

Comparison of English Language Teaching & Learning Activities at Secondary School Certificate and Cambridge O-Level

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Abstract

The primary aim of the research was to explore the effect of teaching and learning activities on students at Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Cambridge O-level. It will make aware teachers to know the level at which the students were able to use English language as a skill; at SSC level or O-level. The researchers used qualitative approach for data collection. The research tool was 'Test' to check the effect of activities comparatively at both levels. Two tests were conducted named as; Test-1 and Test-2 to check the students' Reading and Writing Skills. Sample of the study included thirty (30) students each at SSC and O-level. The qualitative data was analyzed by developing codes and themes. It was found that different teaching and learning activities were implemented to improve students' reading and writing skills at O-level but no activities were being done at SSC level. The findings of the study also revealed that the students at O-level were better in the use of grammar, choice of vocabulary, in forming coherence and cohesion than the students at SSC level. It was recommended that different activities for teaching and learning process should be activated at SSC level to enhance students' reading and writing skill and to improve listening and speaking skill as well at both levels.

Key words: *Comparison, Teaching Techniques, Learning Activities, Effect, English Language, Language Skills.*

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Introduction

English language is being taught as compulsory subject since the creation of Pakistan; from level 1 to graduate level. English language has become the language of education, law, government, science and technology in Pakistan. It is being used in every sphere of life. It is being used as a second language. It is necessary and inevitable for the students to learn the basic rules and structures in order to read and write good English. The need to learn English language has become important in this present age for today's students. As far as English language is observed, it is an essential tool to get survival in this world; the requirement or demand of English language has grown (Akram & Mehmood 2007, p. 2).

Nawab (2012) describes that "teaching has the major role in facilitating the acquisition of English language." The purpose of teaching English is not only to transmit information to the learners but its main purpose is to make them able to speak, read and write English language smoothly.

The distinct point of this research is the teaching activities and their effect on students' learning as well as the new proposal of English books by Punjab Text book Board for SSC Learners. There are certain teacher development trainings and activities which are organized in Pakistan under Directorate of Staff Development (DSD), Punjab Education Foundation (PEF), British Council, Pakistan and certain other workshops. These training programs can play their significant role to train teachers according to the needs of students.

For this purpose, the researchers conducted a research on comparative study based on the effect of teaching and learning process at Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Cambridge O-level. These are two parallel systems of education in Pakistan. This is the common notion that teaching of English language at SSC level is not very good. The students at this level are not able to read and write English language skillfully. In contrast of SSC learners, the students of O-level are supposed to be good learners of English language

Teaching and learning activities create an impact on the performance of students. The concluded effect of teaching and learning activities will enable teachers and curriculum experts to know the students' performance while using the activities which teachers use in their class rooms. The significant difference will make teachers capable to change their teaching methods and activities if they are not helpful to teach students English language as a skill. It will provoke them to adopt new era of teaching language and modern teaching activities to create improvements among students' learning.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

Comparison of English Language Teaching & Learning Activities at Secondary School Certificate and Cambridge O-Level

1. To analyze the current effect of English language teaching at SSC and Cambridge O-level
2. To compare the activities involved in English language teaching at SSC and O-level.

Delimitation of the Study

The study was delimited to the 10 schools where the program was being done at SSC and Cambridge O-level by keeping in view the time and resources.

Literature Review

Education System in Pakistan

Brown (2007a) states that teaching and learning depend upon each other. Teaching plays an important role to direct, facilitate and inspire the learners for learning. When the teachers have enough awareness about the learners' learning, it helps them to devise their philosophy of education, design teaching methods, approaches, style and techniques used in classroom. "The proof of teaching is in learning", and "all successful teaching depends upon learning" (Cook 2001, p. 9).

There are two sectors in Pakistan in which children are given school education as primary and secondary education; Public Sector and Private Sector. School education has four stages:

- i. Primary stage comprises of 5 years education.
- ii. Middle stage comprises of 3 years education.
- iii. Lower secondary stage comprises of 2 years education.
- iv. Upper secondary stage comprises of 2 years education.

At secondary level there are two parallel systems of education in Pakistan:

- The Local education system in Pakistan
- The British Education system in Pakistan (National curriculum report 2006, p. 6)

English Course at SSC and Cambridge-O level

English Course at SSC level

English A (Paper A): It includes the short stories for the translation of English into Urdu. It includes different activities with respect to the lessons.

