



Communicative Competence of Female English Subject Teachers of Secondary Schools in District Mardan, Pakistan

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Abstract: *Communicative competence of English Subject teachers is essential for teaching English effectively. The present study aimed to explore the communicative competence of female English Subject Teachers of Public Secondary Schools in District Mardan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The main objectives of the study were to find out the existing level of the communicative competence of English Subject teachers in Secondary Schools, investigate the ongoing practices of English Subject Teachers in their classrooms, and explore problems of female English subject teachers in developing communicative competence in secondary school students. A quantitative research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study consisted of 130 Public Schools of District Mardan, where 364 female English subject teachers are working. The study was conducted in 86 randomly selected sampled Public Schools of District Mardan by contacting 191 English subject teachers. A questionnaire comprising 49 questions was administered to the 191 English subject teachers. The main findings of the study show that a majority of the English Subject teachers did not possess the required communicative competence; almost all of the teachers did not adopt the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. For developing the communicative competence of learners, physical resources and facilities were not available for developing the listening and speaking skills of the students.*

Key Words: Communicative Competence, English Subject Teachers, Linguistic Competence, Sociolinguistic Competence, Discourse Competence, Strategic Competence, Classroom Observation

Introduction

Communicative competence is the ability of a person to use the language for the purpose of communication successfully (Hymes, 1972). Most people learn a language in order to be able to communicate in that language (Hery, 2017). Communicative competence is the ability of a person to know what, when, and how to speak (Hymes, 1972). The speaker's ability to mix up with a specific language-based community is called their Communicative Competence (Habermas, 1970; Campbell & Wales, 1970). Communicative competence consists of *linguistic competence*, i.e., a complete understanding of the structure and form of the language; *sociolinguistic competence*, i.e., interrelationship and logic across phrases and sentences; *discourse competence*, i.e., knowledge of rules of interaction, native-like language; and *strategic competence*, i.e., mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies to compensate for communication breakdowns (Canale & Swain 1980; Savignon, 1972). After getting command over these components, a person can have effective conversations during his/her social interactions, and s/he is known as a communicatively competent person.

In teaching, communicative competence leads to the integration of both grammatical competence and sociolinguistic competence in syllabus designing, teaching methodology, and assessment (the actual demonstration of knowledge in real-life situations and for authentic communication purposes) (Allen, 1978; Candlin, 1978; Munby, 1978; Stern, 1978; Morrow, 1977; Wilkins, 1976). For effective teaching of English, the subject teachers must be communicatively competent. Only then they would be able to produce communicatively competent learners, which is the initial goal of English teaching (Wang, 1996; Clement and Murugavel, 2015). However, most of the students of public schools in Pakistan, even after passing the secondary school certificate examination, are unable to express themselves in English (Bilal, Rashid, Adnan

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& Abbas, 2013). Teachers are blamed for this poor condition of students as they ignore students' speaking skills in their instructions (Kannan, 2009). Parveen and Bhatti (2009) have mentioned the lack of training and relevant qualifications of teachers teaching English subjects, the non-availability of audio-visual aids, and insufficient time allocation in school timetables as causes of incompetency in learners.

Being an international language, Pakistan cannot ignore the importance of the English language for communicative purposes. Many developmental programs of Pakistan depend largely upon the advanced nations of the world who use English as their native language. Moreover, it is the medium of instruction in the majority of colleges and in all universities of Pakistan. Therefore, the study of English and acquiring communicative competency in the English language is indispensable for Pakistani youth desirous to reap the full benefits of modern education (Ali, Ahmad, Manzoor, & Naseer, 2014).

In the entire education system, the secondary level is the most important sub-sector (Government of Pakistan, 2000). The secondary level serves as a feeder for higher education. Preparation of the students in basic subjects at the secondary level is a foundation stone for their future education (Government of Pakistan, 2000). Therefore, equipping students with a strong base of English at the secondary level is very much necessary so that they can fully benefit from the language in higher education (Ali, Ahmad, Manzoor, & Naseer, 2014).

