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CURRICULUM & TEACHING STUDIES | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Analysing institutional influences on teaching-learning practices of English as second language programme in a Pakistani university

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Abstract: This paper examines the institutional influences on the teaching-learning practices within English as Second Language (ESL) programme in the University of Sindh (UoS), Pakistan. The study uses qualitative case study approach, basing its findings on documentary review, observations, and responses of teachers and students. The analysis of the data is informed by Bourdieusian notions of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*. The study found that UoS's institutional policies and practices are shaped by its position in the field of higher education, which shape ESL teaching-learning practices. Specifically, UoS defines its *capital* as "higher education for all", which in practice translates as admitting students from disadvantage groups. To meet English language needs of these students, UoS offers the ESL programme. However, teaching-learning practices of ESL are significantly influenced by UoS's policies related to faculty hiring and development, ESL teachers and administration relationships, teacher-student ratio, assessment, quality assurance, and learning support resources.

Subject: Bilingualism/ESL; Higher Education Management; Study of Higher Education; Teaching & Learning

Keywords: institutional culture; Bourdieusian structuralism; ESL; higher education; Pakistan

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

The success or failure of any English as Second Language (ESL) programme is traditionally measured by examining the effectiveness of different variables that shape teachers' teaching approaches and students' learning strategies. These variables include teaching strategies, curriculum, learning material, examination, feedback mechanism, teacher-student ratio, class duration, teacher-student interactions and so on. However, these micro-level variables are shaped by the macro-structure, i.e. the policies and practices of the institute where the ESL programme is offered. An institute's policies and practices are also informed by the field of higher education in which that institute operates. Thus, what happens in the ESL classroom is highly influenced by how an institute operates and positions itself in the field of higher education through its policies and practice. This paper attempts to examine these institutional policies and practices and how these shape teaching-learning practices in an ESL programme offered at University of Sindh, Pakistan.



Irfan Ahmed Rind

1. Introduction

The role of English language teaching and its declining standards in the higher education of Pakistan has been widely studied (Mansoor, 1993, 2003; Malik, 1996; Rahman, 1996, 1999, 2001). Some of these studies have even influenced the policies of the Higher Education Commission (HEC), Pakistan, which in 2004 launched its first-ever exclusive language-based project on English Language Teaching Reforms (ELTR) to bring qualitative improvement in English language teaching and learning in higher education. The project is mainly based on the quantitative findings of Mansoor (1993, 2003), complemented by Rahman (1996, 2001), suggesting that learners and teachers are not satisfied with the available resources and quality of the ESL programmes offered in the higher education institutions (HEIs). It was suggested that a standardised ESL programme should be set up in all the HEIs; teaching approaches and institutional policies should be revised to successfully implement the programme. Following this, most of the public sector universities, including University of Sindh (UoS), introduced the new ESL programme in 2006. UoS has been specifically mentioned here as the ESL programme offered in UoS has been the focus of an extensive research that explores different aspects of the programme including, the need of the programme (Shahriar, 2011), curriculum (Shahriar, Pathan, & Sohail, 2013), assessment and learning space (Bughio, 2013), teachers' and students' motivation (Pathan, 2012), interaction of programme with students of different educational background (Shahriar, 2012), interaction of programme with students of different identities (Rind & Alhawsawi, 2013; Rind, 2015), students' attitude towards reading (Memon, 2014), students' language learning anxieties (Gopang, Bughio, & Pathan, 2015) and so on. Most of these studies examined different aspects of the ESL programme from agentic perspective, keeping the structural influences at the background. This study attempts to foreground the structural influences (i.e. institutional influences) that shape the teaching-learning practices of students and teachers in the ESL programme at UoS.

