English in Pakistan

THE AUDIENCE OF THE ANALYSIS

The audience of this analysis is all primary school as the writing will focus on the existing teaching techniques at this level and will concentrate on the anomalies in this methodology. The revised 2006 English Teaching curriculum is completely based on the ongoing teaching technique. The revised curriculum 2006 for the first time introduced English at the level of grade 1 which used to be introduced to students at 6 grade before 2006. This is a milestone in the history of Pakistan that students of government run schools could start learning English from the very first year of school. The government new education policy unveiled on 12 March 2009 with a hope to reduce the illiteracy to a great level. The policy will be implemented at the expiry of National Education Policy 2008-2010 next year. But revised English curriculum and the new national policy does not draw attention to the mammoth problem of obsolete teaching techniques especially English curriculum at all levels. To overcome these issues we will deeply look into the Communicative Language Teaching techniques which will resolve the long standing issues of the country and put the teaching techniques on the right track.

POLICY ANALYSIS
TIME AND PROCESS SPENT ON THE POLICY DEVELOPMENT

It is arduous to forecast the exact time the Ministry of Education (MoE) undertook the task of coming up with a revised curriculum for English in 2006. As the national education policy 1998-2010 introduced in 1998 was heavily criticised for being inadequate to cater the needs of the country in twenty first century and very soon MoE realised the gravity of the mistakes when the new education policy was heading towards complete collapse. To save its face the MoE came up with a new idea to revise some of the most defective policies.

INTENDED AUDIENCE

The analysis is going to focus on the problems of teachers, students and the curriculum. The analysis is restricted to the primary system of education in the biggest province of Punjab.

FUNCTION AND PURPOSE OF THE ANALYSIS

The main function and purpose of the policy analysis is to focus on the drawbacks in the teaching methodology and the proposed curriculum introduced at the primary level. How these problems are adversely affecting the people involved with education sector, especially the students who are at the receiving end.
TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE

The analysis is both non-interpretative and interpretative.

NATURE OF POLICY

The analysis is non-perspective as it will have a wide approach towards the existing policy. "A non-perspective policy text... is construed so that the reader is allowed a great deal of latitude as to how they interpret its message(s)" (Scott, 2000, pp 18). Scott adds "if the text is non-perspective, the reader is not asked to behave or think in a certain way but is offered a number of possibilities which they can then choose from" (ibid, pp 18-19).

The writing will be based on the views, analysis and research of different educationists, analysts and opinion. It will focus on both the traditionalist approach and CLT approach and how it works out for a country like Pakistan. The topic is wide focus on the English teaching techniques at primary level in Pakistan and how this is effecting the students in term of their progress. The CLT will be dealt with in depth to address the issue the English teaching as a second/foreign language. While talking about the new approach we will keep our focus on Pakistan’s primary level language teaching techniques. One figure is used but graphics and statistics have not been employed as the topic under discussion is of generic nature and involves opinion and research of different researchers and educationists.

PAKISTAN AND ENGLISH

Worldwide the significance of English as a language of communication cannot be overlooked. As communication is the most fundamental aspect of human life (Thompson 2003:1) and a language works as a key mean of communication for humans (Clark et. al. 1994:1). The communication process starts first at communal level but this circle widens up when people from different communities and societies interacts with one another. As the world has become a global village the English rightly fulfils the need for a common lingua franca to bridge the widening gap between world communities. Nowadays English is widely considered as a global language and according to Brutt-Griffler (mentioned in Mackay 2002:12) due to its some of the most appealing features it holds this position. The popularity of English these days could be judged from the fact more than 85 percent international organisations worldwide employ English as the main language, for instance in Asia and the Pacific ninety percent of the organisations officially use English (MacKay 2002:17).

The national language of Pakistan is Urdu but English has been the official language for communication over the last six decade since its independence. The Kachru’u’s concentric model describes Pakistan’ position in a very well manner as it falls in the outer-circle of the model. This circle includes the earlier period of the extension of English in non-native countries where it has become a part of a country’s chief
institutions, and plays an important 'second language' role in a multilingual setting and includes 50 other territories.

Fig. 1

The University Grants Commission of Pakistan (1982) in a “Report on the Teaching of Language” deemed the English as the language of knowledge, technology, and international communication, as an important second language’. Furthermore the report adds regarding the future of English in Pakistan that it would be employed in the near future as the language of technology and for international communication and soon English is going to hold the position of global lingua franca and ignoring language would be detrimental for any country especially for a country like Pakistan which is already having advantages in the form of past knowledge of English (UGC 1982:14). This statement reveals the significance of English for a third world state like Pakistan and recently the government decided to introduce English at all Government Schools from the year one (MoE 2007) and shun the existing policy of teaching English at grade 6 (i.e. sixth year of schooling).

