

Factors Causing Low Achievement of Post Graduate Students at the Department of English University of Malakand, Pakistan

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Abstract

Failure ratio at master level in the subject of English literature and language at postgraduate level in the Department of English, University of Malakand is high as compared to the results of other subjects in other departments. To find out reasons of the failure mix method design was used which comprises a questionnaire having Twenty Six items, covering main aspects like: parental education, motivation level, their background knowledge in English literature, classroom environment, study material and examination, and focus group discussion. After analysis of the data, it was found that lack of audio-visual aids, external evaluation, lack of departmental library, classes in the afternoon and lack of background knowledge in literature are some of the factors which cause failure of the students. If these factors are worked out, the failure ratio may be decreased.

Keywords: English literature and language, students' low achievement, factors causing low achievement, remedies to overcome the failure

Introduction

English is an international language. It is the language of offices. Without English using internet is impossible. One cannot travel abroad without learning English language. Globalization has increased the importance of English language. Knowledge and command over English is considered obligatory. This is shifting focus in the schooling system of a country as well, as importance is given to the teaching and learning of English at the cost of local languages (Shahzada, Ghazi, & Khan, 2012). Aggarwal (1995) says that in this age of Science and technology, lack of command over English means isolation. No country would like to keep itself in isolation from advancement in medicine, engineering and education. In countries, like, Pakistan, importance is

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given to English. English literature and language occupies a vital place in the disciplines of higher educational institutes of Pakistan. Almost all the higher educational institutes offer English literature and language degree to their students. Unfortunately, low achievement in it has become a dilemma for researchers. Mostly, traditional approaches are adopted to teach English though demands and abilities of students change from time to time. There is a considerable decline in learning of English in Pakistan. Ammena (1983) notices decline in the learning of English literature and English language itself due to low response of students towards it. Several reasons are responsible for this lack of mastery in English. Incompetent teachers, family background, lack of language learning environment, low motivation level, outdated curriculum, large classrooms, teaching methodologies and emotional disturbance are shown to be some of the reasons for the low achievements of students in learning English (Shahzad et al, 2011; Bhatti, 1987; Martha, 2009 & Diaz, 2003). While some say that income, age and study hours affect achievements of students in Pakistan (Ali et al, 2013). Many researchers have done work on factors affecting the performance of students in different contexts. Almost all aspects are studied and still researchers are working on these factors. Student performances are affected by various factors.

Review of Literature

Omar and Alrubayea (2012) sought reasons for the failure of students at the College of Applied Studies and Community Services (CASCS). Their findings showed that student's achievements were unsatisfactory at CASCS. Students considered that external factors are responsible for their failure. They found out that student's failure was high because of lack of transportation, lack of English language skills, and lack of students' boarding facility and boring teaching methodologies. Similarly, research was conducted in Babol, Tehran in

2012 which shows that academic failure is a multidimensional phenomenon. Socio-economic, personal status, family problems and educational issues affect the performance of students (Jeludar, Jeludar, Shayan & Gatab, 2012). The academic performance of students in West African Senior School Certificate Examination (WASSCE) was not good and the teachers felt that they were partly responsible for this poor performance. They thought that government, school, parents and children are equally responsible. The cause is multidimensional and so a multidimensional approach should be adopted towards its solution; teachers, parents, school and government should meet expectations and students should also come in 'flying colors' to WASSCE (Ajayi, 2012). Fonseca and Conboy (2006) studied the causes of students studying science in Portugal. They found several reasons which affected students' performance and caused their failure in science subjects. The results can be interpreted from different angles. Quality teaching and lack of enough preparation caused the failures. Motivation and attribution theory is also responsible for the increasing failure of students.

Martha (2009) studied factors affecting academic performance of undergraduate students at the Christian University Uganda. She finds that there is a relationship between the grades achieved at 'A' level and the performance at undergraduate level. She further says that the socio-economic background of the students also affect the students' performance. Her third finding is that the former schooling background also affects performance at undergraduate level. These three factors played a vital role in the poor performance of the students. Emotional disturbance, depression, chronic illness, playing video games, time given to TV and time spent on the internet are also some of the causes of failure of students. These findings are the outcome of a study conducted by Kamal and Bener (2009). Shahzada et al (2012) also

studied causes of student's failure at secondary level. Authors concluded that lack of quality teachers and their poor techniques of teaching, lack of audio-visual aids in the classroom, course is not in line with modern needs and lack of linguistic teachers in school are some of the factors which are responsible for the poor performance of the students in English at secondary level. This study seeks to identify the main causes of failure; hence it will help in minimizing failure of the students. The study will help teachers and administrators for making necessary decisions for minimizing failure. Furthermore, students will be motivated to take admission in the department. The study will also help in rising moral of the students and teachers.