2. The ESL programme

The ESL programme is divided into four courses taught in the first two years (equivalent of four semesters) of undergraduate study. These courses are taught as compulsory, but have been designated as a "minor" in the curriculum. Consequently, they have fewer credit points and teaching hours, with classes taught twice a week. An average of 22 classes enables the ESL courses to be taught in one semester. The courses are based on two books—*English for Undergraduates* by Howe, Kirkpatrick, and Kirkpatrick (2006) and *Oxford Practice Grammar* by John Eastwood (2006). The former book is used by teachers in the class, whereas the latter is used as practice book. The programme claims that it focuses on all aspects of the English language, namely listening, speaking, reading, writing and grammar. According to HEC report on the Curriculum for English (2008, pp. 15–16), the general objectives of the ESL programme include: integrating the class as a whole without any gender, race or ethnic bias by encouraging the communication among students of different backgrounds and giving them equal opportunity to interact in the class; boosting students' confidence by ensuring their participation in the class; and making their learning experiences enjoyable by giving them maximum opportunities for class interaction. The HEC-recommended methodology to fulfil these objectives requires teachers to apply variety of techniques including guided silent reading and communication tasks. It is also recommended that teachers should adopt "a process approach" to teach writing skills with a focus on composing, editing and revising drafts both individually and with peer and tutor support (Curriculum for English, 2008, p. 16). These recommendations mean that the advised teaching methodology is a significant departure from previous traditional teaching approaches to ESL in the universities. However, to what extent these recommendations have been practised in the universities is an important question?

3. Why focusing on University of Sind (UoS)?

UoS was established in 1947, and is the second oldest and one of a few largest public sector universities in Pakistan. According to the UoS's official statistics of 2010, there were approximately 19,000 students enrolled in 43 teaching institutes/centres/departments functioning under six academic faculties: Natural Sciences, Arts, Islamic Studies, Law, Commerce and Business Administration, Pharmacy and Education. Around 70,000 full-time students were enrolled in different affiliated

colleges; and 30,000 distant learners appearing privately for annual examinations from various affiliated colleges. In 2010, the university therefore provided education and conducted examinations for over 122,000 students on its various campuses. Majority of these students are from rural areas of interior Sindh. Most importantly, these students have studied in the vernacular medium schools with little exposure to English language in educational and other contexts (Rind, 2008). Realising the need of its potential clientage, every vice chancellor, at least in their policies, emphasised the importance of ESL programme and strategies to reinforce the implementation of ESL programme in all departments of UoS. However, the research studies (i.e. Bughio, 2013; Gopang et al., 2015; Memon, 2014; Pathan, 2012; Rind & Alhawsawi, 2013; Rind, 2015; Shahriar, 2011, 2012; Shahriar et al., 2013) report unsatisfactory results in terms of teachers' teaching approaches and students' learning strategies. This study attempts to examine these unsatisfactory results from structural perspective, focusing on different policies and practices of the university that directly or indirectly impacts on teaching-learning practices in the ESL programme.

4. Conceptualising institutional influences

Teaching-learning practices (i.e. teachers' teaching approaches and students' learning strategies) in the ESL programmes in HEIs are influenced by various factors including, teaching, examination, curriculum, learning materials, teaching aids, duration of class, size of class, teacher student ratio and so on. However, these variables are not free from structural influences. In this study, structure refers to the institute (i.e. UoS) which operates within a field (i.e. the field of higher education of Pakistan), and structural influences refer to institutional influences (i.e. the policies and practices of UoS). These institutional policies and practices shape the above-mentioned variables and ultimately teaching-learning practices within the ESL programme. Thus, it is important to understand the institutional influences and how these shape teaching-learning practices.

A number of studies have examined the institutional (i.e. universities and other institutes of higher education) influences on the teaching-learning practices in higher education in general (Ashwin, 2009; Barratt-Pugh, 2007) and on ESL programmes in particular (Flowerdew & Miller, 2008; Gao, 2005; Kelly, 2010). These studies refer to institutional influences as *institutional culture*. The institutional culture has been studied from different dimensions.

Marginson (2008) discovered a link between institutional culture and the *position* of an institute in the field of higher education. Exploring the global field of higher education and drawing on Bourdieu (1993), Marginson divides the field of institutes of higher education along two axes. The first axis is a continuum from elite research universities to commercial vocational education, and the second axis is continuum based on the institute's focus on global or local markets. Within the field of higher education, different institutes develop their own cultures which are strongly influenced by their positions in the field, and which highly influence the teaching and learning within these institutes.

Kezae (2006) finds that the *size* of an institute can be an important institutional influence that greatly impacts the way in which students engage with a programme. Similarly, Gibbs and Dunbas-Goddett (2007) establish a link between *assessment* and institutional culture, arguing that different approaches to assessment on different programmes are related to institutional culture. Jones, Turner, and Street (1999) discuss the relationship between the *use of English* and institutional culture, noting that there are few differences in the quality of English that produced in two different institutional cultures; however, the ways in which it is produced differ.

