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## Exploring Teachers' Difficulties in Teaching English as a Second Language in Public Sector Elementary Schools

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### Abstract

*This study explored the difficulties faced by the teachers while teaching English as a second language in public sector elementary schools. This study was descriptive in nature, and a survey-type research design was used. Data were collected from a randomly selected sample of 120 teachers, both male and female, out of the population of 800 public sector elementary schools of tehsil Samundari district Faisalabad. A questionnaire in the form of a 5-point Likert scale was used as a tool to collect data from respondents. Data were analyzed by using SPSS version 22. Weighted scores, mean values, and standard deviations were calculated for analysis. Findings revealed that teachers' workload in school, irrelevant qualifications, and financial pressure were the key challenges. Over crowdedness in classrooms, students and their parents' less interest in the English language, faulty examination system, limited time to complete the syllabus, and fewer training opportunities were the major problems faced by the teachers while teaching English. This study urges curtailing the workload of teachers and the arrangement of training programs for the teachers.*

**Key Words:** Teaching, English, Second Language, Elementary Schools

### Introduction

English is a global language, and its learning is increasing all over the world (Paik, 2008). It is spoken as a second language in many countries where it has not the status of native language (Ahmad, 2016). Our world now has become a global village, and the need for learning English is the demand of the present time. Furthermore, it is one of the languages which the United States uses, and it is also the language of all modern sciences, media, international organizations, and the latest technology (Nawaz et al., 2015). Because of this present-day situation, this language is being

taught and learned as a second language more than any other language across the world (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

In Pakistan, English is the official language whereas Urdu has the status of the national language. English is taught as a compulsory subject in public schools, and it is an arduous task to teach English as a second language (Dar et al., 2019). The medium of instruction in public schools is Urdu; therefore, teachers teach English subject in a second language (Abdullah, 2020). Teachers who teach English face numerous problems which consequently influence their teaching skills negatively.

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Many factors contribute to the weak teaching of teachers, and among all this lack of training is a major problem. Teachers are not trained properly as language teachers; therefore, they cannot teach according to the demand of the subject ([Sarwar et al., 2017](#)). Due to overcrowdedness in classrooms, the teaching of English as a second language also raises the problems of classroom management ([Abdullah, 2020](#)). A conducive environment in the classroom nourishes students' abilities for learning, while those classrooms which are not properly managed negatively affect students' participation and learning ([Kayikci, 2009](#)). There are also many problems which teachers face due to students, their school heads, and the education department.

Looking at the problems and challenges of English teachers, there is a need to explore the difficulties of teachers in teaching the English language. Although various researches have been conducted on the problem of English language teachers yet, there is a scarcity of research on those teachers who are teaching English at public sector elementary schools. Considering the significant problems of the teachers, the study was conducted to explore the problems of teachers teaching English as a second language in public elementary schools of tehsil Samundri district Faisalabad. The study might be helpful for teachers, policymakers, curriculum developers, and the education department.

## **Review of Literature**

Many studies in the past investigate various issues and problems of teachers in teaching English as a second language. The problems and difficulties which teachers face can be divided into five types.

### **Own problems of Teachers**

Many problems are related to teachers themselves as the burden of extra duties in schools stops teachers from designing learning activities for language development ([Nawab, 2012](#)). Most of the time, English subject is assigned to those teachers whose qualification does not match with this subject ([Musthafa, 2010](#)), and they also use their native language while teaching English which does not provide a chance to maintain direct contact with the English language ([Nadeem, 2007](#)). In our country,

the profession of teaching is viewed as less profitable and poorly paid, so teachers remain unmotivated, and consequently, they take less interest in their school duties ([Saeed et al., 2013](#)). Teachers are not satisfied with the facilities provided to them, and this dissatisfaction negatively influences their teaching ([Khan et al., 2017](#)). Poor teaching practices are due to deficiencies in the system of certain in-service training ([Zein, 2016](#)). Sometimes, different refresher courses and training for professional development are not held ([Warsi, 2004](#)). Audio-visual aids are not available in schools ([Teevno, 2011](#)); therefore, the lack of these teaching aids was the cause of weakness in English language teaching ([Saeed, 2015](#)). According to [Saeed et al. \(2013\)](#), some schools do not have basic aids such as laboratory, whiteboard, office, and library. Teachers cannot take help from their own as no guide books for teachers are provided ([Panezai and Channa, 2017](#)). Teachers spent most of the class time managing the student and handling the disciplinary issues, due to which they found less time for teaching ([Abdullah, 2020](#)).

