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## INVESTIGATING PHONOLOGICAL ACCURACY AMONG PAKISTANI EFL INSTRUCTORS AT HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL IN PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*Pronunciation in second language learning has been a neglected aspect in most English classes in Pakistan. Teaching pronunciation is interestingly and widely discussed subject in the area of English language teaching. It is an admitted fact that teacher may be an effective tool in developing students' accuracy and shaping their fluency in pronunciation. In the same way, Teachers may work out better results through supra-segmental and by conducting pronunciation with intensive listening practice. The current study probed into Pakistani English teachers' perceptions about why English should be taught in schools and explored their attitudes to compare related to intensive practice of fluency, phonological accuracy, teaching techniques and identifying suitable methods to treat phonological issues among Urdu EFL learners. Sample populations were 60 English teachers from 6 different Institutes in Southern Punjab of Pakistan. Questionnaire consisting thirty items on a five point Likert scale and three open ended questions were used as research tools. The results of the study revealed that the teachers' attitudes were highly positive towards teaching phonological accuracy and communicative fluency activities. Nonetheless, teachers' attitudes do not relate to the pedagogy conducted in their classrooms as highly as expected.*

### 1. Introduction

Teaching of pronunciation is a widely discussed subject in the area of English language teaching and role of pronunciation in various schools in Pakistan is different from having virtually no role in GTM (Grammar translation Method) as main focus in the audio-lingual method where interest remains on improving pronunciation, drills and short conversations through dialogue (Aziz & Hassan, 2018). It has been related that most of Pakistani Urdu EFL learners are poor in using English for communication purpose. There are various reasons of this problem such as Pakistani Urdu EFL learners find few opportunities to speak English outside the classroom. Moreover, lack of competent teachers is an important point too. The

prevalent system of examination at all levels examines vocabulary, grammar and comprehension while listening and speaking skills are equal to none. Practically students are drilled with memorizing the meaning of English vocabulary in Urdu, highlighting grammatical mistakes or reading comprehension rather than speaking English for appropriate communication to improve pronunciation. Above all, teachers give grammatical explanation, teaching and test reading comprehension. It is so sad to point out that English language teaching atmosphere in Pakistan has clearly valued language correction rather than pronunciation.

In fact, Urdu EFL learners normally find difficulties with English supra-segmental phonemes, e.g. wrong use of stress in words and intonation in sentence during speaking English. Contrastive analysis of segmental consonant phonemes shows that similar consonant phonemes between Urdu and English include /p/, /t/, /k/, /b/, /d/ /tʃ/, /f/, /s/, /h/, /m/, /n/ ,/ŋ/, /l/, /w/, /z/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/ ,/ʒ/, and /j/. However, different consonant phonemes are /ʒ/, /v/, /ʒ/, /ŋ/, and /r/. From this analysis, it may be said that Urdu EFL learners may find difficulties when they pronounce /ʒ/, /v/, /ʒ/, /ŋ/, and /r/. As Urdu phoneme system does not contain articulations like them. So, all such facts explore that a poor equivalence of some of the English consonants causes some difficulties to students' correct pronunciation.

### **. Literature Review**

Clear and intelligible pronunciation is a vital component of communicative competence and performance. To serve this purpose, EFL teachers must include pronunciation in English courses so that students may be benefitted well because without sufficient skills in pronunciation, the students' ability to communicate is severely handicapped. Morley (1992) states that ignoring learners' pronunciation, is an complete dishonesty to professional responsibility but emphasis on pronunciation with oral communication, a shift from segmental to supra-segmental, meeting individual student's requirements with task-based communicative practices, developing new teachers' strategies, and applying peer correction and group communication can be effective in improving students' pronunciation. At present, there has been a change from particular linguistic competence & performance to wider communicative competencies as milestones for English teachers and students (Wongsuriya, 2013).

