

ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN PAKISTAN'S HIGHER EDUCATION

RESEARCH REPORT

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This Report was commissioned by the British Council and prepared by Carfax Educational Projects.

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past decade, the role of English language teaching and learning has risen in prominence throughout Pakistan, also as a result of the country's expanding higher education sector. This has led to the emergence of a context in which numerous public and private educational service providers are seeking to enter the sector, operating throughout the four provinces of the country. While this has facilitated improvements in access to higher education, the rapid growth within the sector has also created substantial skills gaps and a potential erosion of educational good practice, with significant variance in the quality of provision between, and even within, institutions in English language teaching and learning as well as proficiency levels.

In this context, the British Council has sought to provide a range of services and products to learners and educational providers, to support them in their efforts to improve EFL proficiency levels, thereby seeking to bridge the gap arising (at least in part) from the

varying teaching and learning approaches adopted by the myriad providers within the sector.

To further strengthen its support in this area, as well as more effectively engage other stakeholders in the Pakistani higher education domain, the British Council has commissioned research to evaluate English language proficiency and perception in Pakistan's Higher Education. The research was conceived with a very practical intent in mind, to help British Council and other relevant stakeholders identify opportunities that currently exist within the Pakistani EFL sector for improved provision of EFL programmes and courses, an improved approach, and more effective interventions at policy level.

The report draws on a large body of secondary research, but also on extensive language testing, surveys, and structured stakeholder interviews to offer answers to the four broad research questions set within the initial Terms of Reference:

1. Assess the English language proficiency levels of the current student body in the higher education sector using the British Council assessment test.
2. Identify and highlight the gaps between existing state of English language learning and teaching in comparison to the international and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan's standards.
3. Take into consideration the perceptions of key stakeholders around English language learning in Pakistan's Higher Education sector.

4. Recommend methods of learning and improving levels of English in the Higher Education institutes.

DEFINITION OF THE TERMS

Given the wide range of terms used to refer to English language learning, teaching, and proficiency levels of non-native speakers, it is important to clearly define the

usage of the terms within the remit of this research and its relevance to the Pakistan Higher Education context. The following are a list of terms commonly used:

Term	Meaning and Approach	Relevance
EFL	Stands for English as Foreign Language , and in general refers to English studied by non-native English language speakers, who mostly learn English within their own country.	● ● ● ● ●
ESL	Stands for English as Second Language , and is usually used interchangeably with EFL.	● ● ● ● ●
EIL	English as International Language – refers to English spoken or used between speakers of different cultural and national backgrounds, usually within non-English speaking countries.	● ● ● ● ●
ESOL	English for Speakers of Other Languages – refers to English for learners of other languages, but is usually offered in English speaking countries. This is usually referred for learners seeking proficiency for social and academic settings.	● ● ● ● ●
EAL	Stands for English as Additional Language . Unlike EFL it refers to non-native speakers learning English within English speaking countries, usually migrants.	● ● ● ● ●

Source: (Oxford University Press ELT, 2011) (ESL teacher EDU.org, 2016)

The research carried out in this instance has been largely focused on EFL learners undertaking courses and programmes to improve their English language in Pakistan (though many may have complemented such learning through short-term language courses undertaken abroad) and as such will focus on EFL as in the first two instances.

Furthermore, this research also heavily references the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) to assess and refer to a level of English level proficiency in Pakistan. The CEFR, is a framework developed by the

Council of Europe, and is used throughout the continent and increasingly overseas to provide a method for a common evaluation of language ability for all European languages. It is also commonly used for assessing an individual's language proficiency in any given language (Council of Europe, 2014).

The framework uses a number of indicators, across the core language speaker competencies to assess the speaker's level. On a global scale, the descriptors for each of the reference levels, according to the framework, is the following (Council of Europe, 1989):

Using this framework for assessment, the research found that most students in Pakistan possess B1 level of proficiency.

GLOBAL LEVEL	LEVEL CODE	HOURS REQUIRED	DESCRIPTOR
PROFICIENT USER	C2	1,000 – 1,200	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarise information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	700 - 800	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognise implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organisational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
INDEPENDENT USER	B2	500 - 600	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	350 - 400	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
BASIC USER	A2	180 - 200	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	0	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

The researchers have opted to use this framework, due to its wide acceptance and its merit as a tool

that allows for comparison in language proficiency across geographies and demographics.

AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

In an effort to understand the factors contributing to skills gap and challenges possessed in teaching and learning English within the country, this research assignment has explicitly focussed

on the following four research questions as determined by the British Council. The objective and approach in addressing these questions are:

1. **Highlight the English language proficiency levels of the current student body in the higher education sector using the British Council assessment test.**
Given the variance of different aggregated test, this research sought to triangulate the existing findings through administering an additional EFL proficiency test developed by the British Council called APTIS. This allowed the researcher to validate the results as well as obtain a range of other insights about the test-takers, their background and motivations.
2. **Identify and highlight the gaps between existing state of English language learning and teaching in comparison to the international and Higher Education Commission of Pakistan's standards.**
Official educational frameworks as well as teaching and learning vary significantly across provinces and regions. This report presents research findings pertinent to outlining of some of these differences, their causes, and international comparisons.
3. **Take into consideration the opinions and suggestions of key stakeholders around English language learning in Pakistan's Higher Education sector.**
Research included herein has undertaken a number of interviews with key stakeholders at universities, the public sector, and employers to gain a better understanding of the perception of key issues facing the EFL sector, their causes, and potential solutions. These have been included below to aid the British Council and other relevant stakeholders to drive forward policy to address such perceived challenges.
4. **Recommendations on methods of learning and improving levels of English in the Higher Education institutes.**
As the chief aim of the British Council through this project is to develop a range of relevant services and products to directly target universities, university students, and partner agencies, this research report has therefore attempted to provide evidence-driven recommendations on good practices.

METHODOLOGY

METHODS AND TOOLS

Given the aim of the research, this assignment adopted a mixed-methods strategy, comprising different instruments collecting a wide range of both qualitative and quantitative data, and seeking to acquire information from as many relevant stakeholder as possible (Denscombe, 2010). This mixed methodological strategy allows for substantial triangulation of findings, drawing on multiple instruments with insight into the research's four chief target outcomes (*ibid.*).

Desk Research

The consultants have undertaken desk research related to the HE context within Pakistan, its policy goals, challenges, and other related contextual needs. The desk research was undertaken with the aim of summarizing data that may exist pertinent to the research questions on this assignment and provide context and background to this report. Findings of the desk research phase have also been used to validate and provide context to primary research findings.

Assessment of English Level Proficiency

The assignment employed the British Council's English assessment test to evaluate the English proficiency levels among students. Overall, there were 1,161 test takers who completed the test from a number of universities distributed across Pakistan. Namely these were:



Abasyn University

- City: Lahore
- Type: Private
- # research participants: 171
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: 39.56



Information Technology University

- City: Lahore
- Type: Public
- # research participants: 335
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: N/A (only universities established after 2010 are ranked)



Institute of Business Management

- City: Karachi
- Type: Private
- # research participants: 69
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: 72.91



Sindh Madresatul Islam University

- City: Karachi
- Type: Public
- # research participants: 256
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: N/A (only universities established after 2010 are ranked)



University of Faisalabad

- City: Faisalabad
- Type: Private
- # research participants: 115
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: 52.69



University of Lahore

- City: Lahore
- Type: Private
- # research participants: 215
- Ranking points (out of 100) by HEC: 47.97

Source: (HEC, 2016)

Surveys, Interviews and Focus Groups

In conjunction with the language test, the research also involved the use of a survey gauging participants' perceptions, motivations, and self-assessment. This test was distributed to all test takers after the test, though was not compulsory. As such there were 795 answers to the survey. Since not all participants always answered all questions, the relevant sample sizes are always presented in the research below, wherever appropriate.

Furthermore, the researcher has also undertaken 23 structured interviews and 4 focus group discussions at Abasyn University, Bahria University, Information Technology University, and the University of Lahore, which were attended by 15 men and 16 women – students and faculty at these universities. Focus group discussions allowed the researcher to obtain a wider range of opinions and ask semi-structured

exploratory questions to understand some of the more nuanced drivers of varying EFL levels across Pakistan's higher education.

Lesson Observations

While the participatory methods and documentary review offered some insight into the objectives of the research, to validate self-evaluations and perceptions of teaching, the researcher has also undertaken a very limited number of lesson observations at Abasyn University, Information Technology University, and the University of Lahore.

These structured observations were undertaken according to criteria and frameworks for good practices in teaching derived from the inspection regimes of OFSTED, ISI, and COBIS, who operate in the UK and internationally.

This has also included a review of English curriculum, where available at a representative sample of public and private institutions.

DEMOGRAPHICS

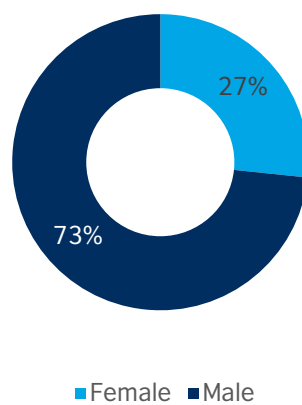
In order to achieve as comprehensive an overview of the Pakistani higher education sector as possible, the research involved but was not limited to the following stakeholders:

	Private/public university students;
	Private/public university teachers and administrators;
	Higher Education Commission representatives and other public authorities;

	Unemployed graduates;
	Local and international employers/professional institutions;
	International employers of Pakistani graduates overseas;
	Parents;
	Recent Alumni; and
	British Council representatives.

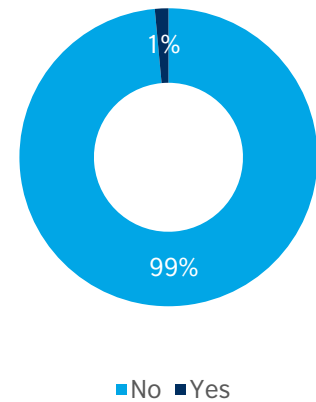
The following summarises the stakeholder demographics pertinent to this study. The vast majority of participants in the study were male students. This is in line with their over-representation in the general population of tertiary education students.

Figure 1 – Gender distribution within the sample (N=1,161)



The vast majority of survey participants were non-native speakers of English.

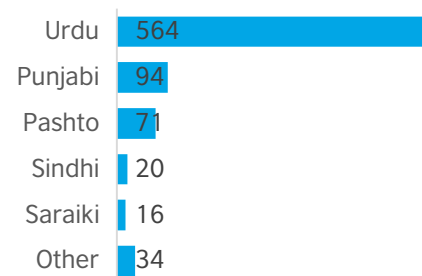
Figure 2 - Distribution of answers to the question: Is English your mother-tongue? (N=818)



This is particularly relevant in light of the aim of this study to deepen the understanding of the EFL levels in Pakistani higher education sector, which does not apply to native speakers.

The participants were relatively varied in terms of their mother tongue, though Urdu was much more represented than any other language:

Figure 3 - Number of participants by mother tongue. (N=799)



CONTEXT, GROUND, CURRENT LITERATURE

BACK- AND

PROJECT BACKGROUND

In the last decade the higher education sector in Pakistan has witnessed significant expansion, as illustrated by enrolment numbers growing from 276,274 in 2001-2002 to 1,298,600 in 2014-2015. (HEC, 2016). Currently there are 104 public sector and 75 private sector universities and Degree Awarding Institutions (DAIs) recognised by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) (HEC, 2016a) that operate throughout the country (HEC, 2016). The higher education system in Pakistan is overseen by the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, which is responsible for the coordination, facilitation, providing technical and financial assistance, as well as taking care of international obligations and commitments across all sectors of education (MFEPT, 2013)

Pakistan's Education System

Regulatory authorities

The Education system in Pakistan is largely dependent on and managed by its provincial governments, while the federal Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training (MOENT) sets broader goals, standards, and curriculum expectations at the federal level (Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan, 2009).

