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## English Teachers' Opinions on Challenges Face in Teaching English as Foreign Language: The Case of Jalalabad selected Secondary Schools

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### Keywords

Challenges, English language, teaching, students, learning, schools



## **ENGLISH TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON CHALLENGES FACED IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE: THE CASE OF SELECTED JALALABAD SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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### **Abstract**

One important goal of teaching is to achieve learning outcomes. It has been observed in universities that many students have different levels of English language proficiency. However, they study in the same English courses at the school level. The main objective of this study is to learn the challenges that exist in teaching the English language as a foreign language in secondary schools that affect the English proficiency of students. In addition, ways in which these challenges will be overcome is reviewed. The data collection tools were questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to collect data from English language teachers in selected schools. The results found that teachers faced challenges with a lack of authentic materials and multilevel students in the same class. The learning environment and the teaching-learning process were two other critical challenges.

**Keywords:** Challenges, English language, teaching, students, learning, schools.

### **Introduction**

Teaching is more than delivering a lecture, it includes the learning outcome. Achieving the objectives of the learning process requires well-educated teachers and planners. The importance of learning English has become a valued need in higher education in most societies. Learning a foreign language also helps familiarize learners with various cultures (Isisag and Demirel, 2010).

Similarly, Gedikoglu (2005) stated that learning a foreign language helps with cultural exchange programs around the world.

English has been taught as a foreign language in Afghanistan schools from grade (4<sup>th</sup>) till (12<sup>th</sup>). Learning the English Language dramatically increased after 9/11, when American troops arrived in Afghanistan (Azami, 2009). Thus, it is essential for foreign language teachers to have good skills to teach according to the needs of students. Sefeoglu (2006) mentioned that teaching is a complex job and requires enough training to be well-planned, to enable the teacher to teach the target language in the class. The teachers' skills, beliefs, attitudes, methodology, and decisions play a vital role in the learning process, and the same is applied to students (Akalin and Zengin, 2007). However, English language teachers still face some challenges in teaching English as a foreign language in Afghanistan (Nazari et al., 2021).

This research aims to study the challenges teachers' have in teaching English as a foreign language in secondary schools in Jalalabad, Afghanistan from the teachers' perspective. Nazari et al. (2021) believed that language teachers face various challenges in countries that contrast politically and ideologically with the western conceptualization of education.

The study addressed the following research questions.

1. What are teachers' main challenges in teaching English as a foreign language?
2. What are the possible solutions for the main challenges in teaching English as a foreign language?

### **Review of Literature**

The government's educational system has the primary responsibility to train and educate entities within the nation. Through viable educational system(s), individuals can actively take part

in social, political, and economic relationships nationwide and globally. Individuals must learn an international language (English) to communicate worldwide. For example, individuals should be multilingual to participate actively in projects, businesses, and gathering data; and to analyze and present it to further the social benefit.

Two questions raised include, what are the main barriers and what are the solutions to improve teaching English in schools. According to Faiq (2005), most teachers in Afghanistan have no formal training and do not have access to support the use of high-quality teaching strategies, especially in rural areas. It is well known that developing both language skills (receptive and productive) has a vital role in communication and proficiency. These days the English language has a tremendous role in making relationships on various levels across the country and with diverse people. English is accepted as a *lingua franca* for better international communication in most countries. Since it is impossible to be an active participant in global life without proficiency in English, it is not regarded as a foreign language to be learned. Rather, English is an essential qualification everyone should obtain. In addition, Braine (1999) stated that the English language has been widely used and considered a universal language.

Learning English as a foreign language is essential in present-day situations. Kohli (2012) stated that the teacher plays the role of facilitator and is only a symbol that exists in the process and sometimes takes part in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, it is essential to know the use of various techniques to help students achieve their goals.

It is essential to learn the English language to cope with the recent revolution in education worldwide. This study focuses on the challenges teachers face during English language teaching and points out and recommends possible solutions.