Research Methodology

The current research study is both qualitative and quantitative in nature. Questionnaire and focus group discussion were used to find out data from students. There were forty (40) students in each class. The Final year students of the Department of English were taken as sample. Thirty (30) students filled the questionnaire while ten (10) students contributed in focus group discussion. Total of twenty Six (26) questions were there in the questionnaire. The questions were divided into five categories; environmental factors, background of students, personal factors, examination and teacher. Students were asked to give responses in 'Yes' and 'No'. Keeping in view the academic background of the students, the format was kept simple. Ten students were chosen randomly for focus group discussion from the class. The purpose of the discussion was to get in- depth analysis of the problems which cause failure. One of the researchers acted as a moderator, the second researcher recorded and took notes of the discussion. The third person was assigned the task to video record the group discussion. Pseudonyms have been used instead of their real names to hide identity of the students. The questions were asked on the basis of literature

review and the supposed problems which the students may have faced in their studies. The recorded data was described verbatim and the moderator confirmed the recorded data and the field notes taken by one of the researchers. All the information gathered from the discussion was read again and again to get to the correct point of view of the participants. After analyzing the recorded data and notes some common themes were identified, which further supported the findings from the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed among thirty students and the data gathered was formulated accordingly.

Table#1 background of students affecting achievement

Statements	Respondents	Response	
		Yes	NO
All my family members are educated	30	%	%
		21	09
		70	30
English was medium of instruction in school	30	12	18
		40	60
English was medium of instruction in college	30	16	14
		53.33	46.67
I have studied English in Bachelor level	30	19	11
		63.33	36.67
I have studied English (Elective) in Bachelors	30	12	18
		40	60
I have background knowledge of literature	30	12	18
		40	60
I have got 50% marks in English (Compulsory) in my academic career	30	23	07
		76.66	23.34
I have received education in private/English medium schools	30	11	19
		36.67	63.33

Table#1 show that there are certain aspects of the students background which has affected the performance of students. 60% respondents responded that English was not the medium of instruction in their schools and 46.67% students responded that English was not medium of instruction in their colleges, while 63.33% students said that they had received education in government schools. In the same way 60% respondents said that they had not studied English Literature,

which is taught as English (Elective) at bachelor level. Likewise, 60% students lack background knowledge of English literature.

Table#2 personal factors affecting performance of students

Statements	Respondents	Response	
		Yes	NO
I understand English grammar	30	83.33	16.67
I am fluent in speaking English	30	12	18
I understand lecture when teacher speaks in English in the classroom	30	93.33	06.67
I have taken admission in Department of English because of my own interest in English literature	30	73.33	26.67

Table#2 show personal factors which affect the performance of the students. 83.33% students had no problem with the understanding of grammar. 93.33% students understand lecture when delivered in English. 26.67% students were present in the classroom who had not taken admission in English because of their own choice. 60% respondents considered themselves to be reluctant in speaking English and were not fluent in speaking it.

Table#3 environmental factors affecting the achievement of students

Statements	Respondents	Response	
		Yes	NO
I find enough opportunity in home to study the work done in the class	30	83	17
Non-availability of departmental library and study material	30	18	12
Classes are in the afternoon and we feel bored in the classes	30	24	06
		80	20

Environmental factors had an important role on the performance of the students. 80% students said that their classes are in the afternoon and they did not take interest in their classes because of boredom and

fatigue. 60% students said that their studies were affected because of the non-availability of study material and departmental library. 83% students get opportunity of studies in their home.

Table#4 Teacher as a factor in the achievement of students

Statements	Respondents	Response	
Teachers do not take classes regularly	30	Yes 11 36.67	NO 19 63.33
Teachers do not prepare their classes properly	30	06 20	24 80
Class duration is not enough to understand and finish topic	30	17 56.66	13 43.34
Teaching methodology of teachers is good	30	28 93.33	02 06.67
Students participate in the classroom activities	30	20 66.66	10 33.34
Teachers take help from audio-visual aids during class	30	04 13.33	26 86.67

Teachers play a vital role in the achievements of students. 63.33% students responded that their teachers take classes regularly, 80% said that their teachers properly prepare their classes and 93.33% students said that their teacher's teaching methodology is good. 33.34% students said that students are active in the classroom and participate in class activities. A considerable amount (86.67%) of students responded that teachers did not use audio-visual aids in their classes.

