

# Teaching of English in an Islamic Education Based English-Medium Institute: A Programme Evaluation

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## **Abstract**

*English has become the international lingua franca for business and communication. In Pakistan, it is being extensively used in official, commercial and educational domains. A huge number of Islamized English-medium schools have emerged as a result of this phenomenon. The researcher selected one of the Islamic education based English medium institutes for evaluating English Language Teaching program in such religiously administered cultural centers. Qualitative research methodology was used for this study. Data was collected through personal visits in terms of classroom observations, semi structured interviews and classroom recording. A convenient sampling was used for this study. Data were analyzed in terms of syllabus design, teachers' performance and selection criteria, teaching methodology, text books and testing. At the end a number of suggestions have been given for the improvement of the program in light of findings of the study. This study also provides an insight into the attitude of religiously inclined people toward English.*

## **Introduction**

There is a huge setup of Islamized or religion based education systems in Pakistan. English being the lingua-franca at international level for business and communication has been focused in almost all education systems. The most of the systems have adopted English as a medium of instruction (MOI). One particular Islamic based education system was focused by the researchers in this study. This education system is spread all over Pakistan. Only one institution was selected for the program evaluation. These institutions are working as alternatives for those religiously motivated people who can not spare their children for Madrassa education. English as a medium of instruction along with religious education is the main motivating factor for these people. The

main purpose of this study was to evaluate the status of English language teaching in these kinds of institutions. An evaluation in respect of syllabus, teachers, teaching methodology, text books and testing procedures was carried out. A detailed semi-structured interview of the chief administrator, a number of meetings with the supervisor of the Karachi zone, over all interaction with teaching staff, interviews of the teachers and students, played a vital role in the evaluation of the program.

### **Rationale**

The motivation at the back this study was to explore the reasons behind the success or failures of an English Language Teaching program in an Islamic education based institution, where English was used as medium of instruction, and to suggest recommendations in accordance with the findings of the study. This study would help the administrators to know the merits and demerits of an English Language Teaching (ELT) program for its effective implementation in future.

### **Research Questions**

This study was meant to find answers to the following research questions:

1. Whether there was proper English Language Teaching (ELT) syllabus or not?
2. How the syllabus was managed with respect to different levels of the students?
3. How the material in the form of text books was selected or prepared and whether it fulfilled the requirement of the syllabus or not?
4. Which criterion was followed for the selection of an English Language Teaching (ELT) teacher?
5. How much teachers and students were satisfied with the syllabus?
6. What methods were used for testing the language proficiency of the students?

7. What kinds of teaching methods were used by the teachers?
8. Whether students are satisfied with the teaching methodology of the teachers or not?

### **Literature Review**

According to Lynch (1996) program evaluation is an important and difficult work in any field, and language education is no exception. The goal is sometime, to evaluate a program's effectiveness in absolute terms, sometime to assess its equality against that of comparable programs and sometime both. In ideal circumstances evaluations receive cooperation from all parties and provide useful information to insiders on how their work can be improved while offering accountability to outsider stakeholders, such as host institutions, governments and financial sponsors.

In order to proceed further in program evaluation following definitions are important:

### **Applied Linguistics**

Applied Linguistics (AL) as an emerging academic discipline and has been the subject of recent discussions. AL is the research and practice concerned with the application of knowledge and methods from a variety of disciplines that is anthropology, sociology, linguistics, psychology and education to the range of issues concerning the development and use of language.

### **Evaluation**

It is defined as the systematic attempt to gather information in order to make judgment or decision. As such, evaluative information can be both qualitative and quantitative in form and can be gathered through different methods such as observations or the administration of pencil-paper tests.

### **Program**

It is a term that has perhaps been used with less ambiguity than evaluation. In general, it tends to evoke the image of a series of courses linked with some common goal or end product. A language

education program generally consists of a slate of courses designed to prepare students for some language-related endeavor. This might mean preparing them to pass a language proficiency examination that in turn would allow them to gain entrance to some other program of study. It might also mean preparing them to function, in general, in the context of a second language culture.

