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Teachers of English in Pakistan: Profile and Recommendations

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Abstract

This paper answers a pertinent question: Who are the teachers of English in Pakistan? By answering this question, the current profile of teachers of English is highlighted. We were inclined to do this study because there was no data available in Pakistan. Data for this paper was generated through a survey questionnaire, which was filled out by 100 teachers of English over three years. Out of these 100 teachers, 53 teachers were from public sector schools, 29 teachers from community-based English-medium schools, and 18 teachers from private English-medium schools. These teachers belonged to various regions of Pakistan, which included Sindh, Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral. The analysis of the data shows gaps in the form of issues and challenges of teachers' careers as teachers of English. The results showed that majority of the teachers teaching in the three categories of schools came from the same stream themselves. In terms of academic qualifications, in majority of the cases, the teachers had Master's degree in disciplines other than English. The lowest percentage was reserved for Master's degree in the field of English. Therefore, in most of the cases, teachers did not hold relevant academic qualifications to be regarded as competent English language teachers. Secondly, both in public and community-based English-medium schools, a significant majority of the teachers were given the English subject to teach by the administration. However, our findings illustrate a striking difference in case of private English-medium schools in this respect where most of the teachers were self-motivated to teach English. Based on the findings of the data, recommendations are made for policy makers which are: pre-service and in-service training is needed, and the hiring practices of teachers need to be rectified. Overall, it appears that there is little variation in terms of the issues and challenges across the three categories.

Keywords: *English language teachers, school systems, Pakistan*

Introduction

Our vast and varied experience of working with teachers of English from diverse backgrounds within Pakistan in particular and the developing

countries in general has given rise to an issue which we have been facing for a long time as teachers and teacher educators. The issue is to explore the profile of the teachers of English. The reason for this is that in the context of Pakistan, people frequently assume that anyone who speaks English fluently can also teach it. However, the reality is quite contrary. In many cases, teachers themselves hardly know how to speak English, but are given the responsibility to teach it (Shamim, 2008). This is because in many contexts teaching is equated to translation of English into mother tongue, which is usually Urdu. Coleman (2010), for instance, writes that “English teachers – especially in government schools – tend to teach the language through the medium of Urdu or a local language because their own competence in English is poor or because they have so little confidence in their own competence” (p. 17). A report found that 62% of the private school teachers and 56% of government school teachers registered scores in the lowest possible bands in Aptis test (PEELI Report, British Council, 2013). The teachers of English concentrate more on translation and grammatical aspects of language as compared to oral competency of students (Ghafoor, 1998). However, some are of the view that teaching English is rather a set of activities involving well-developed teaching methods and creative teaching aids.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, the educational background of most of the teachers is not relevant to teaching English. Based on retrospective data of past five years provided by the Aga Khan University, Institute for Educational Development (AKU-IED) about the in-service teachers entering both Advanced Diploma in Education and M.Ed. courses (specialization in Education), as well as the first author’s longstanding teaching experience, it is evident that merely 20% are to some extent qualified to teach English because they are equipped with some professional qualifications. The rest of the 80% do not have qualifications to teach English. Hence, teachers with degrees in disciplines other than English such as Islamic Studies, Science, Social Studies and Pakistan Studies are teaching English.

This is not to say that merely gaining a qualification in English equips one to teach English. Nevertheless, holding a degree in English is an important indicator of possessing relevant subject knowledge because it can enhance professional confidence and motivation levels of the teachers.

The way English is taught in schools is also problematic. In a study investigating English language instruction in the context of Chitral, Nawab (2012) concluded that the teaching of English was not much different from other subjects like Social Studies or History. Lack of relevant academic qualifications of teachers could be one of the reasons why teaching of English is not considered any different from other subjects.

The quality of English language instruction chiefly depends on the type of school system. Shamim (2008) states that “schools in Pakistan differ not only in the extent to which English is used in the classroom but more importantly in the quantity and quality of resources, including human resources, allocated for teaching and learning” (p. 244). Broadly speaking, there are three main school systems in Pakistan, namely public, community-based and private. Public schools are state-owned schools, where typically students from low-income groups study. These schools are found in both rural and urban areas and mostly have Urdu or the local regional language as their medium of instruction. Community-based schools are non-profit schools that are privately-owned by individuals. Most of these schools primarily cater to a particular religious community. Generally, these are English-medium schools. Private schools, on the other hand, are relatively expensive and less in number as compared to the other two categories; hence they provide education to a small section of the population. Nonetheless, in recent years, the number of private schools has increased dramatically (Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, Vishwanath, & Zajonc, 2007). They are attractive because of their claims to offer “English-medium” education, even though in reality these claims may not be fulfilled.