EDUCATIONAL STRUCTURE OF THE COUNTRY

First of all it is vital to comprehend the structure of education system in Pakistan in order to focus in better manner on the topic under discussion. For a long time English has been an integral component of the syllabus. The education in Pakistan can be dissected into five main levels but we will discuss only two main categories at school level:

Primary Level: The primary level comprises of 1-5 grades and students of age 3-11. At this level the medium of instructions at government schools is Urdu while schools under provincial governments use local/regional languages as the medium. As mentioned above now the government is planning to introduce English at this level both at federal and provincial schools.

Secondary Level: This level can be further segmented into two main stages:

Middle school, which includes pupil of grade 6-8, and

Higher school consisting of grade 9-10 students.

The age group for this level varies between 11-18 years and is of great significance because at this stage of education the syllabus commences towards specialisation in a specific field or disciple and decides towards the future of a student. For instance at this stage a student decides whether he intends to pursue science subjects or arts subjects, the two most common choices available for students at higher school (9-10 grades). Ironically, the medium of instructions at this stage depends on the kind of institution, for example, in private schools the ‘O Levels’ system or ‘Senior Cambridge’ system of education are in vogue and therefore English is the primary source of instruction. While
in government schools, also called the ‘Urdu Medium Schools’, the local curriculum of English is taught as the name suggests the medium of instruction is in Urdu.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING

Since independence of Pakistan in 1947 all successive governments have been aiming at introducing new and robust education policy to ameliorate the obsolete education system left by the British Empire. But most of these efforts have gone down the drain due to insincere, apathetic and sloppy policies of the government and one can judge the failure of these policies from the fact that in the last 62 years Pakistan introduced 11 education policies (1947, 1951, 1959, 1966, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1979, 1992, 1998, 2010) without any beneficial outcome. As educational analysts rightly infer that the number of education policies does not mean we are over-concerned about poor education standard or under-performance of these policies but it means precisely the opposite. For instance in 1998 the education policy 1998-2010 was introduced but within a couple of years of its launch it led to the complete collapse of the education system and to shroud this downfall the Ministry of Education rushed to introduce a new revised curriculum in 2006 (MoE 2007 available at http://www.moe.gov.pk/). This reveals the pathetic situation of crumbling educational system of the country. Now the government has announced initial National Education Policy 2009 which will be enforced from 2010. We will focus on the obsolete English teaching methodology in practice and unfortunately like in the past the Ministry of Education’s revised curriculum for ‘English Language 2006’ totally avoids this issue (ibid). Curriculum planning can be seen as the systematic attempt by educationalists and teachers to specify and study planned intervention into the educational enterprise (Nunan 1988: 1). But in Pakistan the government has never thought on this line and the existing situation has gone from bad to worse where English language teaching is considered as being dissatisfactory, non-conducive and counter-productive for learning the language in Pakistan (Warsi 2004). The educationists summarise the English language teaching techniques in vogue at different levels of education in the following context:

Teaching methodology is scant of deep approaches to learning or in other words lack of connection to personal, experience of the learner, conceptualisation and integration. For language learning it has the implication of memorizing facts about language and lack of contextualized, authentic use of the target language with a focus on meaning.

Curriculum based teaching and learning.

An emphasis on rote memorisation.

More focus and emphasis on transfer and assessment of factual knowledge rather than assessment of critical thinking and analytical skills (Rehmani 2003:3)

The above features indicate the traditional approach to teaching of English language.
Nunan further elaborates the main elements of this traditionalist approach:

Area

Model

View of learning

Transmission of knowledge

Power relation

Emphasis on teacher’s authority

Teacher’s role

Providing frontal instruction

Learner’s role

Passive / individual work

View of knowledge

Presented as ‘certain’

