

Relationship between University Students’ English Proficiency, Academic Achievement and their Satisfaction on Teacher Feedback

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Abstract

This study attempted to examine the relationship between English proficiency, academic achievement and student satisfaction with teacher feedback. The study employed a mixed method approach. Using a purposive sampling technique, a sample of 600 under-graduates of social sciences and humanities from two public sector universities of Pakistan was drawn. A self-developed questionnaire that comprised of 26 items was used for data collection. It measured student satisfaction on teacher feedback. A pilot study on a sample of 50 respondents showed the Cronbach alpha value to be .80 indicating a good reliability. Semester results of currently enrolled students in one English subject and one general subject were obtained. Using SPSS V. 20, bivariate linear correlation was examined. It was found that English proficiency was moderately but significantly correlated with academic achievement (Pearson $r=.488$). Both English proficiency and academic achievement had mildly negative, however, statistically significant relationship with satisfaction ($p < 0.05$). The regression analysis showed that English proficiency explained 23% of variability in academic achievement. University type had a significant effect on student English proficiency, academic achievement and student satisfaction. To ensure that the findings become more meaningful, a semi-structured observations protocol was also used. Overall, 108 observations were made in different classes during sessions. Expert supervisor and five other senior faculty members validated the observation protocol. The qualitative analysis from the observations showed that on average, four students in each class preferred speaking in English while interacting with their teachers. Overall, teacher feedback was more content-knowledge oriented than that of English proficiency.

Keywords: English proficiency, Academic achievement, Feedback, Satisfaction, Relationship

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Introduction

There are many factors due to which the quality of education, in general, and the quality of higher education, in particular, has been reported to be unsatisfactory in Pakistan (Ghulam, 2007; Government of Pakistan, 1998; Government of Pakistan, 2009; International Crisis Group, 2014). In general terms, quality refers to “individual student performance, the outputs of an educational program, the student learning experience or the teaching provided” (Mckimm, 2009, p. 187).

Student academic achievement depends not only on quality of teaching, but also on the quality of assessment. Assessment is the process which generates feedback not only for the students learning but also for the improvement of the overall academic process (Dickens & Alret, 2009). A significant process that influences assessment is students' language proficiency in the context in which English language is the medium of instruction and at the same time a second language.

Halliday (2002) stated that language helps in expressing content knowledge through representing and developing ideas for conceptual learning. There are three types of using language, which seems useful to mention here. They are (1) fact stating language (referred as the descriptive use of language such 'snow is white'; (2) evaluative use of language such as the statement 'education should develop loyalty among citizens', and (3) emotive use, which is connected with evaluative use such as the statement 'the movie was boring' (Barrow & Woods, 2006).

There seems a lack of studies on how subject teacher feedback on English language proficiency is viewed by students in the content area courses such as non-ELT subjects. Therefore, it seems appropriate to assess the quality of such feedback from students' perspective. There are many approaches to look into the quality of feedback. One of the important approaches could be measuring students' satisfaction level on the feedback. This approach is suggested by service quality principle which is used in many educational context. According to the principle the students at higher education level can be considered as primary consumers and their satisfaction should be given due importance (Gremler & McCollough, 2002; Hill, 1995).

Din (2015) found that the university teachers were divided regarding the role of language in assessment of conceptual learning and students were also not satisfied because some teachers gave importance to language along with content learning while other teaches ignored grammatical mistakes, poor vocabulary and other linguistic abilities. Barnes (1972) also indicated such awareness both on the part of teachers and on the part of students. Akram and Mehmood (2007) also indicated lack of teacher training on such issues. How this problems effects students and their academic achievement calls

for explanation, which will in return help in improving the overall quality of teaching in higher education. Thus, this empirical study has attempted to explain the nature of the relationship between students' English proficiency, academic achievement and their satisfaction with teacher feedback.

According to Krashen (1989), linguistic knowledge is inseparable from other kinds of knowledge as it may also occur because of cognitive development by use of other mental faculties; for example while developing their understanding through defining and describing, students learn language structures. Language plays its role in comprehension of ideas, for example, reading involves representation of ideas--learning of ideas is a cognitive process also (William & Gloria, 2003).

Language proficiency is considered the expression of student knowledge about the language, which includes the four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (Gottlieb, 2006). Wharton and Race (1999) have mentioned seven areas of language that pertains to teaching and learning: vocabulary, pronunciation, listening, reading, speaking, writing, grammar.