Higher education within Pakistan on the federal level is managed by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) which operates from within the MOENT (HEC, 2016). According to its own Ordinance, the HEC's tasks include, but are not limited to:

- formulating policies and strategies for the Higher Education (HE) sector;
- performing evaluation of institutions;
- regulating and approving establishment of new institutions;
- providing accreditation of institutions;
- advising Federal and Provincial Governments on granting of degree awarding powers; and
- regulating and advising on financial matters of existing institutions (HEC, 2002).

General education set-up

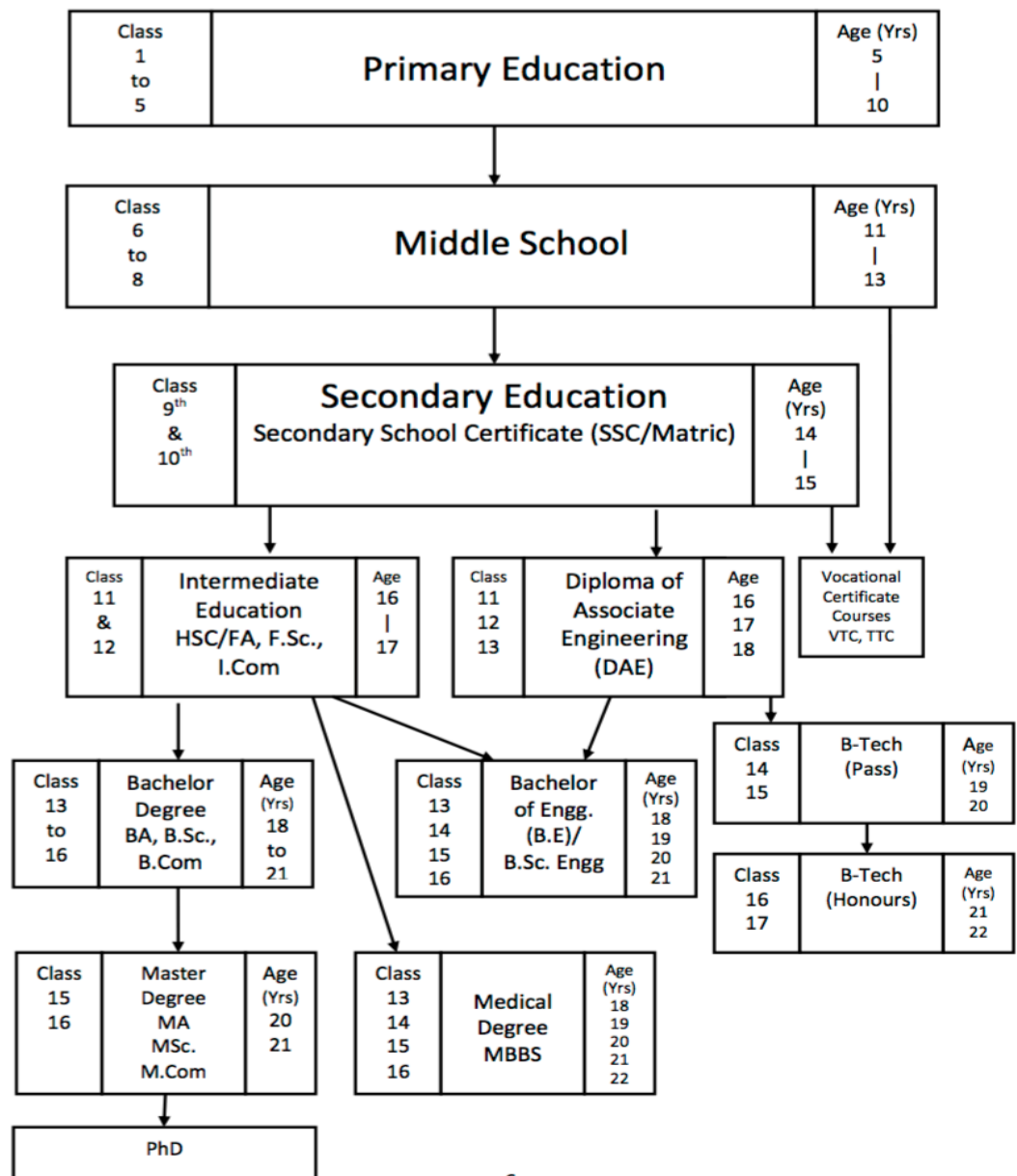
Pakistan's education system has drawn heavily from its colonial history (Classbase, 2015) in terms of its content and structure, and still faces many challenges regarding both access and quality.

The system is broadly divided into Primary Education (age 5-10), Middle School (age 11-13), Secondary School (age 14-15), Further Education (age 15+) and

Higher Education (age 18+) (UNESCO, 2009). The broad set-up

is further explained in the figure below:

Figure 4: Education Set-up in Pakistan



6

Source: (UNESCO, 2009)

The explicit focus of this report remains on Higher Education in line with the research questions set initially, though it is important to note, given that most students are first exposed to EFL within their formal schooling, that some of the implications and recommendations

detailed within this report will address lower levels of education as crucial to progression towards better language proficiency.

Role of the private sector in Pakistan's higher education

To better understand the drivers of varying English language proficiency, it is also important to outline the role of the private education sector, in addition to that of the basic lower education.

The grant of charter to private universities started in 1983, as a result of the state's inability to provide for the demand for higher education and its unwillingness, at the time, to enhance public spending. This allowed the formation of private universities which, although not operated by the government like the public ones, are subject to government regulations and may even be receiving some form of government support in the form of scholarships for students and student loans. Though there are some not-for-profit institutions, supported by philanthropic donations and endowment funds, the majority of the private universities in Pakistan are for-profit institutions (Halai, 2013).

Confidence in private universities is high within Pakistan; however, the quality of education provided within these institutions is highly varied, as shown by the data collected by the HEC in 2012 (Halai, 2013), and difficult to measure. There appears to be little consensus between different evaluators regarding the actual quality of teaching and learning at those universities. As concluded within the report on Pakistan's private education produced by the Institute of Social and Policy Sciences:

'Learning assessments provide more sophisticated evidence of

quality. However, different assessments lead to different directions. A research study commissioned by the World Bank shows that pupils in private schools are outperforming public schools, whereas the data of Punjab Examination Commission suggests that the difference is not too high. The existing documentation is too little to develop a national level picture about the quality of education in private schools. Another issue is that the threshold for performance of private schools remains very low with the performance of already failing public schools as the reference point for comparison.'

(I-SAPS, 2010)

General educational performance

In terms of the general performance of Pakistani's education system, the various indicators monitored by both the UN and the world bank show a fairly concerning, if slightly improving status quo.

The following charts summarise the overall performance of the education sector in Pakistan.

Figure 5: Youth Literacy Rate in Pakistan by Gender (%)

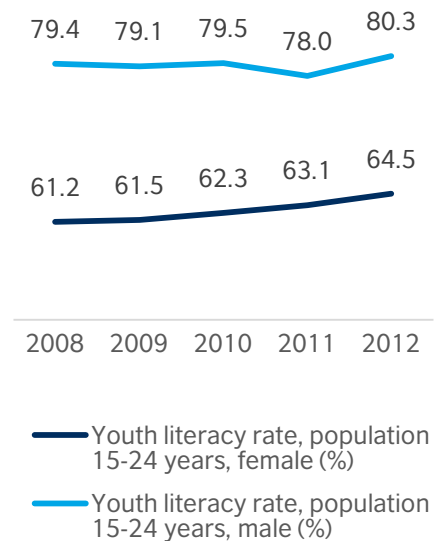
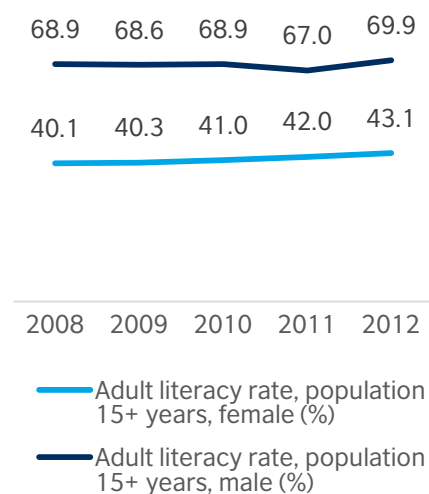


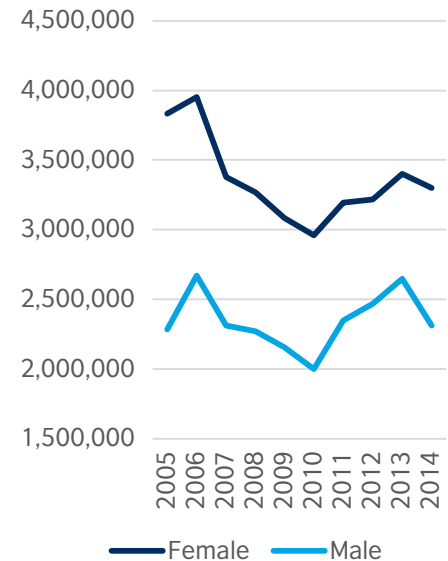
Figure 6: Adult Literacy Rate in Pakistan by Gender (%)



Source: (UNESCO, 2016)

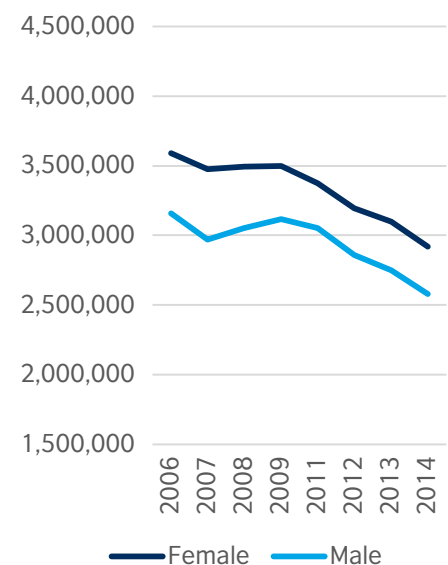
An examination of gender disaggregated data shows that improvements in literacy are especially strong among the female population of Pakistan, although a significant gap between the two genders still remains to be covered.

Figure 7 - Out-of-school children by gender



Source: (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014)

Figure 8 - Out-of-school adolescents by gender



Source: (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014)

According to UNICEF (2013), Pakistan has the highest proportion

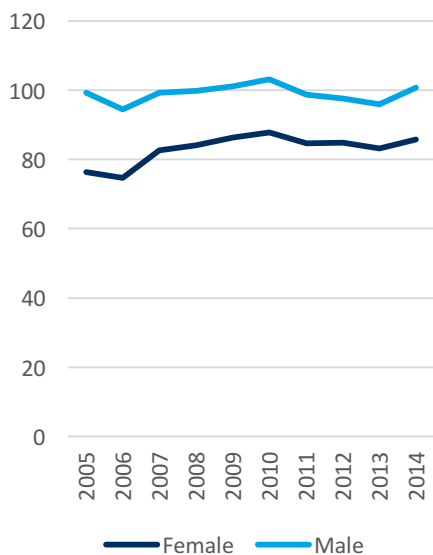
of out-of-school children in South Asia. Despite commitment from the Government of Pakistan to address this urgent need, millions of children are still not accessing formal education. A drop in the number of out of school pre-teen girls and adolescents can be observed in the last decade; however, the number of pre-teen boys not accessing education has not improved since 2005.

There are a number of causes for low enrolment and high drop-out rates according to the UNICEF study. The primary drivers were identified as follows:

'Out-of-School children often face deep-rooted inequalities and disparities due to gender, poverty and child labour as well as lack of school facilities and learning and teaching materials.'