Looking at all the aspects discussed above and considering the education system, school system, relevant educational background of the teachers, etc., there is a need to explore the profile of teachers of English. Presently, there is a paucity of research on the profile of school teachers of English. There are reports available on the profile of teachers generally (of all subjects), but we are not aware of any study that deals particularly with English language teachers. Hence, the present study was designed with the purpose of filling this gap and discovering the background of school teachers of English.

Literature Review

A global survey of primary English language teachers from 89 countries found that in 21% of the cases the teachers mentioned that they were not qualified specifically to teach English (Emery, 2012). This shows that the issue of English teachers not holding relevant qualifications is not just the issue in our country.

It is necessary to know why teachers opt for this profession in the first place. Oplatka (2007) and Barrs (2005) reported that family played a key role in the career choice of female Pakistani teachers, whose parents encouraged them to attend teacher training programs. Unfortunately, lack of other occupational opportunities remains the chief reason why people join the teaching profession. Hedges (2002) noted that those who became

teachers due to a lack of other opportunities were likely to have a lower level of commitment to teaching than those who gave other reasons. Therefore, most of the teachers have economic reasons for joining this profession. Under such circumstances, it is likely that the motivation levels of teachers will be low.

There is a clear lack of data on the backgrounds of English language teachers in Pakistan. Recently a pilot study was conducted in Karachi, which, in Phase one, attempted to investigate the question: Who are the teachers of English? The study looked into the backgrounds and qualification of teachers who were teaching English in both private and public sectors (Malik, 2008). A qualitative questionnaire was administered to 11 public school teachers and nine private school teachers. The data regarding educational background and academic qualification of 11 teachers of English from public schools showed that all the teachers had B.Ed. degree, which is the basic requirement for teaching at secondary level in public schools. It was found that 36% teachers had Master's in subjects other than English such as Islamic Studies, Urdu and Economics. There were 18% teachers who were Science graduates, while the remaining 82% teachers had graduated in Social Sciences or Humanities. Only 27% teachers had completed their CT. An overwhelming majority 82% of the teachers were teaching at lower secondary level, whereas 9% at primary, and 9% at upper secondary level. Moreover, the findings showed that there were 73% teachers who joined this profession by chance because they had no other option for jobs. However, only 9% teachers attributed their joining of the teaching profession to their personal interest, while 18% explained that they had developed personal liking for the profession with the passage of time. Majority (82%) of the teachers were unaware of any policy for hiring the teachers of English. The rest of the 18% stated different hiring criteria: one stated that a teacher should be B.Ed. or M.Ed., and the other stated that he/she should have the ability to teach and speak English.

Bashiruddin (2009) explored the classroom practices of two teachers of English. One teacher belonged to the private sector, while the other was from the public sector. The public school teacher had a Master's degree in Political Science, but was interested in learning English, therefore opted to teach English when she joined as a teacher. The teacher from the private school had Master's in English, but was not really interested in teaching in general. This teacher became a teacher by chance and felt that her Master's degree was not helping her in classroom instruction.

This brief analysis of the situation and research reveals that there are a number of issues and challenges in determining the profiles of

teachers of English, which piqued our interest. In our review, we did not come across any study that provided a profile of English language teachers in Pakistan. This study is an initial attempt to accumulate knowledge about English language teachers and respond to the current informational void. It must be noted that this is not a systematic study and mainly developed out of our personal interest and curiosity. Nevertheless, it offers useful data for policymakers, especially in the implementation of language policy.

Methodology

Instrument

This study used a qualitative questionnaire, which was developed by the first author with Malik (2008). This questionnaire was piloted before it was utilized for data generation.

The survey had five questions in all (see Appendix). The first question was to identify the school system/ institution where the teachers of English were teaching currently. The second question focused on the school that the teachers had attended as students. The third question was about the medium of instruction in the school that they had attended. The fourth question was about their qualifications (both educational and professional). The next question was about their reasons for choosing English as a subject to teach. The last question inquired about the policy or practice for hiring EL teachers in their respective school systems and institutions.

Participants

Convenient sampling was used to select the participants. There were 100 teachers of English who filled out the qualitative survey at different times. Some of these participants were enrolled in different programs at AKU-IED. These programs included M.Ed. (specialization in English Teacher Education) and various other certificate programs and short courses on teaching of English offered under the auspices of donor-funded projects at AKU-IED. The rest of the participants were part of a workshop arranged by Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers (SPELT).

Out of these 100 participants, 18 were from private English-medium schools, 29 from community-based English-medium schools, and 53 from public sector schools. These participants belonged to various regions of Pakistan, which included Sindh, Baluchistan, Gilgit-Baltistan and Chitral.

