

Teaching Strategies and Pedagogical Challenges in Undergraduate English Language Education: A Systematic Overview

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Received	Revised	Accepted
20 October 2025	19 November 2025	30 December 2025

Abstract. English has become indispensable for education, commerce, and scholarly research. It serves as the primary medium of instruction at universities in Pakistan. This study aims to analyze the current research on promoting learner autonomy and achieving success in learning a second language to enhance students' readiness to face academic and professional challenges. The main objective of this study is to assess the present state of English Language Education in Pakistan, recognize the difficulties faced by instructors and students in the English as a Foreign Language context, and propose strategies to policymakers and educators for improving communicative competence and promoting learner autonomy in higher education institutions. The study comprehensively evaluates existing research and contemporary practices to assess the effectiveness of various teaching approaches and learning strategies used by undergraduate students in Pakistan. The focus is on how these strategies improve communication skills and encourage learner responsibility among university students. University students' use of different learning methodologies enhances their communication proficiency. They often exhibit qualities of responsibility and maturity, enabling active participation in self-directed learning. Educators' pedagogical approaches and language proficiency are crucial in allowing students to develop competence and take responsibility for their educational progress. Promoting learner autonomy fosters a sense of responsibility among students, encouraging engagement in reflective activities and understanding their strengths and weaknesses, which are essential for developing language capability. There is a positive correlation between the acquisition of a second language and improved educational achievements, more autonomy, and higher cognitive abilities in decision-making. Implementing conducive social and environmental circumstances for language acquisition has the potential to significantly enhance students' proficiency in English as a foreign language across Pakistan. According to the findings, improving English Language Education in Pakistan must prioritise developing learner autonomy and communicative competence. Policymakers and educators should implement approaches that create a supportive environment where students are motivated to take responsibility for their learning, engage in critical analytical thinking, and develop the skills necessary for academic and career success.

Keywords: communicative competence, English as a foreign language, higher education, learner autonomy

1. Background

1.1 Language Acquisition and CLT Effectiveness

In the present-day global context, acquiring different languages is vital for individuals residing

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and journeying across diverse geographical areas. Language is an essential social instrument that facilitates people's understanding of their experiences and the broader global context. It comprises a range of abilities, including grammatical proficiency, social comprehension, acquaintance with rhetoric, and strategic insight. Hymes (1971) posited that the primary emphasis in language instruction should be on instructing pupils in the appropriate utilisation of the language rather than only concentrating on grammatical rules (Abduvasiyevna, 2022). The approach presented is consistent with Chomsky's (1957) theoretical framework on linguistic competence, which focuses on language's intrinsic characteristics and organisation (Harris, 2021). Furthermore, Hymes' assertion that language serves as a reflection of social behaviour aligns with Halliday's (1973) concept of "meaning potential," a perspective that has widespread recognition within the field of language studies (Abduvasiyevna, 2022).

Throughout history, scholars in the field of language teaching have primarily focused on examining the grammatical systems of the target language. The Communicative Language Teaching method prioritizes fulfilling students' communicative needs, creating a curriculum based on authentic situations, and incorporating a solid understanding of linguistic principles (Farooq, 2015). The increase in the number of English speakers worldwide over the last five decades has resulted in significant transformations in the approaches to language instruction and acquisition. Educators and learners have adopted the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in Pakistan. Conversely, in Western nations, where conventional instructional approaches were previously prevalent, CLT has already shown significant efficacy. In light of these advancements, it is vital to evaluate the efficacy of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) within the particular cultural milieu of Pakistan in order to evaluate its prospective advantages and obstacles. The significance of this investigation lies in its potential to provide valuable insights into the implementation and incorporation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) across educational contexts that include a wide range of cultural backgrounds.