Lynch (1996) gave the following comment about applied linguistics and program evaluation:

*"I have defined applied linguistics as a discipline that applies knowledge from other disciplines to language-related issues and program evaluation in our field has developed within a large context of evaluation, especially as articulated in the education and psychology literature."*

According to Harmer (1990) people who wish to learn a foreign language may have any one of a great number of reasons for doing so. If we take English as an example, we can make a following tentative list of these reasons, although it will not of course be complete, but will at least show the great variety of both the needs and desires of students of English:

- (i) Students may find themselves living either temporarily or permanently in the target language community. For example English would be a target language in English speaking countries that is England, North America, Canada, Jamaica, etc for those students who have come from non-English speaking countries. These students will have to speak the target language for their survival in the community.
- (ii) The term English for special or specific purposes has been applied to situations where a student has some specific reason to learn the language. For example, an air traffic controller needs English to guide aircrafts through the sky. This may be the only time in his or her life when English is used. The businessman may need English for international trade. The waiter may need English to serve customers. These needs are

often referred to as EOP (English for occupational purposes). The student who is going to study in a university where English has been adopted as MOI, may needs English for writing repots or essays and participating in seminars. This is often called EAP (English for academic purposes). The student of medicine or nuclear physics (studying in his or her own country) may need to be able to read article and text books about that subject in English. This is often referred to as EST (English for science and technology). What is interesting about all these examples is that the nature of English for all these learners is different. The waiter might be interested in speaking while a medical student in reading only.

- (iii) Many students learn English only because it is the part of the curriculum and they are bound to do so. They do not learn English by their own choice but by the choice of someone else.
- (iv) Some students study a foreign language because they are attracted by the culture of target language community. They learn the language because they want to know more about the people who speak it and territories where it is spoken.
- (v) Some people want to learn English or another foreign language because they think it offers better job opportunity. It is possible that a good knowledge of a foreign language helps you to get a better job or international access to job opportunities than only knowing the native language. This is specifically very important in respect of English which has gained the position of lingua franca at international level.

There are number of other reasons for learning a language which are possibly less important than the aforementioned. It is clear from the abovementioned possibilities that there are number of possible reasons for studying a language. What is more important to note is that all the students or learners can not necessarily be treated in the same category. The students who are interested in ESP need to be taught in a very different method than those who are learning English

without any particular purpose. The students who learn English only because it is the part of the curriculum should be treated in a very different way from those who voluntarily go to English-medium or English language teaching institution.

For a language teaching program particularly at school level motivation plays a vital role along with other things. Harmer (1990) considered two categories in this regard:

- (i) Students who decide to learn a language other than their mother tongue or native language usually do so because they want to achieve some goal. This may be the result of two motivating factors. First is integrative motivation, which is based upon attractive civilization of the target language community. In the strong form of this motivation someone wishes to integrate oneself in that community and in the weaker form one craves to know as much as possible about the target language community. The second is instrumental motivation. In this case students or learners are motivated that mastery of the target language will be instrumental for better job opportunity. Here language is taken as an instrument for better future.

Some researchers were of the point of view that most successful language learners were result of integrative motivation, but according to Harmer (1990) this conclusion has not yet really been adequately substantiated. Indeed it seems that it is not so much the type of motivation that counts at large. Undoubtedly a student with strong integrative motivation will be likely to succeed, but the same is also true of the learner who possesses strong instrumental motivation.

- (ii) While it is reasonable to suppose that many adult learners have some degree of extrinsic motivation. And while it is also true that a student's attitude may be affected by members of his community, it would seem to be a true case that intrinsic motivation plays by far the larger part in most students' success or failure as language learner. Many students bring no extrinsic motivation at all to the classroom and may 'in the case of

school children' have neutral or even negative feelings about language learning. For them what happens in the classroom will be of vital importance in determining their attitude toward the language. It will also have an important effect on the students who are already in some way extrinsically motivated.

Physical conditions have a great effect on learning and can alter a student's motivation either positively or negatively. Classrooms that are badly lit and overcrowded can be excessively de-motivating, but unfortunately many of them exist in schools. Vitally important will be the blackboard: Is it easily visible? Is the surface in good condition? In general, teachers should presumably try to make their classroom as pleasant as possible. Even where conditions are bad it may be possible to improve the atmosphere with posters, students' work, etc. on the walls. We can say, then, that the atmosphere in which a language is learnt is vitally important: the cold grayness of much institutionalized education must be compensated for in some way if it does not have a negative effect on motivation of the students for language learning.

