

## From Theory to Practice: The Need for Language Labs in Pakistan

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### KEY WORDS

Communication skills, ELT,  
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### ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the need of language labs in Pakistani educational institutions to teach English as a communicative language in context to which the students' capabilities and skills are marred by their limitations in communicative English language. The study is an effort to reconcile the local educational priorities with global imperatives by educating Pakistani students to become cosmopolitan individuals from the linguistic status perspective of English as a global language. The study is offered as a contribution to fill the gap in ELT studies by incorporating modern technology in Pakistani educational institutions. The main research questions focus on the need to establish language labs, their impact in improving the attractiveness of educational institutes for students and on the redesigning the current English syllabus between theory and practice on the basis of 3 to 1 ratio respectively as in the teaching of science and computer science subjects. The research tools employed are questionnaire for the students and the semi-structured interview for teachers to explore their views located in different departments of three private sector universities in urban Lahore. The findings of the research suggest that language labs in educational institutes are desperately needed to integrate the four component of English language and to improve the attractiveness of educational institutes by making English language teachers and learners active participants in the process of teaching and learning. The division of the English syllabus into theory and practice has the potential to improve English language learners' communication skills to cope with the demands of ever-changing world.

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## Introduction

English is the lingua franca of communication across the globe. Being fluent in English is indispensable for survival in the global village successfully and enabling entree into the social, economic, financial, educational and technological sectors of society. Most of the developed countries of the world are facilitating their students to learn English as a second or foreign language by providing them with the state of the art educational institutes; the provision of which reflect their acknowledgment of the status of English as the one providing universal currency.

The communicative aspect of language has a great role in making the world a global village and grooming man as a cosmopolitan individual. Majidi (2005) pointed out that globalization in its cultural aspect is unification of various cultures and formation of a single global culture. In this perspective, an individual is required to be educated, trained and proficient in English language to meet the challenges of twenty first century. It is crucial to implement CLT Approach by deploying modern technology to cope with the demands of present era.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach is generally regarded as a pragmatic approach to language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). It is based on the theory that the key function of language is communication and its primary goal for learners is to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Ying, 2010). CLT emerged during 1970s and early 1980s in reaction to traditional methods-Grammar Translation Method and Audio-lingualism. Canale and Swan (1980) proposed four different components of communicative competence: Grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. In early 1990s, CLT approach was introduced in many countries where English was learnt and spoken as a foreign language in EFL classrooms (Liao, 2000; Ying, 2010). Nunan (1991) pointed out five features of CLT which focus on learning to communicate by interaction, authentic texts and opportunity to focus on learning process, learner's contribution by participation in classroom activities, information gap and linking classroom activities with language activities outside the classroom. So CLT classroom activities include role-plays, interviews, information gap, language games, language exchanges, surveys and group/pair-works. However, Nyinondi, Mhandeni and Mohamed (2016) pointed out lack of supportive language learning environment, teaching material, and students' autonomy versus instructors' authority as emerging issues in implementing CLT approach in the universities of Tanzania.

In the last thirty years, ELT researchers have been arguing regarding the issue of implementing CLT in ESL/ EFL contexts in Asian countries. Some ELT researchers have strongly proposed implementation of CLT in Asian countries (Liao, 2004, Li, 1998). They have pointed out that

certain barriers are needed to be handled for the effective implementation of CLT in Asian countries (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002). The implementation of CLT has also encountered problems and resistance in EFL classrooms (Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004; Rao, 2002; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001).

In Pakistan, English has enjoyed the status of an official language since its independence in 1947 till 2015. It has been taught as a compulsory subject in schools, colleges and universities. Although, Urdu has been declared as an official language of Pakistan, English is a source of economic prosperity, quality education, access to the international job market and global identity (Abbas, 1993). A bird's eye view on the Pakistani education system reveals the discrepancy between the Pakistani students' needs and prevalent practices of ELT in educational institutes which in their application of the English curriculum and examination system promote only reading and writing skills. There is lack of connection between the language practiced in the classrooms and the language prevalent in the outside world. As a result, the Pakistani students are unable to communicate in English even after school, college and university education. Moreover, even the highest achieving students in English lack adequate communication skills. The situation demands that the flaws in the field of ELT need to be addressed to resolve the issues by taking some drastic steps. Raza and Akhtar (2015) emphasized "the need for communicative language teaching activities to facilitate increased English language usage in the classrooms" (pp.10-11). In this regard, Yasmin (2018) emphasized that English language is not simply transfer of knowledge of English language and literature in teacher-centered situations rather it is construction of knowledge in learner-centered classrooms.