### **Challenges of Teaching English as a Foreign Language**

This research aims to discover the main challenges of teaching English as a foreign language that teachers face. Usually, teachers are confronted with various problems at different levels. Teachers whose native language is not English may not be familiar with the fundamentals of English language teaching. Brown (1994) stated that the teachers' success is to implement the strategies and approaches to the teachers' instruction and communicate with students by transferring the knowledge.

Teaching English as a foreign language has become common in various parts of the world. For non-native English teachers, the process of Teaching becomes challenging. These challenges make it hard for teachers to deal appropriately with students. According to Brown (2007), methods are the guideways on which an approach relies. An approach has several methods that can be used to achieve the goal of the learner or teacher.

According to Coleman (2019), the Ministry of Education of Afghanistan has opted to rethink its educational policies and objectives from traditional perspectives to ensure quality education based on current understandings. According to Coleman, language learning has also been given extra credit; English and Arabic subjects will be given more weekly instruction periods. It has yet to be determined how Afghan teachers comprehend and deal with these changes and how they make meaning of their professionalism.

In addition, Teaching is an art, and the quality of Teaching depends on the teacher's love, dedication, and devotion to the subject of the knowledge (Bhallah et al. 2002). The quality of any teaching program cannot rise above the quality of its teachers. Educators have the responsibility to bring positive changes in students learning of the subject. It is hoped that this research may help

educators to constantly develop the learner's ability in English language teaching and resolve the challenges that teachers encounter while teaching English as a foreign language in the secondary schools of Jalalabad, Afghanistan.

### **Research Methodology**

This study is based on mix method that employs qualitative and quantitative components. A descriptive method was used for the questionnaire, and semi-structured interviews were employed for qualitative data collection. This study used a questionnaire to find the challenges teachers encountered in the past and the present with concern to their conditions. This short research study group is selected secondary schools in Jalalabad City, Afghanistan. English is taught as a foreign language in primary and secondary education from grade 4<sup>th</sup> in Afghanistan.

The first part of the questionnaire was regarding the demographic information. The second part of the questionnaire consisted of 10 multiple choice questions; the scale comprised questions verbalizing the challenges encountered by teachers regarding their field and the Likert Scale of (Yes, Partially, No). Moreover, the semi-structured interview was conducted to learn the challenges from the perspective of English teachers in teaching English as a foreign language in the secondary schools of Jalalabad, Afghanistan, more openly.

The data was analyzed via SPSS IBM 24<sup>th</sup> version through percentages and frequencies. The responses to the semi-structured interviews have been changed to transcripts without any modifications.

### **Result**

In total, 20 English language teachers participated in the study and answered all the questions in the questionnaire that can be seen in Table 1. The survey showed that 65% of

participants are male while 35% are female. In the age category, 70% of participants are from 22- to 29, while 30% are from 30–to 35 years old. To determine the native language of teachers, 70% of participants are Pashto speakers, while 30% of teachers are Dari speakers. Based on qualification, 65% are bachelor's degrees, and 35% of teachers are associate degree (14<sup>th</sup> grade) holders. Also, to view their teaching experience, 25% have 1-3 years of working experience, 15% of teachers have 4-7 years of teaching experience, and 60% of teachers have 8-10 years of teaching experience. It was ascertained that 20% of participants were from Nangarhar High School, 25% were from Checknawary High School, 35% were from Bibi Zainab high School, and 20% were from Iqra Private High School.

**Table 1.**

*Descriptive analysis regarding the participants.*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Category</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	13	65
	Female	7	35
<b>Age by year</b>	22-29	14	70
	30-35	6	30
<b>Native Language</b>	Pashto	14	70
	Dari	6	30
<b>Qualification</b>	Bachelor	13	65
	College (14 <sup>th</sup> Grade)	7	35
<b>Experience</b>	1-3 years	5	25
	4-7 years	3	15

	8-10 years	12	60
<b>The School of Affiliation</b>	Nangarhar High School	4	20
	Checknawary High School	5	25
	Bibi Zainab High School	7	35
	Iqra Private High School	4	20

*Note: Primary Data*

**Table 2.**

*The perception of English teachers regarding the challenge encountered in Teaching English as a Foreign language in schools.*