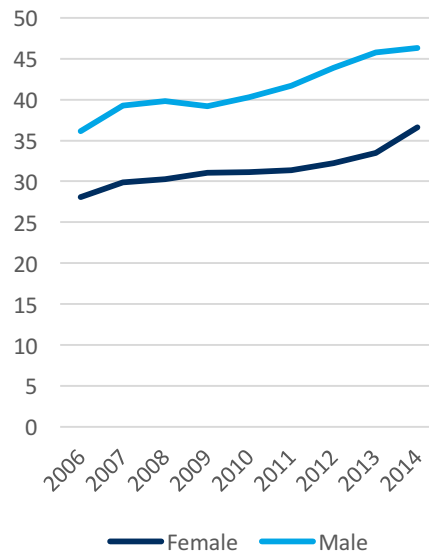
(UNICEF, 2013)

Figure 9 - Primary education gross enrolment ratio (%)



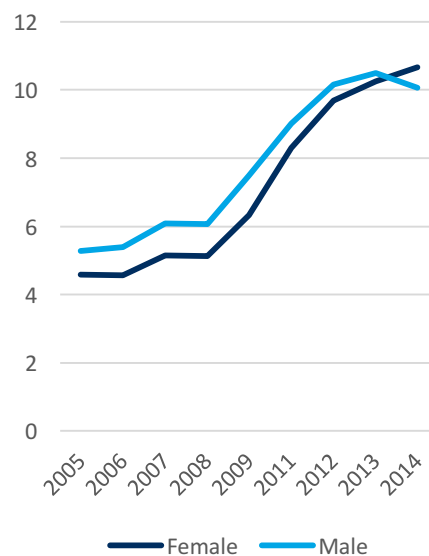
Source: (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014)

Figure 10 - Secondary education gross enrolment ratio (%)



Source: (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014)

Figure 11 - Tertiary education gross enrolment ratio (%)



Source: (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2014)

In terms of enrolment in formal schools, improving trends can be observed in each of the three

sectors. The enrolment rate of girls in primary education shows some improvement, compared to boys' situation, which, despite some variation over the years, has increased only minimally. Enrolment in secondary education has been slowly, though steadily, increasing for both boys and girls, by a rate of 10% and 8% respectively, from 2005 to 2014. While enrolment at the primary level appears to be approaching parity, secondary enrolment rates indicate that the gap in enrolment at that level may be growing.

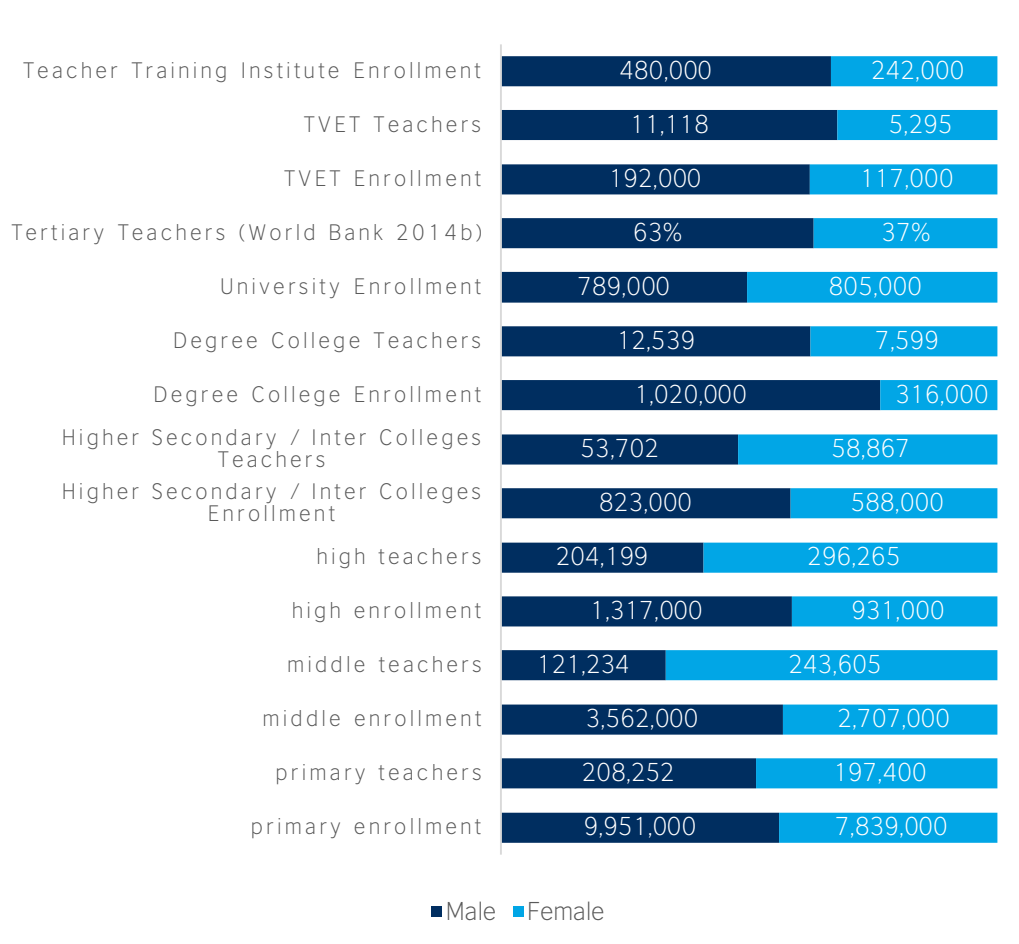
Mujtaba and Reiss (2015) have argued that this is due to growing income being unevenly spent on boys' rather than girls' secondary education by Pakistani families with newfound disposable income.

On the other hand, the proportion of females marginally increases

with each education level, and constitutes the majority in tertiary education. This may suggest that though the total enrolment for girls is lower, their survival rates into higher education is better if low overall.

The sharp discrepancy between enrolment numbers at the three levels confirms the low general survival rate. The main cause for this is the lack of resources needed for attending university in the case of the majority of Pakistan's population, as well as the sparsity of institutes of tertiary education within the country, which limits access to education to many local students. Despite the steady increase in the number of private and public universities in Pakistan, the demand has been consistently higher than the supply (Halai, 2013).

Figure 12 - Gender Enrolment Ratios



Source: (Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, 2014)

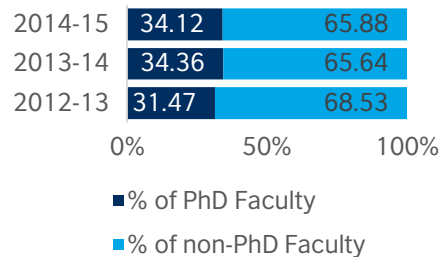
Figure 9 further illustrates this gender disparity at almost every level of education.

Furthermore, the recent improvement in access to higher education, resulting from the increased number of universities, has not been matched by a commensurate growth in quality. Many universities, which were opened in the last decade have not sufficiently addressed the lack of effective and qualified staff to help run these institutions (Halai, 2013).

According to QS, a British ranking agency, Pakistan has the world's weakest higher education system. With an overall score of 9.2 (out of 100), Pakistan has received the lowest ranking of the fifty countries included in the list, as compared to India, which ranked 24th (QS, 2016).

Furthermore, Pakistani universities also lack qualified researchers and staff with advanced postgraduate degrees. The following chart shows the proportion of university staff with a PhD:

Figure 13 - University Full Time PhD Faculty



Less than 35% of Pakistani universities' full time staff hold a PhD. This reflects on the overall quality of higher education in the country.

Use of English as an official language and medium of instruction in Pakistan

Pakistan's historical legacy as well as globalisation have also affected the country with regards to the establishment of English as the *lingua franca* in academia, business, and public life. Indeed, until 2015, English served as the official language of Pakistan, with majority of laws, business, and other aspects of public life, being undertaken primarily in that language.

In 2015, the Pakistani government has approved a reform to introduce Urdu as the official language of the country (Coleman, 2010) (Shamin, 2011) (Malik & al, 2015). Although several attempts to implement this change had been made in the past, it is only the recent Supreme court order in 2015, which has initiated the move to make Urdu both the national and official language of the country (Haider, 2015) (BBC, 2015).

Table 1: How Pakistan's language policy has evolved

Adopting Urdu as the national language has not been without its challenges, as:

- 48% of Pakistanis speak Punjabi, mainly in eastern Punjab province as their first language
- 12% speak Sindhi, mainly in south eastern Sindh province
- 10% speak Saraiki, a variant of Punjabi
- 8% speak Pashto, in west and north western Pakistan
- 8% speak Urdu
- 3% speak Balochi, mainly in Baluchistan
- there are numerous other languages spoken by minorities in the population, including Brahui, Burushaski and Hindko.

Source: (CIA, 2016)

In this context of languages competing for supremacy, many regard English as occupying a special position by virtue of its 'neutrality' (Zubeida, 2012). The use of English as the official language since independence, especially in the context of constitutional laws and amendments, or even development of new policies, has not only resulted in government organisations operating entirely in English (Shamin, 2011), but has also impacted on the education sector and social perceptions pertaining to the language. The table below highlights the complexities of the role of Urdu and English within Pakistan's education sector:

Despite the changes in the policies and political environment, little or no change has been implemented in substituting English with Urdu.

Year	Event	Policy	Implementation
Pre-1947	Colonial rule	Urdu as a medium of instruction for masses, and English a medium for the elite.	As per the policy
1947	Independence	Urdu declared as national language	Urdu as a medium of instruction for masses, and English a medium for the elite.
1959	Sharif Commission	Primary and secondary education in Urdu, higher education in English	No change
1973	New constitution	English to be replaced by Urdu within 15 years; each province free to develop their own language policies	No change
1977	Coup by Zia-ul-Haq	Islamisation and Urduisation	English taught from Year 4; schools begin to prepare for complete Urduization of exams by 1989; private English medium schools begin to grow
1989	New elected government	English to be taught from Year 1	Little effective change
1998	New education policy	No statement regarding language policy	Private English medium schools flourish
2007	White Paper	English to be taught from Year 1; mathematics and science to be taught through English from Year 6	Little effective change; in Punjab. Science taught through English from Year 10
2009	National Education Policy	Science and mathematics to be taught through English in Years 4 and 5; all science and mathematics to be	Punjab declares science to be taught through English starting in Year 4 from April 2009

English is not only seen as a prestigious and important language in Pakistan, but also as a tool of economic and social empowerment.

taught through English from 2014

2015 - 2016

Supreme court order

To replace English as official language to Urdu as per the constitutional clause in 1973

Work towards the change being implemented.

Source: (Coleman, 2010) (Tribune, 2015)

Importance of the English Language in Pakistan

With the increasing establishment of English as the lingua franca, most countries have come to link the language to development and progress (Shamin, 2011). Pakistan is no exception to this.

In Pakistan, the English language has come to be seen as a tool of development at both individual and national level, being viewed as the language of the ruling classes such as the government, the corporate sector, media and education (Rahman, 2003). This is evident from the table included above as well as from the language's persistent presence in business and other aspects of private as well as public life (Coleman, 2010).

English continues to be perceived as a prestigious language, given its historical association with the elite and pro-elite classes prior to Independence (Rahman, 2003). In a previous British Council commissioned research study examining the provisions for teaching and learning of English at individual and national levels in Pakistan, the researcher, Shamin (2011), describes this situation as follows:

'the language of power in comparison to Urdu, the national language... (whereupon) each government soon after it assumes power announces its policy of teaching English to the masses as a way of achieving democratic ideals of equality and opportunity'.

(Shamin, 2011).

The social connotations associated with English are thereby expanded to include economic and social empowerment (Coleman, 2010). These are indeed, at least in part, founded in fact. The salary gap in Pakistan between someone who speaks English and someone who does not is between 10 and 15 per cent (Euromonitor, 2010).