Data Analysis

We began by looking at each of the answer to the question and developed graphs to present analysis. Then we looked at the themes that emerged from each of the question in the survey which we have presented in the findings section.

Findings

Profile of Teachers in Public Schools

1. Own Schooling

A high percentage of the teachers (77%) teaching in public schools went to public school themselves. There were 13% who went to private English-medium schools, while only 10% went to community-based English-medium schools.

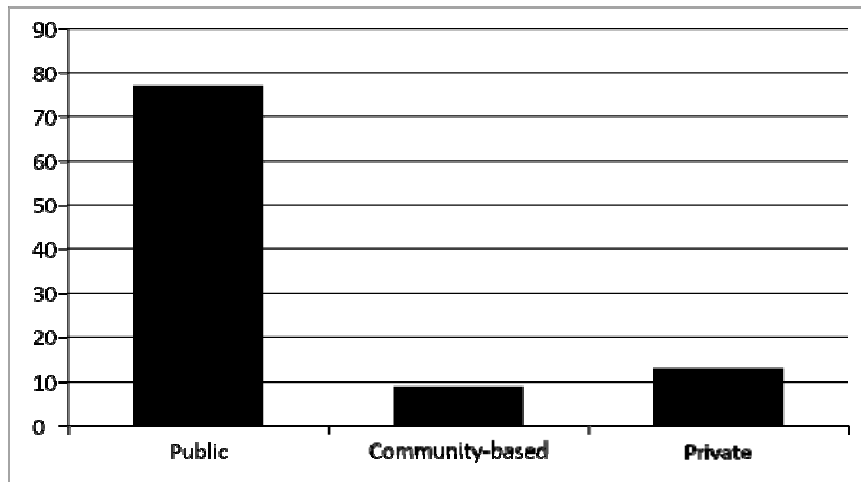


Figure 1: Own Schooling of Public School Teachers

2. Medium of Instruction in Own Schooling

In 78% of the public schools, the medium of instruction was Urdu and a local language. In 15% schools, the medium of instruction was Urdu. In 7% schools, the medium of instruction was the local language.

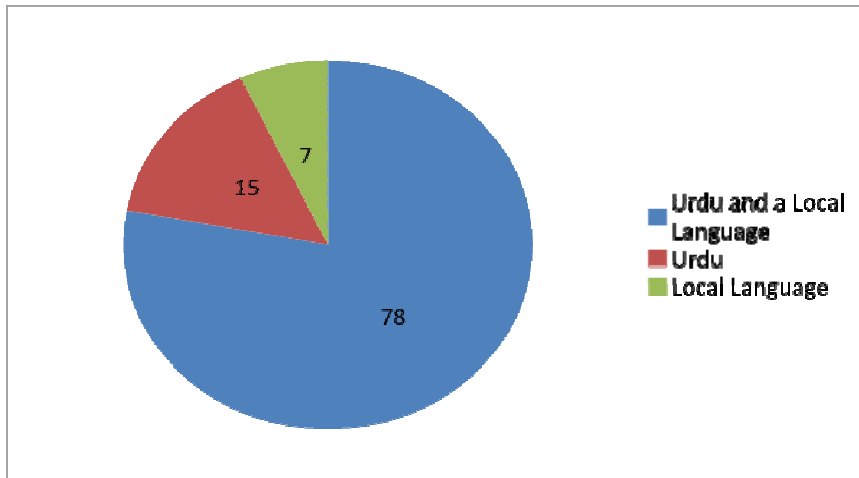


Figure 2: Medium of Instruction in Own Schools

The medium of instruction in all the community-based English-medium schools was bilingual, i.e., Urdu and English. The medium of instruction in 71% of private English-medium schools was English, while in 29% schools it was bilingual in Urdu and English.

3. Academic and Professional Qualifications of the Teachers

The analysis showed that 59% teachers held Master's degrees in subjects other than English, 13% held M. Ed., 11% teachers held an M. A. in English, 6% teachers held M. Sc. degree, 11% teachers had B. Ed.

