



Exploring Challenges Faced by EFL Learners in Pakistani Traditional Classrooms: Insights from Teachers' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to ascertain the difficulties experienced by EFL learners in traditional classroom environments from the EFL teachers' viewpoint. In the present study, quantitative research method has been adopted, and participants were comprised of 150 EFL teachers taken from Multan District using structured questionnaire. The study points out barriers to learning: language barriers, cultural barriers, and instructional barriers. Furthermore, the work explores how teachers manage to overcome the stated difficulties with a focus on the motivation and engagement processes. The study shows a difference in the classroom environment involving EFL learners and their teaching methodology, and the results signify a need for variation in teaching strategies to suit the EFL learners. In keeping with the practical nature of this study, the researcher is determined to improve the teaching contexts for EFL by refining best practices for constructionist teaching, strengthening the learners' content knowledge, and expanding the research and practices in the field of EFL. The findings of this study provide useful recommendations for any educator who could attempt to navigate the difficulties that come with EFL education.

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1. Introduction

Teaching EFL has emerged as highly relevant in the twenty-first century because English is now used as a medium of international communication among people from different backgrounds. The need for English is especially important in non-English speaking nations, which must prepare their students for interaction in a world economy. Nevertheless, learning English as a foreign language poses numerous challenges to learners, especially in conventional classrooms. There are linguistic barriers that might affect the students' process of English language acquisition, as well as cultural and pedagogical barriers. A recent study shows that EFL learners face difficulties improving their grammar and vocabulary and speaking and listening skills in English (Pérez-Llantada, 2018). Further, since the learners come from different cultural backgrounds, the cultural gap between the native context of the learners and the target language context affects the learning process, making it nearly impossible for the students to interact with the language meaningfully. Another difficulty arises from the concept of language transfer, which is simply a way of referring to the impact the learner's first language (L1) has on the second language (L2) learning process, more specifically on English in this case; this tends to result in what can be best described as fossilization or 'stubborn' errors that are not easy to rectify (Larsen - Freeman, 2018). Other than the ones above highlighted linguistic factors, cultural factors define the EFL learning process. Students in EFL classrooms are most likely to be of multicultural origin and have different experiences and learning abilities. This diversification, although positive in any learning environment, presents problems to learners and educators. Culture can be defined in many ways, but in a learning setting, it might include attitudes to learning, approach to communication, and conduct expected in the classroom. For example, some cultures believe memorization and teacher-centered teaching and learning are more appropriate,

but this is usually at variance with the inter-multiactivity approaches that can be adopted in the EFL classroom (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012). These cultural discrepancies result in feelings of awkwardness and embarrassment that slow the learning process or even eliminate it. Furthermore, EFL learners experience difficulty in comprehending and appropriating contextual allusions and directional phrases in English since these features are located in the cultural context of the language (Byram & Wagner, 2018). This absence of cultural knowledge is an issue that can confound the learner's fluency in understanding words and phrases that are steeped in culture.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

The study is focused to trace the barriers out that EFL learners face in traditional classrooms from their teachers' perspective. It is also aimed to highlight some useful teaching methods that can be helpful in the removal of those particular problems.

1.2. Research Objective

- To identify and categorize the primary challenges EFL learners face in traditional classrooms from the perspective of EFL teachers.
- To explore the pedagogical strategies and instructional approaches EFL teachers employ to address EFL learners' challenges.

1.3. Research Questions

1. What are the most prevalent challenges EFL learners face in traditional classroom settings as perceived by EFL teachers?
2. How do EFL teachers adapt their teaching strategies and methods to address the challenges faced by EFL learners in their classrooms?
3. What role does learner motivation play in overcoming EFL learners' challenges, and how do teachers foster motivation in their classrooms?