Though English is the most common language of instruction in the higher education sector, it is not without its challenges. Many have argued that it results in a fractured system that divides society and benefits the affluent. This is because the adoption of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) favours a small minority of the population that is brought up bilingual from infancy. This tends to be the case in more affluent, 'old elite' families, which negatively impacts social mobility. On the other hand, children, often from poorer backgrounds, who have been raised speaking one of the regional

languages thus face another barrier in applying to university.

To make matters worse, the quality of English teaching in public sector schools is seen as lower compared to the private sector (where English is often also the medium of instruction). Many state schools cannot afford hiring competent English teachers (due to higher salaries they command, or their unavailability in rural areas of Pakistan) and also more likely to have indigenous languages as the medium of instruction (Zubeida, 2012).

The implications of this language divide potentially reach beyond mere economic consequences into the realm of political representation, social mobility, and participation in the public life, as English has until very recently been the language of all public offices, laws, and largely Pakistani politics more generally (Zubeida, 2012), (Pillalamarri, 2015).

This prominent correlation between socio-economic background and English language proficiency has in itself contributed to the wide disparities between English language proficiency levels between universities and within them. This report further details some of the other factors that impact language proficiency, examines various stakeholders' perceptions of possible solutions and makes recommendations for addressing the issue.

EFL Performance in Pakistan

To begin the primary analysis, this report also further details the performance of Pakistanis in a range of EFL tests available at the time of writing.

The EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) report ranks Pakistan 45th out of the 70 countries included in the study and 10th out of 16 countries monitored in Asia (EF, 2016). Though the EF EPI's results are often not collected under strictly controlled test conditions, include self-reported results, and must be taken on a computer with internet connection, these limitations imply that the real English language proficiency level within the true population is potentially even lower.

Comparative results from more rigorous tests, such as the TOEFL and IELTS are also available. As can be seen in the tables below, Pakistan's performance on these tests is much improved.

The IELTS tests are divided primarily into two types: Academic IELTS test and General Training test, the former being intended for test-takers who are required to prove their English language ability typically for the purposes of pursuing higher education, and the latter, which is intended for the general public. The score is out of eight. Tables 2 to 5 present results of these tests relevant to this study.

Table 2 - IELTS Mean band score (Academic) 2015

	Average	Pakistan
Overall	6.1	6.1
Listening	6.3	6.2
Reading	6.2	5.9
Writing	5.7	5.9
Speaking	6.2	6.3

Table 3 - IELTS Mean band score (General Training) 2015

	Average	Pakistan
Overall	6.3	6.4
Listening	6.4	6.4
Reading	6.1	6.0
Writing	6.0	6.2
Speaking	6.5	6.6

Table 4 - IELTS Mean band score by test-taker's first language (Academic) 2015

	Urdu	Punjabi
Overall	6.1	5.6
Listening	6.3	5.8
Reading	5.9	5.4
Writing	5.9	5.3
Speaking	6.3	5.5

Table 5 - IELTS Mean band score by test-taker's first language (General Training) 2015

	Urdu	Punjabi
Overall	6.4	5.8
Listening	6.4	6.0
Reading	6.0	5.4
Writing	6.2	5.6
Speaking	6.6	5.8

Source: (IELTS, 2016)

It can be seen that the overall mean score for academic test-takers from Pakistan are at the same level as that of the total global population (IELTS publishes results for 40 countries in

the world); and slightly above average for the general training test.

In both cases it is the receptive skills (listening and reading) that are average or below average, whereas productive skills (writing and speaking) push Pakistani test-takers above the global mean.

Furthermore, we can see that test-takers, whose mother-tongue is Urdu score better on average than those who speak Punjabi (though these likely include many Punjabi speakers from other countries, as the data available does not allow for further filtering). There is no data on speakers of other languages common in Pakistan, such as Pashto, Sindhi, or Balochi, currently available from IELTS.

In terms of overall rankings, Pakistan's score 20th out of 40 countries whose results are published by IELTS in the academic test and 15th out of 40 in the general training test.

TOEFL tests present a similar narrative for Pakistan:

Table 6 - TOEFL iBT Total (score out of 120) and section (score out of 30) score Means 2015

	Score	Global Percentile
Overall	91	64
Listening	23	59
Reading	22	51
Writing	23	65
Speaking	24	80

Source: (ETS TOEFL, 2015)

Similarly to IELTS, the TOEFL test places test-takers of Pakistani origin above the global average, though

Low levels of English language proficiency amongst students entering universities often limits teachers in delivering lectures in English.

they fare significantly better in productive, as compared to receptive skills.

The fact that both IELTS and TOEFL results are rather consistent strengthens the validity of their findings. The slight discrepancy with the EF EPI results can be explained by the fact that whereas IELTS and TOEFL tests are mostly taken by people who are required to do so for the purposes of pursuing higher education (most often) abroad or employment opportunities, and thus include test-takers with inherent motivation to perform well, the relatively inconsequential nature of the EF EPI means it is more often taken by people interested in their own level of English, hence including a wider, more varied demographic, without similar motivation.

Evidence suggests that these lower levels of proficiency in English are often positively correlated with household income, and that at the primary and secondary school level, English-language learning difficulties are particularly prevalent amongst the socioeconomically disadvantaged population in Pakistan (Mansoor, 2003). Furthermore, as access to quality education is limited for these groups, they are disadvantaged in terms of improving their English skills. This is mainly due to a lack of exposure to suitable learning materials and qualified English-language teachers (Mansoor, 2003).

The table below outlines in detail the difference in English test results between students at public and private institutions:

Scores	Public %	Private %
<33	32.4	14.9

33-40	10.0	6.6
40-50	22.0	18.3
50-60	18.6	19.2
60-70	11.9	18.7
70-80	4.7	17.1
80 & above	0.4	5.2
Mean Score	43.0	54.5

Source: (Mansoor, 2003)

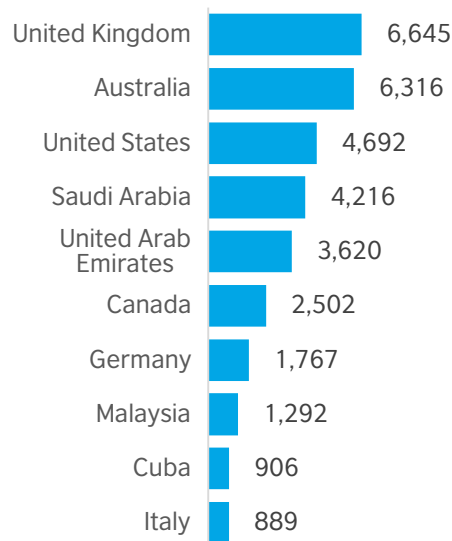
Further, the research suggests that these low levels of English language proficiency amongst students entering universities has in many cases forced professors to completely abandon EMI and deliver lessons in native or regional languages, such as Urdu. This has been primarily undertaken to limit the amount of time students spend translating their textbooks from English into Urdu (de Lotbinière, 2010).

Study Abroad

Though both students and employers interviewed in the course of this research assigned high value to a student's international experience through international academic or professional placements and programmes (particularly in relation to improving such a student's employability), such students remain relatively rare in the labour market.

According to UN data there were approximately 40,000 higher education students in the whole of Pakistan, who participated in international student mobility programmes or studied at foreign universities. The top ten destinations for Pakistani students are listed below:

Figure 14 – Top ten destinations for Pakistani students participating in international student mobility programmes in 2013 (total number of Pakistani students per country)



Source: (UN UIS, 2016)

Though the top three destinations are all Anglophone, the demand for EFL courses abroad from Pakistani students is relatively low. English UK, the UK's ELT industry association, which groups most English language centres in the UK (more than 470 are currently members), and cooperates closely with the British Council has reported very low demand from Pakistani students for EFL courses.

In 2014, Pakistani students were responsible for 653 student weeks, which dropped by more than 80 percent to mere 362 weeks in 2015. These weeks represented 112 students in 2014, which dropped by over 60 percent to 70 students in 2015. Relatively speaking, student weeks purchased by Pakistani students represent a mere 0.02 percent of the total student weeks sold by all English UK registered centres in the UK. The average length of stay of Pakistani students

was 5.2 weeks in 2015. (English UK, 2016).

The low and decreasing demand for EFL study by Pakistani students outside of Pakistan is likely driven by a range of factors, such as high cost of such courses, distance of United Kingdom from Pakistan, or emerging stricter immigration policy.

There is, however, a significant number of scholarships offered to Pakistani students by Universities, Foreign Governments, and International Organizations. Many of them are international scholarships available for the students who want to pursue their education in foreign schools, colleges, institutes and universities. They are offered on the basis of academic excellence and are provided by both Pakistani institutions and countries such as USA, UK, Australia, Canada, China, and Germany (ResearchPedia.Info, 2014). The HEC is another major provider of scholarships. So far, it has sent 7,806 Pakistani students under its Overseas Scholarships Program and, during the 2009 to 2014 period, it has awarded 2,528 foreign study scholarships, executed by universities and DAIs (Khattak, 2016).

Most of these scholarships are focussed on research and development, funding Graduate, Master's and PhD programmes. There appear to be no EFL scholarships available for students at either higher education or primary and secondary education levels.

English language teaching reform

Furthermore, according to existing literature, one of the leading causes of lower English language

proficiency among students is the low level of English language proficiency amongst their university teachers. A project established in 2004 by the Pakistani government and the HEC, with the aim of building capacity in higher education English

language departments and training English language at university, introduced the following interventions to improve teachers' education and professional development:

Activities	Offerings	Target	Actual
Indigenous Scholarships / Degree Programmes	MS in Applied Linguistics and related disciplines Masters in Applied Linguistics, TEFL, TESL, ELT PGD, ADP in TEFL, TESL, ELT	150	64
Continuous Professional Development (CPD)	CPD Fellowships (up to 4 weeks) CPD Courses (up to 1 week)	240 1010	186 727
Conferences / Seminars	Funding for international conferences on the theme of ELT and related issues	10	8
Funding for Research Journals	Funding to start a new English Research Journal	5	2
Funding of Research Projects	Provide ELT scholars with research grants for small scale research projects	5	5
International Resource Persons' (IRP) Trainings	To hold/organize IRP trainings to provide international level exposure to English faculty	12	10
Self-Access Centre	Establish an SAC in four public sector universities to facilitate integration of ICT in the teaching and learning process	4	4

Source: (HEC, 2013)

A key aspect of the ELTR project was to emphasize the difference between literature and language. The teaching of English at university level is often delivered by instructors holding qualifications in English literature, and not in the teaching of the English language, a result of English literature being the only relevant degree offered by Pakistani universities for many years (Pathan, 2012). Furthermore, in examining PhD dissertations submitted by

Doctorate students to Pakistani universities, which are subject to a vetting process conducted by an international examiner, findings show that the quality of English in the vast majority of these submissions was poor (Robinson, 2013). With a less than desirable grasp of English themselves, the limited capacity of educators to improve their students' English language abilities results in a self-perpetuating cycle, detrimental to the stated goals of the HEC.

With regards to the ELTR project, authorities also prioritized access in terms of how many English language training courses were delivered to university teachers at the expense of evaluating results and collecting secondary phase data which would highlight the impact, if any, that these courses have had on how English is being taught and learned at universities. Within university faculties, the failure of many teachers to proactively seek to improve their language teaching skills has been detrimental to continually improving results; the teachers, contented in their job and without a financial incentive, are not sufficiently motivated to undertake professional development training courses (HEC, 2008).

In terms of teaching style and assessment methodology in Higher Education, the prominence of literature in English-language learning, due in part to the prominence of university professors trained only in English literature, is also a legacy of British authority (Pathan, 2012). Many of the teaching and learning materials are remnants of the country's colonial past, and are not appropriate for a contemporary Pakistani context, nor well-matched with the learning requirements stipulated by the HEC.

Proficiency in any language is measured according to the four basic skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking. To achieve mastery of a language, one must have the ability to utilize all four of these skills (Sarwar, et al., 2014). However, at the expense of oral communication skill development, the assessment-driven nature of learning in Pakistani universities emphasizes the development of only

one of the four skills: writing (Alam & Uddin, 2013), which is consistent with the results presented by IELTS and TOEFL examination boards.