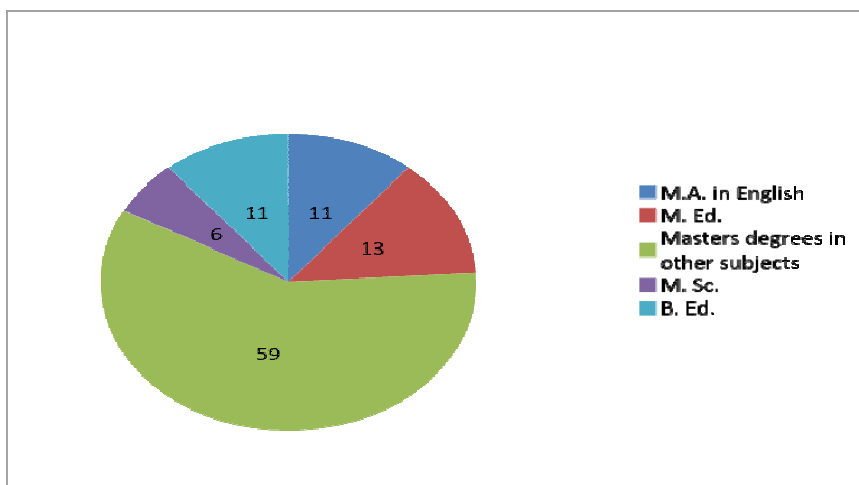


Figure 3: Academic and Professional Qualifications of Public School Teachers

4. Decision to Teach English

For a majority 63% of the teachers, the administration gave the teachers the English subject to teach. For 37% of the teachers, they were either interested to teach the subject or wished to improve their own command over the language.

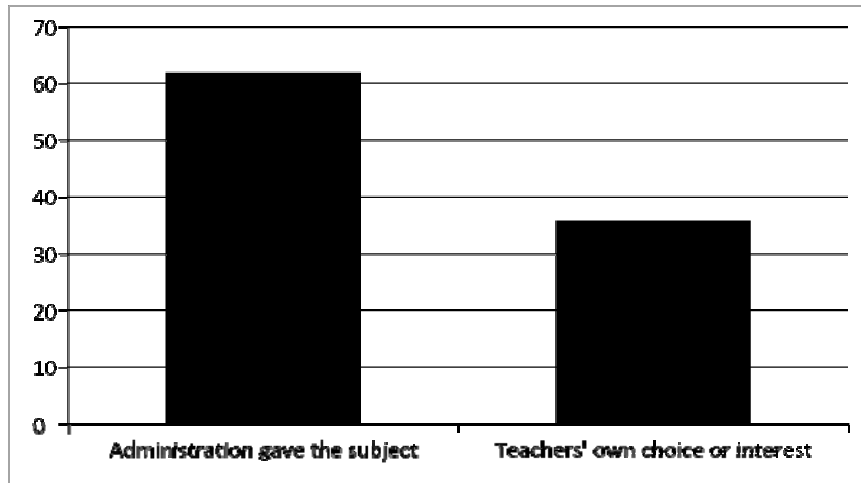


Figure 4: Public School Teachers' Reasons for Teaching English

5. Policy for Hiring Teachers of English

The teachers unanimously reported that they were not aware of any policy or procedure for hiring teachers of English in their schools.

Profile of Teachers in Community-Based English-Medium Schools

1. Own Schooling

A significant majority of the teachers (65%) attended community-based schools. There were 28% who went to public schools, while only 7% went to private English-medium schools.

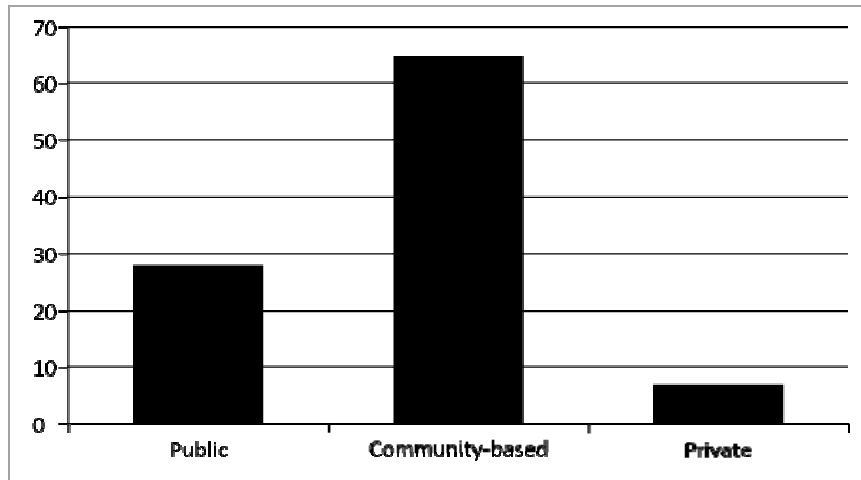


Figure 5: Own Schooling of Community-Based English-Medium School Teachers

2. Medium of Instruction in Own Schooling

In public sector schools, majority of the teachers (63%) responded that Urdu and a local language was the medium of instruction in public schools, while in 37% schools Urdu was the medium of instruction.