1.2 Articulating the Problem Statement

The widely explored nature of this notion may be attributed to the growing need to implement a comprehensive strategy for language instruction that effectively caters to the varied requirements of students and educators within the contemporary global landscape. To accomplish this objective, it is essential to evaluate the fundamental prerequisites thoroughly. Active learner involvement is crucial in facilitating effective learning, underscoring the need to consider students' viewpoints and aims throughout the design of language teaching and learning activities (Farooq, 2015). After identifying student requirements, implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the classroom may be successfully achieved via integrating functional directions and incorporating contextually relevant activities that accurately reflect real-life circumstances. This methodology facilitates the development of students' autonomy and enhances their proficiency in interpersonal communication. Moreover, the utilisation of findings derived from scholarly investigations on the acquisition of the English language might provide substantial advantages for pupils, contingent upon the availability of this research to educators. However, the investigation of learner autonomy has mostly been confined to theoretical frameworks. There is an urgent and significant need for more empirical investigation of learner autonomy, including both undergraduate and graduate levels, in order to provide a comparative analysis of results across diverse educational contexts. The aforementioned need is crucial due to the lack of immediate observable practical application of autonomy, resulting in a significant reliance on instructors among many students (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). While the current body of research on learner autonomy is rather few, it has the potential to provide light on the disparities between student development and language teaching methodologies, specifically in terms of cultivating autonomous cognition and

behaviour (Borg & Alshumaimeri, 2019).

In recent years, there has been a growing emphasis among scholars on the study of learning preferences and language teaching approaches. Nevertheless, more research is necessary to fill the existing vacuum in information about instructors' proficiency, learners' autonomy, the implementation of novel teaching methods, and the evaluation of learning outcomes within the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) framework (Manan & David, 2021). The present study has the potential to significantly contribute to advancing knowledge about language teaching methodologies that effectively facilitate the growth of independent and successful language learners.

1.3 Study Aim and Inquiry

The immediate goal of this study is to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the available literature to provide insights into the difficulties encountered in English language instruction at the postsecondary level in Pakistan. Additionally, this research aims to assess this field's present condition critically. Furthermore, the primary objective of this research is to put forward a theoretical framework that has the potential to augment communicative competence and foster learner autonomy within the higher education landscape of Pakistan. This study aims to address the following enquiries:

Research Question: What are the primary challenges encountered in the enhancement of students' English language proficiency and the cultivation of self-directed learning, and what approaches can be employed to enhance these achievements at the higher education level in Pakistan?

The results of this study have the potential to be an excellent asset for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance their methodologies in English language instruction, eventually providing students with the necessary competencies required for success in academic and professional environments.

1.4 Importance and Relevance of the Research

A strong correlation exists between learner autonomy and communication competence, as shown by the ability of autonomous learners to attain more extraordinary academic accomplishments and experience enhanced job prospects (Reinders, 2010). Nevertheless, a study by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2013 suggests that acquiring a conventional university education does not inherently ensure the cultivation of critical thinking, self-direction, or proficient communication abilities among students. Students must cultivate their "learning skills" with fundamental competencies, including technical proficiency, reading, numeracy, strategic critical thinking, self-assurance, leadership abilities, and collaborative aptitude. Cultivating lifelong learning abilities, such as proficient communication and self-directed learning, is crucial for achieving academic excellence (Permana et al., 2019). The concept of educational autonomy, as defined by Littlewood (1999), refers to students' capacity to autonomously apply their information without relying on teachers. This perspective not only underscores the importance of autonomy as a fundamental objective for all learners but also highlights the long-term benefits it brings. The advent of the Industrial Revolution and globalisation have rendered these talents crucial for achieving success in the contemporary corporate landscape. The acquisition of enhanced competence and increased autonomy confers advantages to learners not just throughout their educational endeavours but also over their lifespan (Clark, 2012).