Furthermore, the examination-heavy focus of the education system is largely borne simultaneously from many students, teachers, and schools seeking renown, as strong test results go hand-in-hand with prestige (Khattak, 2012). Assessments, rather than teaching, are significantly more influential in terms of how they impact a students' learning behaviour, as most students will seek to learn only that which they will be tested on (Gibbs & Simpson, 2004). As such, students' language abilities are measured not according to their performance in the language, but rather by their knowledge of it (Khan, 2011).

Other researchers suggest that English is taught in Pakistan with the aim of preparing students for examinations, especially those which may aid in providing better higher education and employment opportunities, and the motivation for learning English is only for educational purposes rather than for regular use (Coleman, 2010). This has resulted in the teaching and learning of English in a ritualistic manner, involving mere reproduction of a set texts by memorisation and rote learning, thereby neglecting the core skills of any language, which are listening, speaking, reading and writing (Coleman, 2010) (CEFR, 2001). Research by Sawar, et al., (2014) further indicates that this assessment or examination driven nature of learning in Pakistani universities emphasizes the development of only one of the four skills: writing (Alam & Uddin, 2013).

In an attempt to fill the knowledge gap mentioned above in relation to ELTR outcomes of English language teacher training, and to identify whether the lack of an oral module in the syllabus impacts English speaking development, third party

researchers sampled prospective teachers undertaking a one-year teacher training programme at three public sector universities in Punjab: University of Sargodha, Government College University Faisalabad, and University of the Punjab Lahore.

Variable	Level	N	Mean Score
Speaking Skills	Entry	131	15.10
	Graduation	75	14.63
Dialogue	Entry	131	8.15
	Graduation	75	7.54
Monologue	Entry	131	6.95
	Graduation	75	7.09

Source: (Sarwar, et al., 2014)

Their findings show that at the end of the one-year course, there was no significant change in the English speaking skills of participants at entry and upon graduation, largely due to the fact that an oral component was neglected from the

course design, but also due in part to the trainers - sharing the same local language as the students - reverting to delivering instructions in Urdu, to accommodate both the students' as well as their own English-language deficiencies (Sarwar, et al., 2014).

FINDINGS DISCUSSION

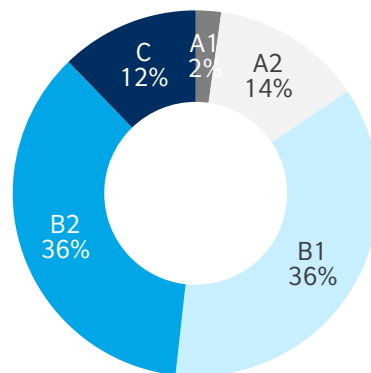
AND

CURRENT LEVELS OF PROFICIENCY AMONG EDUCATION STUDENTS

Overall results of the Aptis test

The Aptis test has been undertaken by 1,161 students under controlled conditions within the Universities listed in the methodology section. The results were as follows:

Figure 15 - Results of the Aptis test taken at Pakistani universities (N=1,161)

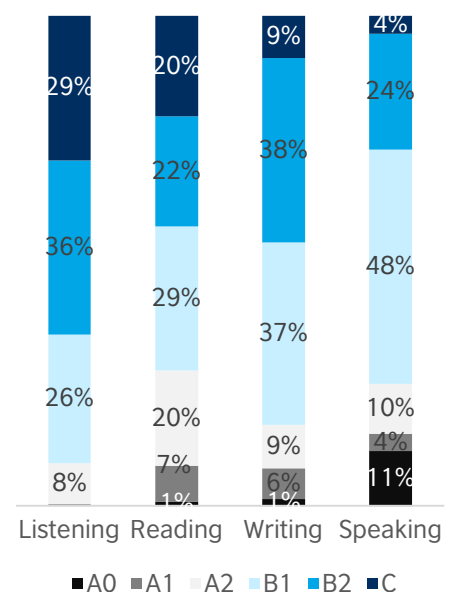


It can be seen from the chart that true beginners are truly rare among Pakistani higher education students, with A1 and A2 levels accounting for a mere 14 percent of the total scores. B-levels, that is intermediate language proficiency, account for 72 percent of total students tested. C-level English language proficiency is achieved only by 12 percent of the tested student population.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PAKISTAN'S HIGHER

The figure below presents a further breakdown of results in terms of individual communicative skills.

Figure 16 - Language levels per communicative skill on the Aptis test (N=1,161)



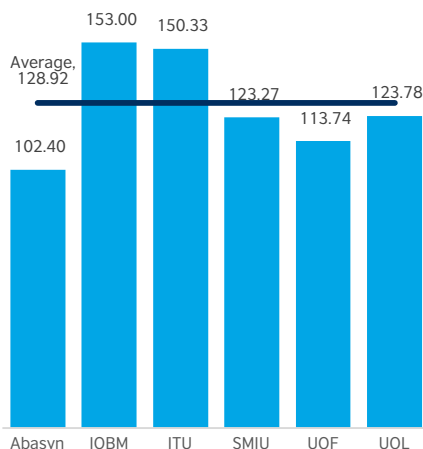
Unlike the results presented by IELTS and TOEFL, speaking is certainly the weakest of the four skills tested. A total of 73 percent of test-takers scored a level of B1 or lower and full 11 percent had no ability (A0 level). Listening on the other hand was the strongest of the four skills observed. There were no test-takers with A0 and only 4 people with A1 level proficiency. 8 percent of test-takers

scored within the A2 range and a full 91 percent scored B1 or above. It is also important to note that a whole 29 percent of test-takers were able to demonstrate EFL proficiency at C level.

Though it is not effectively possible to further break down the C-level into C1 and C2 proficiency – a key limitation of the Aptis test stemming from its original purpose as a diagnostic tool for non-proficient students – there were a total of 342 students who scored in the C band, 27 of whom scored above 48 points out of 50 possible total (~8 percent).

A breakdown by university offers another level of insight to the researcher:

Figure 17 – Mean overall scores on the Aptis test (out of 200 maximum) by university (N=1,161)

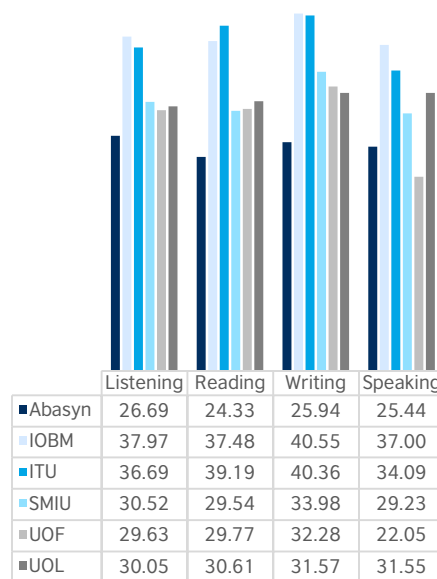


There are a number of interesting implications of the final results. There is a significant difference between the low and high achieving universities in the sample. Indeed, the two universities that scored the highest on the Aptis test overall, and who are responsible for a relatively high overall average, i.e. ITU (public)

and IOBM (private), scored approximately 29 and 27 points above the next highest scorer, UOL. This represents an overall score that is 13-15 percent higher than the next in line. Their score is also circa 50 points (or 25 percent) above the lowest scorer in the sample, Abasyn University.

Breaking the results further by communicative skills, the following results emerge:

Figure 18 – Mean scores by communicative skill and university (out of 50 maximum) (N=1,161)



The results of individual universities by communicative skill are also highly differentiated, with the two leaders scoring significantly higher on each skill than any of the other universities in the sample. The highest score can be observed for IOBM in writing, where the university mean is above 40 points, which qualified all test-takers as B2 or C level in writing. The lowest score is that of UOF in speaking, with an average of 22 points. Speaking is

also the skill with highest variance of results, as the highest score within that skill is almost 15 points (that is 30 percent of total, achieved by IOBM) higher than the lowest.

The universities selected for the study represent a varied sample in terms of quality of education, especially with regards to the ranking scores awarded by the Higher Education Commission. There appears to be a relatively strong correlation between the scores achieved for overall quality of education and attainment within the Aptis test. This is evidenced by the table below:

University	HEC rank within sample	Aptis rank
IOBM	1	1
UOF	2	5
UOL	3	3
Abasyn	4	6
ITU	N/A	2
SMIU	N/A	4

Source: (HEC, 2016)

Though the sample of results is rather substantive in terms of individual test-takers, the limited selection of universities does not allow for meaningful comparison between the private and the public sector at university level.

At school level, it is possible to observe a difference between mean scores of test-takers, though this is not statistically significant. Those students that attended a public secondary school had an average score on the Aptis test of 128.27 compared to 132.75 of test-takers with private secondary education.

In fact, in a multiple regression model that included age, gender, private/public university, completed years of studies, English compulsory at university, hours of compulsory English, participation in extra-curricular activities, private/public secondary school, father's and mother's level of education, and the number of siblings as independent variables, the only two variables that have yielded statistically significant results were gender and mother's education.

Though the sample has its limitations in terms of representativeness, the implications of such a finding are profound. It appears indeed that within the context of Pakistani higher education, years of education, type of university, or other important factors, one may expect to play a role such as participation in extracurricular activities, English as a medium of instruction, or hours spent in class studying English, appear to have little to no impact.

There are a number of plausible explanations, which could be determined through further research. Given that language and family background, as is further explored below, do play a role in students' English attainment, the best predictive factor for any one student's English language proficiency is their socio-economic background.

Indeed, this has been confirmed through perceptions shared by a number of respondents interviewed for this study:

'The quality of intake of students from high schools. The intake is going to be from areas that are quite diverse. Some students

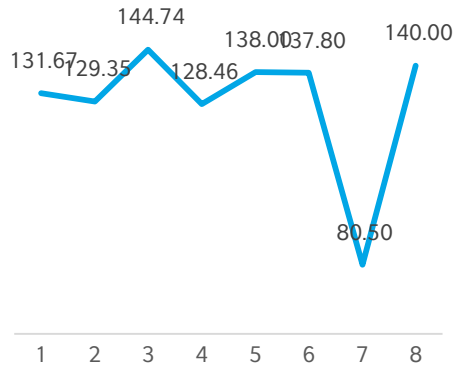
Socio-economic background and a family education level best help predict a student's English language proficiency.

come from humble backgrounds so students may not use English in daily live. If you see a person coming from uptown address into an interview, the chances are that you will see them being able to communicate and understand well.'

Employer of graduate students

Furthermore, the statistical insignificance of some of these variables is further concerning, particularly in the sense of effectiveness of higher education in Pakistan. Again, the sample of universities is admittedly rather limited, though the large number of students that had undertaken the Aptis test give credence to the result. Typically, one would expect that the English level attainment of students with higher levels of completed education to be above those with lower levels. This would serve as evidence of the effectiveness of teaching and learning within such an institution. The results collected during this study indicate no such trend. Not only are they statistically insignificant; the trends that they present are not indicative of a positive correlation between years of education completed and EFL attainment, even when the results are controlled for each university individually. The figure below presents the results overall:

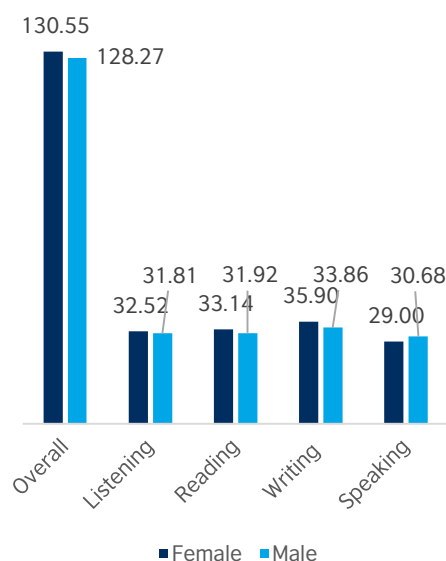
Figure 19 - Average Aptis attainment by years of completed university education (N=665)



Though further research must be undertaken to confirm this hypothesis, such results indicate that universities in Pakistan fail to systematically improve English language proficiency of their students.