In community-based English-medium schools, a very high percentage of the teachers (95%) reported that English was the medium of instruction in community-based English-medium schools. For the rest it was bilingual in Urdu and English.

The medium of instruction in the private English-medium schools was English.

3. Academic and Professional Qualifications of the Teachers

The analysis shows that 62% teachers held Master's degrees in subjects other than English, 4% held M. Ed., 14% teachers held an M. A. in English, 17% teachers were B. Ed., and 3% was B. A.

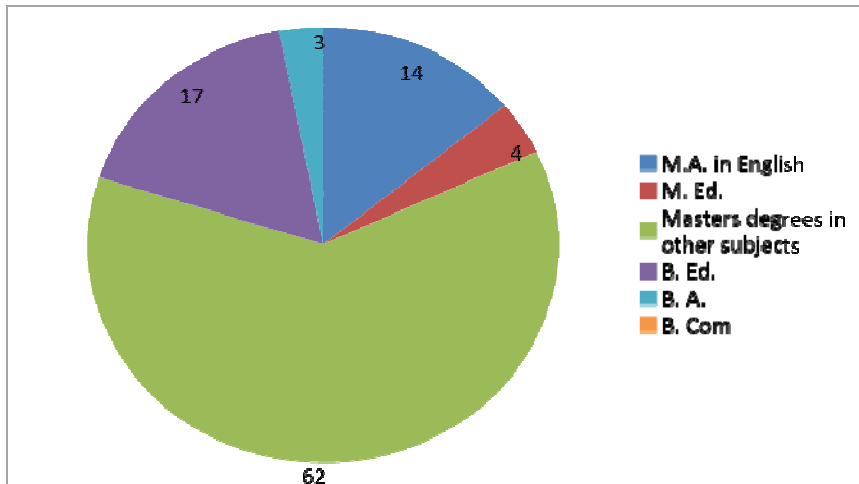


Figure 6: Academic and Professional Qualifications of Community-Based English-Medium School Teachers

4. Decision to Teach English

Most of the teachers, i.e., 59% admitted that the reason they were teaching English was because they had been told by the administration to do so. Consequently, only 31% were teaching English out of their own interest. The remaining 10% did not answer this question.

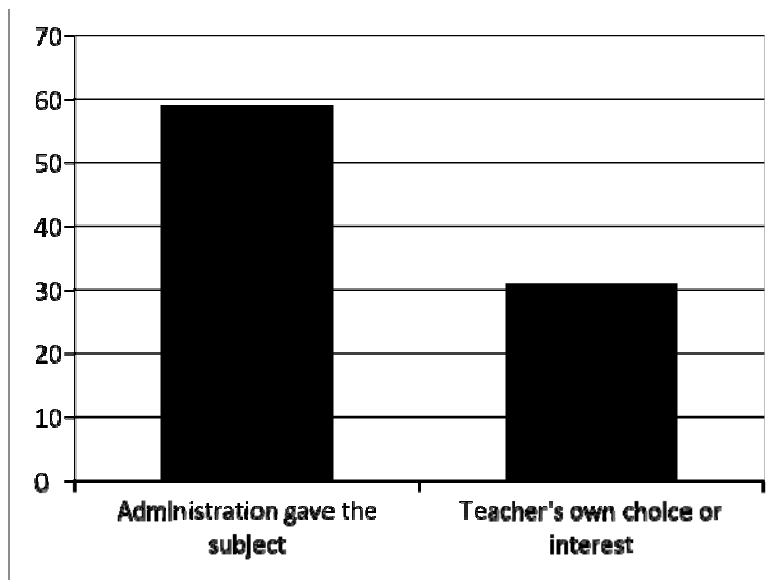


Figure 7: Community-Based English-Medium School Teachers' Reasons for Teaching English

5. Policy for Hiring Teachers of English

A striking 86% of the teachers said that there was no policy for hiring teachers of English. The rest of the 14% responded that although there was no written policy, lesson demonstration and proficiency in English were taken into account when hiring the teachers of English.

Profile of Teachers in Private English-Medium Schools

1. Own Schooling

A majority 61% of the teachers went to private English-medium schools, 33% went to community-based English-medium schools, while only 6% went to public schools as students.