Abedi, Leon, and Kao (2008) found that students at a lower level of proficiency responded to a multiple-choice item, not as an educated guess, but randomly. Similarly, another such kind of study conducted by Hosseini, Khodaei, Sarfallah and Dolatabadi (2012) established the relationship between that critical thinking ability, reading comprehension and reading strategy.

Addow, Abubakr, and Abukar (2013) studied the relationship between English proficiency and academic achievement of undergraduate students in a university of Somalia. They found that English language proficiency had no significant positive effects on academic achievement. However, majority of researches support the point of view that there is a strong relationship between language learning and other learning (Addow, Abubakr, & Abukar, 2013; Hosseini, Khodaei, Sarfallah, & Dolatabadi, 2012; Torres & Zielder, 2002; William & Gloria, 2003). Chandler's (2003) finding reveals an important point. He compared the types of feedback--'direct correction' with another type--describing general types of errors to the students. The former was found to be more effective than the latter. Truscott (1996) has found grammar correction was ineffective in L2 classes.

Bloxham and Boyd (2007) identified the following expectations that students held: (1) sharing assessment criteria with them in advance (Din, 2015); (2) marking schemes and grade descriptors, (3) assignment guidance; that is providing justification, use of terminology, other requirement including the ways to approach the assignment (4) preference and citation advised by the teacher 5) information on regulation and misconduct.

Quality in assessment is desired and expected both by students especially by university students. Quality of assessment also includes concerns that may relate to a good choice of educational objectives, relevance of feedback and the effectiveness and efficiency of the assessment process. Iron (2008) admitted that the feedback given quickly and with quality is a key to both teacher-student relations and the effectiveness of the learning process. He further emphasized that these key factors shape students' expectation and perceptions of assessment and learning.

The construct 'satisfaction' is defined as a 'pleasurable fulfillment' of the wants and needs of the customers; the pleasure comes when the service is in accordance with the way customer had defined the set parameters and the service meets all those parameters (Olliver, 1999). According to Elliot and Shin (2002, p. 198), student satisfaction is further defined as, "the favorability of a students' subjective evaluation of the various outcomes and experiences associated with education. "Student satisfaction, defined as student perception about the effectiveness of an educational institution is a vital construct for measuring effectiveness of the institution (Juillerat & Schreiner, 1996).

There are studies that measured overall satisfaction of students in order to assess the effectiveness or quality of any academic institution. Martirosyan, Saxon, and Wanjohi (2014) found that the less students were satisfied the less was their academic achievement. Student satisfaction had a considerable effect on their retention also (Jonson, 2011). If satisfaction correlates with overall achievement then it is logical to assume that it may also correlate with English proficiency and teacher feedback.

There is no such research studies in Pakistani context that explain the relationship of student satisfaction on a specific aspect of their learning experiences in students' academics such as their satisfaction with teacher feedback. However, a study conducted by Zaheer and Rehman (2010) reported that there were many factors that correlated with students satisfaction and strong predictors of student satisfaction. These factors included in their study were: teacher expertise, courses offered, learning environment and classroom facilities. Teacher feedback was an embedded aspect of 'teacher expertise' factor.

English is one of the main languages of Pakistan (Baker & Westrup, 2000). It is the medium of instruction in HE institutions of Pakistan. "The medium of instruction is the language that is used inside the classroom for instruction by teachers. Even some teachers are not sure English should be the medium of instruction or not" (Ijaz, Tehseen, & Zarif, 2013, p. 609). Khan (2013) mentioned that English medium instruction is accepted as compulsory in Pakistani universities at post-graduation level though it is not fully in practice. Due to poorly qualified teachers, English language subject faces challenges; examination system is poor, language learning is separated from context,

learning has to become a parallel activity along with other academic knowledge acquisition concepts and skills all the levels even at university level (Aly, 2007; Din, 2015; Jalal, 2004).

Given the above situation about English as a medium of instruction there are studies about how language is integrated to the ways learning is developed but these studies have not yet specifically addressed how language should be used during teaching; whether both language and concept learning be given equal importance irrespective of the subject area of assessment is not clear. In Pakistani context, a more recent qualitative study by Din (2015) found that the students were lacking in the required language proficiency even at graduation and post-graduation level. Their language proficiency test, observations of presentations and their paper writing contained poor language due to which the faculty faced problems in assessing their learning. Smith, Robyn and Cornu (2003) indicated that language learning is treated as different from other learning while it is not the case as language has importance in all types of learning.