### **Students and their home Environment**

The reviewed literature showed that learners' educational and socio-economical background affect their academic performance ([Farooq et al., 2011](#)). In public schools, most of the students belong to poor or lower-middle-class families. These social and economic factors create difficulties and challenges for teachers as these students do not take an interest in learning English. Besides it, their families do not support them, and they have no opportunity to speak and learn English at home ([Abdussalam et al., 2015](#); [Tariq et al., 2013](#)). Students belonging to rural areas found the English subject difficult to learn. They feel bored while attending English language classes resulting in discipline problems in classrooms ([Kannan, 2009](#)). All students in the classroom are not the same. Teachers in the classroom deal with students of different mental and physical abilities ([Bashyal, 2007](#)). Over-crowdedness also diverts the teacher's attention towards maintaining discipline in the classroom ([Khan and Iqbal, 2012](#)). That is why improper class size results in teachers' weakness in teaching English ([Saeed, 2015](#)) as all factors of effective teaching and learning get badly affected due to indiscipline ([Zhang, 2002](#)).

Students' misbehavior as refusing to do work, dressing inappropriately, dirty uniform, and fighting with class fellows, poses great challenges for teachers ([Asiyai, 2012](#)). These behavioral problems negatively affect the teaching process in the classroom ([Al-Amarat, 2011](#)). Prior knowledge of the English language strongly affects students learning, but the scarcity of previous knowledge creates an obstacle in effective learning ([Yang and Qudair, 2018](#)) which in consequence increases teachers' difficulties.

### **English Textbook and Curriculum**

In schools, a fixed or limited time is given to teaching English textbooks. But the content of the book is not fully delivered to students in that limited time ([Noom-Ura, 2013](#)). [Anyiendah \(2017\)](#) also concluded that the syllabus could not be covered in the short time that is provided to teach English. Moreover, the textbooks of English are not according to the mental abilities of students ([Bhatti et al., 2017](#)).

### **School Environment and Heads**

[Andende \(2016\)](#) find out that the leadership style of heads directly influences teachers' performance. A democratic style of leadership enhances the performance of teachers. But in most public schools, the general behaviour of principals towards their teachers is not appropriate. Principals' behavior with teachers is like a master and servant relationship ([Saeed et al., 2013](#)). The school environment does not facilitate better learning as there is noise and disturbance in the classes ([Alrawashdeh and Al-zayed, 2017](#)). Lack of different resources in public schools also creates difficulties for teachers as there is no furniture, laboratory, computer, and teaching aids in schools ([Khowaja et al., 2016](#)).

### **Education Department**

The examination system in public schools is full of many flaws, and it is also unable to develop four language skills ([Khowaja et al., 2016](#)). Teachers always remained under examination pressure and prepared students only to pass the exam ([Pandian, 2002](#)). A limited time for teaching English is given to teachers, and teachers spend all the time preparing students to pass the examination ([Behroozi and Amoozegar, 2014](#)). No incentives for efficient

teachers are given to enhance their performance ([Ahmad et al., 2013](#)). Lack of motivation on the part of teachers negatively affects their performance ([Harvie and Winful, 2018](#)). As teaching profession always needs continual and regular training and workshops for the professional development of teachers, but fewer trainings are conducted. As a result, they remain unfamiliar with the latest trends, theories, and practices in English language teaching ([Saeed et al., 2013](#)).

### **Methodology**

#### **Research Design**

It was descriptive research, and survey-type research design was used.

#### **Sample and Sampling Technique**

Both male and female government elementary school teachers of tehsil Samundari district Faisalabad were the target population. There were 74 public elementary schools of both males and females, and 800 teachers were teaching there. Lists of schools and teachers were obtained from the deputy district education office, Samundri. From 74 schools, 20 schools (10 male schools and 10 female schools) were selected, and from a total of 800 population, 120 respondents (60 male teachers and 60 female teachers) were selected as a sample through a simple random sampling technique.