English B (Paper B): It includes the paper of reading and writing skills. Different activities like essay writing, letter writing, application writing, story writing, pair of words, idioms and tenses.

English Course at O-level

English course at O-level is comprised of two sections; English Language and English Literature.

English Language Course

Cambridge international examination (2015) designed syllabus for English language course having the title “Cambridge O Level English Language 1123; Syllabus for examination in 2018, 2019 and 2020.” English language is comprised of two segment; Reading and Writing.

Reading segment: Reading segment is again comprised of two sections which are:

Section 1: Reading for ideas

Section 2: Reading for meanings

Writing segment: Writing segment is also consisted on two sections which are:

Section 1: Directed Writing

Section 2: Composition

Effect of Language Teaching and Learning Activities

Teaching methodology of a subject has great significance in learning process. To achieve the purpose of teaching-learning process, a teacher has to use effective teaching strategies and activities so that a learner can be able to learn the required subject area (Farooq & Ahmad 2002, p. 43). Teaching includes techniques and activities which have an impact on students’ learning. These teaching techniques help students to improve learning outcomes (Amy et al 2011, p. 5). The above discussion shows that learning of language depends on language teaching. Thus, the effect of language learning and teaching also has relationship.

Behlol and Anwar (2011) have conducted a research on the comparison of teaching methods and evaluation systems at SSC and GCE O-level. They compared the teaching methods and evaluation system used at both level. They explored that Grammar Translation method is used to teach SSC level whereas interactive teaching methods (Discussion Method, Audio-Lingual Method etc.) are used to teach GCE O-level. Evaluation of SSC students is done by conducting exams which check their reading and writing skills while communicative competence, creativity and critical skills are also analyzed along with reading and writing skills of O-level students.

Waheed (2005) conducted a comparative study of English language course in terms of teaching writing skills at SSC level and O-level. He concluded that O-level students are good in their writing skill than the students of SSC level. The English language courses at SSC level just motivate students to cram.

Research Procedure

The study is comparative in nature. The overall framework of the study is including population, sampling, tool to collect data and data analysis.

Population

The population of the study is 200 students at SSC level and 50 students at Cambridge O-level.

Sample

Simple random sampling technique is used which helped the researchers to compare the participants' responses, during analysis. The sample of the study included 30 students, selected randomly at SSC-level, and 30 students selected at O-level.

Research Instrument

Qualitative approach is used to collect data. Data is collected through standardized tests at both levels. Two tests were conducted on both levels.

Test 1: Cross Test: One standardized test was selected at SSC and one for O-level separately from Cambridge Board and Gujranwala Board. The standardized test of O-level was conducted at SSC level and the standardized test of SSC level was conducted at O-level.

Test 2: Similar Test: The same tests were selected for Test 1 and Test 2. The standardized test of SSC level was conducted at SSC level and the standardized test of O-level was conducted at O-level.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data was analyzed by coding, and thematic analysis. Standardized tests were conducting at both levels separately under the title of "General English language Test". Two tests were Test 1 (Cross Test) and Test 2 (Similar Test). Huges (2003) defines an analytical model for conducting and scoring of reading and writing tests. It was selected to analyze the test qualitatively devised by John Anderson. The scale of analytical method of Writing Test is described as:

- Use of Grammar
- Use of vocabulary
- Use of spellings and punctuation (Mechanics)
- Fluency of ideas
- Form (Organization and connectivity of ideas)

Results and Findings

Analysis of Test 1 at SSC Level

This was the selected standardized test of Cambridge O-level which was conducted at SSC level. The researchers analyzed both test while using analytical method separately.

Analysis of Paper 1: Reading

Analysis of Paper 2: Writing

Paper 1: Reading

The Reading test consists of two sections. Section 1 is named as ‘**Reading for Ideas**’ and Section 2 is named as ‘**Reading for Meanings**’. Hughes (2003) states that to check the students’ reading ability, evaluate only the reading ability. It is not right to assess students’ mistakes in grammar, sentence structure, spellings and punctuation. The students should be analyzed that either they are able to produce correct and organized answers or not. The qualitative analysis of paper 1 at SSC level by focusing the fluency and connectivity of ideas is as follows:

Code 1: Fluency of ideas

It is observed that participants were fluent to discuss their ideas in section 1: Reading for Ideas but they were not able to use their own vocabulary as they tried to be fluent while writing their ideas. But they were unable to be fluent in section 2: Reading for Meanings.

