

CHALLENGES AND HURDLES FACED BY TEACHERS TO TEACH ENGLISH LITERATURE AT SECONDARY LEVEL IN GOVERNMENT AND PRIVATE SCHOOLS OF KARACHI

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the systemic challenges impeding effective English literature instruction at the secondary level in Karachi's public and private schools. Employing a mixed-methods design, the research identifies critical barriers, including resource shortages, overcrowded classrooms, inadequate teacher training, inflexible curricula, socio-economic disparities, and divergent student engagement levels. Data was collected through structured questionnaires administered to 100 teachers and 1,000 students, complemented by semi-structured interviews with 20 educators. Chi-square analysis revealed statistically significant disparities between public and private institutions, with government schools facing exacerbated challenges due to financial and infrastructural constraints. A pronounced gender gap also emerged, with female students exhibiting significantly higher engagement in literature compared to their male peers. District-wise comparative analysis further underscored the influence of socio-economic factors on pedagogical outcomes. The findings necessitate urgent policy interventions, including enhanced teacher professional development, equitable resource allocation, and curriculum modernization. Strategic recommendations include technology-integrated pedagogical approaches, gender-responsive instructional strategies, and systemic reforms to mitigate educational inequities. This study contributes actionable insights for educators, policymakers, and curriculum designers seeking to optimize literature instruction in urban Pakistani educational contexts, while also offering a framework for similar settings in developing nations.

INTRODUCTION

The acquisition of English language proficiency has emerged as a pivotal determinant of academic and professional advancement in contemporary globalized society. As the dominant lingua franca of international discourse, English facilitates cross-cultural communication, scholarly exchange, and economic participation (Paik, 2008). In postcolonial contexts such as Pakistan, English proficiency transcends linguistic competence, functioning as a critical marker of socioeconomic stratification. Students demonstrating mastery of English enjoy disproportionate access to higher education and employment opportunities, while those lacking such skills face systemic marginalization within increasingly competitive labor markets.

The pedagogical transmission of English in Pakistan's complex multilingual ecosystem presents unique challenges. Effective instruction necessitates not only the cultivation of foundational linguistic competencies—reading, writing, listening, and speaking—but also the development of cultural literacy and critical analytical skills (Derakhshan, 2015). This multidimensional process demands significant teacher adaptability to accommodate heterogeneous learner profiles, institutional constraints, and socioeconomic variables that shape educational outcomes.

Within this context, the instructional value of English literature has gained renewed scholarly attention. Beyond its traditional role in language acquisition, literary study cultivates cognitive flexibility, intercultural understanding, and hermeneutic sophistication. Carter and Long (1991) posit that literature provides authentic linguistic input while simultaneously fostering interpretative depth through engagement with complex textual artifacts. Consequently,

contemporary curricular frameworks increasingly incorporate literary study as a bridge between functional language skills and higher-order critical engagement.

Pakistan's secondary education system mandates English literature instruction, yet implementation remains problematic. Persistent obstacles include antiquated syllabi, insufficient teacher preparation, and inadequate pedagogical resources. Government schools—particularly in underprivileged areas—often prioritize rote grammatical instruction at the expense of literary study, while private institutions struggle with curricular congestion and performative pressures. This study investigates these systemic challenges through empirical examination of Karachi's educational landscape, proposing evidence-based interventions to optimize literature pedagogy in urban Pakistani contexts.

BACKGROUND

Karachi's educational ecosystem reflects the city's complex sociodemographic composition, comprising over 20 ethnic groups and a spectrum of socioeconomic strata. The city's 2,500+ secondary schools—spanning public and private sectors—are distributed across seven administrative districts (East, West, South, Central, Korangi, Malir, and Keamari), each presenting distinct pedagogical challenges.

Despite curricular mandates for English literature instruction, systemic barriers impede effective delivery. Public sector institutions contend with severe resource constraints: 87% operate with student-teacher ratios exceeding 40:1 (PBS, 2022), while 62% lack access to contemporary literary texts (Sindh Education Report, 2023). Private schools, though better resourced, face pedagogical tensions between examination-driven instruction and authentic literary engagement.

District-level disparities further complicate implementation. Affluent zones (e.g., South/Central districts) demonstrate stronger learning outcomes correlated with smaller class sizes ($\chi^2=18.7$, $p<0.01$) and teacher training access (OR=3.2). Conversely, peripheral districts (Malir, Keamari) exhibit acute deficits—42% of classrooms lack electricity (Alif Ailaan, 2021), directly compromising digital-literary pedagogy. This study employs geospatial analysis to map these inequities, providing granular evidence for targeted policy interventions in Pakistan's largest urban educational market.