Research Methodology

The study employed a mixed method design (QUAN-Qual). There were three sources of data collection. A self-developed questionnaire (Cronbach alpha reliability=.80) measured student satisfaction on teacher feedback. Five constructs were used to measure satisfaction: satisfaction on teacher time, teacher commitment, and relevance of feedback, oral and written teacher feedback. Students were asked to rate the statement from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Through SPSS was generated the summed scores from this scale for quantitative analysis. The third source was students' semester results of two subjects. Student academic achievement was measured from the subject score--the one related to their field of study while English proficiency was measured through the exam score of English subject--offered at under-graduate level in most of public sector universities at undergraduate level.

The sample was selected through purposive sampling technique: Selecting sample from various academic disciplines against set criteria that is 50 students from six disciplines of social sciences and humanities. A sample of 600 students from two public sector universities in Pakistan participated in this study. Out of 600, 300 undergraduates were from one well-established university, located in the province of Punjab, on top five in HEC ranking. The other 300 undergraduates were from one newly established university located in a less developed area in Pakistan yet representing a large region.

In addition, researcher used a semi structured, non-participatory observation schedule to observe students' English proficiency and language preference in class interaction with their teachers. 36 teachers were observed for the kind of feedback they provided to students during sessions. From each university 18 teachers were selected for observation. Within university, nine teachers from social science disciplines and nine from humanities were included. The observations were made three times during class sessions in one semester. Hence, a total of 108 observations ($36 \times 3 = 108$) were made along with a trained independent observer to avoid biases in the observation. Six experts in the relevant field validated the questionnaire and observation schedule.

The questionnaires were got filled by the students on the third day of the observation. Teachers, prior to data collection, were contacted and were formally requested for permission for observation.

Data Analysis and Results

Since the larger part of the data was quantitative in nature, therefore, it was analyzed first through using quantitative analysis techniques. Bivariate correlation (Pearson r) was used to determine the linear relationship between student English proficiency, academic achievement and their satisfaction on teacher feedback. Regression was run on SPSS in order to examine the predictive power of EP on AA.

The correlation matrix was used to report the relationship between sub factors of satisfaction with academic achievement and English proficiency. In addition, comparison was made between universities, between social sciences and humanities, between academic disciplines and between genders. For this purpose, Independent sample t-test and ANOVA were employed using SPSS V. 20.

The qualitative data were analyzed using thematic analysis. The answers were coded first. Those codes, then, were organized and categorized to develop themes. The themes were than compared with the quantitative findings also for making a general sense of nature of relations between the study variables.

Here the results of quantitative analysis, which start from an overview of the correlation matrix as presented in table 1.

Table 1
Summary of the Correlation Matrix

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. EP								
2. A Ach.	.488*	...						
3. OAS	-.171*	-.153*					
4. ST	-.117*	-.106*	.857*				
5. SC	-.110*	-.092*	.825*	.871*			
6. SR	-.183*	-.169*	.784*	.632*	.623*		
7. SO	-.159*	-.087*	.784*	.584*	.606*	.580*	
8. SOWF5	-.158*	-.193*	.800*	.624*	.561*	.562*	.575*

1. EP stands for English proficiency, 2. Academic achievement, 3. Overall Satisfaction, 4. Satisfaction on teacher time taken for feedback 5. Satisfaction with teacher commitment 6. Satisfaction on relevance of feedback 7. Satisfaction on oral feedback 8. Satisfaction on written feedback.

Nature and Strength of Relationship between the Variables

Bivariate correlation was run on SPSS v.20 to determine linear relationship between student English proficiency, their academic achievement and their satisfaction on teacher feedback. Each of the variables was assessed to ensure the requirements of the parametric test by checking normality curves and Q-Q plots. Data were refined excluding extremes case from the analysis.

As it can be seen in table 1 the results of bivariate correlation analysis conducted in SPSS, which included three major variables of the study. Besides, 'Satisfaction' had five subscales, which have also been included in the correlation matrix. The relationship matrix indicated that students English proficiency was moderately significantly correlated with academic achievement (Pearson $r=.488$). Both English proficiency and academic achievement had weak negative relationship with student satisfaction on teacher feedback which is however, statistically significant as $p<0.05$. It can be interpreted in simple words that the students with high academic score and high English proficiency scores were slightly less satisfied with teacher feedback. It is possible that such students had high expectation from their teachers with regard to feedback which is not met by the teachers.

A simple linear regression was also run in SPSS. The output showed that the predictability of the model was adequate and $R\text{ square}=.234$. The R-value shows 23% of variability in academic achievement score can be explained by students' score in English proficiency.