Because of the importance of the English language, in Pakistan, it is taught as a compulsory subject from the very first class of school till the higher secondary level. Still, a majority of the students fail to acquire competence in the language. The main reason is the lack of communicative competence of the English subject teachers (Saleh, 2013). A majority of teachers think that it is difficult to achieve competence in a foreign language (Sano et al., 1984). Due to the lack of relevant qualifications and proper training, teachers face difficulties in choosing skills and effective methodologies for developing the communicative competence of students (Li, 1998; Huda, 1999; Nunan, 2003; Orafi & Borg, 2009). They make efforts to prepare students to pass the examination only (Parveen & Bhatti, 2009). English subject teachers do not encourage learners to practice their communication in English (Kannan, 2009), and they do not offer opportunities to learners to enhance their verbal abilities (Anwar, Ihsan, Hayat, Pevez, 2016).

As teachers are the main pillars of the education system, the Government is trying its best to train English teachers through holding various workshops. However, there is insignificant improvement in the language learning abilities of students. This situation motivated the researchers to investigate the communicative competence of female English subject teachers and explore the causes of the problem.

Literature Review

Acquiring communicative competence in the target language is the prime objective of learning a language. The results of a research study (Hery, 2017) showed that all the respondents agreed with the statement that their purpose in learning the English language was to get the ability to communicate in English. Similarly, Tuan (2017) conducted research on the Communicative Competence (CC) of the 4th year students of engineering. The researcher conducted a test to know the level of CC of students. The results of the test showed a high competency level of students on grammatical items. The performance of the students in the English discourse competence test was at a low level. It was also found that those students who had availed themselves of the opportunities of speaking English secured a higher score as compared to other students. It means that the practice of speaking had a positive effect on their CC.

The current study is in line with the study conducted by Anwar, Ihsan, Hayat, and Pervez in 2016 entitled "Teaching Spoken English in Pakistan: Issues and Options." That study, too, explored the problems faced due to the English language regarding spoken English in Pakistan. The results of the study showed that the teaching-learning condition of the English language in Pakistan is not conducive for learners and teachers. All the teaching tasks, engaging in speaking skills, were considered challenging by the teachers. The study was conducted in district Khanewal of the Punjab Province.

Iqbal, Hassan, and Ali (2015) conducted a research study entitled "Assessing Quality of English Teachers at the Secondary Level in Punjab, Pakistan." It was a survey study; the participants were 545 prospective teachers and 31 English teacher educators. A five point Likert scale questionnaire having three open-ended questions at the end was used for data collection. After analysis of the data, it was concluded

that, to some extent, the quality of teachers who are teaching English in the schools of Punjab is all right; yet, the quality of the learning environment and material aids are not standardized.

Kim (2011) presented a project entitled “Developing Communicative Competence with authentic material for EFL Korean high school students.” It was a survey study designed with the Google document tool. The aim of the study was to collect information about students regarding learning English as a Foreign Language and design supplementary authentic material and activities to develop students’ communicative competence. The researcher concluded that for Korean students, it is difficult to find opportunities to practice English for communicative purposes in EFL situations.

Hery (2017) conducted a research study entitled “Teachers and Students’ Perceptions of Communicative Competence in English as a Foreign Language in Indonesia.” This research aimed to design and formulate a comprehensive rationale for writing standards of CC for students in the English language. This was a qualitative study focusing on Indonesian students’ and teachers’ perceptions regarding CC in the English language. The researcher concluded that English teachers, non-ELT students, and ELT students perceived communicative competencies in different ways. However, at some point, conformity in teachers’ and students’ views was noted. For example, on the point that English is learned for the purpose of being capable of communicating with the language and that acquiring competency in a second language by no way means liking for inborn speakers of that language.