In light of the increasing significance of the English language in the modern day, proficient communication abilities have become essential for persons engaged in advanced academic pursuits, entrepreneurial endeavours, or entry into professional environments (Rao, 2019). The

global demand for proficient English language skills is a critical factor in the contemporary job market, prompting educators and learners to place more importance on cultivating communication abilities. A common factor contributing to the difficulty of getting work is a need for more English language skills, which becomes apparent throughout job interviews. Insufficient proficiency in the English language poses considerable obstacles for graduates, both in their academic pursuits and in their future career endeavours. Given the worldwide prevalence of English language instruction and acquisition, individuals needing a solid grasp of the language have difficulties in academic and professional domains (Fendrick, 2018). Contemporary companies increasingly prioritise individuals who can collaborate proficiently within teams, exercise autonomous judgement in decision-making, demonstrate adaptability in dynamic situations, and display self-assurance and adeptness in communication (Hikmawati et al., 2021). The increasing demand highlights the need for educational institutions to prioritise cultivating these essential talents.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Enhancing Learner Autonomy in Pakistan's Language Education

The concepts of learner autonomy and communicative competence have seen increasing attention within the academic research community at universities. According to the findings of Yasmin and Sohail (2018), learner autonomy has emerged as a relatively new phenomenon within the educational landscape of Pakistan. However, providing learners with the essential abilities to cultivate autonomy and assume accountability for their academic endeavours is crucial. The concept of "learner autonomy" was first introduced by John Dewey, who emphasised the need for educators to recognise and operationalise practical approaches to integrate this principle into their instructional methodology. Unfortunately, many educational establishments in Pakistan persist in giving precedence to language training as a content area rather than acknowledging its practical use. Nevertheless, current research indicates that the promotion of learner autonomy not only fosters improved academic achievement among students but equips them with the necessary skills to navigate the dynamic global landscape (Ahsan & Alam, 2023). Given the dynamic nature of the educational environment, incorporating autonomy within language instruction is progressively imperative in fostering the cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving, and lifelong learning proficiencies among students (Khan & Bukhari, 2022).

2.2 Strategic Language for Learner Autonomy

Consequently, it becomes essential to undertake initiatives to foster the appropriate development of students' language abilities. Strategic development is necessary to effectively address these difficulties and provide students with the requisite skills to thrive in the contemporary global landscape. Benek-Rivera and Mathews (2004) propose that using creative teaching approaches is more likely to effectively engage pupils and maintain their attention on the subject matter being instructed. According to Darsih (2018), educators who engage in autonomous knowledge acquisition play a crucial role as facilitators and providers of information to their pupils. In the context of Pakistan, there is a notable need for substantial advancement in the realm of student autonomy, especially in light of language instruction. Improving the knowledge and competencies of educators about efficacious language instruction methodologies is crucial for cultivating learner autonomy. In order to foster autonomy among students in Pakistan, educators must have a thorough grasp of the concept (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Additionally, it is crucial to deliver comprehensive instruction to students regarding the learning process, familiarize them with innovative pedagogical methods, and reshape their perspectives on language acquisition (Akici, 2015). In order to accomplish this objective, educators must possess a degree of proficiency comparable to that of subject matter experts in

the instruction of English to individuals who speak other languages (Larsen-Freeman, 2018).

2.3 Challenges and the Role of English in Post-Partition Education

Within the framework of post-partition India, Urdu has supplanted chiefly English as the predominant medium of instruction, engendering difficulties and contention in the realm of English language pedagogy. However, it is essential to note that English continues to be of significant importance in higher education, as it plays a crucial role in facilitating access to novel prospects and promoting advancement in the contemporary day. In contemporary society, individuals from many cultural origins communicate effectively using English (Irgashevich et al., 2022). The English language is of significant national, global, and historical importance and is widely used in various sectors such as law, medicine, economics, education, and research (Rachid et al., 2018). This tendency is prevalent in both well-established and less-recognised educational institutions. Nevertheless, several challenges exist within the school system, namely, conventional pedagogical approaches. Factors contributing to learner demotivation include an excessive emphasis on grammar, restricted vocabulary acquisition, inadequate feedback about students' areas of difficulty, and explicit correction of mistakes. Students have challenges not only in the domains of oral communication, reading comprehension, and written expression but also in comprehending and implementing the instructions provided by their educators. The challenges also encompass restricted communication skills, absence of motivation, constrained vocabulary, and insufficient dedicated practice time among the students (Fareed et al., 2018). Zahid and colleagues (2020) conducted a comprehensive examination of the obstacles confronting the higher education system in Pakistan and its prospective trajectory. The study's findings indicate deficiencies in the quality of instruction, insufficient allocation of resources and training, a limited focus on character development, and a crucial need for increased investment in money, training, equipment, research, student services, and political lobbying. These concerns highlight the need for systemic enhancements to provide expanded assistance to educators and learners in attaining academic accomplishments.