To materialize the theory into practice, CLT can be implemented by establishing language labs in educational institutes which may promote communicative activities including the use of language in real-life situations. A language lab is an audio-visual installation which is used as an aid in modern language teaching. The first language lab was established at the University of Grenoble in 1908. From 1950 till 1990, there were tape-based systems using reels and cassettes. During 1970 to 1980, language labs had a bad reputation due to frequent breakdowns. However current language labs are multimedia PCs as compared to previous outdated labs.

Right from the beginning, language labs are teacher-controlled systems which are connected to students' booths with students' control mechanism and headsets with microphones. Language teachers are able to monitor and control audio, video and web-based content in the next generation digital labs. Language labs allow teachers to plan for communicative language activities and tasks so that the students may generate their own sentences and texts for a variety of situations. They may design materials and activities for their students' various needs besides using

a wide range of published materials. There may be controlled, guided, semi-guided and dynamic exercises to introduce, reinforce, improve and promote internalization of the language items. Corder (1966) perceived a language teacher as a motivator or conductor of learning. The classroom is a place where learners are 'doing', 'making' and 'sharing'. In this regard, Pegrum (2014) pointed out that this 'may require both teachers' and learners' training in the developing and developed world alike" (p.109). Yasmin (2018) identified "instructors' role, poor communication skills and outdated curriculum" as an 'academic challenge' in the universities of Pakistan.

### **Statement of the Problem**

English language Communication skills have been considered a grey area due to multiple factors since the foundation of Pakistan. The students have been found to be deficient in speaking English fluently even after studying English as a compulsory as well as an optional subject at school, at graduate and postgraduate levels throughout their academic career. Thus, it is imperative to explore the challenges regarding the gap between theory and practice in English language teaching at graduate and postgraduate level in Pakistani universities. Further, these challenges should be addressed to make students proficient in English language skills which are necessary to excel in academic and professional careers.

### **Significance of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to bridge the gap between theory and practice in English language teaching practices at graduate and postgraduate level in Pakistani universities. The study is an effort to incorporate modern technology in the field of ELT in Pakistani educational institutes. It may prove significant to reconcile the local with the global by educating Pakistani students as cosmopolitan individuals in the global village. The findings of the study may be an initiative for further investigation in the area of use of IT in English language teaching practices in the developing countries like Pakistan to address the challenges faced by teachers and students.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The present study was guided by the following objectives:

1. To establish language labs in Pakistani educational institutes to implement CLT Approach
2. To use language labs for improving the proficiency of graduate and postgraduate students in universities
3. To improvise present English curriculum by dividing it into theory and practice according to 3 to 1 ratio respectively as per science and computer science subjects.

### Research Questions

1. What might be the advantages of establishing language labs in Pakistani educational institutes to implement the CLT approach?
2. How might language labs help to improve the English proficiency of graduate and postgraduate students in universities?
3. Is it necessary to redesign the present English curriculum by dividing it into theory and practice in the ratio of 3 to 1 respectively as per science or computer science subjects?

### Methodology

This study is located in the qualitative paradigm to explore the research project titled “From Theory to Practice: The need for Language Labs in Pakistan”. It follows the inductive approach to explore the need to establish language labs for implementing the CLT approach for improving English language communication skills of graduate and postgraduate students in Pakistani universities. The data will be collected from BS (Hons.) students and their English language teachers, selected by purposive sampling technique by questionnaires and interviews respectively. The data will be analyzed by using grounded theory approach, with a view to develop an explanatory proposition to account for the different outcomes of the implementation.

### Population and Sample

The cohorts for the study consisted of a total of 145 BS (Hons.) students and four English language teachers. The students were enrolled in three different departments while studying the course *Communication Skills*. The researcher selected fifteen students from each department - BS English III, BBA II, BS Mass Communication III at three private sector urban universities in Lahore. The cohort of students was comprised of 55 % males and 45 % females. Their ages ranged from 18-22 years. The cohort of teachers was divided equally between males and females. Their ages ranged from 28-55 years. All teachers had achieved either MPhil or PhD in English. Most of them (60%) were experienced with an average of two to fifteen years English language teaching experience.

The researcher employed random purposive sampling as it was the most suitable sampling approach for this qualitative research. It was significant for the selection of the samples of researcher's choice. The researcher used it for the identification and selection of samples with insights on the topic under investigation. The researcher selected more participants than needed for the study to avoid the risk of drop outs at later stages due to certain reasons. Although sixty student participants were selected initially by purposive sampling, a random sample of only twenty participants, five from each department were chosen to add credibility to the

study. However, only four English language teachers were selected as samples of the study.