2. Literature Review

Writing, speaking, listening, and reading are some facets of language that EFL learners experience interrelated difficulties in conventional classroom environments. Among all the difficulties that affect EFL learners, linguistic factors are some of the most daunting: grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Pérez-Llantada (2018) captured it when they pointed out that EFL learners encounter a 'web of linguistic difficulties,' which include the 'subtleties of grammar and the seemingly endless array of words that one gets to use in English.' These difficulties are made worse by the fact that most EFL learners rarely get to use the language in other contexts apart from classroom practice, and thus most of the time, they end up not finding ways to reinforce what they have learned in class with actual practice. Such non-fully immersed learning situations can be slower in the rate of language acquisition and may have more often the phenomenon of fossilization of errors. Larsen - Freeman (2018) also highlights the role of 'interlanguage' – the system of language learner develops on his or her way to proficiency, which is filled with both accurate and inaccurate language data. The interlanguage phenomenon tells us that feedback and repetition are crucial, but many EFL classrooms do not offer the intensive, specific attention to provide the correction that is necessary. This lack of language education hence comes as a revelation of how flexible pedagogy that may address the kind of language demands EFL learners may require can be employed.

Cultural factors also seem to contribute a lot to EFL students' successes or failures. EFL students are likely to be from different cultural backgrounds, bringing in different learning modes and expectations. Matsuda and Friedrich (2012) stated that cultural factors impact Classroom Interactions negatively in that they give rise to misunderstanding and misinterpretations in the classroom, especially when the culture of the learners contradicts that of the target language. For example, learners from some cultures may be used to listening to the teacher only and having no right to criticize him or her, while in the Western models of education based on which EFL is often conducted, learners are active and may even dispute. The disparities in cultural manifestation can make the students feel frustrated, confused, negative, or even incapable of minimizing the learning barriers set by the cultural differences they meet in their learning process. However, as stated by Byram and Wagner (2018), cultural sensitivity is the ability to grasp diverse cultural contexts and occasions when one has to mediate cultural differences in communication. They argue that 'the approach to EFL instruction is that the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence should be pursued as a core learning outcome since it

prepares learners for interculturality' (Ibid, p. 142). However, the realization of this goal calls for the incorporation of cultural elements in a coherent manner, and this aspect is neglected when promoting language acquisition. This way, the educational process may fail to prepare learners for practicing their language in contexts of intercultural interactions and, therefore, hamper the efficiency of EFL education.

All the prospects of EFL education have specific problems correlated with linguistic and cultural difficulties, as the ways of their solution depend upon these aspects. Richards and Rodgers (2014) discuss the scope of more typical and conventional approaches to language education, including grammar translation, which does not foster students' interest or enhance their practical skills. They opine that "it is more appropriate in the contexts of the modern EFL learners to employ more interactive and communicative approaches like the task-based language teaching and teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). These approaches focus on the actual language and students' cooperation as important for building language awareness and cultural sensitivity. However, some of these methods can only be successfully utilized, bearing in mind some factors like the training of teachers, availability of materials, and proper attitude of the teachers towards changing teaching methods. Ellis, Skehan, Li, Shintani, and Lambert (2019) affirms this posturing by observing that teachers trained in integrated communicative approaches are in a better position to foster consummately oeuvres, learning environments that meet the individual, as well as group, achievement, and readiness of students. However, few EFL teachers, especially in developing countries, have the opportunity to be trained professionally enough to embrace such more effective teaching strategies of inclusions. Lack of training in these areas is one of the reasons that teaching concepts currently in use do not help prepare students for the demands of communication in the contemporary world. Consequently, the importance of systemic reform of teacher education programs to prepare EFL teachers for the challenges of modern language education has recently emerged in the literature.

Several factors affect the success of EFL learning, and pedagogical challenges are also important. Language learning is, to a great extent, determined by the learning-teaching methods and practices used by teachers. Some of the traditional teaching techniques, which mainly focus on grammar and vocabulary exercises, may not go well with EFL learners and may not meet their learning needs as expected, especially in terms of interactivity (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Current research has focused on teaching practices that include TBLT and CLT as the ideal methods to compel students to engage and use the language naturally (Ellis et al., 2019). Nevertheless, using such methodologies in various EFL classes may pose some difficulties, especially when teachers are ill-equipped to address the task. Also, with the change in the learning paradigm during the COVID-19 outbreak, such aspects as online and distant learning can be considered new to the pedagogy and can be problematic because modern information technologies can limit the interactivity of linguistic learning (Yundayani, 2021). Despite the numerous benefits that the inclusion of technology comes within the instruction of EFL, there are some risks and problems that come with it, such as access to technologies, the level of literacy in the use of the technologies, and the tendency of students to be less attentive when using technology in learning, together with these teaching difficulties, the linguistic and cultural issues that EFL learners have to cope with explain the necessity of applying flexible and creative approaches to the teaching of EFL classes with heterogeneous students.