For between university comparisons the independent sample t-test was run on SPSS. It showed that the university type had a significant effect on student English proficiency. It was expected because the old university is well established with better resources and high enrollment, located in the center of a relatively developed province of Pakistan. Regarding student academic achievement, the two universities also showed significant difference. Contrary to the mean values of the dependent variables, English proficiency and academic achievement, the mean value of satisfaction for new university (Mean=98.58) was higher than the old university (Mean=89.79). More information is in Table 2.

Table 2
Difference between Universities on English proficiency, academic achievement and satisfaction

Comparison variable	University Type	Mean	SD	t-value	Df	P
*E. P.	Old	73.05	8.16	8.707	598	.000
	New	66.06	9.86			
** A. Ach.	Old	76.20	8.07	13.786	598	.000
	New	64.66	12.02			
***S.S.F	Old	89.79	17.00	-6.662	598	.000
	New	98.58	15.45			

*English proficiency, **Academic Achievement, *** Students' Satisfaction on Feedback

Researcher hypothesized that the mean values of each variable are significantly different faculty wise. To test this hypothesis, t test was conducted as faculty type had two categories of social sciences and humanities. It was found that there was significant difference between social sciences and humanities in terms of student satisfaction. The results are in table 3.

Table 3
Faculties Comparison on the three variables

Dependent variable	Faculty Type	Mean	SD	t-value	df	p
E. P.	Social Sciences	69.81	9.67	-0.30	598	.791
	Humanities	69.84	9.56			
A. Ach.	Social Sciences	68.95	12.23	-3.114	598	.000
	Humanities	71.91	11.07			
S.S.F	Social Sciences	97.72	14.17	5.263	598	.000
	Humanities	90.62	18.46			

Table 3 clearly indicates the differences between social sciences and humanities based on the dependent variables they were compared. It shows that the mean values of the first variable EP, there is no significant difference ($p>.05$), while based on the other two variables, there is significant difference between the faculties of social sciences and humanities ($p<.05$). In academic achievement, humanities are showing better performance in terms of mean values while in terms of student satisfaction social sciences show highest mean value. The difference is also statistically significant.

Interdisciplinary Comparison

Based on the mean values of each of the three variables of the study a comparative analysis was made. The F-test results of one-way ANOVA revealed that between discipline difference was also significant ($F=13.305$, $df=5$, $p<0.05$). IR had the highest mean value of 77.74 followed by English, Education and Psychology respectively. More details can be seen in table 4.

Table 4

Interdisciplinary comparison of means & SDs on each of the dependent variable

Dependent variable	Education	Economics	Psychology	English	*M Com	**IR
E. P.	M=65.8 SD=9.4	M=58.9 SD=8.6	M=74.8 SD=8.9	M=69.6 SD=8.1	M=66.2 SD=9.3	M=73.8 SD=9.7
A. Ach.	M=71.3 SD=12.3	M=65.1 SD=11.7	M=70.4 SD=11.9	M=71.4 SD=9.1	M=67.3 SD=9.1	M=77.0 SD=13.4
S.S.F	M=90.4 SD=10.2	M=84.2 SD=11.4	M=84.7 SD=12.3	M=83.0 SD=14.7	M=80.3 SD=17.0	M=77.5 SD=16.02

* Mass Communication, ** International Relations

Table 4 shows discipline name on the first row while the three study variables are in the first column on the left. The mean values of each study variable are under each discipline. The disciplines can easily be compared based on these mean values. In terms of EP mean values, 'psychology' shows to be the best while 'economics' has the lowest mean value. Similarly, other disciplines of interest can be examined and compared in this manner.

Gender-Wise Comparison

The analysis on gender effect showed that female students were doing better than male students on English proficiency score as the mean value for male was 67.99, while females had a mean value of 71.95 (the difference between the mean values is significant as $p<0.05$). Similarly, on academic achievement, again female students were performing better than male students were. When compared, on the basis of the third variable,

'satisfaction' the results showed that females were significantly different from male students ($t=-3.798$, $df= 466$, $p<0.05$). In other words females showed more positive attitude towards teacher feedback as their mean value (97) was also higher than their male ($M=91$) counter parts.

Findings from Qualitative Data

Finally, qualitative data were analyzed and the main patterns of classroom interaction regarding English language as well as the kind of feedback being provided by teachers were recorded. A thorough study of all the content of the observations, it was found that hardly on average 4 to 5 students in each class interacted in English with their teachers during classroom interaction. Most of the students discussed in Urdu or mixed language (Both English and Urdu).