S.No.	Question	Yes	Partially	No
1.	Is teaching hours per week sufficient for learning English in high school?	61%	18%	21%
2.	Do you usually find enough time for preparing and planning your English classes?	59%	12%	29%
3.	Do you consider a large number of students in a class a challenge in English class?	78.6	0%	21.4
4.	Do you provide feedback on students' assignments?	86%	14%	0%
5.	Do you give short and direct instruction on assignments?	35.7%	35.7%	28.6%
6.	Do you think the different levels of students are a challenge?	72%	7%	21%

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7.	Do your students actively participate in the classroom?	50%	7%	43%
8.	Do the textbooks of English specified for secondary school support their purpose and needs for learning English?	43%	0%	57%
9.	Are the current methods and materials appropriate for teaching English to young learners with specific learning objectives?	21%	19%	60%
10.	Do you have enough space for group work and other classroom projects/activities in the classroom?	36%	14%	50%

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To the question "Are teaching hours per week sufficient for learning English in high school?" 61% of teachers responded that it is not enough to cover all the objectives of the lessons and fulfill the needs of the students. On the other hand, 18% partially agree, while 21% of teachers think it is enough time per week.

To the statement "Do you usually find enough time for preparing and planning your English Classes?" 59% of English teachers responded 'yes.' It means they have enough time to prepare for English class, while 12% partially agreed. Opposite to that number, 29% of teachers answered the statement with 'No.'

Usually, a teacher schedules time to make lesson plans, prepare for class teaching, give feedback on assignments, and make supplementary annotations. Teachers also have their office hours when they want to have students individually work with them. A teacher needs to have enough time for class preparation in this case. Luckily, in this study, it can be read that 59% of

teachers answered that they have enough time. This indicates a good improvement in teaching English.

To the statement "Do you consider a large number of students as a challenge in English class?" 78.6% of teachers consider large numbers of students a challenge, while 21.4% do not consider it a challenge. The definition of a large class may differ from nation to nation. Let's consider a class of 25 students as small and more than 25 students in a class as large. Teachers in the four schools studied reported that a large class is challenging. Almost 80% said that it is a problem to teach a large class. Large classes in these four schools make learning difficult because the English proficiency of the students differs.

To the question "Do you provide feedback on students' assignments?" 86% of teachers answered that they provide feedback, while 14% partially offer feedback. Similarly, to the question, "Do you give short and direct instruction?" 35.7% of teachers answered 'yes' while the other 35.7% responded partially and 28.6% of teachers responded that they do not provide short and direct instruction.

In response to the question, "Do your students actively participate in the classroom?" 50% of teachers responded with 'yes.' In comparison, 7% partially agreed, and 43% replied 'no.' Teachers replied to the question "Do the textbooks of English specified for secondary school support the purpose and needs for learning English?" with 43% 'yes' and 57% with 'no.' It can be read that current English textbooks have some drawbacks to fulfill the students' needs.

When teachers were asked, "Are the current methods and materials appropriate for teaching English to young learners with specific learning difficulties?" 60% of teachers said they are not appropriate, 19% of respondents believed they are partially relevant, but 21% said they are suitable

for students who have specific needs. Students of special needs are students who lack hearing, seeing, or other abilities. For example, a student can learn a text by heart, but he can comprehend it by looking at the underlying meaning of the text.

Teachers responded to this question, "Do you have enough space in the classroom for group works and other classroom projects/activities?" with 36% 'yes,' 14% partially, and 50% 'no.' Two of three English classes do not have enough classrooms, a yard, or any other facilities where students can do their group work, educational activities, and discussion.

### **Analysis of the Semi-Structured Interviews**

In addition, the data collected from the semi-structured interviews on the challenges of English teachers in secondary schools of Jalalabad from teachers' perspectives elicit some vital information on challenges from the teachers and their views on how to overcome the difficulties.