View of curriculum

Static; predefined content and product

Learning experience

Knowledge of facts, concepts & skills; focus on content and product

Control of process

Teacher structured learning

Motivation

Extrinsic

Evaluation

Product oriented: achievement testing; criterion referencing
Nunan correctly draws the traditional methodology in English teaching in the country where the traditionalists view and focus on the language as a structured system of grammatical patterns, with a higher focus of such techniques on formal and bookish language. Such approach aims to have pupils producing formally correct sentences and in terms of skills, an emphasis on reading and writing (Nunan 1988:26-27). Globally there has been a greater tendency towards research and development in the field of language teaching techniques and approaches but haplessly Pakistan education system is oblivious of such developments in the world. Warsi laments “the obsolete [grammar] translation method is still being adopted by most language programmes” (Warsi 2004) and the facets of language teaching programmes are irrelevant to the most fundamental requirements of students (ibid). Since 1960s, there is an ambition to formulate language teaching more responsive to the needs of the student and this has been a consistent feature of both writing and practical experimentation in language teaching (Tudor 1996:66). Tudor further advocates such approach and opines that it permits students to ‘play a fuller, more active and participatory role in their language study’ (ibid). And it develops language teaching more effective as the teaching process is highly helpful to the needs, characteristics and expectations of learners. Tudor insists that immense need for different kind of language skills within a swiftly evolving social and economic context made it indispensable for “a language teaching profession to develop appropriate tools for identifying learner’s communicative needs and for translating them into coherent course structures” (Tudor 1996:8). Tudor’s argument truly reflects the need of development skills in the education sector of Pakistan to foster the needs of a strong and well-educated society and a robust education system for the present and the future.

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in 60s as an approach towards the teaching of language which lay emphasis on interaction as a source of learning a foreign language. The approach in CLT is totally different from the traditionalist approach as it is a wider approach which is based on a list of common principles and characteristics. As CLT can be well defined by Nunan’s five points:

An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.

The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.

The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the Learning Management process.

An enhancement of the learner’s own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

(Nunan 1991, 279)

The main aim of CLT is to make a student capable of achieving communicative competence in the foreign language so that he can utilize the language for doing the similar tasks which it undertakes in day to day life. In other words its application should be reflective of the circumstances or events surrounding and should not be based on imaginative or unrealistic ideas. Until 1970s teaching and learning system was deemed as system of rules and the learners were assumed to internalize such rules (Nunan 1999:9). The approach was contradictory to CLT because it focus on set rules of teaching and a set path which could never be breached or in other words simply the teaching of fundamental like grammar of a language while there is no emphasis on its application and usage in the language. As Richard contends that language ability cannot be restricted to just grammar and it involves more than merely memorizing grammar and the grammar and other features of a language should be applied properly and purposefully for different communicative purpose and therefore the focus of learning and teaching need to be directed towards the use of language and not just the knowledge of language (Richards 2007:9).

ENGLISH CURRICULUM AND TEACHING TECHNIQUES IN PAKISTAN

In third world countries like Pakistan, the teaching curriculum, especially English curriculum, has been the centre of criticism over the last couple of decades. The English curriculum is obsolete and outdated which has been in practice since colonial rule over the sub-continent. Before 2006 to the worse of students at government owned schools important subject like English was introduced at the secondary level or 6th grade and at this stage the students started learning the ABC of English. The revised 2006 English curriculum for the first time introduced English at 1st grade. The new revised English curriculum only focuses on outlining the policy but does not focus on the problems at the heart of the system. The organisation of the curriculum framework reveals that students of primary level have been divided into two categories of I-II and III-V with the aim to develop a solid base for the tender age students in order to develop them into autonomous learners and to develop skills and understanding to build a foundation for later studies. This policy guideline for the English curriculum also sets different benchmark for different groups of students. For instance the benchmark summarised in table 2.3 at page 11 for grade III-V reveals that the planner of the policy has concentrated more on the grammar. The government while introducing such syllabus overlooks the capabilities of the government schools to enforce such policy.

One can understand the level of competency the curriculum plans to achieve for the students for instance one of the competency objective for grade one student is to learn how a student will hold a book, open a book and turn pages of a book correctly (Revised Curriculum, section 3, page 22). The other competency objective for the same
group is tantamount to spoon feeding where a student is supposed to tell what comes before and after an alphabet (ibid, page 25). Furthermore on the page 26 of the curriculum the grade-I students are supposed to learn the poem by heart which will help them in developing reading and thinking skills (ibid, page 26). The big question mark is how a student is supposed to memorise something which is new for him without knowing or understanding the meaning and what is the main purpose of that exercise which a grade-I student is going to adopt and does it help towards the aim of developing a student reading and thinking skills. The writing skills of the curriculum (page 27) focuses on how a student will hold a pencil correctly, draw different lines, draw within the lines, trace and copy small and capital letters, write number from 1 to 10, write date, name, phone number etc. The ‘formal and lexical aspect of language’ again diverts the student from English towards local languages which defocus them from their main objective (page 33). These are some of the aspects of the revised English curriculum which reflects the insincerity and lack of dedication to introduce new English teaching techniques and a fresh syllabus based on modern knowledge. The curriculum is seen by most of the critics as a repetitive and ineffective guideline for the teachers and students which will hardly benefit any of the two. The teaching guideline is more inclined towards the traditionalist approach and there is no room for any reform towards adaptation of new techniques being practiced worldwide for teaching English. The curriculum does not work to amend the existing practice of teaching where the students are the biggest losers. The curriculum restricts to develop and promote the internal abilities of the student by binding them to follow, adopt and think within limited parameters without any concession to go out of those limits and this in turn leads to lost of confidence and self-learning capabilities.