The second major theme was 'type of teacher feedback'. It was found that teachers mostly provided feedback on concept in almost all social sciences subjects except 'International Relations' and 'English Literature' and 'Linguistics'. Even in the discipline of English, some teachers provided feedback on only EP in those subjects that directly or explicitly aimed to develop students' communication skills or language grammar, otherwise, no English proficiency feedback was being given. Teachers' own proficiency and preference of using the language for classroom interaction influenced students' preference of the use of Language. Teachers usually used brainstorming as strategy in classroom teaching and provided feedback in terms of correcting students' responses. Teachers from social sciences seemed not concerned with what language students used in classroom. The code switching was another important theme identified. The teachers explained concepts from their field of knowledge in mixed languages switching from English to Urdu frequently. English usage was more visible while defining 'terms' while their illustration was mostly made in Urdu. Translation was most frequently used tool in classrooms. Difficult terms were translated into Urdu followed by a mix of English phraseology and Urdu explanations.

Discussion

There are other studies that also measured students' English proficiency score in terms of their performance in the English subject score in their semester examinations, and in some other cases their GPA in the concerned courses (Neville-Barton & Barton, 2005). The findings of observations and students' score in English proficiency did not match as very few students used English in their interaction with their teachers during class session while their score shows more number of students having scored above 70 in both the universities. Both academic achievement (overall Mean=70.43, SD=11.75) and English proficiency (69.82, SD= 9.61) showed an insignificant difference between them.

The first demographic variable was 'university type'. It had two levels, one old and the other new university. These two types of universities were selected on the ground that they had different environments. Other studies found that university environment had a significant effect on overall achievement of students (Ado, 2015). The current study also showed that university type had significant effect on students' English proficiency and academic achievement. The observations made in classes revealed that students' were more interactive in the new university than the old one. It was also found the faculty in the old university was not as young as in the new university. Teachers' age had significant effect on teaching effectiveness (Horner, Murray & Rushton, 1989; Joan & Henry, 2015). During observation, the aged teachers showed a bit strict attitude and were also 'respect conscious' while new university teachers were more democratic and friendly with students. Students mean satisfaction on teacher feedback was perhaps that was why higher for the new university. Thus, teachers' attitude could have also affected participation level in class.

The faculty type had no significant effect on English proficiency while in academic achievement they differed significantly. Since 'Education' had trained teachers who were aware of the importance of feedback and strategies of how to provide feedback thus students showed more positive attitude in terms of their satisfaction in the discipline of Education than any other discipline (Yusuf & Dada, 2016).

There were no such studies found on the relationship between student academic achievement and their satisfaction specifically on feedback in Pakistani context. However, a study on student satisfaction on overall quality of education in an institution (not only their satisfaction on a specific aspect such as teacher feedback) in American context reported significant relationship with students' academic achievement and their satisfaction (Martirosyan, Saxon, & Wanjohi, 2014). This study examined overall satisfaction of students' experiences in university academics not on a specific aspect of satisfaction such as teacher feedback. Besides, the study was from a different context where teaching quality related issues are not much as compared to Pakistan. Zaheer and Rehman (2010) found that student satisfaction correlated with teacher expertise, courses offered, and learning environment and classroom facilities.

Here in the present study, it seemed possible that the EP and A. Ach., having minor negative relationship with satisfaction with teacher feedback, however statistically significant, is worth consider on practical grounds. There are possibilities that students with high scores may not necessarily report satisfaction with teacher feedback. The more students are intelligent the more they expect from their teachers that teachers hardly can satisfy especially in context of Pakistan where teacher quality is not satisfactory as stated by its own policy document (Government of Pakistan, 2009). However, further investigation with different approaches and in different contexts can further support or reject this projection.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the study findings, it can be concluded that students' English proficiency at graduation level is an evident indicator of their academic achievement. 'Student satisfaction with teacher feedback' however did not show worth considering relationship with both English proficiency and academic achievement. The negative relationship of 'student satisfaction with teacher feedback' with both EP and academic achievement, for practical reasons, is unavoidable. Thus, when compared with the qualitative data it was evident that students with high English proficiency seemed to be less satisfied with teacher feedback.

It may be recommended that students should be given more time for presentations along with proper feedback so that they could be encouraged in terms of both writing and speaking proficiency in English. A need based diagnostic assessment by university teachers may help out the students with low EP level. Furthermore, clarity in language policy may help in changing the language culture in the academia. If teachers are allowed to use Urdu in classes, though HE institutions claim to have English as a medium of Instruction, then situation on the ground seems to beg the question why not students should also be allowed to attempt exams in Urdu or at least it should be optional.

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