The method by which students are taught should have an effect on their learning performance. If they find it deadly boring they will probably become de-motivated, where as if they have confidence in the method they find it motivating. But perhaps this is the most difficult area of all to be certain of. We said earlier that a really motivated student will probably succeed what ever method within reason is used. It is also true that different students are more or less sympathetic to any particular method depending upon their expectations. Teachers can easily recall students who felt that there was not enough grammar or enough conversation. Despite various attempts there is unfortunately no research which clearly shows the success of one method over another. What though is clear is that if the student loses confidence in the method he or she will become de-motivated. And the student's confidence in the method is largely in the hands of the most important factor affecting intrinsic motivation, the teacher.

Whether the student likes the teacher or not may be very significant. It is quite possible that two teachers using the same method have vastly different results. How then can we assess the qualities a teacher needs to help in providing intrinsic motivation? Denis (1970) attempted to answer this question as reported by Harmer (1990). A thousand children between the ages of twelve and seventeen were asked to put a list of teacher 'qualities' in order of preference. The children showed what their learning priorities were by putting these qualities in the following order (1= most important, 10= least important):

- i. He makes his course interesting.
- ii. He teaches good pronunciation.
- iii. He explains clearly.
- iv. He speaks good English.
- v. He shows the same interest in all his students.
- vi. He makes all the students participate.
- vii. He shows great patience.
- viii. He insists on the spoken language.
- ix. He makes his pupils work.
- x. He uses an audio-lingual method.

Success or lack of it plays a vital part in the motivational drive of a student. Both, complete success or complete failure may be demotivating. It will be the teachers' job to set goals and tasks at which most of his or her students will be successful or unsuccessful. If it is not appropriately managed it may have a negative effect on motivation. It will also be the case that low challenge activities are equally de-motivating. If students can achieve the task with no difficulty at all they may lose the motivation that they have, when faced with the right level of challenge.

We can conclude in the light of this review that language teaching is not an easy task. For successful language teaching, especially in case of foreign language, teachers and administration of the school or program have certain responsibilities as discussed in the



above narrated lines. This study was meant to evaluate the ELT program in the same perspective in an Islamic education based English medium institute.

### **Research Methodology**

Lynch (1996) and Brown (1994) have favored the observation of all aspects of an ELT program for its evaluation. The researcher used Context Adaptive Model (CAM) which was favored by Lynch (1990). System Approach Model (SAM) could also be adopted for a program evaluation, although it is the most appropriate for large scale research projects, because it is very systematic and lacks flexibility and adaptability for a small scale research, while CAM is flexible, adaptable and heuristic (Lynch, 1996) and the better one for small scale research. CAM consists of seven steps which serve as a check list for program evaluation. Step-one is concerned with the audience and goals that is to determine the purpose of the evaluation. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the ELT program in an Islamic education based English-medium institution. Step-two and three are related to inventory and preliminary thematic frame work that is to determine what is being evaluated? In this regard present research focused on the teachers, students, syllabus, teaching methodology, material, testing procedures and social context. Step four and five are about evaluation design and data collection. They will be discussed in the following lines. Step-six is concerned with analysis and interpretation of data, which will also be discussed in the following lines. The last step is the evaluation report that is to communicate the findings of the evaluation, which is the ultimate goal of every complete research work.

The qualitative research method is basically an interactive approach (Maxwell, 2005). The research participants are the major source of data collection in a qualitative research study. The researcher has adopted qualitative research design for this study because according to Lynch (1996) qualitative method was the most appropriate for evaluation purposes. The other reason for its preference was that it was the naturalistic approach for program evaluation.