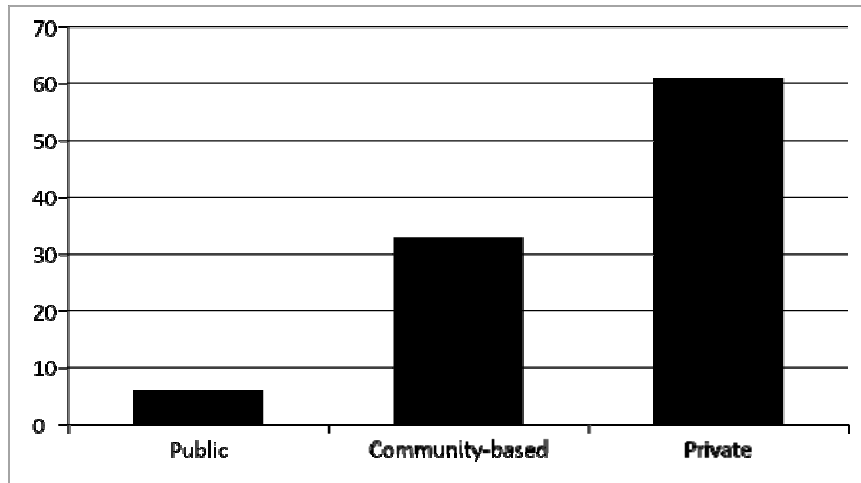


Figure 8: Own Schooling of Private English-Medium School Teachers

2. Medium of Instruction in Own Schooling

All the 6% of the teachers who went to public schools had Urdu and a local language as the medium of instruction. Out of 33% of the teachers who went to community-based English-medium schools, 22% said that the medium of instruction was English; while 11% said it was Urdu. All the 61% of the teachers who went to private English-medium schools received instruction in English.

3. Academic and Professional Qualifications of the Teachers

A majority 56% of the teachers held Master's degrees in subjects other than English, 28% teachers held an M. A. in English, 11% teachers were B. Ed., and 5% held B. Com.

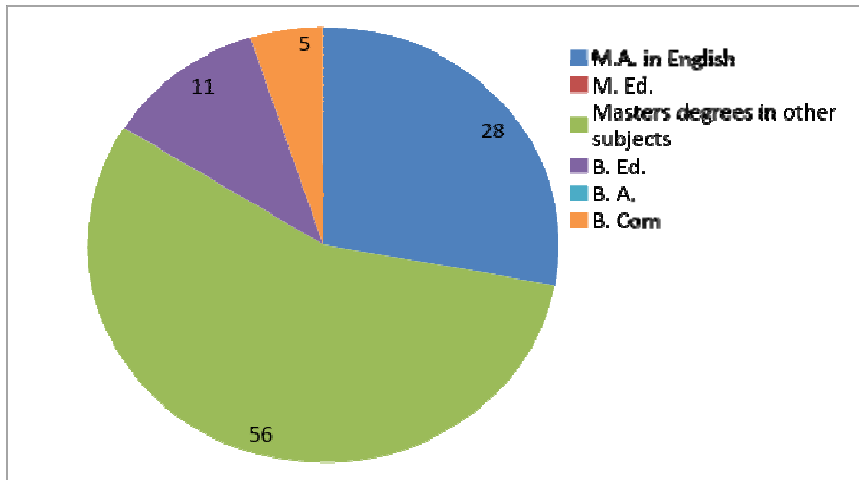


Figure 9: Academic and Professional Qualifications of Private English-Medium School Teachers

4. Decision to Teach English

There were 45% teachers who said that interest in English language was their reason to become an English language teacher. For 33% teachers, this decision was imposed on them by the school administration, while 22% teachers stated that their expertise influenced their decision to select this subject.

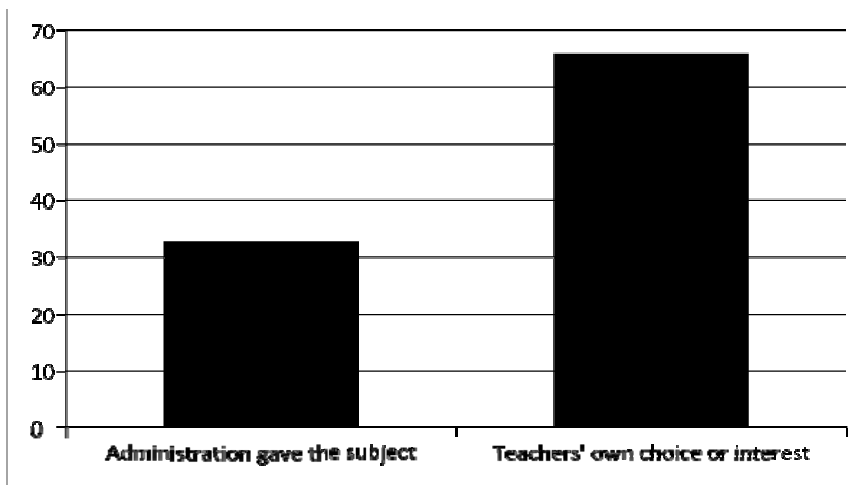


Figure 10: Private English-Medium School Teachers' Reasons for Teaching English

5. Policy for Hiring Teachers of English

A majority 44 % of the teachers said that there was no policy for hiring teachers of English. There were 39% who responded that there were some procedures in place such as interviews, test of teachers' proficiency and demo lessons. Only 11% said that there was a policy in their schools according to which teachers of English should have Master's in English and be proficient speakers of English. Few teachers (6%) did not respond to this question.