Gladday (2011) conducted a research study entitled “Strategies for Enhancing the Communicative Competence of Students with learning disabilities.” This paper highlighted some useful strategies to enrich the CC of learners. The paper also explained in depth these motivational strategies and their benefits for teachers and students with disabilities. Finally, the paper suggested an eclectic method to be adopted by the English language teachers. The researcher argues that the implementation of the suggested strategies might be very fruitful in developing the skills of those students who were suffering from some learning disabilities.

Tawalbeh and Ismail (2014) conducted a research study entitled “Investigation of Teaching Competencies to Enhance Students’ EFL Learning at Taif University.” The main objective of that study was to explore the implemented teaching competencies to improve students’ learning in the subject of English at Taif University. The study found that students face many challenges during the learning process for the acquisition of a foreign language. They don’t have a conducive environment and rich background for learning English. Incompetence on the part of the instructors, old and ineffective teaching methodologies, inappropriate syllabi, and non-availability of resources are the main obstacles in the way of learning English. The findings of the study have similarities with the findings of the current study. However, the study of Tawalbeh and Ismail was focused on the professional competence of the teachers as a whole, while the current study is focused on a specific area of professional competence, that is, Communicative Competence.

Naz (2016) conducted a study in secondary-level schools of Muzaffarabad District to investigate the connection between the professional competency of teachers and the educational attainment of students. In light of the findings, the researcher recommended training for teachers according to professional standards and provision of helping material, IT facilities, libraries, etc.

Chang and Goswami (2011) interviewed eight teachers in their study entitled “Factors Affecting the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College English Classes.” All of the respondents of that study reported that lack of relevant knowledge and inappropriate training are the major obstacles in the way of adopting a communicative language teaching approach. The respondents further expressed their opinion about the help they got from their professional training to comprehend the concept of CLT and to adopt suitable methodologies for effective teaching in their classrooms.

Doukas (1996) conducted a study entitled “Using Attitude Scales to Investigate Teacher’s attitudes to the communicative approach.” Fourteen Greek teachers were observed who were teaching the English language. After observing the ongoing practices of the above-mentioned teachers in their classrooms, Doukas found that even though those teachers, during the conversation, showed their liking for the CLT approach, their classroom practices were much more different from the principles of the CLT. Their



approach was eclectic, an amalgamation of CLT with the traditional approach. Four areas of CC were worked upon, and the researcher found that 27.9% of teachers used communicative approach.

The current study has similarities with the above-mentioned previous researches; yet, all these studies were conducted outside of Pakistan or only in some districts of the Punjab Province, while the current study “Communicative competence of female English subject teachers of public secondary schools of District Mardan” is the only study that is conducted in District Mardan, a district of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan.

Statement of the Problem

The ultimate aim of language learning is to get communicative competence. English is taught as a compulsory subject in public schools of Pakistan from the very beginning. However, it is a common observation that most students, even after studying English for ten years, cannot communicate in the English language. A number of factors may be responsible for this state of affairs. One of the factors could be teachers’ incompetency. Teachers’ communicative competence may positively affect students’ acquisition of English. Therefore, it is necessary to explore and document the nature and problems of the communicative competency of teachers. In this regard, the researchers found no previous research directly addressing the problem, so the researchers decided to explore the communicative competence of female English subject teachers of public secondary schools in District Mardan.

Research Questions

This study was conducted to explore the following questions:

1. What communicative competence do female English subject teachers possess and practice in their classrooms?
2. What teaching methods do female English subject teachers use to develop communicative competence in students?
3. What problems do female English subject teachers face in practicing teaching competency skills?

Research Methodology

The study was descriptive and exploratory in nature. A quantitative research design was adopted for the study. In this way, the findings of the study can be generalized to the whole population (Gay, 1987). The data was collected through a questionnaire.

The population comprised all teachers of secondary level in government schools of District Mardan. There are 80 Government High Schools and 30 Higher Secondary schools for girls in district Mardan. The total number of female Secondary School Teacher-General (SST-G) in these schools is 364 (Annual Statistic Report, 2017-18).