The main focus was to study what was actually happening rather than the objectives of the program. The data was collected

through classroom observations, classroom recording and interviews of the chief administrator, zonal administrator, teachers and students. To get the holistic view of the situation triangulation technique of data collection was adopted. Triangulation deals with dual role of validity check and analytic strategy.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected through convenient sampling. Three different classes of three different teachers of English were selected. Three classes of each teacher and total number of nine classes were observed and recorded. Three teachers of English and nine students of three classes besides the principal, zonal administrator, and chief administrator of the institution were interviewed. A semi-structured interview format was used to collect data.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected data was analyzed qualitatively, and the results helped in finding answers to research questions. In this analysis, the researchers focused mainly on syllabus, teaching methodology, material, teachers and testing procedures. The details of the analysis are as follow:

### **Syllabus**

According to Hornby (2007) syllabus is the collection of subjects that are studied in a particular course or it is an outline or summary of the subject to be covered in a course. Syllabus is also known as a program or outline of a course of study, teaching etc or a statement of the requirement for a particular examination (Thompson, 1995). Syllabus is a good starting point in surveying the existing situation and according to Nunan (1988) and Brown (1995) syllabus is a document indicating the course outline.

It can be said in view of abovementioned references that without a proper outline or syllabus, required objectives of a program can not be achieved. In other words if a suitable or up-to-date course outline was not designed for a program, it means that systematic approach toward education had not been adopted and still objectives of the program were not clear. Same was observed in the institution during evaluation. The institution was making progress day by day.

The administration was putting their best efforts for the improvement of their education system. They had the plan in their education policy for a proper syllabus at each level in their education system. Presently they were operating without any proper ELT syllabus. The importance of the syllabus was emphasized during interaction of the researcher with the administration. According to the remarks of the administrator, the work in this respect was in progress and very soon the problem would be resolved. In fact aims and objectives determine the course content and methodology. If there are no aims, there will be no teaching.

### **Teaching Methodology**

Grammar is considered a main component of a language in our community and who have mastered the rules of grammar is considered as an expert of the language. That is why in the most of institutes of Pakistan, English is being taught in the form of extracted rules. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is being applied almost every where for teaching English. The same was observed in this study. Instead of creating an environment in the classroom for language teaching, English was being taught as a subject like mathematics. Teachers were not aware of the language teaching techniques. According to Jordon (1997) teachers should emphasize on communicative approach in a language class. They should elicit the views of students and engage them into a meaningful discussion/communication. It is worth mentioning that teachers' role in the class should no longer be that of a dictator who speaks in the class all the time, forcing students to listen to the monotonous lecture. I found one teacher delivering his lecture in English through out the class. When during the interview students were asked, whether they understood the lecture or not? They all replied in negative. The use of language in the class should not be the choice of the teachers. They are basically facilitator in the process of learning. They must facilitate learning by creating an environment conducive to language learning. The performance of other teachers who were selected as respondents was relatively quite better. They were also not qualified / trained English language teacher like other one but they performed well. They used very simple language in the form of code switching in the classroom

according to the level of students. They gave students enough freedom to express themselves regarding their problems of comprehension.

Discussion, group work and activities engage students in active learning rather than the old fashioned lecturing method. All English language teachers were observed following the instruction given in the textbook if any. They were not found trying to manage the activities at their own like pre reading, post or while reading and follow up reading. The active participation of students in class through different interesting activities is highly advocated among linguists. The process of language teaching was not activity based as a whole. English was being taught by grammar translation method. Communication skill was totally neglected. There was no activity based learning. Even the students of class 8<sup>th</sup> were not able to speak five sentences coherently. During the class room observation it was noted that accuracy was mostly emphasized and fluency was totally neglected. The ungrammatical utterances were totally rejected. For language learning, fluency and proficiency can not be neglected any way. The teachers were required to be trained for the purpose of language teaching. There were no audio-visual aids to facilitate the teaching methodology.

Based on aforementioned observation, it was learnt that without appropriate teaching methodology, accurate learning can not take place. The syllabus might be well designed, learning facilities might be enough, but when teaching methodology was defective, learning could not be effective. Only right method can result into right track of learning achievements.

### **Teachers**

The selection of a teacher in a language teaching program is an important aspect. Good selection criteria based upon experts' opinion in a language teaching program ensure the selection of good language teachers and thus make the aims and objectives of the program to be achieved easily and proficiently. The foremost requirement of the institution in this regard was Islamized and religious attitude. To be a good practitioner of Islamic values was a convincing and motivating factor of selection as teacher in the institution. During visits the researcher found all the teachers with long beard, shalwar kameez and shalwar above the ankles, greeting each other in accordance with the

Islamic values. Saying “assalam-o-alaikum wa-rehmatullah” while passing and departing.