3. Research Methodology

The present study used a thorough research technique to examine the difficulties encountered in Pakistan's educational setting of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The primary objective was to assess the current systems and identify potential avenues for improving language acquisition. The study used a qualitative methodology, including critical examination, situational analysis, and a synthesis of pertinent scholarly works. A diverse approach enabled a comprehensive analysis of the deficiencies present in contemporary educational methodologies and the development of prospective approaches for improvement.

3.1 Evaluation of Inadequate Systems in the EFL Environment

A comprehensive examination was undertaken to critically assess the scholarly literature about assessment processes at educational institutions in Pakistan that teach English as a Foreign Language. According to Shamim (2017), the predominant emphasis on exam-oriented learning materials within Pakistan's educational system hinders students' capacity to cultivate critical literacy abilities or engage in practical language application within authentic situations. The present investigation aimed to evaluate the essential elements of language education, including pedagogical attitudes, instructional methodologies, and curricular design, to determine their effectiveness in addressing the changing requirements of students (Hameed & Tahir, 2016). The study further revealed notable deficiencies in the assessment system, as emphasised by Ahmad and Malik (2011) and Rehmani (2003), which hinder intellectual advancement among students. Furthermore, the current investigation examined the impact of many variables, such as beliefs, motivation, personal talents, and attitudes, on academic achievements (Malik, 2005). One significant observation that emerged from the study conducted by Khattak (2012) is that a

considerable number of students in Pakistan's educational institutions need help in attaining their academic objectives due to inadequate competence in the English language.

3.2 Situational Analysis and Enhancing Language Learning

An extensive situational analysis was undertaken to investigate the concept of learner autonomy and its crucial importance in language acquisition in Pakistan. The primary objective of this research was to provide a comprehensive understanding of the many viewpoints on the concept of student freedom in the context of language learning. A comprehensive analysis was conducted on independent learners' attributes in conjunction with identifying efficacious approaches for fostering autonomy within the language acquisition journey. The present research was conducted in the broader framework of educational reforms in the 1990s. These reforms aimed to implement student-centred methods, including learner-focused instructional modules, organised curriculum, project-based learning, and student-centred teaching. The changes above have considerably altered the responsibilities of educators and learners, resulting in pupils assuming a heightened level of accountability for their educational achievements. The investigation also examined the pivotal role of autonomy and the notion of the self-sufficient student in contemporary language instruction. The technique used in this study aimed to integrate these findings in order to provide a comprehensive comprehension of the present condition of language acquisition and to pinpoint strategies for improving learner autonomy and proficiency.

3.3 Data Collection and Analytical Approach

The research technique used in this study included a comprehensive array of data-gathering methods, including a thorough examination of current studies, government reports, and scholarly literature relevant to the assessment systems and language teaching practices in Pakistan. This data was analysed exhaustively to identify deficiencies in existing educational methods and provide strategic suggestions for enhancing English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teaching. In addition, the research evaluated the efficacy of different instructional methods in promoting learner autonomy and communication competence among students. The results of this study provide a robust basis for future scholarly investigations and contribute to formulating policies that seek to enhance the standard of English language instruction within Pakistan's Higher Education system. A comprehensive approach guarantees that the tactics put forward are grounded on empirical data and tailored to the specific context, providing pragmatic resolutions to the identified difficulties.