Out of the total 110 schools, 86 female secondary schools were selected through a random sampling technique. Then, 191 female English subject teachers teaching English at the secondary level were selected randomly from these selected schools using the table of sample size given by Krejcie & Morgan (1970) as cited by Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007).

Data were collected through questionnaires. The questionnaire for teachers consisted of 49 statements, each with five-point Likert scale responses. The data collected were calculated, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted, and conclusions were drawn.

Results and Discussion

Table 1

Teachers’ Linguistic Competence

Item	Statements	SD	DA	UD	AG	SA
1	I am a fluent speaker of the English language.	0 0%	1 .5%	44 23%	82 42.9%	64 33.5%
2	I speak English with the correct pronunciation.	0	2	39	76	74

		0%	1%	20.4%	39.8%	38.7%
3	I know about the morphemes of the English language.	0	6	124	57	4
		0%	3.1%	64.9%	29.8%	2.1%
4	I know and practice stress and intonation patterns accurately while speaking English	0	3	39	79	70
		0%	1.6%	20.4%	41.4%	36.6%
5	I have full command of the grammatical rules of the English language	0	0	7	49	135
		0%	0%	3.7%	25.7%	70.7%
6	I have a high degree of proficiency in the phonological system of the English language.	0	9	65	103	14
		0%	4.7%	34%	53.9%	7.3%
7	I constantly try to increase my English vocabulary	3	4	74	93	17
		1.6%	2.1%	38.7%	48.7%	8.9%
8	I have a good knowledge of the lexical aspect of the English language.	0	1	46	76	68
		0%	.5%	24.1%	39.8%	35.6%
9	My English accent is near to native language speakers.	4	122	34	21	10
		2.1%	63.9%	17.8%	11%	5.2%
10	I usually spell English words correctly	0	1	40	91	59
		0%	.5%	20.9%	47.6%	30.9%

Table 1 consists of 10 items that illustrate the Teachers' Linguistic Competence. The data of Table 1 shows that only on statement 05, the majority (70.7%) of the participants responded that they have full command of grammatical rules of the English language, while on all other items, less than 50% responded strongly agreed that they possess or practice those components of linguistic competency and especially on statement nos. 3,6,7 and 9, only 2.1% strongly agreed that they know about the morphemes of the English language, 7.3% claimed a high degree of proficiency regarding the phonological system of the English language, 8.9% showed agreement with the statement that they constantly try to increase their vocabulary and 5.2% respectively strongly agreed that their English accent is near to native language speakers.

Table 2

Teacher Socio-Linguistic Competence

Item	Statement	SD	DA	UD	AG	SA
1	I am interested in the cultures of major English-speaking nations	0	32	49	65	45
		0%	16.8%	25.7%	34%	23.6%
2	I can talk to foreigners keeping cultural diversity in mind	4	30	80	75	2
		2.1%	15.7%	41.9%	39.3%	1%
3	I help my learners to understand cross-cultural issues	0	32	45	90	24
		0%	16.8%	23.6%	47.1%	12.6%
4	I can best use my tone and pitch of voice according to the situation and listeners.	0	10	35	91	55.
		0%	5.2%	18.3%	47.6%	28.8%
5	They choose appropriate words and phrases during communication with my students	0	0	5	126	60
		0%	0%	2.6%	66%	31.4%
6	I know and use English idioms during conversations with students and colleagues	0	0	18	94	79
		0%	0%	9.4%	49.2%	41.4%
7	I use correct socio-emotional English expressions on different occasions	0	0	27	116	48
		0%	0%	14.1%	60.7%	25.1%
8	I feel comfortable while conversing formally in the English language	13	16	72	59	31
		6.8%	8.4%	37.7%	30.9%	16.2%
9	I understand the rules of word and sentence formations (structural skills) of conditional sentences (e.g., narrative, persuasive, complimentary, gratitude, and regretting)	0	0	6	125	60
		0%	0%	3.1%	65.4%	31.4%
10	I can adjust my conversation tone according to the people I speak	0	10	35	95	51
		0%	5.2%	18.3%	49.7%	26.7%

Table 2 comprises ten items that depict the Teachers' Socio-Linguistic Competence. The above data shows that none of the statements could get even 50% of respondents "strongly agree." Especially for statement



No. 2. only 1% of respondents strongly agreed that they can talk to foreigners keeping cultural diversity in mind.