I put the question regarding the new English curriculum to a former senior Professor of English, Mr. SafdarRana, (at Islamabad Model College for Boys, F-8/4, Islamabad, Pakistan) who is associated with teaching profession for over 30 years, he ridiculed the syllabus and said:

“the syllabus is the same obsolete which I started teaching at primary level in 1967, it is 100 percent the same. The same syllabus includes topic like write the story of ‘greedy dog’, ‘union is strength’, ‘write a letter to father thanking him for buying a pen’, essay of ‘Journey by Bus’ etc is going on and Ministry of education is happy that they are promoting education and in their mind this system is the best in the third world. But actually the current English teaching techniques and the curriculum are not student-friendly and their learning process has stopped as they do not use their abilities and skills but heavily dependent on rote memorisation.”

To another question regarding the improvement in English teaching standard, expressing his sorrow, he replied:

“how one can expect improvement in education when not a single government tried to change the system, the teachers are under-educated and ill-equipped to teach the students because they are adopting the old techniques of teaching and an obsolete
syllabus left by British before independence; these techniques and syllabus has been rejected by the rest of the world as counter-productive and inefficient but still this is in practice over here. Second how a teacher can teach a crowded class of 80 students, you cannot introduce new system in such circumstances. The government is heedless to the student-teacher problems and this sector has been completely ignored by all political and military government came to power.”

To a question that teacher are against new techniques like CLT, he opined:

“as far as I am concerned I will welcome any such change. But the government has never introduced any such scheme or system in the past and it will be wrong to say that teachers are against any such techniques. But it is an upheaval task as it needs long term massive investment in term of finance and human resources and serious and consistent efforts are needed on the part of current and any future governments to train, monitor and supervise up to half million teachers where 70 percent of government schools are located in rural and far flung areas of the country.”

As Hindal furthers the argument that the techniques of teaching and learning are fully relied upon the well-organised and effective memorisation of information and procedures, which is part of the text books or lecture notes, and its later recollection in exams (2007). This pattern of teaching and learning techniques is common at all levels of education (Hindal 2007). In this setup the student and teachers are very rarely rewarded for their comprehension and the rewards in exams are completely based on retention and memory (ibid). The main trend in such system is that how much a student is capable of memorising and recalling and the learning or success is not based on learning, understanding or using its capabilities. It is a common concept that those teachers in Pakistan have been successful in a system which rewards accurate recall because comprehension is not valued highly for learners at all level.

Reid in 1979 gave this idea that for a change of an approach, new information needs to interact with the long-term existing memory. Reid contends that there is no possibility of change in attitude if there is failure to establish mental relationship. Reid identifies specific kind of circumstances where there is higher probability of interaction and this will include learning situations which are active or in other words the student should be involved with the new material, feelings or experiences. This theory rightly suggests that the English text books and curriculum in Pakistan have failed to develop positive attitudes among learners and teachers towards English language.

In third world countries like Pakistan the teacher is deemed as the ‘fount of knowledge’ and not as a facilitator (Liu1998:5). Liu emphasise the needs and significance of a proper teaching methodology in accordance with the cultures of these countries instead of completely depending on the western researchers and approaches for their need as some western techniques are not going to work out for a poor country (Liu1998:4).
CONCLUSION

The education standard at primary level cannot be improved without complete overhaul and innovation of the existing teaching techniques and curriculum which merely promotes the traditionalist approach sans any hope of development. The traditionalist approach to teaching could be replaced with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which is the best alternative to the existing system of education, especially for teaching English as a second language. The introduction of new curriculum is not up to the standard to assist the pupils to engage their natural abilities and skills but it discourage them to be innovative, constructive and confident. The successful student in such system is that who blindly adopts and follows the current education system. The Ministry of Education (MoE) has been following a vicious circle of education policies and strategies for a very long time with this hope that this path will lead to success but by end of day the MoE comes to the same point from where they started in 1947.