3. Methodology

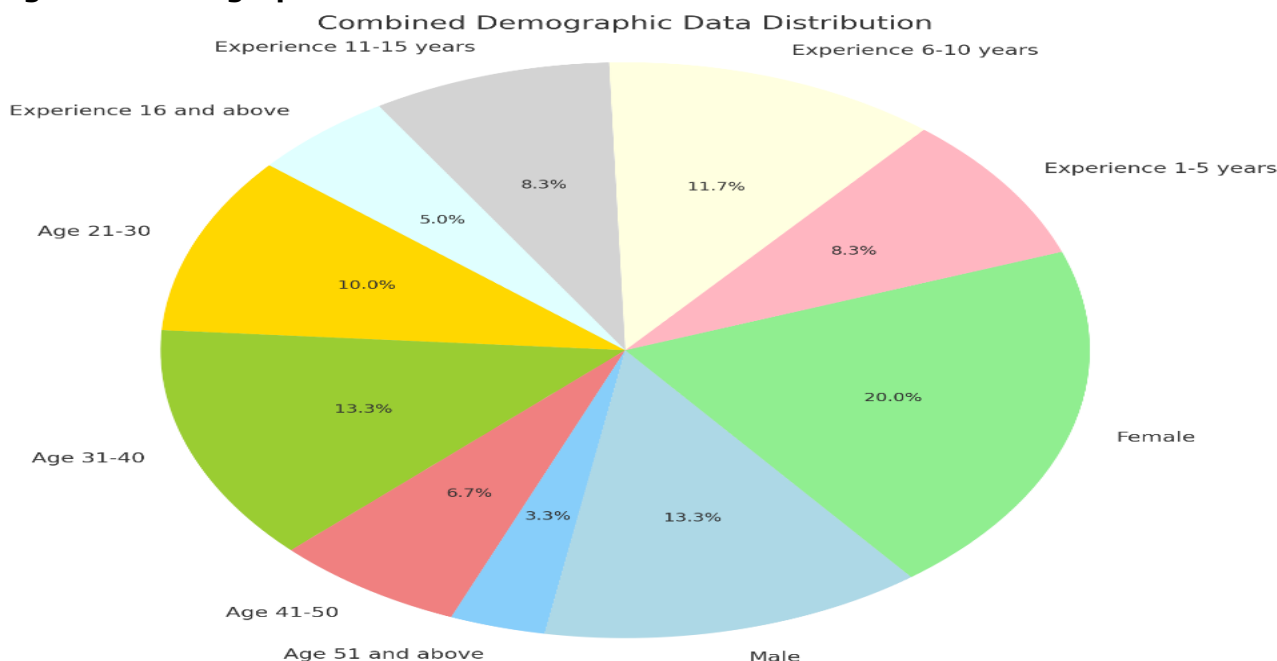
The current research used a quantitative research approach in order to systematically analyze obstacles to EFL learning in traditional classroom environments as viewed by EFL teachers. The study was conducted among the Multan District only, for the selection of the sample a purposive sampling technique was used and the participants involved were those with more than three years of teaching experience in EFL. Self-administered structured questionnaires in Google Forms were used to conduct data collection and included a massive scope and geographical spread of educators. The questionnaire was developed very carefully in order to obtain the detailed information about the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical problems experienced by EFL learners; some of the questions were devoted to the certain problems, for example, the choice of the vocabulary, grammatical difficulties, cultural differences, teaching methods, etc. In order to make sense of the data that was gathered, descriptive analysis was used and it included the use of frequencies, percentages and correlation, therefore it obtained a detailed picture of the trends and impacts of the challenges observed. The study also followed a

high standard of ethical considerations including anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' identities and responses; and use of informed consent from all participants. The reliability of the data was kept by using the similar research protocol in all four countries, whereas the validity of the survey was kept high due to the construction of the survey instrument, which was pre-tested before actually being used for data collection among the four countries. Quantitative data analysis provided a rational and fatal perspective on the works of EFL learners, teaching practice, and learning issues through the identification of various barriers to learning, and a qualitative analysis of the data provided insights into the learners' process that served as key and informative for future educational trends and policies.