Code 2: Form (Organization and Connectivity of Ideas)

In Test 1 at SSC level, participants were good in organizing and connecting the ideas in Section 1: Reading for ideas. But in Section 2: Reading for Meanings, they were not able to organize as well as connecting the ideas according to the relevant questions. For example irrelevant answers were observed from the participants which are as:

Q. Why Jean Louise feel ‘miserable’?

Ans. “He was miserable without Jean that he would be starting school in a week.”

Q. Explain in your own words why, according to Jem, he and Jean Louise would play together at home but not at school?

Ans. According to Jem, he and Jean would play together at home but not at school because I was to stick with the first grade and he would stick with the fifth.”

Paper 2: Writing

The Writing paper consists of two sections; Section 1: Directed Writing and Section 2: Creative Writing. The qualitative analysis of paper 2 at SSC level by following the codes of analytical method is described as:

Code 1: Use of Grammar

It is found that participants were not able to use correct grammatical structures. For example they were not able to use correct tense, forms of verb, helping verbs, subject-verb agreement and preposition. They produced incorrect grammar while they were identifying the answers from reading comprehensions.

Use of Tense and Verbs

The participants were unable to get the idea about the use of tense and verbs in paper of Writing.

Section 1: Directed Writing demands to write a speech which was conducted in past. So, the participants were supposed to write down the speech in Past Tense. Instead of, they wrote the speech in Present Tense and Future Tense or they used Mixture of Tenses. For example errors committed by participants were as:

"I will written a speech on speech competition."

"My principal asked me that **you organize** a speech on sport day."

"Our **sport gala is held** today. In ground a score board, a position holder **stage is** also present. Different types of **games will played** today."

"Good morning everyone! **Yesterday is** the spelling bee competition

Subject-Verb agreement

The participants used incorrect subject-verb agreement in two sections while writing. Errors were analyzed of the participants as:

"I am writing a story about **a child who don't care** of his parents and always think this that life is enjoyable. This child is a teenager and he was 13 years old. **He do** a lot of fun with his friends and **do not** come back home late at night. **He never overcome** their advice"

"In this competition many students participated and **few are wins..** Some **student win** and some are not. The **girl take** part in the competition many time. **She participate** in the competition so the next time she win. So the **student take** lesson from them....."

Code 2: Use of Vocabulary

The participants' use of vocabulary was not as extensive in Test 1 at SSC level as the test demands variety of vocabulary. Instead of, they used same vocabulary in the given topics. Almost 15 participants wrote the speech on the topic of 'Sports and Games activity' by using similar vocabulary. 10 participants wrote the speech on 'Speech Competition activity.' 5 participants wrote speech on 'Spelling-b Competition.'

Code 3: Use of Spellings

It is analyzed that participants wrote wrong spellings of some words. They did not know the correct use of punctuation marks in sentences. Errors were noted from the tests as:

“Their, spell, ‘orginizer’, ‘competation’, ‘interestly’, ‘benefist’, ‘participat’, ‘jamnestic’, ‘co-circular’, ‘participhate’, bcz, ‘condation’, ‘personalty’, sport’s day etc.

Code 4: Fluency of Ideas

Almost all participants were unable to attempt Section 2: Creative Writing Test 1 at SSC level. They tried to write down by choosing one topic from the given topics but cannot fulfill the task. Some of them wrote irrelevant content while some of them left the task incomplete. In Section 2: Creative Writing, almost all participants remained unable to produce the relevant content. The section of Creative Writing consisted of 6 different topics. Topics were based on different scenario and events that the students had to write down about the situations while thinking critically or putting themselves into that situation.

Code 5: Form (Organization and Connectivity of Ideas)

It has been observed that participants attempted the Section 1: Directed Writing. They wrote on different topics like ‘Sports and Games activity’, ‘Speech Competition activity’ and ‘Spelling-b Competition’. 20 participants were not able to organize a speech event. They were not able to write a speech and connect the ideas of a speech which had been held in the past days. They simply wrote the topic on the format or pattern of paragraph or an essay on ‘Sports Day’, or ‘Sports and Games’. They were not able to write a speech and fulfill the requirements of the ‘Guided Writing’.