4. Findings and Analysis

4.1 Thorough Assessment & Analysis

The section below thoroughly analyses research findings on teaching English to non-native speakers. It focuses on challenges related to enhancing communication skills and fostering learner autonomy.

4.2 Importance of Language Proficiency for Academic and Social Achievement

Within the framework of globalisation, the English language has attained a status of universality, assuming a crucial position in academic, economic, and professional spheres. Therefore, colleges must guarantee their pupils achieve significantly elevated autonomy and competence in English language studies. To succeed in their professional endeavours, individuals aspiring to become leaders, managers, educators, and business professionals inside their own country and abroad must cultivate intrinsic drive and self-reliance (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Per the National Education Framework (2018) from the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training Pakistan (MFEPTP), there is a clear need to enhance the English language proficiency of university students in Pakistan. There is a notable disparity between undergraduate students'

skill-based requirements and the ability of academic and professional domains to sufficiently address these needs. The research conducted by MFEPTP in 2017 underscores the challenges faced by Pakistan's educational system in effectively harnessing its capacity to enhance students' skills and knowledge. In order to excel in both international and local employment sectors, young individuals in Pakistan need to cultivate sophisticated cognitive and communicative abilities. Based on the Pakistan National Qualification Frameworks (2015), first-year students are expected to show enhanced communication skills and greater autonomy in articulating ideas to varied audiences and addressing intricate problems (Din, 2020).

4.3 Analysis of Language Proficiency Among Pakistani EFL Learners

Pakistani students have a somewhat lower level of language proficiency than their counterparts in other Asian countries. Based on the EF English Proficiency Index (2018), Pakistan is positioned at the 12th rank among 21 Asian nations and 50th among 86 countries worldwide. More implementation of a standardised curricular framework in language courses at the university level poses a substantial obstacle to students' language learning and retention (British Council, 2015). Furthermore, educators' competence and skill levels still need to be determined, given that conventional language instruction approaches at the tertiary level mainly depend on text-based exercises. Based on the Pakistan National Qualification Frameworks (2015), first-year students are expected to show enhanced communication skills and greater autonomy in articulating ideas to varied audiences and addressing intricate problems (Din, 2020). A survey released by the Bureau of Statistics in Pakistan, as reported in the Dawn newspaper on March 18, 2018, reveals that the number of jobless graduates in Pakistan exceeds 500,000. The prevailing unemployment in Pakistan may be primarily ascribed to a deficiency in communication and self-management abilities, both of which have significant importance in the eyes of employers (Gurmani et al., 2022). Additionally, a study by the Federal Public Service Commission of Pakistan (FPSC), reported in Dawn on December 6, 2016, revealed that 92% of graduate and postgraduate students from prestigious Pakistani institutions failed the competitive public service exam due to insufficient English language proficiency. The prevalence of this failure underscores notable inadequacies in the pedagogy of English instruction in Pakistani higher education institutions (Aman-Rana, 2020).

4.4 Achievement in Academics and Mastery of Language Skills

The core of Pakistan's 2025 initiative lies in the slogan "**One Nation - One Vision**," underpinned by the principles of a knowledge economy. The primary aim is to enhance the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) by advancing higher education. The predominant medium of instruction in higher education in Pakistan is English, requiring students to possess proficient language abilities to attain academic excellence (Nasir et al., 2013). Students with limited English language skills often need help in English classes and other academic areas (Abbas, 1998; Manso, 2003). As a result, language competence has emerged as a crucial criterion for attaining academic advancement (Dar & Khan, 2015). The correlation between subpar academic achievement and discontent underscores the significance of student satisfaction as a crucial determinant in achieving objectives in higher education. A potential approach to accomplish this objective involves implementing dynamic consent (Najeeb & Sabitha, 2013) and cultivating students' intrinsic motivation to enhance academic performance (Jurik, 2014; Domench & Gomez, 2014).

