English, U & Punjab)

I, _____, hereby agree with giving an interview for a study entitled above. I have been briefed that the data being collected in form of interviews will not be used for any other purpose. The data will only be used for the analysis of this research. I agreed for participating in this study for a social and academic cause to contribute specifically to the Pakistani EFL teachers' community. I have understood the research questions and got to know about the research ethics as well after which I am giving my consent here in written.

Signature

Date