Observing the statistically significant factors, gender seems to affect EFL attainment as measured by the Aptis test:

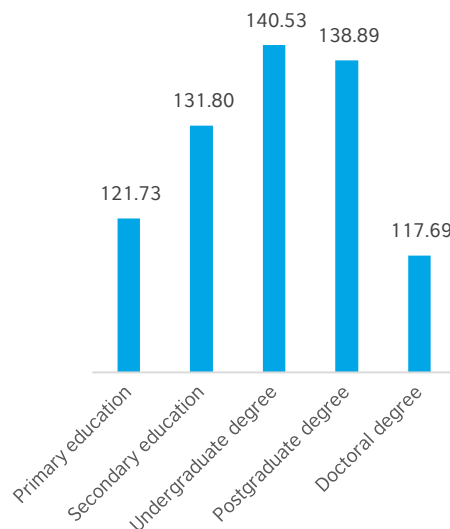
Figure 20 – Comparison of attainment on the Aptis test by gender (N=1,161)



'Though further research must be undertaken to confirm this hypothesis, such results indicate that universities in Pakistan fail to systematically improve English language proficiency of their students.'

Though much less represented within the sample, and within Pakistan's higher education sector in general, Pakistani women outperform men in English language proficiency. The differences are not large, but they are statistically significant. The largest difference can be observed for writing. Speaking on the other hand is a skill where men outperform women.

Figure 21 - Mean Aptis score for test-takers grouped by mother's highest completed education



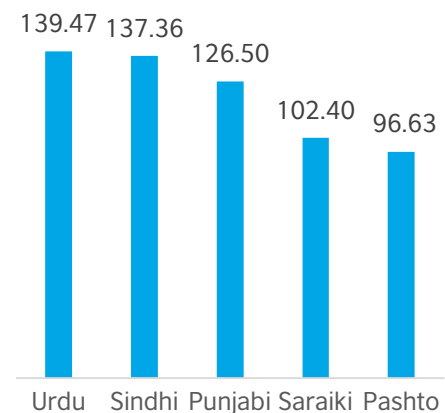
This is an interesting finding, because while test results for students do increase with father's level of highest achieved education in a similar pattern, the increases are much smaller and not statistically significant. It appears that the education of the mother is more crucial in providing the necessary motivation and support within each student's home to attain higher in English. The drop in attainment for mothers with doctoral degrees is likely due to a much lower sample size for that part of the population. In the whole sample of 616 students who provided information about

their mothers' educational attainment, mere 13 listed that their mothers had doctoral degrees.

There was a range of other statistical data gathered through the survey that present interesting findings but were not included in the regression model.

For example, native speakers of Urdu, Sindhi, and Punjabi attained higher scores on average than those of Saraiki and Pashto:

Figure 22 – Mean Aptis test scores by mother tongue for the 5 most commonly spoken languages in the sample (N=672)

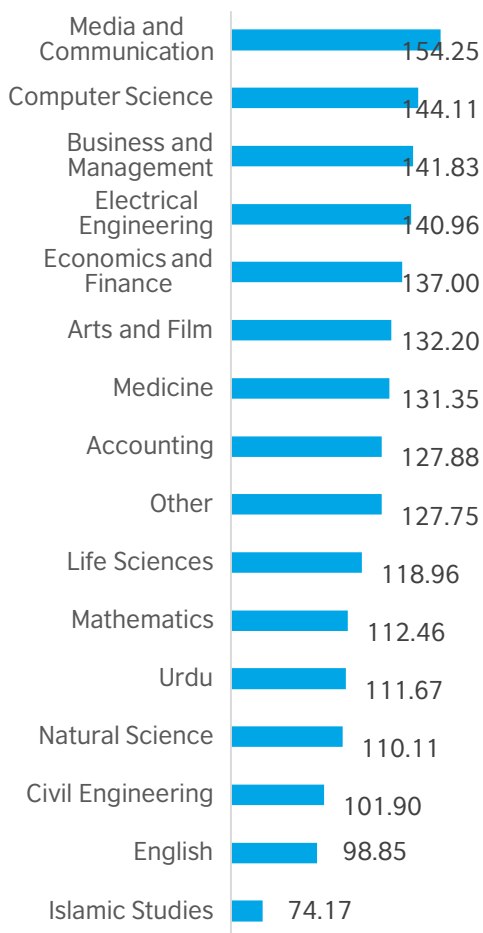


It is important to note, however, that this is likely not related to any linguistic advantages that these native tongues may afford their speakers, but is rather more likely indicative of the test-taker's region of origin and socio-economic background. Pashto is spoken primarily in the poorer Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) region, and Saraiki, a dialect of Punjabi, is also spoken primarily in KPK and South Punjab, another poorer region of Pakistan (Cheema, et al., 2008).

Other demographic information gathered about the students, which

is potentially of interest here, relates to their primary domains of study.

Figure 23 – Average Aptis attainment by major subject of study (N=703)



Perhaps the most surprising result in the chart above relates to the attainment of English students on the Aptis test. Though the sample size in their case is only 13, all students who participated in the test and indicated English as their major scored well below the overall average. Given the suspected ineffectiveness of EFL teaching at Pakistani universities mentioned above, this could be further evidence of the lower effectiveness of English language teachers.

PERCEPTION OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND PROVISION IN PAKISTANI HE SECTOR

The research undertaken has also asked the test-takers a number of questions pertaining to their own language proficiency and that of their peers. The results presented below detail the findings of this study pertaining to that perception.

Figure 24 – Perceived English proficiency v actual Aptis performance on receptive communication skills

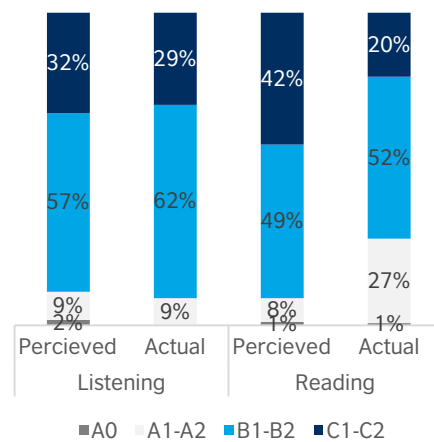
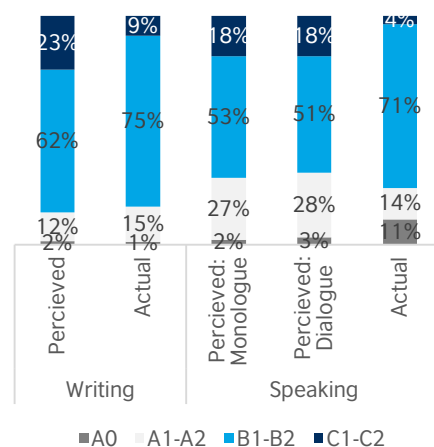


Figure 25 - Perceived English proficiency v actual Aptis performance on productive communication skills



The two charts included above show the differences in perception of own skill and results actually achieved in the Aptis test. It shows that test-takers tend to have a higher perception of their own skills than what they are in reality (except in speaking). This is particularly true for reading, where 42 percent of test-takers perceived their abilities to be at C-level, whereas only 20 percent were actually able to demonstrate such reading proficiency in the test.

Speaking is somewhat different. There is a significant number of overly confident speakers, who have overestimated their abilities by more than 400 percent (where 18 percent claimed a C-level speaking ability, compared to only 4 percent who actually demonstrated it); though there are a number of EFL speakers at the other end of the spectrum as well. While 27-28 percent thought their speaking ability was merely at an A-level of proficiency, there were actually only 14 percent of speakers at that level in the test. The percentage of speakers with no ability, however, is four to six times higher in reality than what had been perceived.

Differences in perception become even more pronounced when comparing perception of own ability with that of peers. This is again particularly prominent in reading:

Figure 26 - Comparison of English language proficiency perception of own

ability compared to that of others on receptive skills

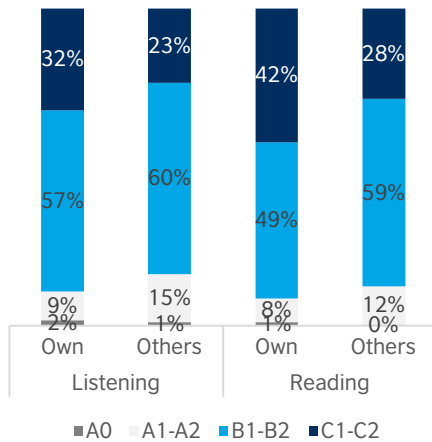
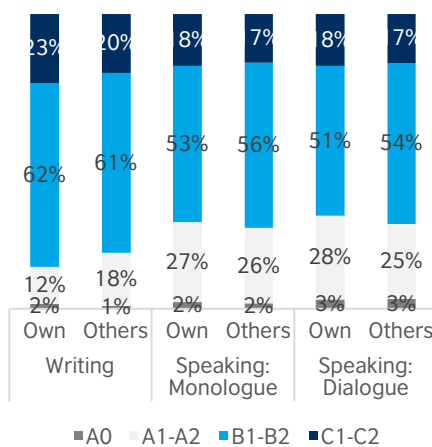


Figure 27 - Comparison of English language proficiency perception of own ability compared to that of others on productive skills

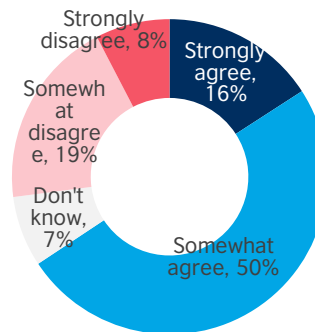


Besides perception of English language performance, the data gathered offer a number of additional insights regarding the state of EFL at Pakistani universities.

Even though Pakistani students' perception of English level proficiency relatively accurately reflects the challenges of reality, their perceptions relating to the importance and potential causes of lower levels of EFL proficiency

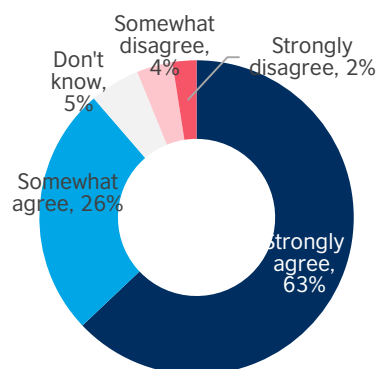
remain quite positive. The charts below outline the situation.

Figure 28 – Distribution of responses to statement: 'To what extent do you agree with the following statement: Current higher education students in Pakistan can express themselves clearly and fluently in English language?' (N=813)



Overall, Pakistani students have confidence in the ability of the student body in the country to express themselves clearly and fluently in English, with over 66 percent of people somewhat or strongly agreeing with the statement.

Figure 29 – Distribution of responses to statement: 'English language proficiency plays an important role in a student's ability to secure and maintain entry-level employment.' (N=812).



English language is seen as extremely important for securing and maintaining employment within the Pakistani labour market. Over 63 percent of respondents said that they would strongly agree with such a statement and additional 26 percent agrees at least to an extent.

In reality, the situation is more complex. Secondary sources and primary research carried out for this study show the positive relationship between English and income, as well as between English and career progression, and highlight a number of areas of employment within which English is already crucial in the selection process (Erling, 2014), (Coleman, 2011), (Arcand & Grin, 2013), (Grin, 2001).