Some students face challenges such as low confidence, feeling disconnected from their classrooms, and difficulty participating in in-class activities due to insufficient English language proficiency (Domench et al., 2016). The existing disparity between students and teachers is intensified by the instructors' demeanour and pedagogical approach inside the educational setting (Almubrak, 2016). Acknowledging and tackling these concerns is essential to enhance student involvement, contentment, and overall academic achievement.

5. Research Contributions

The mastery of the English language plays a crucial role in facilitating social advancement within the privileged strata of Pakistani society, acting as an essential competency for obtaining work opportunities and a fundamental component of a graduate's total identity. It has a pivotal position within Pakistan's educational structure, serving as an essential component for both academic success and societal progress. Despite its inherent importance in Pakistan's academic, social, and historical context, a considerable number of students encounter obstacles in acquiring English language proficiency, hence exerting a detrimental impact on their academic achievements (Haidar, 2019). In order to conduct a comprehensive assessment of learning outcomes and ascertain the level of assistance offered by English language teachers, it is essential to analyse how these educators use their pedagogical theories to enhance language acquisition in Pakistan (Yasmin & Sohail, 2018). Furthermore, by rectifying the deficiencies in teaching approaches and ensuring that educators possess up-to-date pedagogical tactics, the efficacy of English language education may be further augmented, enhancing students' competence and overall academic achievement.

6. Conclusion

In addition, integrating professional development opportunities for educators alongside cutting-edge technology can yield substantial enhancements in students' English language proficiency. This, in turn, empowers them to effectively and autonomously address their communication requirements within higher education and their prospective professional endeavours. Gathering thorough data is essential for accurately evaluating learner autonomy and communication competence levels among instructors and students. The findings derived from this study will provide valuable guidance for policy-making processes, enabling educators and trainers within Pakistani higher education establishments to develop more efficient curricula that more effectively cater to the requirements of their students. Additionally, using these methodologies has the potential to reconcile the disparity between conventional pedagogical approaches and the requirements of contemporary education, augmenting the overall calibre of English language pedagogy.

7. Recommendations

At the outset, it is necessary to choose a fundamental action to assess the efficacy of these suggestions. The present activity has the potential to include several techniques:

- Firstly, allocating time in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) educational programs should be modified to accommodate more task-based activities, promoting student engagement in the learning process.
- Secondly, EFL instructors must dedicate themselves to ongoing professional development to remain up-to-date with industry trends and preserve the integrity of their teaching methodologies. Substantial class sizes have been recognised as a notable obstacle to effectively implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) college environment. Hence, ensuring a sincere effort in managing student registration is essential.
- Furthermore, it is not just essential but also necessary to prioritise the classroom atmosphere. A captivating and participatory setting is not just conducive to student-centred activities, but it also inspires and motivates both students and instructors.
- One potential approach to accomplish this objective is the integration of sophisticated technological tools inside educational settings, including communication devices, easily available information, multimedia materials, and interactive arrangements to facilitate

collaborative tasks.

8. Future Research

Future research should prioritise the investigation of novel approaches aimed at addressing the disparity between educational methodologies and the professional requirements within the context of English as a Foreign Language in Pakistan. It is advisable to research the impact of integrating modern pedagogical approaches like task-based learning and technology-enhanced teaching on improving university students' communicative competence and learner autonomy. Furthermore, it is essential to conduct longitudinal studies that evaluate the enduring impacts of these interventions on students' academic and professional achievements. Additionally, research needs to focus on developing and assessing standardised curricular frameworks specifically designed to cater to the distinct requirements of Pakistani English as a Foreign Language learners. This will guarantee that both instructional approaches and evaluation mechanisms are by international benchmarks. This endeavour will make a valuable contribution towards enhancing the strength and efficacy of Pakistan's English language education system.

Acknowledgements

We express our heartfelt gratitude for the support shown by all those who contributed to the successful completion of this task. We also really appreciate the empathy and forbearance shown by our family and friends throughout this whole process.

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