Another relationship is established by Crozier, Reay, Clayton, Colliander, and Grinstead (2008) between *entry requirement for students* and institutional culture. Using Bourdieu's (1990, p. 56) notion of "habitus", they argue that the implicit understanding of an institute influences who can be "legitimate" students within particular programme within particular university.

This study is inspired by the work of Ashwin (2009), who used Bourdieusian structural approach to conceptualise the influence of macro-structure (i.e. the influence of higher education on the policies

of a university; the influence of university policies on its departments; the influence of departments on the structure of the programmes offered) on the micro-structure (i.e. teaching–learning practices) in higher education. He suggests that using the Bourdieusian notions of *habitus*, *field* and *capital*, it is possible to consider the position of different institutes in the field of higher education, and how these positions impact on their *institutional habitus*.

This notion of institutional habitus was borrowed from the works of (McDonough, 1997; Reay, 1998). McDonough (1997) develops the concept of institutional habitus as a link between institutes and the wider socio-economic context, and it is this link which, she argues, differentiates institutional habitus from institutional culture. She argues that the formation of institutional habitus constitutes a complex mixture of agency and structure, and could be understood as the impact of a cultural group or social class on an individual's behaviour as it is mediated through an organisation (McDonough, 1997).

McDonough (1997) further claims that institutional habitus is established over time and develops its own history. It is, therefore, capable of change, but by dint of its collective nature, institutional habitus is less fluid than individual habitus (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 78, describes it as “a power of adaptation”).

McDonough (1997) argues that institutional habitus is developed in relation to each institute's position in the field of higher education. Each institute has a form of capital (economic, cultural and social capital that takes on different forms of symbolic capital) which are developed or maintained in the field of higher education. Bourdieu conceptualised capital in a way that significantly differs from the traditional economist use of the term. For Bourdieu, economic capital is only one aspect of a wider symbolic capital which includes social status, honour, prestige and recognition. Symbolic capital serves as value that institutes hold within a culture. The ways in which institutes attempt to develop or maintain their capital inform the notions of what is reasonable. In her study of how schools in the United States influence their students' choice of college, McDonough (1997) argues that institutional habitus informs: (1) an institute's sense of its students' expected identities, (2) the courses institute will offer; and (3) which progression routes constitute reasonable uses of the capital developed by students.

Ashwin (2009) argues that institutional habitus can be articulated in different forms of expression, which constitute institutional settings for the development of students as learners. These forms of expression include: (1) the selection criteria for entry to an institute and onto a programme within institute; (2) the particular form of the programme offered by institutes; (3) institutional teaching and learning quality regimes, which include the general standards of institute; teaching standards; examinations criteria; curriculum; and the quality of learning space (i.e. the size of classrooms, the quality of libraries or laboratories, etc.). All these forms of expression determine the ways in which institutes perceive the role of students. Some institutes perceive students as “consumers” (Naidoo & Jamieson, 2006), while others adopt approaches to develop “independent learners” (Smith, 2007). Ashwin (2009) argues that institutional settings do not act in a deterministic way, but instead, different students can respond to the same institutional setting in different ways, depending on the relationship between students' identities as learners and their other personal identities.

This review foregrounds the importance of institutional influences on teaching–learning practices in HEIs. At the same time, it highlights the importance of an institute's position in the field of higher education, its institutional habitus and different forms of capital that an institute tries to maintain. It also helps in identifying Bourdieusian notion of field, capital and habitus to conceptualise institutional influences. Thus, to understand the institutional influences of UoS on the teaching–learning practices in ESL programme, this study examined: (1) field of Pakistani higher education and the ESL programmes offered within this field, (2) the position of UoS within the field of Pakistani higher education, (3) different policies and practices of UoS including, (1) general admission policy, (2) policy for ESL programme, (3) policy regarding teacher–student ratio per class in ESL programme, (4) teaching

practices in ESL programme, (5) relations between ESL teachers and the administration, (6) assessment policy, (7) role of Quality Enhancement Cell (QEC) in ESL programme and (8) learning resources for ESL programme

5. Methodology

This study adopts a case study approach, drawing data from documentary material, in-depth semi-structured interviews and observations. A thorough review was conducted of printed and electronic documents related to the ESL programme, published by the UoS and the HEC. This review particularly focused on documents which state the aims and objectives of the ESL programme, while textbooks (i.e. Eastwood, 2006; Howe et al., 2006) and students' results in the ESL courses were also analysed. For comparative analysis, admission policies, entrance test papers and assessment policies of other universities were also reviewed.