Some researchers state in their studies that teaching of phonemes may not be sufficient for intelligible communication (Krashen, 1986). Some other researches support Morey's belief in the needs for professional duty. In other words, if a non-native speaker's pronunciation in English is below the standard level, he cannot successfully communicate orally even though he or she has sufficient command over English grammar and vocabulary (Celce-Murcia, 1987). Speech process is influenced by speech perception; the listener becomes significant factor in speech discourse (Hassan & Dzakiria, 2020; Davies & Pearse, 2000). This concept signifies the need to correlate pronunciation with communicative activities in teaching so as to facilitate the students to improve their own pronunciation by listening and speaking drills. It is a unanimously agreed upon that students' pronunciation in target language should be taught with communicative tasks, since the learners may be able to speak with native speakers appropriately and easily. The better choice for improving learner's mind is the learner's participation in the learning practices, that is, the procedures used by the student to improve his/her target language (Harmer, 2017;). It is the teacher's duty to make the learning procedure interesting so that the learner may avail chance to better the learning processes.

The teacher also has a vital role to play in the communicative language learning process. Morley (1999) calls it one of 'speech coach or pronunciation coach'. In

addition to just providing corrective feedback to the learner's mistakes, the 'speech coach' gives information and models with the passage of the time, supplies cues and suggestions about performance, offers various opportunities to practice e.g., supports, puzzles and encourages the students (Hassan & Aziz, 2019; Naka, 2017). It can be observed that the teacher's role is not only to teach but to facilitate learning also while monitoring English at two points, speech performance and speech production (Hassan & Dzakiria, 2019; Ur, P. 1999).

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem and Objectives**

Teaching English as practiced in Pakistan concentrates on grammatical knowledge in morphology and syntax rather than speaking. The current study is investigated into the issues of students' inadequate practice with phonological and communicative activities. If this issue is resolved, communicative English language teaching in Pakistan may be more proficient and result oriented. English teachers play a very decisive role in improving students' pronunciation. So, they may be very useful to resolve this issue. Current study explored to establish the attitudes of Pakistani teachers teaching English towards practicing communicative activities, phonological accuracy, and the causes why these phenomena are rarely touched upon.

#### **1. Objectives of Study**

Objectives of this study paper are as follows:

- I. Shaping the attitudes of Pakistani English teachers about phonological accuracy and communicative fluency.
- II. Analyzing the collected data obtained on teaching communicative fluency and phonological accuracy.
- III. To find out ways to treat issues about phonological teaching and communicative English language teaching in Pakistan.

#### **2. Methodology**

The population of the study, were 60 Pakistani including 30 male and 30 female Urdu EFL teachers who had one to 10 years experience of teaching English in Language institutes. In fact, they were teaching in six private language institutes in Vehari which is District of Southern Punjab, Pakistan. For the selection of participants, Cluster sampling was used to approach the language institutes. Then, the participants were selected from the six English language institutes by applying purposeful sampling strategy (Patton, 1990).

##### **2.1 Instruments**

A questionnaire consists of 30 items rated on a 5 point scale was designed with three open-ended questions asking teachers (i) whether the learners had problems in learning English pronunciation and how they treat those problems, (ii) if they used communicative activities in their classrooms, (iii) what communicative activities they wanted to handle in the classroom in case of occurring any issue?

##### **2.2 Procedures**

The questionnaire was derived from Wannakarn (2013) study and reshaped for the present study according to the participants' views and suggestions concerning the wording and concepts. The samples of the study, 60 Pakistani EFL teachers, were asked to select option given in the questionnaire. Data collected from the questionnaire were analyzed. The quantitative data were statistically formatted in keeping with arithmetic mean and percentage.

#### **3. Results**

The Table (1) is designed to particularly categorize level of opinions from a five point scale teachers' Table 2 reveals opinions towards phonological accuracy practice, and Table 3 shows teachers' opinions towards communicative oral activities.

**Table 1 showing Level of Opinions from a Five Point Rating Scale Questionnaire**

<b>Level of opinions</b>	<b>Criteria</b>
Highest	4.50 - 5.00
Higher	3.50 - 4.49
Average	2.50-3.49
Lower	1.50 - 2.49
Lowest	0.00-1.49

**Table 2 showing Teachers' opinions towards phonological accuracy practice**

<b>Teachers' opinions</b>	<b>Mean Values</b>	<b>Mean Scores</b>
You should correctly teach students English sounds	Highest	4.78
Your students should practice English sounds as native speakers	Average	2.76
If students mispronounce words teachers should correct their mistakes	Average	2.40
You as a teacher teach how to stress words in your class.	Average	3.31
You as a teacher teach sentence intonation in your class.	Average	3.26
You use minimal pairs in teaching pronunciation in your class.	Lower	2.30
You use tongue twisters for teaching pronunciation to the students.	Lower	1.83
You use English songs in teaching pronunciation to the students.	Average	2.61
You use English films in teaching pronunciation in your class.	Lowest	1.38
You make the learners listen native speakers' dialogues	Lower	2.32
Pronouncing English sounds correctly can lead to efficient communication	Higher	4.45
You work to get sufficient English pronunciation knowledge.	Higher	4.28
Your students find your teaching English pronunciation useful	Higher	4.47