Discussion

To summarize the above findings, it was noted that an overwhelming majority of public school teachers went to public schools themselves as students. In all of these schools Urdu or a local language was the medium of instruction. A majority of these teachers held a Master's degree in a discipline other than English. A significant majority of these teachers were told by the administration to teach English.

A majority of the teachers teaching in community-based schools had community-based schooling themselves. In 95% of these schools, English was the medium of instruction. A majority of these teachers held a Master's degree in a discipline other than English. A significant majority of these teachers were also told by the administration to teach English.

A significant number of teachers teaching in private English-medium schools had private English-medium schooling themselves. In all of these schools, English was the medium of instruction. This could explain the better quality of English instruction imparted in these schools. Moreover, a majority of these teachers decided to become teachers of English because of their own choice, which makes them better positioned to teach English. Further an analysis of the findings reveals:

Majority of the teachers teaching in the three categories of schools themselves come from the same stream. This finding contributes to the perspective that teachers' knowledge remains embedded in their contexts. However, the survey also showed that 13% of the teachers who studied in private English-medium schools were now working as public school teachers. This is an indication that, albeit to a very little extent, the gap between the two streams of education might bridge in some cases. It will be interesting to explore why this is so.

The teachers shared their background in terms of their academic qualification, irrespective of the school systems they belonged to. In majority of the cases, the teachers have Master's degrees, but in other disciplines. The lowest percentage is reserved for Master's degrees in the field of English. Therefore, in most of the cases, teachers do not hold

relevant subject knowledge to be regarded as effective English language teachers. This finding calls for some remedial measures for it may be a contributing factor towards poor education standards.

Lack of trained teachers proficient in the English language has consistently emerged as a significant challenge in Pakistan (Nawab, 2012). In Pakistan, continuing professional development opportunities are simply not available for most of the teachers. There is a wide gulf between teachers working in urban and rural areas. Further training may be more easily available if a teacher works in a major city, whereas rural teachers may go a whole lifetime without attending a single training course. In such a scenario, the lack of relevant academic qualifications becomes an issue of priority.

The Policy and Planning Wing of the Ministry of Education in Pakistan in collaboration with UNESCO and with financial assistance from USAID has implemented the STEP project. Under the STEP project, professional standards for teachers have been developed. The 10th Standard of this document deals with ESL/EFL teachers. It reports standards on three main criteria: knowledge and understanding, dispositions, and performance and skills.

However, these standards are basically for primary teachers. Also, after the 18th amendment, the education system in the country has decentralized and now provinces have the authority over educational matters. Nonetheless, these standards can provide the foundation to build professional standards for secondary school teachers of English. The findings of the current study lay out the ground realities and underscore the challenges facing the government in implementing these standards.

Both in public and community-based English-medium schools, a significant majority of the teachers were given the English subject to teach by the administration. This is a major shortcoming and appears to indicate poor motivation levels of the teachers, which is a cause for concern since teachers' motivation has a profound impact on students' learning. In any case, the status of teachers is thus compromised making them under-perform and earn low respect.

From administration's perspective, this might be their way of meeting the acute shortage of language teachers. In order to address the high demand for English, created by the government's emphasis on using English as the medium of instruction, they may have little choice but to compromise on the qualification of teachers. The poor pupil-teacher ratio in Pakistan is also characteristic of this chronic shortage. Furthermore, this could also explain why most of the teachers do not hold a relevant academic qualification. Such administrative coercion could explain low

morale and motivation levels of teachers, which in turn, runs the risk of causing overall deterioration in the quality of education. Unless teachers themselves choose to teach the subject, they are unlikely to perform this job satisfactorily.

In this respect, however, the findings illustrate a disparity for private English-medium school teachers, since most of these teachers were self-motivated to teach English. It seems that the profile of teachers in private English-medium schools might be more positive as compared to their counterparts in public or community-based English-medium schools. Hence, the findings of the study show grounds for optimism where private schools are concerned. This could also explain why private school students outperform their counterparts in public schools (LEAPS report).