#### **Research tool**

A close-ended questionnaire was developed to collect data in the form of five-point Likert scales from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The questions were about the various problems of teachers which they face due to their weaknesses, students and their home environment, textbook and curriculum, school environment, and education department. The opinion of 5 experts who were English language teachers was taken to check the validity of the questionnaire, and 3 items of the questionnaire were revised. Reliability was checked through the Pilot testing of a questionnaire on 20 teachers from the list of non-selected schools. The reliability was checked by Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha and it was 0.82 which shows the high level of reliability.

## Data Collection and Analysis

Questionnaires were given to respondents in their schools, and all the questionnaires were collected at the spot. It took two weeks to collect data. The

response rate of respondents was 100%. Data were analyzed by using SPSS. Weighted Score, Mean value, and standard deviation were calculated for analysis, and all the results were arranged in the form of tables.

## Findings

### Own Problems of Teachers

**Table 1.** Weighted Score, Mean Value, Standard Deviation, and Rank Order of the respondents related to their own problems

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean Value	S.D.	Rank Order
Prepare a lesson plan for each topic	490	4.08	0.94	1
Workload of teachers	489	4.08	1.18	2
Frequently use mother tongue	478	3.98	1.03	3
Financial pressure	469	3.91	1.10	4
Pre-service/in-service trainings are effective	459	3.83	1.43	5
Irrelevant qualification background	459	3.82	1.22	6
Use A.V. aids	450	3.75	1.17	7
Knowledge about modern techniques of teaching	435	3.63	1.39	8
Problems in developing own lesson plans	432	3.60	1.42	9
Dissatisfaction with job	429	3.57	1.50	10
Use guide book	427	3.56	1.12	11
Attend refresher courses	427	3.56	1.34	12
Difficulty in maintaining discipline in the classroom	415	3.46	1.18	13
Access to new technologies	387	3.23	1.49	14
Failure in using different teaching techniques	383	3.19	1.07	15

*n=120*

Table 1 shows that most of the teachers agree that preparation of lesson plan is a problem for them, and this is ranked as 1<sup>st</sup> with a mean value of 4.08 and SD of 0.94. The second problem was the workload of teachers with a mean value of 4.08 and SD of 1.18. The frequency of using mother tongue with a mean value of 3.98 and SD 1.03 was the 4<sup>th</sup> problem of teachers. Teachers agreed that financial pressure also creates problems with a mean value of 3.91 and SD of 1.10. Teachers agreed that pre-service or in-service trainings were effective for them, with a mean value of 3.83 and SD of 1.43. When the teachers inquired about their qualification background, they agreed that their qualification background for teaching English was irrelevant, with a mean value of 3.82 and SD of 1.22. Teachers agreed that while teaching English, they used A.V. aids, and the mean value for

this statement was 3.75 and SD 1.17. Teachers also agreed that they have good knowledge of modern teaching techniques with a mean value of 3.63 and SD of 1.39. Teachers agreed that developing of own lesson plan is a problem for them with a mean value of 3.60 and SD of 1.42. While inquiring about the job, teachers agreed that they were dissatisfied with their job with a mean value of 3.57 and SD of 1.50. Teachers agreed that they used guide books and attended refresher courses with a mean value of 3.56, while the S.D. of these statements were 1.12 and 1.34, respectively.

Teachers remained neutral on the statements about classroom discipline, access to technology, and their failure in adopting various teaching techniques.