In the above table 2, first inquiry is about English teachers teaching how to English pronunciation correctly. From their responses, an arithmetic mean score is 4.78. Statement 2 which is about, students' practice of how to speak English like native speakers scored average mean 2.76. It reveals that the teachers agree on teaching phonological accuracy to EFL learners. In other words, they think that learning English phonemes correctly is very helpful for language communication in the real

life situation. The teachers were also of the view that students’ interest in speaking English increases whenever they are able to pronounce English words and sentences correctly and are able to convey meaning efficiently. Some of them are of the view that a correctly pronounced words develop mutual understanding that ultimately give confidence to learners and enhance social relationships. As a result, efficient communication takes place between native and the non-native speakers if EFL learners able to speak well nearly meeting the RP English standard. Nevertheless, the mean scores from question 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 asking the frequency of teaching mispronounced words, sentence utterance, tongue twisters , the use of minimal pairs, and listening English songs, watching English films, mimicry-memorization activities are 2.40, 3.31, 3.26, 2.30, 1.83, 2.61, 1.38 and 2.32. The analysis revealed that the mean scores obtained from the indicators in the questionnaire are lower with the exceptions of indicator 1. These statistical results indicate that English teachers’ positive attitude towards teaching English pronunciation does not commensurate to what they teach to the EFL learners in the class room. However the results lead to the conclusions that Pakistani EFL teachers are very well aware of the importance of teaching English pronunciation to the learners, but they are not teaching this important aspect of language according need of the Urdu EFL learners. Same results are reinforced by the mean score 1.67 obtained from statement 15 enquiring teaching English pronunciation is an interesting activity in the classroom.

**Table 3 Teachers’ opinions towards communicative fluency activities**

<b>Teachers’ Opinions</b>	<b>Mean Values</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
You should use communicative activities to teach English	Higher	4.16
You should use activities help students improve their fluency.	Higher	4.33
You use answer/ questions technique and involve students in discussion	Highest	4.88
You apply information gap activities for EFL learners.	Average	3.45
You think that role play activities are effective in your class.	Higher	3.92
Use of communicative games such as describe and draw in class.	Lower	1.92
You encourage students for improving fluency in speaking	Highest	4.69
Activities in books help learners to improve communication skills	Average	2.97

Using fluency activities daily help students obtain communicative skill	Highest	4.80
EFL learners can use English for communication purpose.	Average	3.32
You wish to increase knowledge on communicative Teaching	Higher	3.93
You want to improve teach communicative activities	Average	2.78
You arrange fluency activities for EFL learners in your class.	Average	3.38
You want to increase students fluency through teaching pronunciation	Average	3.45
You arrange group discussion for EFL learners in your class	Highest	4.53

The above table 3 shows results about teachers' opinions towards English language communicative fluency activities, the mean score about obtained for the statement 1 was 4.16 which revealed the fact that EFL learners agree to using communicative activities for the learners in their classes. The other data analyzed also reveals that teaching English through activities gives Urdu EFL learners opportunities to make well use of their knowledge in English and skills for communication in as statement 2. Urdu EFL teachers also acknowledged this strategy that if communicative activities are practiced, it can help Urdu EFL learners to improve their communicative skills. The arithmetic mean score reveals that teachers are in favor of using communicative activities. Surprisingly enough, arithmetic mean score of statement 18 is high with 4.74, which asks if English teachers should continue the practice of questioning or conduct conversations with English learners by encouraging students to answer in English. While teaching, English teachers also confirmed that they conducted communicative activities among EFL learners e.g., role playing, information gap, group discussion, learning communicative games and their arithmetic mean scores are 3.92, 3.45, 4.53, and 1.92 respectively. Urdu EFL Teachers described that activities given in course books could very well support their Urdu EFL students to practice English for improving communication skills while mean score 2.97 for this statement shows that this practice is very rare to be undertaken by English teachers. But the quality of some course books used by the teachers is quite suitable for conducting communicative activities in the class room. Arithmetic mean score 3.47 for statement 30 shows that teachers do not often make use of communicative activities in the teaching of English. In addition to that, English teachers acknowledged that Urdu EFL learners could use English for communicative purposes. To describe simply, the results of quantitative data, English teachers have positive attitudes towards teaching English through communicative activities.