Besides, qualification is also an important feature of the selection criteria for the teachers. The minimum qualification for the teachers was intermediate, but most of the teachers were holding bachelor, master and professional degrees.

Teacher (A): FSC retired naval technical education instructor.

Teacher (B): B.A, B. Ed with 10 years teaching experience.

Teacher (C): MSC Economics with two year teaching experience.

All the teachers were well civilized. During several visits by the researcher, no loose talk in their interaction and discussion with each other was observed. They were found very punctual and cooperative. The school administrator/principal was very hospitable. Visitors were cordially welcomed. Teachers were very frank with their students and guided them in following the Islamic norms especially if someone was found violating.

They had no patent criteria for the selection of English language teacher. English was considered as a subject that every one could teach at school level. To avoid confusion in this regard three teachers were nominated for English language teaching. None of these teachers had attended any common or special course of English language teaching.

Wright, T. (1991) identified that essentially teachers had two major roles in the class. First was to create the condition under which learning could take place. This was the social side of teaching. Second was to impart knowledge by a verity of means to their students. The task oriented side of teaching. A teacher was expected to play the role of a manager, resource, guide, evaluator, organizer and instructor.

The English language teacher of the selected school was performing at their level best, but they needed proper training in this field. They all were hard workers and good training could enhance their efficiency.

### **Textbook Evaluation**

Evaluation is a process that syllabus designers, reviewers, teacher, authors or student use to see how useful a book, an activity or an

article is, or Evaluation is a process of judging something to see its fitness. Cunningsworth (1984) says that no course book will be totally suited to a particular situation. The teacher will have to find its own way of using it and adapting it if necessary. So we should not be looking for the perfect course book which meets all our requirements but, rather for the best possible fit between what the course book offers to teachers and what students need.

The administration of the institution was trying their level best to provide their own text books for all subjects. As English language was concerned, they had prepared the text books up to the fifth class. I consulted four text book evaluation check lists given by Cunningsworth (1984) and used the most appropriate one after consultation with experts.

As none of the text books would be totally suitable to a particular situation, there was no doubt that sincerity and hard work of the writer with his experience in the particular field could make the textbook better for the situation. However, the result of the check list was quite satisfactory for textbooks, which were evaluated by me. The main objective of the institution was to provide the education in an ideal Islamic environment. This aspect was also very obvious in their text books. In all the text books throughout, Islamic names were used like Mohammad, Umer, Abubaker, Ali, Usman, Talha etc. and it was very astonishing that in the seven different books, the researcher had not found even a single complete picture of an animal or human being as the display of a such a photograph is forbidden according to a popular belief of Muslims. Most of the lessons in the books were related to Islamic history or Islamic values or they were written in an Islamic perspective. When I held the books, in my hands and consulted it, I really felt that English was being taught in the perspective of Islamic values.

There were a number of exercises at the end of each lesson in all the books. The books were based on grammar translation method. And grammar was being taught in a step by step method. The use of vocabulary was managed according to the level of the students. Most of the exercises were related to grammar and vocabulary teaching. The writer had tried to manage the four language skills in the exercises. The teachers and students were quite satisfied with the material. According to Harmer (1998) some teachers had the poor opinion of

textbooks. But it was not observed in this research.

Finally it was known that ELT textbooks of the subject system were the obvious examples of the objectives and aims of the program. Shortcomings can be identified every where and the aspect of improvement always remains demanding, but the over all view of the textbooks was quite satisfactory. The author had addressed the Islamic social background of the students to a greater extent.

### **Test Papers**

Promotion of the students to next classes was based on the annual or final examination. The researcher studied the test papers of English from class III to class VII thoroughly and found errors of grammar, spelling and instruction generally in all the test papers. The test papers of class III, IV and V were quite satisfactory. They were almost of the same pattern. The test papers were not managed properly. For example, in the 5<sup>th</sup> class test paper, parts/sections of the paper were not mentioned. After first six questions, there was a heading (subjective 45) and again the questions started from 1. The heading was 'subjective' but again No. ten question was objective type.

The third part of the same paper, although third part was not mentioned there, contained oral tests of three kinds that were correction of spelling; form of verb; reading and answering the question. The most of the part of the test papers for 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> classes was concerned with grammar and vocabulary testing. The four language skills were given consideration in these test papers.