## Students and their Home Environment

**Table 2.** Weighted Score, Mean Value, Standard Deviation, and Rank Order of the respondents related to students and their home environment

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean Value	S.D.	Rank Order
Students belong to less educated families	508	4.23	1.02	1
Less interest among students regarding English	498	4.15	1.05	2
Social status affects students' learning	498	4.15	1.42	3
Over crowdedness in classroom	496	4.13	1.08	4
The family has a role in motivating student	477	3.98	1.11	5
Students consider English difficult to learn	470	3.92	1.33	6
Home environment affects second language learning	467	3.89	1.34	7
Insufficient previous knowledge for learning	464	3.87	1.30	8
Lack of attention on the part of parents	463	3.86	1.26	9
Parents' education affects students' learning	459	3.82	1.12	10
The financial status of the family has a role in learning	457	3.81	1.33	11
Heterogeneous characteristics	443	3.69	1.44	12
Disobedience and aggressive behavior	436	3.63	1.34	13
Parents neglect parent-teacher meetings	431	3.59	1.24	14
The second language can be learned as the first language	311	2.59	1.48	15
Only classroom teaching can fulfill learning requirements	272	2.27	1.42	16

*n*=120

Table 2 reveals that teachers agree that in public schools, mostly teachers belonged to less educated families with a mean value of 4.23 and SD 1.02. Teachers agreed with the statements that students took less interest in learning English and their social status also affected their learning with a mean value of 4.15, while S.D. of these statements were 1.05 and 1.42, respectively. Teachers agreed that overcrowdedness is a great problem for them, with a mean value of 4.13 and SD of 1.08.

Teachers agreed that family played a role in motivating students with a mean value of 3.98 and SD of 1.11. Teachers agreed that students considered English difficult to learn as their home environment and previous knowledge for learning English was improper with a mean value of 3.92, 3.89, 3.87, and SD 1.33, 1.34, 1.30, respectively. Most teachers agreed that parents did not give attention to their children's

learning while their education and financial condition also affected the learning process of their children. The mean values of these statements were 3.86, 3.82, and 3.81, while SD were 1.26, 1.12, and 1.33.

Teachers agreed that in the class, students had heterogeneous characteristics with a mean value of 3.69 and SD of 1.44. Teachers agreed with the statement that students showed disobedience and aggressive behaviour with a mean value of 3.63 and SD of 1.34. Teachers also agreed that the parents of students neglected parent-teacher meetings with a mean value of 3.59 and SD of 1.24. Teachers disagreed that the second language can be learned as the first language, and only classroom teaching could fulfill learning requirements with mean values of 2.59 and 2.27 while SD 1.48 and 1.42, respectively.

### English Textbooks and Curriculum

**Table 3.** Weighted Score, Mean Value, Standard Deviation, and Rank Order of respondents related to English textbooks and curriculum

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean Value	S.D.	Rank Order
Incompatible with the mental level of students	448	3.73	1.20	1
Lack of coordination between the amount of content and time allocated for them	438	3.65	1.16	2
Focus only on memorization	409	3.41	1.09	3
Content is less interesting for students	403	3.36	1.22	4
Textbooks are not updated	396	3.30	1.11	5
Objectives are not related to learners' needs	396	3.30	1.24	6
Textbooks material do not facilitate teaching	382	3.18	1.12	7
Exercises do not promote critical thinking	376	3.13	1.25	8

*n=120*

Table 3 shows that most of the teachers agreed that textbooks and curriculum were incompatible with the mental level of pupils with a mean value of 3.73 and SD 1.20, and it is ranked as 1<sup>st</sup>. Teachers agreed that there was a lack of coordination between the

amount of content and time given for them, with a mean value of 3.65 and SD of 1.16. Teachers remained neutral on the rest of the statements concerning the problems of textbooks and curriculum.

### School Environment and Heads

**Table 4.** Weighted Score, Mean Value, Standard Deviation, and Rank Order of respondents related to school environment and heads

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean Value	S.D.	Rank Order
Different extra duties are assigned to teachers	339	2.83	1.47	1
Heads supervise teachers properly during lecture	299	2.49	1.47	2
The noisy environment in school	263	2.19	1.52	3
Demotivating behavior of heads in applying different teaching methods	255	2.13	1.32	4
Lack of basic classroom components (furniture, light and fans, etc.)	249	2.08	1.25	5

*n=120*

Table 4 shows that teachers disagree with the statement that different extra duties were assigned to them with a mean value of 2.83 and SD 1.47. Teachers disagreed with the statement that heads supervised properly during class lectures with a mean value of 2.49 and SD 1.47. Teachers disagreed that classrooms were noisy with a mean value of 2.19 and SD of 1.52.