4. Results

4.1. Demographic Analysis

Figure 1: Demographic Data Distribution



The demographic analysis of the participants in this study reveals a diverse group of EFL teachers in terms of age, gender, and teaching experience. The age distribution of the teachers shows that the majority are in the 31-40 age range, comprising 40% of the participants, followed by those in the 21-30 age range at 30%. Teachers aged 41-50 comprise 20% of the sample, while those aged 51 and above represent 10%. Gender distribution indicates a predominance of female teachers, who constitute 60% of the respondents, with male teachers making up the remaining 40%. Regarding teaching experience, a significant portion of the participants has 6-10 years of experience (35%), while the 1-5 years and 11-15 years experience categories are evenly represented at 25% each. Teachers with more than 16 years of experience account for 15% of the sample. This demographic data provides a broad representation of EFL educators, ensuring that the insights gathered reflect various perspectives and experiences within the field.

4.2. Challenges Identified

In the variety of difficulties described by the survey, it is possible to distinguish the linguistic, cultural and pedagogical difficulties for the EFL learners. The most reported barriers were indeed linguistic where students are regarded as having difficulties with understanding and using grammatical patterns, learning new vocabulary and accurate pronunciation. Interference, or what is referred to as language transfer, which is engendered by the students' first language in the English learning, is also presented as another constraint, which causes learners to make persistent wrong usage of the language. The cultural issue is also quite manifest, especially the problems relating to the interpretation by the students of culturally sensitive references and proverbs. The learners indicate that it is sometimes difficult for them to get involved and engage their/we teachers in meaningful informative interaction because they may find themselves in an all together different cultural setting as that of the target language for learning communication. Some of the factors that constitute the pedagogical difficulties include; the variation in the learners' profile that may require the use of different techniques in instructions, and the

limitations of conventional instructions that may not fully meet the interpersonal and communicative needs of EFL learners. The COVID-19 pandemic deepened these difficulties by forcing learning to move fully online and resulted in digital learners and student engagement problems.

4.3. Pedagogical Strategies

These challenges can, therefore, be met with a variety of EFL teaching practices that focus on interaction and communication. TBLT and CLT are widely applied to promote language use and learners' involvement in meaningful activities. Teachers also modify the content of their lessons by using multimedia resources and real-life texts that can demonstrate real-life contexts to help the two blend. Another of the strategies is scaffolding, whereby the teacher offers a framework through which students are slowly eased into using appropriate language proficiency. This entails task analysis and then providing incremental assistance to learners until they acquire the skills and knowledge to execute the big task. Additionally, teachers value the cultural component of languages and, on such basis, expose their students to the cultural peculiarities of English. It improves language skills and enables learners to use the language in multicultural contexts.

4.4. Motivational Strategies

Motivation is a critical factor in language learning, and teachers employ several strategies to foster and maintain learner motivation in the EFL classroom. One of the primary methods is providing learners with autonomy, allowing them to make choices about their learning paths, topics, and projects. This sense of ownership increases engagement and encourages students to take an active role in their language acquisition journey. Teachers also use positive reinforcement to build confidence and reduce the anxiety that often accompanies language learning. This includes offering praise for progress, providing constructive feedback, and creating a supportive classroom environment where students feel comfortable taking risks and making mistakes. Additionally, incorporating gamification elements, such as language games and interactive activities, helps to maintain student interest and makes the learning process more enjoyable. Teachers also emphasize the importance of setting clear and achievable goals, which helps students to stay focused and motivated as they work towards language proficiency. These strategies collectively contribute to a more dynamic and engaging EFL learning experience, helping students to overcome challenges and achieve their language learning goals.