With an epistemological interpretivist stance, we used semi-structured as one of main tools to collect data from teachers and students. Seven teachers of different genders, age and experience were interviewed, all of whom were involved in teaching the ESL programme in different semesters. Additionally, 17 students of different gender, region, ethnicity and family backgrounds were also selected for interviews from the Institute of English Literature and Linguistics (IELL), UoS. Although we got permission to access documents, classes and students, we couldn't manage to convince anyone from administration for interviews despite great efforts.

All the interviews with teachers and students were open-ended and lasted between 60 and 90 min. All interviews were conducted in regional languages (i.e. Urdu and Sindhi), audio-recorded, translated and transcribed. As interpretivists, we believe that in order to understand an individual's behaviour, one should attempt to view the world from that individual's viewpoint. The job of researchers is to obtain access to the individual's context in order to interpret their reality from their point of view. Within an interpretive framework, the researchers try to make sense of what they are researching. Bryman (2008) calls this process as *double hermeneutic* in that conducting social research; both the subject (the researchers) and the object (other participants in the study) bear the same characteristic of being interpreters or sense seekers. This means that researchers have to understand how participants view their reality, but at the same time understand what they make out of participants' reality and how they define their findings in the light of existing literature. With this approach, we developed our arguments on the responses of research participants reinforced by existing literature. Since participants responded in regional language, great care was taken to translate their responses in a way that maintains the natural quality of their contributions. The data from document review, interviews (and observations) were compiled into themes using NVIVO 9.

There were many problems in finding the volunteer teachers and students for this study. There are 31 teachers that are involved in teaching ESL, however, only seven agreed to be interviewed. Likewise, almost 100 students were requested for the study and only 25 volunteered, out of which only 17 were interviewed. All the participants including teacher and students were initially not comfortable with the idea of having their conversation recorded. As qualitative researchers, we were interested not only in what respondents have to say, but also in how they say it, i.e. their use of high tone or long pauses in their sentences, or their facial expressions that add certain meaning to their statements. If these aspects were to be fully woven into analysis, then it was necessary to have a complete account of the series of exchanges in an interview. Although such minute details could have been better captured with video recording, it was very difficult to convince teachers and students even for voice recording. So, we had to convince teachers and students by assuring them that whatever is voice recorded will only be used for research purpose without any clue of their identities. Moreover, we all showed teachers interview transcripts for their comments. It was also an opportunity for them to withdraw from any of their comment or the whole interview. In addition, all the data were secured in password-protected files for additional security.

While we subscribe to the view that it is important to talk to teachers and students in order to understand their realities, we also acknowledge that teachers and students may not be able to express their views about many aspects and issues within an interview context for numerous reasons. This meant that it was particularly important to observe teachers and students and their worlds; however, these observations were evidently subjective. This adds a further issue for consideration, namely the ability to witness first-hand the behaviours and activities described by participants in interviews. This was achieved through active and non-participant participation with students and teachers in the research context. Active participation involved conducting classes and taking part in the class activities, while examples of non-participant participation include sitting in classrooms, observing student groups and being present during teachers' informal meetings. Through these different forms of participation, we aimed to observe and experience the research context as a participant, while still acting as an observer focused on understanding, analysis and explanation. The observations were mainly used for three purposes: firstly, to understand the institutional context in general, and the ESL context in particular; secondly, to understand and explore the sensitive issues that participants were uncomfortable to discuss in interviews; and thirdly to verify interviewees' certain responses and claims.

It is important to mention that the lead author had got access to students, teachers, classrooms, teachers' common rooms, students ESL results and official documents by the virtue of his positionality in relation to this study. In conducting this study, the lead author sees himself as, what Jahanbakhsh (1996) called, an *ex-insider*, who had been involved in teaching ESL programme at UoS. Thus, it gave him an opportunity to easily involve with teachers, who once were colleagues. After briefing the aims and objectives of this research study, all the colleagues ensured full cooperation with the hope that the findings may pave the way for the desperately needed reforms. However, this position of the researcher also raised the issue of power relations in conducting interviews with students who might have seen him as *insider*. In such situations, maintain Bryman (2008), respondents usually say what the researcher (as the insider) wants to listen rather expressing their honest opinion. This situation was avoided by creating a friendly atmosphere to make respondents feel comfortable and assuring them that their identities and responses will be kept anonymous.