### **Research Instruments and Validation Process**

The instruments employed in the study were questionnaire administered to the students and semi-structured interviews undertaken by the teachers. The interviews were undertaken on the understanding that this instrument provides a deeper understanding of social phenomena (Silverman, 2000). The researcher selected two students from the target population for collecting pilot data.

The results of the pilot study were used to assess the research methodology. Most of the designed research questions for students were found to be appropriate for addressing the research problem. However, two research questions were rephrased to improve their clarity and precision.

A research is coherent, harmonious and logical only if there is research alignment, that is, the research objectives, research questions, instruments used in the study and data analysis strategies are aligned and coordinated to make the research logical and coherent. This quality control was undertaken.

The validity of the present study was justified by establishing trustworthiness. The trustworthiness of the research was achieved by addressing the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the findings (Guba, 1981). Credibility was established by explaining the factors that contribute to a lack of practice to improve communication skills by students. Transferability was established by sharing the statements of the participants of the study to familiarize others with the setting. Dependability was established by ensuring the stability of the collected data whereas conformability was established by neutrality and objectivity in dealing with the data.

The reliability of the study was ensured by using appropriate data collection techniques. The data was collected consistently during the study to guarantee reliability. The questionnaires were administered at the same time by the researcher by inviting all the students at the same place at the same time. The interviews were conducted and recorded by following the same procedures by the researcher.

### **Ethical Considerations**

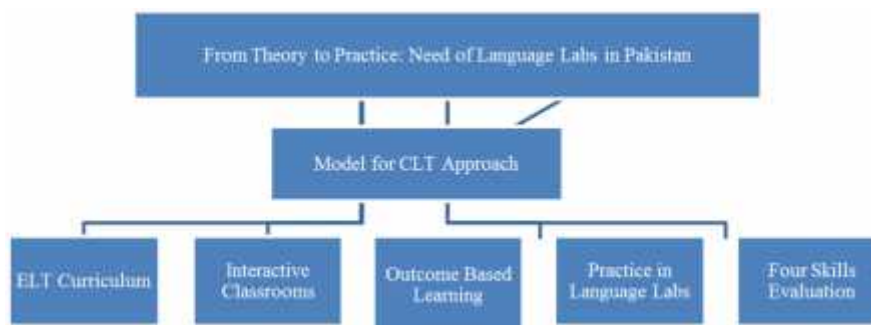
Considering ethical codes are an integral part of any research, the researcher adhered to the codes of conduct while conducting the research. A Consent Form was used to seek consent from the participants. Confidentiality was ensured by the researcher during data collection, transcription and countercheck by the participants of the study. The researcher showed the transcribed data to the respective participants to ensure accuracy had been achieved as the basis of correctly interpreting the findings.

## Results and Discussion

### Qualitative Data of Questionnaires

The Grounded Theory Approach was employed to analyze the data. It was suitable for this study as the views shared by the participants were personal and there was no predetermined hypothesis for the gathered data. Corbin and Strauss (1998) pointed out that a researcher does not begin a project with a preconceived theory in mind. Rather, the theory emerges from the data when the researcher begins with an area of study. An in-depth analysis of the data is followed by processing and theoretical concepts by the researchers' thoughts.

The collected data were analyzed manually due to the small number of participants. The data were transcribed accurately for ensuring that the participants agreed with the transcriptions. A coding scheme was prepared by writing notes. The constant comparative method and the coding paradigms of the grounded theory approach, that is, open, axial, and selective coding were used to generate the concepts and themes (Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen, 2010). The participants' statements were taken as the basic units of meaning. For developing categories, the units with the same coding were collected for open coding. Different categories emerged concerning the need for language labs in Pakistan. Then the core categories were developed by making the connections among subcategories by applying the axial coding. Further, some categories were integrated in selective coding to create a model for the need for language labs. Lastly, the emerged themes were the 'bones' for a model, and the various codes under each theme were determined.



*Figure 1: Model Representing the Need for Language Labs in Pakistan*

The data analysis helped to develop a framework to justify the need for language labs in Pakistan. The themes that emerged during the data collection were classified under four perspectives. The diagram below shows the framework that emerged from the analysis.