5. Discussion

The findings of this research can extend the body of knowledge as to the difficulties of EFL learners, which is consistent with the literature review section. The following linguistic difficulties pointed out in this study align with the existing body of EFL research: The learners were observed to have weaknesses in using grammatically correct English and accented pronunciation, and the quantity and quality of the lexis used have also been another problem. For example, Pérez-Llantada (2018) discuss the nature of language difficulties, pointing out that EFL students have problems dealing with several lexemes and comprehending and applying grammatical rules of the English language. That is why the conclusion of this study, regarding the persistent errors many learners make due to language transfer, is comparable to Larsen - Freeman (2018) of interlanguage, which characterizes learners' internal language development. Such consistencies enhance the evidence that linguistic challenges are evident and require consistent and specific efforts, more so in grammar and vocabulary. Richards & Rodgers, in their article, teach that one of the upstream approaches might also help reduce these challenges through using authentic language materials in teaching.

There were also cultural issues where learners needed help understanding some contextual meanings or some phrases used in the host country. This is in agreement with (Matsuda & Friedrich, 2012), who noted that cultural incongruities in the classroom lead to the production of confusion and thereby deny students meaningful interaction with the target cultural language. In addition, Byram and Wagner (2018) argue that ICC is essential for learners to meet EFL in a globalized world, but it needs to be included in the dimension of language acquisition. The findings indicate that although the teachers experienced cultural competence as relevant, they identified cultural-enhanced instruction as difficult. As was pointed out by Yundayani (2021), EFL learners in remote and online settings reported higher levels of cultural hiatus since students' face-to-face interactions are important in strengthening intercultural competence. In essence,

the crossing of cultural outlooks has created the need for better encoded cultural training and materials for teachers so that learners can be well prepared for the peculiarities of culture in English language usage.

Teachers' training was another area touched upon in this study, and it included issues such as pedagogy difficulties, including the efficacy of the direct instruction method. They remarked that there is a popular preference for interactive methods that include Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), but they are seldom used as introduced due to inadequate resources and trainer help. Ellis et al. (2019) has also affirmed that TBLT and CLT help present real-life use of the language and students' involvement, but implementing these processes is only possible with qualified staff. These findings also relate to Richards and Rodgers (2014) opinion that many EFL teachers still use the grammar-translation approach, which is useful in some cases. However, it does not cover the communicative aspect of learning. Also, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the productivity of communicative teaching methods because of the increased reliance on online learning platforms in which teachers and students face several technological limitations and the absence of interactive learning tools (Yundayani, 2021). This highlights the need for professional development programs to arm teachers with skills to put such techniques in their normal classroom/text-based instructions and the virtual e-learning platform.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, the present study has helped identify some of the complex learning issues that EFL learners experience in conventional classrooms, as seen from the teacher's point of view, who is more often on the front-line grappling with these problems. The research indicates that the generalized barriers to language learning are still in place and affect learners' efforts to communicate fluently and precisely through the target language: aptitude in grammar, lexicon, and phonetics. Besides, there are cultural challenges that make learning more challenging, and this includes factors like the difficult understanding of cultural references and idioms in EFL learning, which call for enhanced intercultural competencies in the teaching and learning of EFL. There is also a serious problem for educational processes, first of all, in traditional approaches to teaching and in using textbooks, which do not contribute to students' active participation or increase their communication skills. Consequently, the study emphasizes the effectiveness of more interactive and communicative methods, such as language and communicative language teaching. However, teachers need to undertake professional development to facilitate the implementation of these methods. Additionally, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought new issues related to changes in learning models, the need to use technology, and new teaching techniques that are suitable both in traditional face-to-face and fully online learning. All in all, this work is significant in the following ways: Firstly, the research contributes to understanding essential factors that confront EFL education and enhances educators' understanding of how students can be motivated for a learning process in a foreign language classroom.

6.1. Future Recommendations

1. The future researchers can explore the same angle from EFL learner's perspective.
2. They can make the comparative study of private vs public school's classrooms to have deep insight into such barriers.

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