It is far from a universal requirement, however. English tends to significantly improve employment opportunities for those applying for managerial positions, front-of-house, and client-facing positions. Those interviewed for this study have supported this with their own statements:

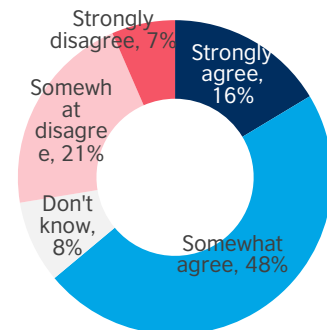
'Need of English for employment depends largely on the role; for technical role it is not quite as important.'

Employer of graduate students

With regards to the importance assigned to English in HE students' perception, it is perhaps surprising to see other aspects of EFL proficiency perceived in such a positive manner: When asked about the quality of teaching English at Pakistani universities, over 64 percent of Pakistanis agree or strongly agree with the statement that it is good. There are 28 percent overall who disagree with that

statement, but they remain a significant minority.

Figure 30 – Distribution of responses to statement: 'Quality of teaching English language at Pakistani universities is good.' (N=812)



Similarly positively do Pakistani students evaluate the qualification and effectiveness of EFL teachers. 75 percent of Pakistani students think that teachers are well-qualified and 68 percent think they are effective in their course delivery:

Figure 31 - Distribution of responses to statement: 'English teachers at Pakistani universities are well-qualified.' (N=807)

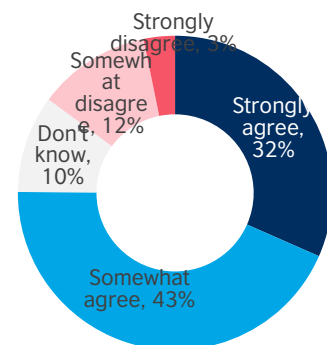
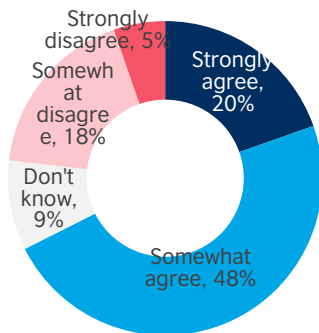


Figure 32 - Distribution of responses to statement: 'English teachers at Pakistani

universities are effective in teaching students English.' (N=811)

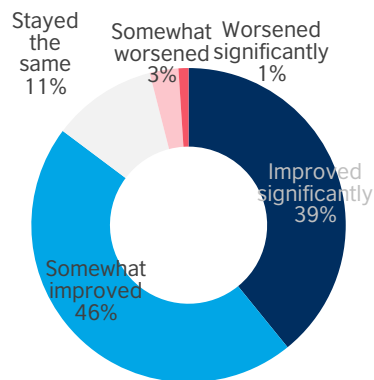


Given data discussed previously, there is evidence to suggest that the approach to teaching English within Pakistan's HE sector lacks systematicity and real impact over time. Students' positive perception of teachers' effectiveness thus poses a challenge for any EFL provider and/or policy maker, in the sense of raising awareness of teaching good practices, focus on real impact (as measured by objective evidence), and recognition of effective methods

for improving English language proficiency.

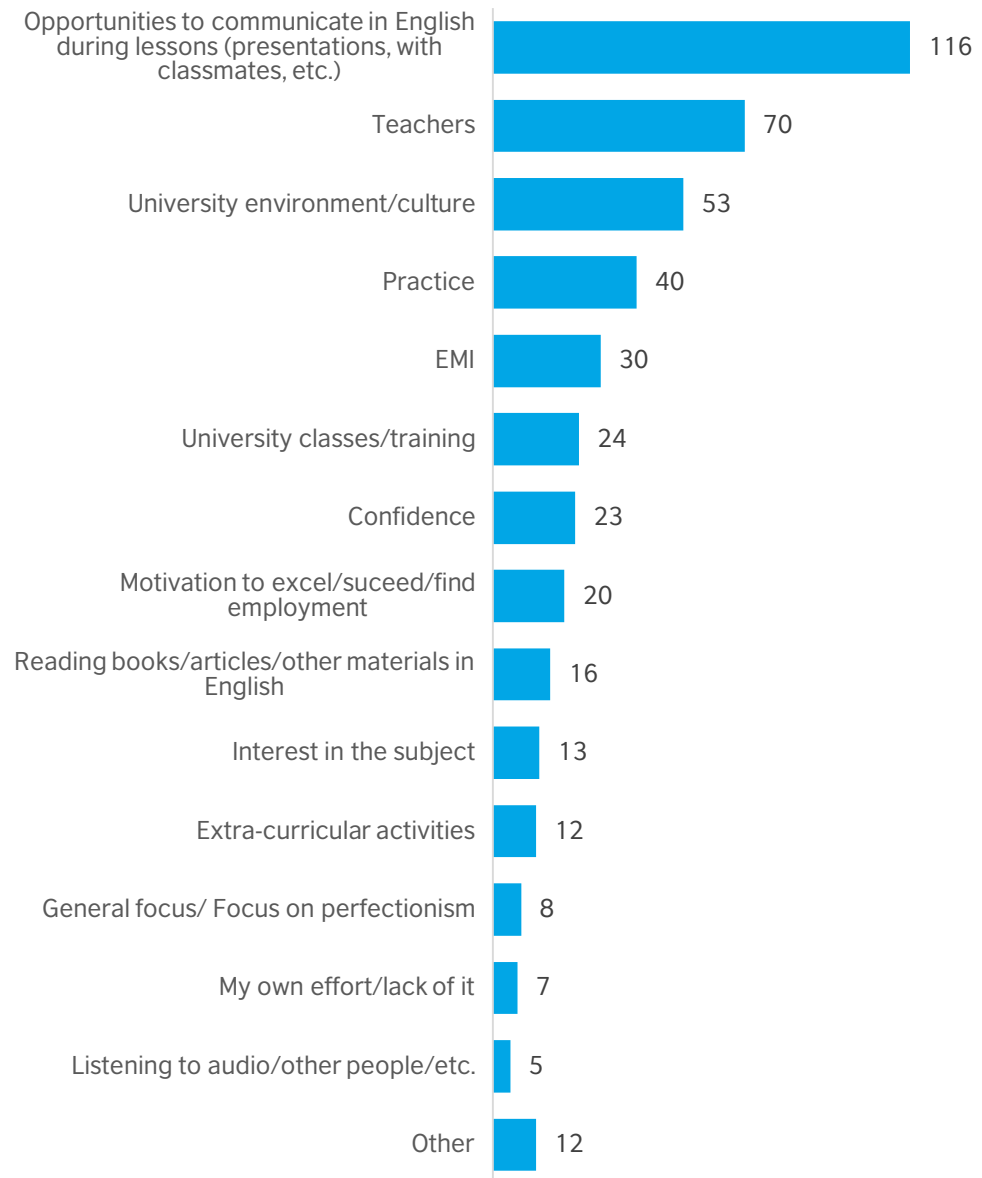
The vast majority of students also felt that their time spent at university was rather useful, at least in the sense that their English language proficiency has improved over time.

Figure 33 - Distribution of responses to the statement: 'If you are a university student, since the time you joined university, do you feel that your English language proficiency has:' (N=779)



The reasons given for the change (or lack thereof) have been grouped into the following categories:

Figure 34 - Histogram of reasons given for improvement/deterioration of respondents' English language skills while at university (N=449)



The most quoted reason for improvement related to opportunities for practicing active communication in English through a wide range of means, such as presentations, discussions and debates, and also when meeting international classmates.

The second most prominent reason related to teachers. This applied on

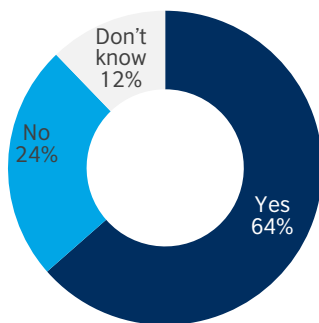
both ends of the spectrum: good teachers were singled out as the primary drivers behind many a student's progress, and poor, ineffective teachers were mentioned in relation to insufficient progress or outright deterioration. This point again reinforces the crucial importance of teachers to any policy

or intervention within Pakistan's EFL sector.

Last but not least the respondents also considered the impact of marking on the quality of Pakistani's higher education.

Marking has been generally regarded as 'transparent, fair, and equitable':

Figure 35 - Distribution of responses to the question: 'Do you consider that marking and grading of assignments is transparent, fair, and equitable?' (N=754)



Among those that answered 'no' to

the question above, the most commonly mentioned challenges of the marking system in Pakistan related to plagiarism and favouritism on the part of teachers. They suggested that more thorough checks for plagiarised materials should be carried out on a regular basis and that assignments should be marked anonymously as much as possible to avoid unfair marking on the part of the teachers.

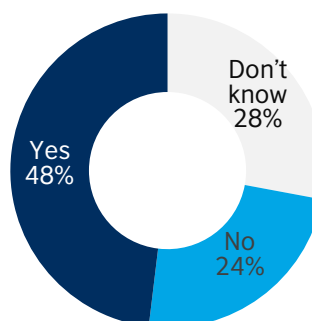
Few respondents also mentioned the fairly rudimentary nature of most marking criteria set by teachers, a lack of 'objective scale for marking', which would help students complete assignments to specification and progress within their subject.

STAKEHOLDER SUGGESTIONS

Despite their overall positive view of the state of EFL within Pakistan's HE sector, the stakeholders do notice differences in EFL provision between universities:

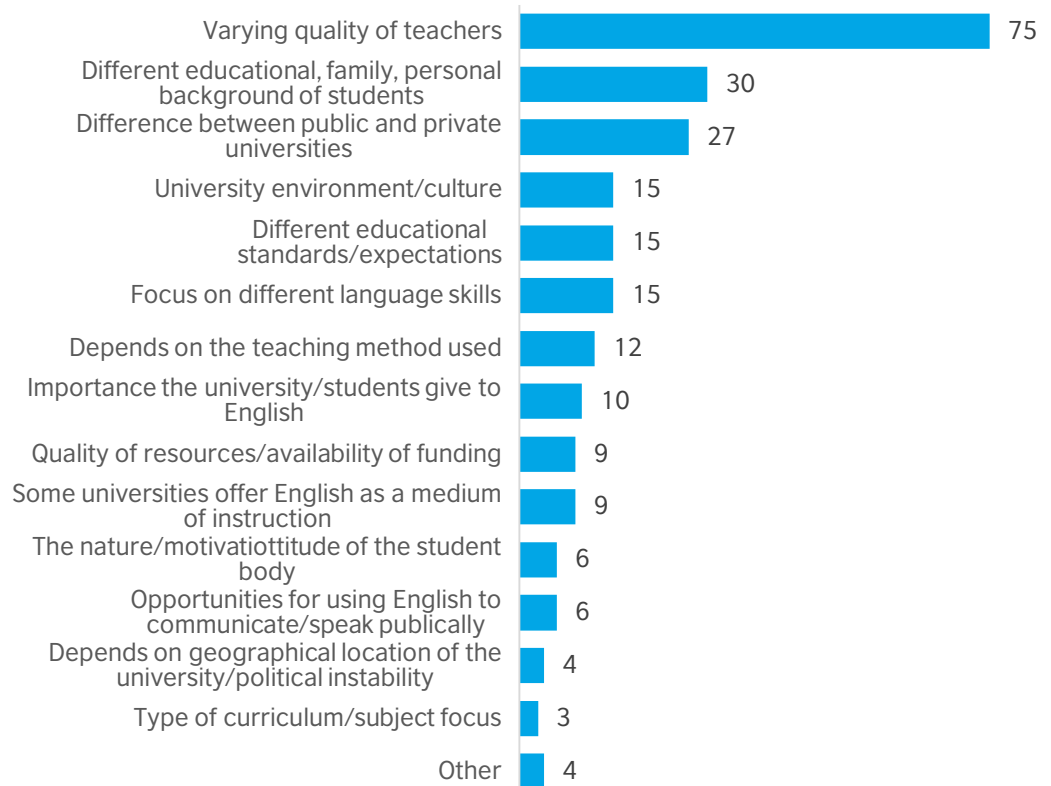
Figure 36 - Distribution of answers to question: 'Do you consider there are any differences between English language

provision at different universities?' (N=809)



When asked to identify the sources of the difference, the answers given include the following:

Figure 37 – Histogram of answers to the question: ‘In your view, what is the main cause of the difference?’ (answers have been categorized into distinct groups of potential causes) (N=240)



By far the most important cause of the difference in EFL proficiency between universities is seen to be the varying quality of teachers with 75 respondents identifying it as the leading cause.