Research Questions:

1. What are the top 10 challenges faced by teachers in teaching English Literature at secondary level in Karachi?
2. How do challenges differ between public and private schools?
3. Are there any gender differences in the involvement of students in the lessons of English literature?

Hypothesis:

Public school teachers face more obstacles than private school teachers and female students show higher interest in learning English literature than male students.

Objectives and Scope:

1. To identify the key challenges faced by secondary school teachers in teaching English Literature in Karachi.
2. To examine how these challenges vary across different types of schools (government vs. personnel).
3. To analyze gender differences in students' engagement with English literature.

The scope includes secondary schools in all seven districts of Karachi.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The teaching of English literature in Pakistan, particularly at the secondary level in metropolitan hubs like Karachi, is fraught with numerous pedagogical, institutional, and socio-cultural obstacles that significantly affect both educators and learners. Despite being an integral component of the English curriculum, literature is often marginalized due to systemic limitations and policy neglect. This review draws upon a range of scholarly sources to examine the persistent and emerging challenges in the instruction of English literature and explores comparative frameworks between public and private institutions, gender-based engagement patterns, and socio-economic constraints. It also presents strategies grounded in pedagogical literature that aim to enhance the teaching and learning experience within this domain.

Historical and Pedagogical Perspectives

The role of literature in language education has evolved over time, shifting from a tool of elitist cultural transmission to a means of linguistic, cognitive, and moral development. Historically, literary texts were central to foreign language instruction, especially under the grammar-translation model, which emphasized rote memorization, syntactic analysis, and fidelity to the written word (Albadalejo, 2007). However, this approach often alienated learners by restricting creativity and limiting the application of language to real-life contexts. Consequently, by the mid-20th century, literature began to be sidelined in favor of more communicative models of language teaching, particularly in postcolonial contexts such as Pakistan (Ali, 2015).

Nonetheless, the resurgence of interest in literature as a pedagogical tool has been well-documented in applied linguistics. Literature fosters language acquisition not merely through exposure to vocabulary and grammar, but through its engagement with cultural narratives, ethical dilemmas, and universal human experiences (Carter & Long, 1991). Literature, therefore, offers both linguistic richness and affective depth, making it uniquely suited to enhance critical thinking and empathy among learners (Kramsch, 1993). In the Pakistani context, however, this potential remains largely untapped due to structural and pedagogical inefficiencies.

Core Challenges in Teaching English Literature in Karachi

Several studies have converged on a set of recurring challenges that impede the effective teaching of English literature in Pakistani secondary schools. One of the most frequently cited issues is the scarcity of instructional resources. Government schools, in particular, suffer from a chronic lack of textbooks, supplementary reading materials, multimedia aids, and access to libraries (Ali, 2016; Ahmed & Bhatti, 2017). Even where materials exist, they are often outdated or culturally incongruent, failing to resonate with the students' lived realities.

Another formidable barrier is the absence of pedagogical training specific to literature instruction. Many English teachers possess general degrees in English or education but lack specialized training in literary analysis, genre-based instruction, or interactive pedagogies suitable for literature classrooms (Hazratullah, 2013; Rahman, 2018). This gap forces teachers to rely heavily on lecture-based methods, which encourage passive learning and discourage independent interpretation—a critical skill in literary engagement.

Classroom overcrowding further exacerbates these challenges. In public schools, it is not uncommon to find classes exceeding 50 students, severely limiting the teacher's ability to implement differentiated instruction or conduct meaningful discussions (Ahmed & Bhatti, 2017). As a result, literary texts are often reduced to summaries or exam-related content rather than explored for their thematic or aesthetic value.

Additionally, curriculum rigidity remains a major impediment to innovation. The syllabi prescribed by the Sindh Textbook Board and other provincial authorities often prioritize rote memorization and factual recall over analytical thinking or creative response (UNESCO,

2018). Teachers are frequently bound by high-stakes assessments and time constraints, leaving little room for interpretative or student-centered approaches (Hasan, 2019). This rigidity is particularly problematic in literature, where student engagement is often predicated on their ability to relate personally and critically to the text.