6. Findings and discussion

6.1. Field of higher education in Pakistan

In this study, higher education in Pakistan is conceptualised as a field in which different institutes play their parts. These institutes aim to position themselves according to their capital (whether economic, social or symbolic), with different policies and practices within the field. Additionally, institutes define higher education in various ways, with each emphasising the particular form(s) of capital they excel in, and suggesting that this is the most important in the field.

The higher education of Pakistan has been institutionalised into the HEC by the Government of Pakistan. As a government-influence institute, the HEC defines the rules of the field, and ensures that HEIs abide by these rules. However, in practice, HEIs in Pakistan only follow HEC's recommendations to a limited extent, and primarily act in order to safeguard their capital. For example, although the HEC sets the general criteria for quality assurance in HEIs, HEIs interpret these criteria according to their resources and limitations (Memon, Joubish, & Khurram, 2010).

The HEC's recommendations include the hiring of qualified faculty, and the promotion of research and regular publication of research. However, some HEIs follow these recommendations less rigorously than others. For example, elite universities such as Aga Khan University (AKU) or Quaid-i-Azam University (two of the top-ranked universities in Pakistan) focus on the production of quality graduates, and therefore have a palpable interest in hiring highly qualified faculty through a rigorous hiring process, conducting and publishing impact-orientated research, and so on.

By contrast, multi-disciplinary universities such as UoS (ranked very low among Pakistani universities) focus on producing the maximum number of graduating students, and so accommodate the vast majority of applicants. However, these universities show little interest in hiring quality teachers, or in research and publications.

The definition of higher education for each of these universities reflects their attempts to assert their superior position in the field. For example, AKU asserts that the aim of higher education is to produce high-quality graduates following principles of “quality, access, impact and relevance” (AKU, 2011a). However, only those who can afford this higher education can access it. By contrast, UoS promotes a model of accessible higher education which is “for everyone” (UoS, 2011a). Thus, both kinds of universities legitimise their unique position in the field.

6.1.1. English language teaching programmes in higher education

Almost all HEIs in Pakistan offer various English language programmes. Elite universities such as AKU offer professional English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP) programmes for their students, as well as specialised English language programmes for teachers. These programmes aim to promote advanced English language skills among learners (AKU, 2011b). Other universities, including UoS, have introduced the ESL programme in order to improve students’ basic English language skills. The aims of these ESL programmes are twofold. Firstly, due to UoS’s relatively open admissions policies, the majority of applications with weak educational and English backgrounds get admission. The programme therefore aims to improve students’ basic English language skills so that they can follow the English-medium teaching and textbooks on their university courses. Secondly, major public sector multi-disciplinary universities are now required by the HEC to provide ESL programme; the introduction of ESL at UoS was therefore in compliance with these requirements.

6.2. UoS’s position in the field of higher education

The position of UoS in the field of higher education can be inferred from the kind of students it attracts, i.e. (1) students who are rejected from other professional universities, and (2) students who belong to underprivileged families and have weak educational background.

UoS is located between Liaquat University of Medicine and Health Sciences (LUMHS) and Mehran University of Engineering and Technology (MUET). These universities are well-known professional institutes in the Sindh Province. The review of different official policies of LUMHS and MUET suggest that these universities focus on the production of independent professional learners and so applicants must meet strict entry requirements to gain admission to these universities. For example, in order to qualify for the LUMHS pre-entry test, candidates must have scored a minimum of 60% in their Higher Secondary Certificate Examination (HSCE), and at least 55% for the MUET pre-entry test. In-depth knowledge of subjects including Biology, Maths, Physics, Chemistry and English is also required for students to compete in these pre-entry tests. If candidates fail to secure admission in their first attempt, they must re-sit their HSCE Part 1 or Part 2 examinations in order to be eligible for re-taking the MUET and LUMHS pre-entry test. The admission procedure is highly competitive, with a large number of students applying for a limited number of seats every year. In 2008, 6,024 candidates sat the MUET pre-entry test; 975 (16%) were offered places. Similarly, 4,451 candidates took the LUMHS pre-entry test in 2008, and 451 (10%) were offered admission.