It is generally believed that public school teachers' own English proficiency is considerably poor. Our findings might offer one possible explanation of why this is so. Majority of the public school teachers went to public schools themselves, where Urdu or a local language is the medium of instruction. In only 9% of the cases (i.e., those who went to private English-medium schools) did the teachers have exposure to English as the medium of instruction. While, this is not to say that medium of instruction is the only indicator of language proficiency, there is certainly a strong connection between medium of instruction and quality of instruction.

In terms of school policy for hiring English teachers, the findings reveal amazing similarities among all the teachers surveyed. In majority of the cases, the teachers reported that there was no written policy in this regard. This hints at the sad state of affairs where there is no formal mechanism for hiring teachers.

These findings should also be seen in the light of the contentious medium of instruction debate. How will the government be able to enforce English as the medium of instruction when majority of the teachers do not hold relevant qualifications? This question needs to be answered by the policy makers.

Recommendations and Way Forward

This independent study provides critical information about the profile of English teachers in Pakistan, which includes information about the schools the teachers themselves attended as students, the medium of instruction in these schools, their educational and professional qualifications, their reasons for teaching English, and the policy or practice for hiring EL teachers in their school systems and institutions. The findings have several implications for policy-makers. Since most of the teachers do

not hold relevant qualifications, attention needs to be paid to promoting pre-service teacher education and on in-service teacher development.

There are various ways of fostering continuous professional development of teachers. Still, in Pakistan the trainings model seems to be the prevalent one. There are other models that have emerged such as establishing professional learning communities (Kennedy, 2005) and reflective conversations (Ashraf & Rarieya, 2008) that should also be explored. These models differ from traditional models in several ways. For instance, they cater to group instead of individual development that could better serve the shortage of trained teachers in the developing context.

This training should particularly focus on the teaching of English. This finding should be a source of concern for the policy makers and implementers who are responsible for quality assurance of education.

The study also sheds light on how teacher appointments are made in our schools. Our findings indicate that in majority of the cases, teachers are simply given the English subject to teach by the school administration. The percentage for this is higher in public and community-based English-medium schools, but drops down significantly when it comes to private English-medium schools. This also reflects poor level of teacher autonomy exercised in our schools. Additionally, there are inherent inconsistencies between the provinces when it comes to hiring teachers. To sum up, policy initiatives must also focus on the hiring process of language instructors, with particular focus on public and community-based English-medium schools. This could also explain why the quality of education imparted in these schools is generally considered to be poor.

If the government wants to improve the standards which have been underlined in the national standards document (2009), then it will have to provide relevant qualifications to the teachers of English and will also have to emphasize on pre-service teacher education.

In future, a large-scale systematic study may be carried out to get a better understanding of the teachers' backgrounds and understand what provisions can be made for teachers so as to prepare them to teach English. Likewise, it will be interesting to examine teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. The profession needs to get to grips with the issues highlighted if high quality English teaching is to be offered to all learners.

Limitations

The present study focused primarily on the general education of the teachers. A comprehensive profile of teachers may include many other factors as well. For example, the training received, years of teaching experience, etc.

Conclusion

This study was the first of its kind to illustrate a broad profile of English language school teachers in Pakistan. Broadly speaking, majority of the teachers a) taught in the same stream in which they studied, b) did not have a specialization in English, c) were given the English subject to teach by the administration, and d) came from schools where no written policy for hiring of teachers existed. Hence, majority of the teachers may not be regarded as subject-specialists. The findings give insight into the challenges that need to be addressed if English language teaching is to be improved. The authors of this study put forward two main recommendations for the policy makers. Under such circumstances, where teachers do not hold relevant qualifications, pre-service and in-service training mechanisms should be strengthened to address the lack of availability of competent teachers. Besides, the hiring practices of the teachers need to be rectified.

Notes

¹ Aptis is a flexible English assessment test that aims to benchmark the English proficiency of its users.

² AKU-IED is a private teacher education institute that caters to in-service teachers and educational leaders through its M. Ed. program and other courses.

³ Certificate of Teaching

⁴ SPELT is a professional body of ESL/EFL teachers that aims to improve the standards of English teaching in Pakistan (Society of Pakistan English Language Teachers, 2013). It organizes monthly academic sessions and annual international conferences and also publishes a quarterly journal. It is also affiliated to IATEFL and to TESOL.

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Appendix 1

Who are the teachers of English in Pakistan?

Qualitative Survey

Name:

1. School system/institution where teaching currently:
2. Which school did you attend?
3. What was the medium of instruction?
4. What are your qualifications? (Please write educational and professional qualifications)
5. Why did you choose to teach English?
6. What are the policy and practices of hiring EL teachers in your school systems and institutions? Is there any written policy or criteria that you are aware of? If yes, what is it?