Analysis of Test 1 at O- Level

Cross Test at O-level was comprised of 5 questions. Question 1 and 5 were designed to check the translation skills. Question 4 was designed to check the Reading skill which was related to Reading Comprehension. Question 2 and 3 were designed to check the writing skill of the students. Question 2 was about Essay writing and Question 3 was about Letter or Story writing. This test was comprised of Reading and Writing skills collectively. The researchers analyzed the skills in the test respectively according to questions. The analysis is based on the coding of analytical model which is described as:

Code 1: Use of Grammar

In Test 1 at O-level, participants used correct grammatical structures while writing Essay and Letter. There were very few grammatical errors in their writing. They used correct use of tense according to the situation. They wrote in Past, Present

and Future tense where it was required. They were able to form correct subject –verb agreement while writing. They produced correct form of verbs and helping verbs.

Code 2: Use of Vocabulary

It has been analyzed that majority of the participants used diverse vocabulary. The questions were not scenario based but quite traditional topics. In spite of it, Question 4 was of Reading skill, the participants tried to answer in their own words instead of following the original sentences in the paragraph. While writing Essay and Letter, the participants used correct vocabulary.

Code 3: Use of Spellings and Punctuation (Mechanics)

The participants in Test 1 at O-level produced correct spellings. No there spelling mistakes were observed in all questions. The participants used punctuation marks where they were required.

Code 4: Fluency of Ideas

It is assessed that all participants were able to find out the required answers of questions. They were fluent in producing their ideas while writing Essay or Letter. They were able to comprehend the topic in a better way.

Code 5: Form (Organization and Connectivity of ideas)

It has been evaluated that all participants at O-level in Test 1 were able to organize the content and connect the ideas in Essay and Letter writing. They followed the steps of Essay writing and Letter writing. All participants did not write traditional material or the same material on the topics. For example in Letter writing, all the participants did not hit on one aspect of health. Some of them talked about fever, some of them talked about physical injury, some of them talked about bad throat etc. At the same time they organized the letter in a good way. Similarly, in Essay writing, all the participants did not write on one topic. They wrote according to their own choice of topic given in the test. They organized essay in a proper way.

Analysis of Test 2 at SSC Level

Test 2 was the selected standardized test of SSC level which was conducted at SSC level. The analysis is based on the coding of analytical model which is described as:

Code 1: Use of Grammar

It is observed that participants used incorrect grammatical structures while writing Essay and translating the passage into English. They wrote wrong subject-verb agreement and sentence structure. For instance errors committed by students were noted as:

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“I read in which school is the famous school of the city. But I most liked Mr. Zaid. They teaches us English. Their teaching pattern is so good.” (**Incorrect Sentence Structure**)

“His method of teaching is so good that we learn very soon.” (**Incorrect Sentence Structure**)

“**Four teachers teaches** my class. **They teaches** us English. **They teaches** us English and math’s.” (**Incorrect Subject-verb agreement**)

Code 2: Use of Vocabulary

The participants’ choice of vocabulary in Test 2 at SSC level was not so extensive. There was no diversity in the choice of vocabulary when the researcher was analyzing the questions. The participants did not rephrase the sentences. They wrote same sentences and same words which had been used in the original passage. It is noted from the tests that they wrote same sentences while picking out from original passage. For example same words and use of vocabulary by the participants were observed as:

Q. Who was the chief commander and what was in his charge?

Ans. Musa was in chief command and the gates were in his charge.

Q. When were the gates barred?

Ans. Musa said, “Our bodies will bar the gates.”

Q. What effect had his words on the young man?

Ans. The young men were kindled by such words.

Code 3: Use of Spellings and Punctuation

It is observed in Test 2 at SSC level that participants were unable to write correct spellings. Wrong spellings were found from the tests as:

‘badminton, maths and childrens’.

Code 4: Fluency of Ideas

15 participants did not complete the test. 4 participants did not attempt Question 5 (Translate the paragraph into English). 5 participants did not attempt Question 2 (Essay Writing). 1 participant did not attempt Question 3 (Letter Writing). 1 participant did not attempt Question 4 (Reading Comprehension). 5 participants remained unable to complete the task of Essay writing.