The test papers of class VI, VII and VIII were also having the same pattern. Question No: 1 was related to essay writing, Question No: 2 letter writing, Question No: 3 'do as directed', Question No: 4 'answer the question', Question No: 5 'use of idiom' and Question NO: 6 'translate Urdu in to English'. These questions were typically same for the class VI, VII and VIII. This was the very traditional method of examination widely used for English as a subject in Pakistan especially in government schools. The more emphasis was on grammar and writing skill. Testing of speaking, reading, and listening skills were totally neglected. Vocabulary testing was also not given considerable and due importance. It was difficult to judge the language proficiency level of the students through this method. The technique of

examination was based on grammar translation method, which is no more favored by the language teachers nowadays. It was noticed that Question No: 1 and 2 were exactly same in the examination papers of class VI and VII (Session Annual 2007).

### **Testing**

Testing is central to teaching and learning. It is a sort of reinforcement. Testing and learning are two side of a coin. Testing is a methodology for experimentation and investigation. Learning can not be justified with out proper testing. Therefore test papers should be properly managed. There should be no spelling or grammatical mistakes at all. Mistakes by the teachers at preliminary stage have bad impact on the learning of the students. There is no doubt that grammar is the back bone of a language but it should not be tested in isolation. Testing of grammatical items in isolation does not ensure students ability. Testing methods used for class III, IV, and V was better then class VI, VII, and VII. Up to class V institution had prepared good ELT books and for class VI and above ELT books were adopted from other sources.

Teaching and testing is closely related. Proper teaching will be ended by proper testing. Things which are not taught will not be tested. Whereas which were not tested was ignored in teaching (Hughes: 1989). The practice of providing students ready made essays, letters and application and then questioning them in the test papers is a very old practice in the education sector. Cramming the answers of the questions and vomiting them on the papers in the examination is a very bad practice. It destroys the creativity of child's brain. Through the process of teaching and testing the mental ability of the student should be developed in the form of self creativity. Grammatical errors, wrong spellings and unclear instruction confuse the mind of student. Therefore, test must be prepared carefully devoid of errors. The ultimate objective of teaching and learning should be the development of student's mind. A language teaching needs to be well planned and systematic with respect to the level of the students.

### **Conclusion**

The administration of the institution was determined and committed to provide education and teach English effectively in an Islamic



environment. They were committed to produce good users of English in the form of engineers, doctors, scientists, pilots. Their priority was religion; however, teaching of English was subtly and efficiently integrated in the teaching-learning input. English language teachers were not properly trained and needed in-service training to develop the required skills to teach English more effectively. The syllabus especially for ELT was not properly designed. It required to be designed by the trained, experienced and expert English language teachers. Without proper course outline, the objectives of the system do not become clear. As the teachers were not properly trained, so the teaching methodology which they adopted was not appropriate for language teaching. English Language Teaching material was also under preparation, and the prepared one was quite satisfactory. Test papers based on the material prepared under the guidance of the academic consultants of the system were quite satisfactory while others based on owned/adopted material were very traditional and substandard. The overall program showed signs of significant and sustainable future development.

### **Recommendations**

One observes continuous variation in the field of education. New ideas are accepted and old ones are referred or rejected. The aspect of improvement especially in the field of education is always prominent. We advance in the world with a lot of changes in every aspect of life. The ELT program in the institution was also needed a lot of improvement. ELT syllabus should be designed by the language experts. A well designed syllabus is the identity of sincerity, seriousness, interest and systematic learning of any system. Teachers must be trained for the language teaching. The administration of the system should try to manage a language learning academy for the proper training of their teachers. The teaching material should be recommended by ELT experts at each level. Need analysis is a basic component in this field; it should be carried out according to the current requirement of the learners. There should be a systematic learning. Students must be taught all the four language skills with due consideration. Language should be taught as a language not as a subject. Test papers should be designed to check the mental

development and language proficiency of the students. They should be trained for the creative writing instead of cramming and vomiting the thing on the paper. Their ability of comprehension and understanding should be developed. Communication is the prominent feature of language learning, it should be given due consideration. Instead of adopting the old and archaic methods, newly developed successful methods/approaches should be preferred.

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