The data analysis of the questionnaires revealed that the majority of the students (55%) rarely communicated in English during the English classes. The course content and class activities were not supportive of course module's objective, that is, to promote the quality of communication skills. The majority of the students (92 %) agreed that English classes were used to practice reading and writing skills (written expression). It showed that class activities were exam oriented as only these two skills are assessed and evaluated in exams. The majority of the students (61%) did not participate in activities based on listening and speaking English (oral expression) in the classroom despite the fact that they were studying Communication Skills. The listening and speaking activities were rarely marked, and so it is unsurprising that ultimately the students did not seriously participate in these activities. The majority of the students (100%) did not use any AV Aids to be become familiar with native English language (syntax, vocabulary, grammar, accent, pronunciation, slang, colloquial etc.) in the classrooms. Eventually, the students were unable to understand and respond if the situation demanded of them to communicate in English, even though they secured good marks in English. The majority of the students (100%) were willing to improve their English communication skills by practicing in language laboratories in their respective educational institutes as a part of their subject requirements instead of joining English language courses in private institutes due to the comfort level they experienced with the status quo. A significant proportion of the students (40%) faced rejection and humiliation on various occasions due to their poor communication skills in English in contrast to the students with good communication skills. The majority of the students (31%)? aspired to improve communication skills for better job opportunities; some students (29%) pursued this goal for accessing information and technology; some students (26%) required it as it is a language for higher studies; and a few students (14%) desired proficiency as a symbol of social status. The majority of the students (88%) considered proficiency in English as a prerequisite for achieving academic and professional goals. The majority of the students (98 %) agreed to study English language in the form of theory (75 marks) and practical (25 marks) in order to excel in communication skills. Moreover, such a formula may assist in the elimination of cheating to secure good marks in English.

#### **Qualitative Data of Interviews**

The data analysis revealed that the majority of English language teachers frequently communicated in English during their English period. However, they practiced code-switching to facilitate the process of effective teaching and learning. They switched from English to Urdu (native language) and vice versa during lecture for explaining and reinforcing the important concepts students' demand.



Most of the teachers taught by a variety of methods including the Lecture method, Direct instruction, the Audio-lingual approach and an Eclectic approach. All the interviewers agreed that they engaged the students in the activities to practice reading and writing skills extensively. The students participated in written expression (reading and writing) activities keenly as they were particularly spurred on to achieve good grades. Oral expression (listening and speaking) activities were practiced the least in the classrooms due to a number of factors. As a consequence, the students received no formal exposure to the target language and its associated culture so their mistakes and misconceptions became fossilized. All the interviewers strongly agreed that students needed to improve their communicative skills in English as it is the language of IT, a necessity for higher studies, a mean for better job opportunities and a symbol of social status. All the interviewees agreed that students' communication skills could be improved markedly if language laboratories were established in their universities to integrate the four skills of language instead of joining a separate spoken language course in some institute. Most of the teachers suggested that the establishment of language labs in universities could assist students to use English language in real life situations to improve fluency, improve confidence and presentation skills and perform better in interviews to secure good jobs. All the teachers approved teacher training and refresher courses mandatory for teaching communication skills to students in language labs by engaging them in various activities. All the interviewers agreed that English language curriculum should be redesigned by dividing it into theory and practice, 3 to 1, for implementing CLT in Pakistani universities which is the current need.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

It is concluded that English language labs are required for implementing CLT Approaches in the educational institutes at the university level to teach English language by integrating the four skills. In this regard, language labs are badly needed to materialize the theory into practice in teaching English language as a living language. The institutional language labs not only provide opportunities to English language teachers and learners to be active participants in the process of teaching and learning but they are also a source of exposure to native English language in real-life situations, enabling the students of English to improve their communication skills. The shift from the prevalent teacher-centered practices to students-centered CLT approach-based activities in the English language classrooms may improve the attraction of educational institutes in Pakistan. Most importantly, the division of English curriculum into theory and practical can enhance English learners' communication skills to cope with the ever-changing demands of the world.

The issues regarding English language teachers include teachers' inadequate English proficiency, lack of CLT training and technological resources. The problems related to students comprise students' low English proficiency and ignorance of native English language and associated cultures. Other issues revealed relating to the educational system include the influence of the examination system, class size, lack of technological resources and English language curriculum. If a more equitable world is the goal where every Pakistani student has access to high quality education and the economic opportunities that can follow on this education, then it is vital to reconsider the way we teach and learn.

On the basis of discussion and conclusion, some recommendations are forwarded in the following to Higher Education Commission, Ministry of Education in Pakistan and concerned authorities.

1. The education policy should be revised to implement CLT Approach in the field of ELT at university level.
2. The English language curriculum should be improved to integrate the four skills of language which should be assessed and marked to award the degree.
3. The establishment of language labs in the English departments of universities can provide opportunities to the students to practice four language skills.
4. Teachers should focus on outcome-based learning.
5. Computer labs in the universities may be re-configured to be used as language labs.
6. The four skills of language should be taught and evaluated by allocating 75 marks to the theory paper and 25 marks to the practical.

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