Table#5 Examination as a factor in the achievements of students

Statements	Respondents	Response	
I attempt all the questions in the question paper	30	Yes 23 76.66	NO 07 23.34
We do not get sufficient time for preparation of examination	30	09 30	21 70
There is not enough gape between	30	15	15

papers		50	50
Teachers teach one thing in the classroom and there is another thing in papers	30	07	23
		23.	76.66
		34	
Papers are checked by external evaluators	30	28	02
		93.	06.67
		33	

Table# 5 show that examination is also a factor which affects performance of the students. 70% students claimed that they got sufficient time for preparation of examination. 93.33% students considered the external evaluators were responsible for their failure. 76.66% students were satisfied from the contents of the question papers. 50% students said that there was not sufficient gap between the papers.

Qualitative Data

The interviews of the students also showed similar reasons for their failure. One interviewee said that failure is because of external evaluation, lack of study material in the department and that students have not studied English literature (Elective) in their bachelors. The second respondent said that students fail in large number because papers are checked by external checkers; classes are in the afternoon, class duration is not sufficient and they were weak in English at school and college level. The third student said that most students have studied science subjects at Bachelors and they do not have any background of English literature, similarly, fourth students also said that external evaluation, afternoon classes, weakness in English and lack of background knowledge in literature are responsible for failure of students. Class duration is 45 minutes; hence teachers do not get sufficient time to finish their topics. The next participants said that there is no departmental library that is why they do not have access to resource books and they rely on 2nd rate notes. He further said that every student who falls in merit is given admission without considering

his/her proficiency in literature. They spent the whole day in waiting for their classes and when they come for classes in the afternoon, they feel bored. Lack of audio-visual aids also leads to boredom. The sixth respondent said that most of the students are very weak in written English and they cannot express themselves appropriately. External evaluation is also one of the causes of failure. The next respondent repeated almost the same causes of failure. The next two respondents said that class duration, lack of study material, lack of literary background, weakness in English at school and college level and most importantly lack of audio-visual aids in the classroom are responsible for so much failure.

Findings and Conclusions

1. Lack of background knowledge in literature at under graduate level.
2. Students feel bore when they take classes in the afternoon.
3. Evaluation by external examiners in annual examination. The examination system is annual. Examination papers are prepared by other experts who have not taught them..
4. The students fail in the examination because the students do not have easy access to books and other reference material.
5. Although at college level the courses are taught in English language but still the students do not have skills enough to meet their academic needs in English literature and language. Moreover, some students have not studied English literature at bachelor level which can also be a cause of their failure
6. Some students have taken admission in the department on the demand of their parents. They are not interested in the department because they have not taken admission due to their own interest.

Discussion

Students' performances are affected by several factors. It is a multi-faceted issue. The questionnaire and interview provided enough space to the students to discuss reasons of their failure. Parental education is a major aspect which affects a student's performance either in positive or negative way. The current research study does not agree with the study of Jeludar et al (2012) who say that family disturbs performance of the students. 70% respondents replied that their families are educated and positively affect their studies. Fonseca & Conboy (2006) and Diaz (2003) say that motivation affects performance. The current research study does not agree with these writers as the students are motivated and have taken admission to pursue their studies in English literature but still 36 % students have not taken admission in the department on their own interest. This may also be a cause of the failure. Audio-visual aids are very important in a classroom and highly affect performance of the students. Shahzada et al (2012) also mentioned that audio-visual aids play its role in the performance of students. This paper further supports the work done by these writers. Because of lack of audio-visual aids in the classroom students feel bored and do not take interest in the class which affect their performance in the examination.

A research was conducted by Farooq, Chaudry, Shafiq, and Berhanu (2011) on secondary school performances of students. The researchers reached to the conclusion that parental education played a more vital and important role than the studies of the students themselves. Ali et al (2013) conducted a research study in the sub campus of Islamia University Rahim Yar Khan. It was concluded that age of the students, income of their parents and the time given to their studies play a positive role on the performances of students. A teacher psych-pedagogy expert of Spain, Diaz (2003) studied the factors affecting student's performance. The survey shows that motivation,

relationship with peers, gender and parent's academic level have a direct influence on the academic performance of the students. The current study does not agree with the findings of these studies. Students at the Department of English are highly motivated to study English; they show no role of parents' income in their studies; age of students do not affect their studies; and students give enough time to their studies.

Recommendations

On the basis of the research findings, following points are recommended to minimize failure of the students.

1. Only those students should be given admissions who have studied English literature at under grade level.
2. Classes should be taken in morning time rather than in afternoon.
3. Appropriate study material should be provided to the students and a departmental seminar library should be established to provide easy access to the resource and reference books.
4. It is also suggested that audio-visual aids and multi-media should be introduced in the classroom because the concept of *Suggestopedia* is very important in language and literature classroom.
5. Furthermore, the research findings also suggest that evaluation should be done by faculty of the university.

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