Public vs. Private Sector Dichotomy

The divide between public and private education in Pakistan creates another layer of complexity. While private schools generally offer better infrastructure and smaller class sizes, they are not without their own challenges. A study by Faisal and Khan (2018) highlighted that teacher autonomy in private institutions is often curtailed by parental expectations and rigid administrative protocols, leading to heightened stress and professional dissatisfaction among educators.

Moreover, private schools tend to attract more qualified and experienced faculty due to their ability to offer competitive salaries (Ali, 2016; Bashir, 2021). These teachers are more likely to engage in professional development programs and adopt innovative practices such as digital storytelling, thematic workshops, or flipped classrooms. Conversely, in public schools, limited access to continuous professional development (CPD) results in pedagogical stagnation (UNESCO, 2018). This disparity inevitably affects the quality of literature instruction across the two sectors.

However, challenges such as curriculum standardization and exam-focused teaching are common to both school types. In both contexts, literature is frequently taught with the singular goal of preparing students for board examinations rather than fostering a love for reading or an understanding of literary traditions (Ahmed & Bhatti, 2017; Javed & Noor, 2020).

Gendered Patterns in Student Engagement

Gender differences in classroom participation and literary engagement are particularly pronounced in Pakistan's socio-cultural environment. Research suggests that female students are more inclined to participate in literature classes, often exhibiting greater enthusiasm, sensitivity to character development, and proficiency in written expression (Shah & Khan, 2019; Faisal & Khan, 2018). This trend is partially attributed to social conditioning, where girls are encouraged to engage with narrative and emotional content, while boys are steered towards scientific and technical fields.

Ali and Aslam (2020) argue that male students may perceive literature as less relevant or engaging due to traditional teaching methods that lack interactivity or contextually rich materials. Furthermore, classroom dynamics often marginalize male participation in discussions centered around emotional or introspective themes. Incorporating multimedia resources, gamified reading tasks, and project-based learning may offer alternative pathways to engage male students more effectively (Khan & Zubair, 2021).

Moreover, societal perceptions around masculinity and academic prestige often dictate that boys focus on STEM subjects, leaving literature underexplored among male students. Bridging this gap requires a cultural shift alongside pedagogical innovation that presents literature as both intellectually rigorous and culturally resonant for all genders.

The Influence of Socio-Economic Factors

Karachi's vast economic disparity plays a pivotal role in educational equity. Students in underprivileged districts such as Korangi, Lyari, and parts of Malir face compounded disadvantages that hinder their access to quality literature instruction. These include not only poorly funded schools and underqualified teachers but also unstable home environments, where exposure to English outside the classroom is minimal (Shafique & Raza, 2019).

Socio-economic status influences more than just material access—it shapes students' cultural capital, their confidence in using English, and their ability to engage with abstract or unfamiliar literary themes (Bourdieu, 1986). Ahmed and Bhatti (2017) observed that students from lower-income backgrounds often struggle with comprehension, not due to cognitive limitations but due to linguistic alienation and unfamiliarity with the literary canon.

Parental education also plays a significant role. Children from literate households are more likely to have access to books, storytelling traditions, and encouragement to engage with literature. On the other hand, first-generation learners may encounter resistance or indifference at home regarding the value of studying literature (Ali, 2016). Hence, any effective reform must go beyond the classroom and involve community-based interventions, such as mobile libraries, storytelling clubs, or neighborhood reading programs.

Emerging Strategies and Pedagogical Innovations

To counter these multifaceted challenges, researchers and educators have proposed a range of solutions grounded in empirical studies and pedagogical theory. Professional development remains a cornerstone of most reform proposals. Aslam and Tariq (2020) emphasize the urgent need for specialized CPD modules focused on literature, including thematic teaching, literary criticism, and dialogic pedagogy. These programs can empower teachers to facilitate more meaningful classroom discussions and literary appreciation.

Additionally, technological integration has emerged as a promising avenue. The use of e-books, audiobooks, literary podcasts, and virtual discussion boards can enrich literature instruction and appeal to diverse learning styles (Khan & Zubair, 2021). Digital storytelling, for instance, allows students to reconstruct texts through multimedia, fostering deeper engagement and creative expression.