Table 3

Teachers' Strategic Competence

Item	Statement	SD	DA	UD	AG	SA
1	I can substitute an equivalent term (synonym) for a word I can't recall so smoothly that it is scarcely noticeable	0 0%	30 15.7%	73 38.2%	84 44%	4 2.1%
2	I frequently use dialogue and drama techniques in my English class	29 15.2%	2 1%	124 64.9%	36 18.8%	0 0%
3	I use demonstration techniques for explanation in my English class	2 1%	6 3.1%	87 45.5%	67 35.1%	29 15.2%
4	I adopt different techniques (verbal and non-verbal) for explanation of words and clarification of concepts	0 0%	9 4.7%	109 57.1%	43 22.5%	30 15.7%
5	I can spontaneously switch over to a new topic when communication breaks down	2 1%	42 22%	87 45.5%	54 28.3%	6 3.1%
6	I can backtrack when encountering a difficulty and reformulate what I want to say without fully interrupting the flow of speech	6 3.1%	58 30.4%	84 44%	41 21.5%	2 1%
7	When I can't think of a word during a conversation in English, I use gestures	0 0%	20 10.5%	109 57.1%	26 13.6%	36 18.8%
8	I can communicate emotions/feelings through facial expressions	0 0%	8 4.2%	84 44%	58 30.4%	41 21.5%
9	My body language and gestures usually facilitate students' understanding of English lessons	0 0%	6 3.1%	82 42.9%	56 29.3%	47 24.6%

Table 3 consists of 09 items that illustrate the Teachers' Strategic Competence. The data indicates that only 2.1 % of respondents strongly agreed that they can substitute an equivalent term (synonym) for a word they can't recall so smoothly that it is scarcely noticeable. None of the respondents could strongly agree to use dialogue and drama techniques in English class, while only a few (18.8%) could show their weak agreement with the statement. The majority remained un-decisive or disagreed with the statement. Only 15.2 % of the respondents strongly agreed that they use demonstration techniques for explanation in their English class, and 15.7% for adopting different verbal and non-verbal techniques for explanation of words and clarification of concepts. The number of respondents who confirmed that they can spontaneously switch over to a new topic and who can backtrack when encountering a difficulty and reformulate what they want to say without fully interrupting the flow of speech is only 6% and 1%, respectively. The number of respondents who strongly agreed with the use of gestures, facial expressions, and body language to facilitate students' understanding of English lessons is 18.8%, 21.5%, and 24.6%, respectively.

Conclusions

In light of the findings, it is concluded that the majority of the teachers did not possess relevant academic qualifications for teaching English, nor were they properly trained to teach English. They had little or no knowledge of modern methodologies for teaching the English language, and mostly, they used traditional methods of teaching for teaching English. Teachers were not competent enough in all the four areas of communicative competence. They often mispronounced commonly used words, so their students did the same practice. Moreover, the workload on teachers consumed much of their time and energy, badly affecting their teaching. The teaching process was mostly teacher-centered rather than student-centered. More stress was laid upon completion of textbooks as compared to students' learning. Role play, drama, and dialogue delivery were rarely arranged in the class. The national language, Urdu or mother tongue, was frequently used for communication inside and outside the classrooms. No audio-visual aids were

available for teaching English except personal mobile phones of the teachers. Shyness and lack of confidence were the main reasons for hindering communicative practices both in teachers and students. No recreational-cum-educational activities were practiced by the teachers in their classrooms.

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