Code 5: Form (Organization and Connectivity of Ideas)

While attempting Essay and Letter, the participants were good in organizing their content and connecting their ideas. But all of them have produced almost same content and ideas. They wrote traditional and similar material on the topics.

Analysis of Test 2 at O- Level

This was the selected standardized test of O- level which was conducted at O-level. At Cambridge O-level, English language was comprised of two papers. Paper 1 named as 'Reading'. The Reading test consists of two sections. Section 1 is named as 'Reading for Ideas' and Section 2 is named as 'Reading for Meanings'. Paper 2 named as 'Writing' which is consisted on two sections; Section 1: Directed Writing and Section 2: Creative Writing.

Paper 1: Reading

Reading test again was analyzed in terms of reading ability. The qualitative analysis of paper 1 at SSC level by focusing the fluency and connectivity of ideas is as follows:

Code 1: Fluency of Ideas

It is found that participants were fluent while picking up the ideas and collecting the ideas meanings in questions respectively. They were good to produce relevant ideas.

Code 2: Form (Organization and Connectivity of Ideas)

The participants were good while connecting the ideas and organizing them in both the sections respectively in Test 2 at O-level. Very few participants were unable in some questions to create connectivity and organization of reading text in Section 1.

Paper 2: Writing

The qualitative analysis of paper 2 at O-level by following the codes of analytical method is described as:

Code 1: Use of Grammar

It has been observed that participants used correct grammatical structures while writing speech in Section 1: Guided Writing and Section 2: Creative Writing. They used correct tenses, accurate subject-verb agreement and forms of verb.

Code 2: Use of Vocabulary

It is noted that participants used varied vocabulary in Test 2 at O-level. They wrote speech on different activities which were held in the schools as "Prize distribution activity, Trip to hilly area, Sports and games, Activity of watching movie, etc."

Code 3: Use of Spellings and Punctuation

The participants produced correct spellings. The participants used punctuation marks where they were required.

Code 4: Fluency of Ideas

It has been assessed that all participants in Test 2 at O-level were able to be fluent in producing their ideas while writing Essay or Letter. They were able to write introduction, middle and conclusion. They had the sense to differentiate speech from essay, essay from story and story from description of any event.

Code 5: Form (Organization and connectivity of Ideas)

All the participants were able to organize the material and connect the ideas in the section of Guided Writing and Creative writing.

Conclusion

The difference at both levels (SSC and O-level) is observed from the analysis of Test 1 and Test 2 which was the primary objective of the research. The participants at SSC level have done more grammatical mistakes than the participants of O-level. At SSC level, the participants used wrong forms of verbs, helping verbs, article, and subject-verb agreement and incorrect tense. There is a comparison in the use of vocabulary at both levels. It is evaluated that the students at SSC level used traditional sort of vocabulary in the challenging tasks while the students at O-level were able to use substitution words or synonyms in the passages. The difference is also observed in the use of spellings. It is noticed that the students at SSC level did lot of spelling mistakes but the students at O-levels did not do spelling mistakes. The students at O-level were able to connect the ideas by the use of transformational words at the beginning of the sentences whereas the students at SSC level were not so good to organize their content of writing but the students at O-level were good for delivering their ideas on different topics of writing. It is concluded that the students at O-level were able to attempt the test because they are being provided the chances to learn and improve their language skills. They are given the environment to read for ideas, meanings and write in any situation either it is an essay, story, letter, paragraph or speech. They are being trained to learn English language as a skill in a better way while English language is not being taught in an interactive way at SSC level. The SSC learners are learning English as a subject not as a skill.

Recommendations

The recommendations of the study are as follows:

1. The discussion based technique and AV-aids should be used to teach students at both levels, specifically at SSC level to make students able to meet the needs of the hour.

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2. There should be sections to check sub-skills of reading and writing in the evaluation system at SSC level.
3. Listening and Speaking skill should also be assessed through examination system at both levels, so that the students put focus on these two skills as well.
4. The teachers should adopt the new teaching activities and techniques for English language teaching.
5. The teacher training development programs are important tool to enhance the teaching skills. Teachers at both levels should make themselves the part of those training programs, so that they can create good effect on students' learning.
6. The teachers should follow the new designed activities of English language which have been recommended by PTBB at SSC level.
7. The paper pattern should also focus on the situational activities which make the students able to learn skill not only the content of the subject at SSC level. As the paper pattern of O-level is situational based.

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