#### 4.1 Description of Qualitative Data

*Question 1: What difficulties do EFL learners have in learning English phonemes?*

Most of the teachers responded that their students encounter problems applying stress, segmental phonemes and segmental phonemes. In other words, Urdu EFL learners are not aware of which syllable should be stressed and which one should not. The majority of the Urdu EFL learners does not know how to use pattern of intonation; even for Wh-questions and Yes/No questions, therefore, when they speak English, they stress the wrong syllable or apply wrong intonation. As a result, their speech for the native speakers becomes unintelligible. The most difficult phonemes to be pronounced by Urdu EFL learners are: /v/, /z/, /ŋ/, and /r/. Though these phonemes are extremely imperative to be accented like the native English speakers yet majority of Pakistani Urdu EFL learners are unable to pronounce them correctly. They are unable to make any distinction when words those begin with the letter *west* /west/ and *vest* /vest/. In the pronunciation of /w/ sound corners of the lips are pushed backwards as in smiling position and it sounds like Sami- vowel while in the pronunciation of /v/ sound upper front teeth and lower lips are pressed together with audible frictions (Ladefoged, 2001). Another important difficulty in pronunciation of the phoneme is that they do not know difference in the pronunciation of words while adding “-ed” in finite verbs or adding “s” or “-es” for making plural nouns or adding “-s” or “-es” with the first form of verbs for third person singular subject in simple present tense. Following table 4 may describe distinction between native speakers and Urdu EFL learners:

**Table 4 showing distinction between Native and Pakistani Urdu EFL learners**

Words	Native speakers’ Pronunciation	Urdu EFL learners’ pronunciation
Passed	/pa:st/	/pa:sd/
Helped	/helpt/	/helpd/
Watches	/wɒtʃɪz/	/wa:tʃɪz/
Housing	/haʊzɪŋ/	/haʊsɪŋ/
Houses	/haʊzɪz/	/haʊsɪz/
Come	/kʌm/	/kəm/
Admit	/əd'mɪt/	/ed'mɪt/

The above table 4 shows few examples of pronunciation inaccuracy in uttering words. Pakistani EFL learners as revealed in the above table replace /t/ sound with /d/ as in passed and helped. Some time replace /v/ sound with /a:/ as in the pronunciation of “watch” and in adding “ing” participle with noun “house” they pronounce final sound /sɪŋ/ instead of /zɪŋ/ while making the plural of “House” they say /haʊsɪz/ instead of /haʊzɪz/. while in pronouncing “come” they replace /ʌ/ with schwa /ə/ and some schwa sound is replaced with /e/ as in “admit”.

**Question 2: How do teachers solve the problem of teaching English pronunciation?**

Most of the Urdu EFL teachers informed that various techniques and strategies were applied by them. In other words, as they acknowledged that the rules of English stress, pronunciation and intonation are well described with distinction between Urdu and English sounds. They explained that they tried to present themselves as model by pronouncing English words and phrases and ask their students to speak after they have listened the correct sounds, they also make the learners practiced by writing words quite often on white board to emphasize underlined some English



phonemes. They also make their students listen to native speakers' dialogue or conversational CDs, watch videos, or YouTube videos of English and imitate.

Some teachers reported that they divided their students in small groups to study and told them how to pronounce or stress the words given in the vocabulary book asking brilliant students to help their fellow students who did not know correct pronunciation of the words. They further explained that Urdu EFL learners practice how to pronounce English as self-study and practice at home.

*Question 3: what are the communicative activities which language teachers use for English learners in the classroom?*

As reported by the teachers, there are numerous communicative activities that EFL teachers in this investigation wished to introduce in the classroom. Their names are: presentation, discussion, playing roles, taking part in debates & singing contests, communicative games, story-telling, read and draw information gap and short plays. Some of teachers favored titles such as Western cultural elements and attitudes should be incorporated in the communicative activities while some other English instructors told that the level of communicative activities should be such as to meet the EFL learners' ability to incite them in expressing ideas or opinions in target language.