Teachers disagreed that heads did not motivate teachers in applying different teaching methods with a mean value of 2.13 and SD of 1.32. Most of the teachers also disagreed with the statement about the lack of basic classroom components with a mean value of 2.08 and SD of 1.25.



## Education Department

**Table 5.** Weighted Score, Mean Value, Standard Deviation, and Rank Order of the respondents related to the education department

Problems	Weighted Score	Mean Value	S.D.	Rank Order
Faulty examination system	483	4.02	1.30	1
Time duration of the English period is inadequate	457	3.81	1.29	2
No incentives for efficient teachers	454	3.78	1.13	3
Lack of training	444	3.70	1.35	4
Inappropriate inspection system	400	3.33	1.14	5

*n=120*

Table 5 indicates that most of the teachers agree that a faulty examination system is a big problem for them, with a mean value of 4.02 and SD of 1.30. Teachers agreed that time duration for English class is inadequate, with a mean value of 3.81 and SD of 1.29. Teachers also agreed that no incentives were given to efficient teachers with a mean value of 3.78 and SD of 1.13. Teachers agreed that there was a lack of training from the department, and the inspection system was also inappropriate, with mean values of 3.70 and 3.33 while SD 1.35 and 1.14, respectively.

## Discussion

The results of the study show that there are numerous problems that teachers are facing in teaching English as a second language in public elementary schools. Table 1 shows teachers' problems. It is found that extra periods besides the fixed periods were imposed on teachers, and it is in agreement with the study of [Nawab \(2012\)](#). They also found that extra workload on teachers created difficulties for teachers as it prevented teachers from designing activities for the language development of learners. It is also found that teachers use their mother tongue in the classroom when teaching English, and this finding is similar to the findings of [Nadeem \(2007\)](#), who found that teachers use their mother tongue in teaching English.

Findings reveal that financial pressure is also a big problem for teachers. Previous researches have also supported that teacher are less motivated towards teaching due to financial problems, and they are not satisfied with their jobs ([Saeed et al., 2013](#); [Khan et al., 2017](#)). According to results, it is found that teachers consider trainings effective. But this

result contradicts a study conducted by [Zein \(2016\)](#) and [Warsi \(2004\)](#), who found that in-service system of training has deficiencies. It is found that teachers' qualification is irrelevant to teaching English subject. This is in agreement with Mustafa (2010), who also concluded that in many schools' English subject is taught by those teachers whose qualification does not according to English subject. Present research finds that in public school teachers use A.V. aids guide books, and they have good knowledge of different teaching techniques. On the other hand, these findings do not support the findings of [Teevno, 2011](#); [Panezai and Channa 2017](#) and [Saeed, 2015](#) who found that A.V. aids were not available in schools.

Table 2 shows the problems of teachers related to students and their home environment. It is found that in public schools' students mostly belong to less-educated families. These findings are supported by the findings of [Farooq et al. \(2011\)](#), who found that low academic qualifications of parents affected students learning. It is also found that in public school students are less interested in learning English as their social status and home environment affect their learning because a second language cannot be learned as easily as the native language. These findings are similar to the previous researches ([Abdussalam et al., 2015](#); [Kannan, 2009](#); [Tariq et al., 2013](#)), who also found that students belonging to poor or lower-middle-class families did not take an interest in English, and they have fewer chances of practising English at their homes. As for as overcrowdedness is considered, findings reveal that most classes are overcrowded due to which teachers cannot pay proper attention to each student. Due to overcrowded classes, teachers also face the problems

of class management and discipline. Besides the current study, previous researchers ([Khan and Iqbal, 2012](#); [Saeed, 2015](#); [Abdullah 2020](#)) also found that overcrowded classes increased the problems of teachers and destroy the conducive environment for learning. Moreover, disobedience of students is also a major hurdle in effective teaching. Some students do not follow the instructions of teachers and also behave aggressively with their class fellows. Similarly, [Al-Amarat \(2011\)](#) and [Asiyai \(2012\)](#) also found that misbehaviour of students increased teachers' problems.