The teachers were asked about the main challenges in teaching English as a foreign language in secondary schools. Almost all the teachers mentioned the three main challenges, the textbook, learning environment, and teaching-learning process. They specifically said that the current textbooks do not have a teacher's guide, making it difficult for them to teach the English language effectively. A teacher from Nangarhar High School stated, "The ministry of Education spent so much money on color books, but they did not think of teachers at all; at least they could provide a teacher's guide with answer key and instruction." Similarly, another teacher mentioned, "the textbooks do not have audio material essential for listening skills. We teach listening without any audio-visual aids, which means the students cannot listen to the native speaker". All teachers had similar responses about learning environments that are not conducive to learning a language. They believed that class strengths are enormous, and there is not enough space for activities. A

teacher from Checknawary High School said, "the school building is tiny, and the number of students is large, sometimes it rains, we have a lack of classes, as we sit some classes under the trees." Another teacher said, "Most of the time, our school is out of electricity, especially in the summer season, so how can we teach in a class full of students and no space of half-meter at all." The teachers mentioned some challenges related to the teaching-learning process; specifically, they name the vast number of students per class resulted that they cannot give time for each student to participate.

It was pointed out that teachers cannot provide constructive feedback on students' assignments. Importantly, they mentioned the vast burden on instruction periods given to each teacher per week and noted that a teacher must teach 30 hours per week.

When teachers were asked about the possible solutions to these challenges, the responses were almost the same. They mentioned that the ministry of education must reform the textbooks, increase the number of teachers per school, provide teaching materials like teacher guides and audio-visual aids, and increase the length per class for language hours. Similarly, they mentioned that providing language labs will also help overcome the learning challenges. In addition, to provide professional training for English teachers on methodology. Finally, they said teachers' salaries must increase so that all teachers prepare for classes without any tension or the need to work in part-time jobs.

### **Discussion**

In this study, the schoolteachers participated and answered the questions openly. It is revealed that there are some specific challenges in English Language teaching that most teachers face in secondary schools in Jalalabad. First, the credit hours per week are not enough for students

to learn English. It is lack of credit hours and the widely divergent levels of students that challenges an English teachers' ability to teach English. For example, students' English proficiency levels differ greatly within a class.

Another finding that could be reported is large classes. Teachers said that a large class is a real problem. Large class in these four schools makes learning difficult because most of these students' English proficiency differs from one another. If a teacher chooses to teach intermediate-level beginner students, they will find it boring. Beginner students will find teaching at the intermediate level challenging if a teacher decides to teach. The solution is to divide the class based on proficiency.

Finally, many teachers replied that the current textbooks and curriculum do not support the students' purpose and learning needs. It can be read that recent English books do not comply with the curriculum and do not answer their students' needs. Curriculum and English books need a close review. An alternative or solution to this case is redesigning the course according to students' needs.

In the interviews, teachers suggested solutions to improve English teaching in secondary schools. Most of the teachers said that the curriculum needs to be reformed. Moreover, there is a need to develop the teachers' capacity through professional trainings and workshops. Providing learning material is yet another critical aspect that should be provided for effective teaching. Similarly, they responded that the teaching load would not give enough time for them to be well prepared. In addition, they suffer from low salaries, which cause most of them to go for part-time work. Working part-time will block the roads for them to prepare and write feedback on students' assignments. Finally, the learning environment needs to be conducive to leading the learning

process successfully.

### **Conclusion**

This study gained insight into investigating the challenges teachers face in teaching English as Foreign Language in Jalalabad schools. The research questions were directed to investigate the problems of teachers and provide possible solutions. Finding the challenges that teachers encounter based on their experience, the study provided a viable solution for the betterment of the teaching and learning process at the school level. The present study results yielded a report on teachers' challenges in teaching English in secondary schools in Jalalabad. The main challenges were a lack of authentic materials, a less conducive learning environment, and the teaching-learning process presently in use. The results recommended that the ministry of education provide authentic learning-teaching materials, provide a conducive learning environment, and facilitate the teaching-learning process more effectively.

It is recommended that further research is needed to find similar challenges, proper solutions and implement more appropriate future English language course design for the school level. Challenges in education, especially in English learning and teaching, could be improved based on proper research. Challenges may vary depending on the area, and the researcher recommends further exploration.

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