### 3. Discussion

Nooteboom (1983) states that production of speech is influenced by perception of speech; that's why learners become significant factors in communication discourse. This idea emphasizes the need to incorporate teaching pronunciation with communicative activities so that Urdu EFL learners may be able to improve their own pronunciation by engaging themselves in listening and speaking. It is an admitted fact as to favored by most linguists that uttering correct pronunciation is an important element for oral communication; however, in EFL classes in Pakistan, this important factor is ignored as part of teaching English as foreign language. To explore this fact, the current study was conducted to have the evaluation of English language teachers' attitude towards teaching and examining pronunciation of English learners. The study concludes that most of the participants Pakistani EFL teachers teaching English language at private language institutes in Vehari in Punjab (Pakistan), showed positive attitudes for teaching accuracy in phonology and communicative activities to escalate fluency among learners. Apart from this they realize that providing phonological accuracy to the students and conducting communicative activities are part and parcel for making Pakistani EFL students so that they may obtain confidence in speaking as well as using English for every day communication. Instead of teachers' acknowledgment of importance phonological accuracy and communicative activities have, their attitudes do not fully confirm to what they actually taught in their classrooms.

It is regrettable to see as collected data reveal that EFL teachers use communicative activities but fewer teaching techniques are used for teaching pronunciation as opposed to their attitudes expressed by them. From the teachers' point of view, it can be concluded that they miscalculate about themselves to possess sufficient know how of teaching pronunciation and use communicative activities. In fact, most of them do jobs to seek experience and to improve their teaching. They want to refresh their knowledge about the contents of phonological accuracy and communicative activities.

Expert linguists state that acquisition does not require conscious efforts and is anxiety free process. Similarly learning pronunciation is becomes easier if the context of learning is stress free. As learning English as foreign language in classroom setting requires deliberate efforts where numerous activities regarding language learning are conducted and practiced but it is the EFL teachers' duty to create such situation where learners may acquire rather than learn to pave the way to learn and utter correct pronunciation. Moreover language is learned well in a relaxed, stress free environment. The learners feel secure as long as they practice their newly acquired knowledge of language skills (Lessow-Hurley, 2013). Therefore, EFL teachers in Pakistan should create friendly environment with fun or positive attitudes in learning English pronunciation. They must make use various activities relating to real life situations such as watching cartoons or films listening English songs, playing games, participating in impromptus speech competition, instant use of vocabulary in into meaningful sentences.

## **6. Pedagogical Implications**

One thing is common in every research that it has such findings to be put into practice into actual life situation. That is why it devolves upon National Accreditation council for teacher-Education, and provincial department of education Punjab, researchers, policy makers, educationists, textbook writers, and in service programmers to make foreign language teachers aware of the new findings of the researchers in the field teaching and learning phonological accuracy and communicative fluency. In this sense present study may have some implications for Urdu EFL teachers not only in Punjab but also across Pakistan. The results of this study revealed that the most of the teachers showed positive attitude towards teaching English pronunciation but this attitude is surprisingly opposite to what they actually practice in the classroom. However, findings reveal that Pakistani EFL teachers realize the significance of teaching English pronunciation but they are not teaching this language aspect in such a way as to fulfill the need of the learners.

## **7. Limitations and Suggestions**

The present study was limited to District one of the southern Districts of Punjab in Pakistan. So number of participants in this study was 60 (including male and female) which was not sufficient. If the size of the population is spread to different cities in Punjab and across other provinces in Pakistan and research study is conducted in different contexts with induction of more qualitative questions then the results of the study would have been far more comprehensive.

Pedagogically, Urdu EFL teachers in Pakistan need organized training about how to teach pronunciation to the learners of different levels or grades. Various researches made on the importance or methods of teaching phonological accuracy and English communicative fluency should be provided to EFL teachers teaching English at institutes. It goes without saying that if the EFL teachers and learners put their head together in creating stress free environment; almost all of the Urdu EFL learners desire to do well in uttering acceptable pronunciation of English. A good success can be achieved if each have set, respectively, individual teaching and learning goals. Therefore, pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of phonemes: it must be viewed in the same light as grammar, syntax, and discourse that is a crucial part of communication.

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