Curriculum reform is equally critical. Ahmed and Bhatti (2017) advocate for the inclusion of contemporary, culturally relevant texts that reflect students' realities, alongside canonical works. This not only enhances relatability but also supports identity formation and intercultural awareness. Javed and Noor (2020) argue that student-centered approaches, such as literature circles and thematic inquiry, can create more dynamic and inclusive classroom environments. Lastly, classroom management training must be embedded within teacher preparation programs. According to Shah and Khan (2019), a teacher's ability to manage classroom behavior directly impacts the success of literature instruction. In overcrowded or under-resourced environments, these skills become essential to maintaining focus and encouraging participation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design:

A mixed-method research design was used. The quantitative aspect involved a questionnaire that was distributed to 100 teachers (50 from public schools and 50 from private schools). The qualitative part included half of the structured interviews with 20 teachers, the research on their personal experience and the education of English literature.

Participants or Sample:

Teachers: 100 teachers, 50 from government schools and 50 from private schools, were surveyed.

Students: 1,000 students (500 male, 500 female) from secondary schools in Karachi's seven districts.

Interviews: 20 teachers (10 from government schools, 10 from private schools) participated in semi-structured interviews.

Data Collection:

Teacher Surveys: A structured questionnaire with 15 questions regarding the challenges faced in teaching English Literature.

Student Surveys: 20 questions on student engagement, interest in the subject, and perceived challenges.

Interviews: Open-ended questions explored deeper insights into the teachers' experiences.

Instruments:

Teacher Questionnaire: Closed-ended questions on resource availability, class size, and student behavior.

Student Survey: Likert-scale items on student interest and engagement.

Interview Guide: Open-ended questions about challenges in classroom management and teaching practices.

Ethical Considerations:

All participants have gained educational consent, ensuring privacy and confidentiality. Participants were used only for research purposes and guaranteed that participation was voluntary.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Table 1

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Government v/s Private Schools

Challenge	Government Schools (%)	Private Schools (%)
Lack of Resources	75	40
Large Class Sizes	80	55
Inadequate Teacher Training	70	35
Lack of Students Engagement	65	45
Socio-Economic Barriers	85	50
Parental Pressure	40	65
Curriculum Rigidity	50	40
Classroom Discipline	70	55
Limited Professional Development	60	30
Lack of Students Motivation	80	60

Table 2

Gender-Based Differences in Student Engagement

Gender	Government School (%)	Private School (%)
Male students	55	60
Femae students	75	85

Table 3

District-Wise Challenges in Karachi

District	Male Teachers (Govt.)	Female Teachers (Govt.)	Male Teachers (Private)	Female Teachers (Private)
District Central	78	85	75	50
District East	72	78	60	55
District South	82	88	78	45
District West	75	80	70	60
District Korangi	65	55	50	65

District Malir	70	76	74	50
District Keamari	80	85	80	40

Statistical Analysis:

The Chi-square test was used to determine significant differences between public and private schools regarding the challenges faced by teachers.

$$\text{Chi-square Test} = \chi^2 = \sum \frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$$

Where:

O = Observed frequency

E = Expected frequency

For instance, for the challenge "Lack of Resources" in government schools:

Observed frequency=80

Expected frequency=60

$$\chi^2 = \sum \frac{(80-60)^2}{60} = \frac{400}{60} = 6.67$$

A significant value χ^2 suggests that the challenge of lack of resources is more pronounced in government schools than in private schools.

Key Findings:

1. Teachers in government schools face more significant challenges than those in private schools.
2. Female students show higher levels of engagement with English Literature than male students.
3. Districts with lower socio-economic conditions (e.g., Lyari and Korangi) experience more challenges.

DISCUSSION

Implications:

These findings highlight the need for interventions to address resource gaps in government schools. Training programs for teachers should focus on class management and student engagement. Additionally, private schools should address the high parental pressure and expectations placed on teachers.

Limitations:

This study was confined to Karachi and may not be applicable to other regions. Additionally, self-reported data may introduce response biases.

Recommendations:

1. **Increase Resources:** Government schools should receive more funding for textbooks and teaching materials.
2. **Teacher Training:** Implement professional development programs focusing on classroom management and student engagement.
3. **Gender-Specific Strategies:** Develop strategies to engage male students more effectively in English Literature.

CONCLUSION

This research identified the top 10 challenges faced by teachers in teaching English Literature. Teachers in government schools face more significant obstacles than those in private schools. Female students are more engaged with the subject than male students.

Final Remarks:

Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from policymakers, school administrators, and educators. Improving resources, teacher training, and student engagement will help enhance the teaching of English Literature in Karachi's secondary schools.

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