Table 3 shows the problems of teachers which are due to curriculum and textbooks. Findings show that the textbook of English is not according to the mental level of students as the material in books is incompatible with the mental abilities of students of that age. [Bhatti et al. \(2017\)](#) also reported that textbooks of English did not match with the mental level of students. Findings of the current study show that in schools, limited time is given to complete the textbook and syllabus of English as just one period is insufficient to complete the textbook. These results are also supported by various past researches ([Noom-Ura, 2013](#); [Behroozi and Amoozegar, 2014](#); [Anyiendah, 2017](#)), who found that completion of English syllabus in a short period was a problem for teachers.

Table 4 depicts those problems of teachers which they face due to school environment and school heads. It is found that school heads do not supervise properly during their lectures in class as if heads supervise teachers, they could give their suggestions for the betterment. Similarly, [Saeed et al., \(2013\)](#) found that heads did not supervise teachers properly. But present research also shows that heads of schools do not impose restrictions on implementing different teaching techniques for teachers, and their behaviour is also friendly. It shows that the overall behavior of heads is good with their teachers, and this is in agreement with the findings of [Andende \(2016\)](#) who found that heads gave importance to teachers. The current study finds that the school environment is not noisy, and there is no sound distraction in the school environment. So teachers face no problem due to noise in schools. [Alrawashdeh and Al-Zayed's \(2017\)](#) study is in disagreement with these findings as they found that

in schools, sound distraction diverted teachers' and learners' attention during the teaching-learning process. Findings reveal that classrooms are equipped with basic classroom facilities as proper benches or desks, lights, fans, and whiteboards are present in all classrooms. On the other hand, the study findings of [Khowaja et al. \(2016\)](#) did not support these findings as they found in their study that basic facilities were not present in classrooms.

In table 5, it is found that the examination system has many faults as it promotes cramming and rote learning which prevents teachers from planning language development activities for students. The findings of [Pandian \(2002\)](#) and [Khowaja et al. \(2016\)](#) are also in line with these findings as they found that the faulty examination system of English subject, which is grammar-based, negatively affected teachers' performance. It is also found that in public schools, no rewards or incentives are given to teachers according to their good performance, which demotivates teachers. The findings of [Ahmad et al., \(2013\)](#) and [Hervie and Winful \(2018\)](#) also supported these findings. They found that incentives were not given to teachers to motivate them for better performance. Data show that although trainings are conducted for teachers yet, they are less in numbers which enhances the problems of teachers in English teaching. [Warsi \(2004\)](#) also supported these findings that less training increased teachers' problems.

## Conclusion

From the above discussion and findings of the study, it is concluded that teaching of English as a second language is a challenging task for teachers at the public elementary school level. The workload of extra periods, financial pressure, and irrelevant qualification background are those problems that pose major challenges for teachers in teaching a second language. Even no reward or incentive is given to hardworking teachers which results in teachers' dissatisfaction with teaching. The atmosphere which students get from their homes is not promoting their learning as parents do not give attention to their children which also increases the problems of teachers. Classes are large, and the teacher is unable to give proper attention to the student. Due to overcrowdedness, a large amount of time is spent in managing the class and maintains



discipline. Some students in the class have disobeying nature which further increases the problems for teachers. The material presented in the English textbook is not according to the mental level of students and is lengthy, which cannot be fulfilled in just one period which is fixed for English subject. From the findings, it is clear that behaviour of heads is cooperative, but they do not supervise teachers during class lectures for further guidance in their teaching practice. The current system of evaluating or assessing students is full of flaws as it promotes cramming. Although different trainings are conducted for the professional development yet, they are few in numbers due to which teachers cannot get professional development.

### **Recommendations**

Based on findings and conclusion following recommendations is made:

- The workload of teachers should be minimized.
- Only one period is not enough for better teaching of English subject so at least two periods should be fixed.
- Through continuous training programs, teachers should be equipped with the latest techniques of teaching English as a foreign language.
- To avoid discipline problems, sections of large classes should be made.
- Experts English teachers should be consulted while selecting material for English textbooks.
- The financial status of public school teachers should be uplifted by increasing their salaries and providing incentives.
- While recruiting English teachers, those persons should be selected who have relevant qualifications.
- The examination system should be improved.

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