Given that 68 percent of the same respondents previously agreed with the statement that Pakistani teachers are generally effective; it can be understood that the Pakistani population sees the general level of teaching at universities as good, but teaching as absolutely crucial to the

success (or a failure) of any university.

The public very much shares this view with the Higher Education Commission of Pakistan, who has become very committed to improving the teaching and learning in Pakistan, recently not least through its quality assurance policy, which is to be followed by all institutions of HE.

Though the policy mentions nothing of the expectations of the Commission with regards to the

general levels of English prevalent among HE students, it does talk extensively about teacher effectiveness and introduces a number of measures for the evaluation of teachers, lecturers and university staff, as well as offer guidance on the process of quality assurance (Batoool & Qureshi, 2015).

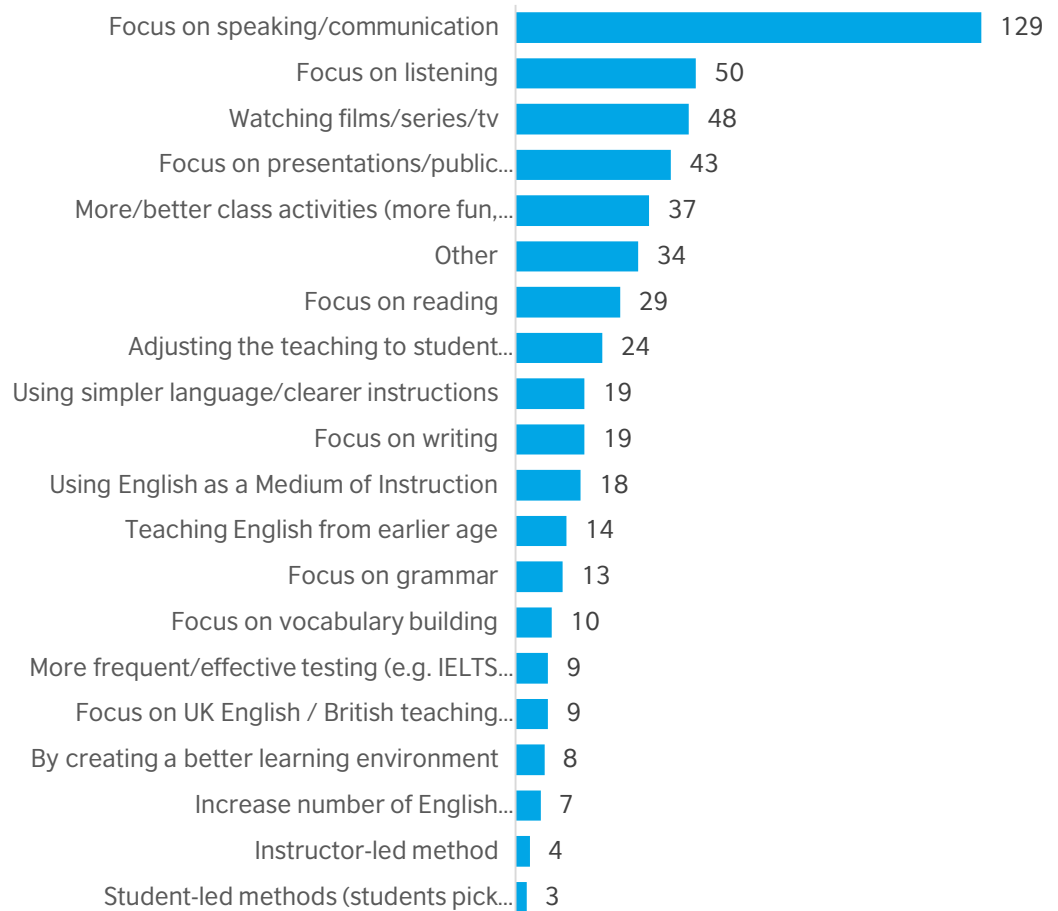
The other two major causes identified by students and evidenced in research include the varying socio-economic background of students attending different universities, and the difference between public and private institutions (with the general view that private universities have higher quality provision).

Following the largest three are university culture / environment and

different educational standards / expectations. Many students have mentioned in open-ended answers that proper environment and culture within the university, which is more conducive of learning and offers challenges and higher expectations than secondary schools (often located in rural areas), which these students previously attended, can significantly contribute to the higher quality of provision and educational attainment at universities.

In terms of the most effective teaching methods, stakeholders have also identified a number of preferred approaches that were deemed most conducive to higher levels of English language proficiency. These were later sorted into over-arching categories and are presented below:

Figure 38 – Distribution of responses to the question: ‘What methods of English language instruction do you find most effective?’ (N=527)



Communication appears again on the list as the most preferred and effective method of teaching English language in Pakistan. Students prefer to be given opportunities for improving their language proficiency through practical, discussion-oriented activities, engaging with other students and faculty. More passive listening exercises, and to that

related watching English-speaking TV, films, or listening to radio, were selected as the second and third most effective method.

All in all, it can be concluded that Pakistani students prefer a more interactive and practical approach to teaching within the classroom and choose to acquire the language through real-life use.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The report has made use of extensive secondary and primary research to reach conclusions regarding the state of English language within Pakistan's higher education institutions. Founded in evidence, the following recommendations have emerged as important for the various stakeholders going forward:

Significant effort has been taken to select such recommendations that

would be viable, deliver real impact, and remain feasible to all major stakeholders, that are founded in evidence and respect the socio-cultural background of the stakeholders.

These have been broadly divided into three distinct categories, according to the stakeholders responsible for implementing them.



Policy

1. Harmonize English language teaching at basic education level; and
2. Strengthen data, reporting, and accountability within the education system in general.

Potential Implications

Harmonize approach to English at lower levels of education

Recent changes in language policy and a shift away from English as the official language to Urdu may have been a largely political move, one that may undermine the perceived importance of English as the language of public and business affairs.

It is important to realize, however, that the position of English as the global lingua franca is unlikely to change any time soon, and, as such, further weakening EFL provision within Pakistan, albeit for legitimate political reasons, will likely have detrimental effects on the country's economy and global outreach in the long-run.

State-wide policy must ensure that English retains the status of primary foreign language in Pakistan, and that sufficient focus is given to it at lower levels of education.

The lack of a systemic approach to English language teaching at university level largely inhibits progress at this stage, at least statistically speaking. As such, most students will do little to improve their English once they enter university. Stronger provision at secondary level would ensure better proficiency at entry level into higher education, and is therefore paramount as focus of the country's language policy.

Strengthen quality assurance regime

The lack of observable progress for students at different stages of their university studies indicates the absence of progress, at least in terms of English language education. Though further research would be required to confirm the hypothesis, the existing evidence suggests low teachers' effectiveness.

In order for the Pakistani HE sector to develop and implement interventions that will improve teacher effectiveness and consequently educational outcomes, a more data and evidence driven approach to policy on the part of the government is required.

Gathering, analysing, and synthesizing data on a regular basis is the only way of identifying opportunities and challenges that exist within the sector. Developing effective interventions to address them is just as important.

There are a number of ways, in which the government can collect

such data, and encourage individual institutions to pursue similar goals on a micro-level, though the one used most often relates to quality assurance and inspection.

This is not to argue for extensive regulation, as the recent boom in private universities has provided access to many, and in some cases produced very promising institutions, some of which were included in this research. A large share of that success can probably be attributed to a level of academic freedom, or at least absence of stringent regulation. Improved quality assurance can, however, be data-driven and effective without imposing unnecessary regulation.

Data collected through such a process can then be used by the government, relevant public bodies, as well as the private sector to gain better overview of the education sector and develop policies and programmes to the appropriate needs of the education sector in Pakistan, including EFL at HE level.



Teaching

1. Develop teacher training programmes for new teachers focusing on aspects of practical use of language and communication;
2. Strengthen in-service training for teachers and educators to enable a more communicative approach in teaching and learning;
3. Integrate CEFR levels and recognized certifications;
4. Strengthen international benchmarking, and links of the system to international standards, such as CEFR;

5. Harmonize curricula across provinces to ensure a united approach founded in practical and communicative aspects of the language;
6. Develop better testing and assessment practice to ensure fairer, more transparent, and equitable marking; and
7. Raise challenge and expectations for language attainment across the board.

Potential Implications

Training Teachers First

Teachers' English language proficiency at Pakistani universities is often lacking, both in terms of the subject knowledge and competency.

This is particularly true for younger teachers and teachers that work in more remote areas of Pakistan. Providing such teachers with relevant and sufficient pre-service training to enable them to become effective educators from the very start is thus of utmost importance.

Develop English as Medium of Instruction courses.

Though it is expected that most teachers / lecturers / professors at university in Pakistan deliver their lectures and seminars in English, little to no training is provided to help them develop their skills for using English as medium of instruction.

Developing courses to address this need, as well as helping teachers make better use of academic English is likely to help them become better educators and more effective in delivering their teaching.

Development of new communication-oriented curricula

Students reported that they find a communicative approach to language instruction not only the most appealing, but also the most effective. As such, development of new curricula or enhancement of existing ones to be more practically oriented and offer more opportunities to students to communicate in real-life situations is also likely to improve educational outcomes in EFL at HE level.

Harmonizing the expectations for curricula across provinces, as far as practically possible, will also help make comparisons between regions, school types, and schools, in order to better and faster identify effective approaches to EFL teaching and education in general.

Dedicate more time to planning for assessment

Assessment is a key aspect of effective pedagogy. Without assessment and data that results from it, each teacher's ability to make useful and meaningful inferences about their students is severely limited.

Data gathered in this manner must be robust, fair, and comparable.

Planning for assessment more explicitly will thus allow each teacher to consider the data available to them more effectively, develop an assessment practice that is more transparent, fair and equitable, and most importantly understand the challenges and opportunities facing each one of their students in detail, to develop effective remedial measures on an ongoing basis.

Raising challenge and expectation

The few lessons observed by the research during the course of this study, as well as information gathered at interviews and through assessments, indicate that the

general expectation and challenge within English language lessons is particularly low.

Students are given simple tasks to complete, well below the level of what should be expected of a university student. Though observed classes in Pakistan were mostly mixed-group, there was also no evidence of differentiation in approach.

Making sure that students are sufficiently challenged by the teacher on a regular basis, but according to their ability, will help ensure better progress and attainment, particularly in the area of English language.



Learning

1. Provide opportunities for learners to communicate in English;
2. Make use of interactive multi-media materials, including films, TV, and radio programmes to improve English language proficiency; and
3. Undertake international benchmarking and EFL certifications.

Potential Implications

Provide opportunities for communication

Teachers have a number measures and tools they can use to provide more opportunities for practical communication. This can be further strengthened by the students themselves, through seeking out such similar opportunities outside the classroom.

For example, students can look to undertake a particular extra-curricular activity that is completed

in English, make use of interactive and multi-media programmes, or simply find foreign friends with the help of modern technology, in order to practice their language in a natural setting and attain higher proficiency.

Foster international exchange programmes

International exchange programmes are a perfect way for students to practice their language and learn about culture in a way they mostly find enjoyable.

Locating, applying for, and going on such international scholarship programmes can certainly have a

very positive effect on students' language attainment.

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