In addition to these demanding academic requirements for applicants, a considerable degree of financial security is required. Students who gain admission on merit to LUMHS can expect to pay around PKR. 200,000. (\$2,000) in fees for five years, while students who are self-funding will pay around PKR. 2,100,000. (\$21,000) for fees over the same period. At MUET, fees for students who gain admission with merit are approx. PKR 200,000 (\$2,000) for four years, and PKR 500,000 (\$5,000) for self-funded students. These figures evidently do not include accommodation and other living costs. In short, admission to these universities is restricted to students who have strong academic and

financial backgrounds, and students with lower educational abilities and/or limited financial resources are excluded.

By contrast, UoS accommodates students from many disadvantaged groups. In 2010, 8,376 candidates sat the UoS pre-entry test, and 3,686 (44%) were successful, on the Jamshoro campus alone. Moreover, fees range from PKR. 6, 000 (\$60) to PKR. 10,000 (\$100) (according to the discipline) per annum for students admitted on merit, and up to PKR. 70,000 (\$700) for the whole course if they gain self-funded admission. The teachers, we interviewed, described UoS as an institute, which offers opportunities to “everybody”, from students rejected by other universities (described as “leftover” students) to underprivileged students.

Students who have been rejected from other universities are said to find “solace” in UoS. These students join UoS largely because re-sitting university pre-tests significantly reduces their chances of admission. Not only do candidates have to re-take their HSCE exams and secure a minimum of 60% in HSCE exams, but 10 marks are deducted from their cumulative score at intermediate level if they are taking the pre-test for the second time. Their ability to compete with first-time candidates is therefore considerably diminished. Additionally, many students described the pressure they faced from parents in order to join a university rather than re-applying to the entry test of medical or engineering universities.

Students from underprivileged areas, and particularly from rural areas, join UoS due to poor educational backgrounds and limited financial resources. Having attended vernacular-medium schools, these students’ competency in subjects such as Maths, Biology, Chemistry, Physics and English is limited. Additionally, these students are from poor families, and so cannot afford the fees charged by professional medical, engineering and other high-ranking multi-disciplinary universities. However, due to the district quota, these students have the opportunity to gain admission to UoS. The quota maximises their chances of admission to UoS, as they only have to compete with students from the same district. UoS is, therefore, a viable higher education option for students from underprivileged areas.

In the light of these findings, it can be inferred that UoS legitimises its position in the field of higher education based on capital related to “higher education for all”. By contrast, elite universities which focus on producing professional doctors or engineers have a more selective approach to higher education, with opportunities only available to students with particular academic and financial backgrounds. While UoS’s inclusive approach to admissions is clearly a positive source of capital, there are also challenges associated with this approach. The following section considers some of these limitations and challenges by analysing various dimensions of UoS, with a particular focus on the ESL programme.

6.3. Different policies and practices of UoS related to the ESL programme

6.3.1. University’s entry requirements

Since UoS attracts students from disadvantaged groups, their entry is facilitated by lowering the entry requirements in three ways. Firstly, students with HSCE scores as low as 45% are eligible to take the university’s pre-entry test compared to minimum 60% for other professional universities. Secondly, the pre-entry test has been made significantly less challenging than those at the nearby medical and engineering universities. And finally, district and other special quotas provide the weakest candidates with access to some of the university’s best departments. Many candidates, therefore, lack the basic skills required to cope with the demands of higher education. Most of them have limited English language skills. In response to the limited English language skills of the majority of students, and particularly those from rural areas, the introduction of a supportive English language programme seems logical. However, as mentioned earlier, this was not the only motivation for the introduction of ESL programme at UoS; the initiative was also undertaken due to HEC requirements.

6.3.2. *Teacher–student ratio in the ESL class*

Considering that the UoS's capital is based in granting entry to a large number of candidates in spite of limited university resources, it is therefore unsurprising that there are a high number of students per classroom and low number of teachers per students. However, an excessively high number of students per classroom, e.g. 150–200, may reflect the university's interests which are driven by profit, rather than the quality of education. Any interactive programmes, such as the ESL programme, are inevitably ineffective in such settings (Bughio, 2013; Loo, 2007). Large class sizes therefore form a barrier to a sense of community developing among students, while interactions between students and teachers are severely restricted. These limitations also notably affect teachers' pedagogic strategies and their perceived role in the class.

6.3.3. *Qualification and professional development of teachers*

University's profit-driven interests and ignorance of quality also reflect in its faculty hiring policy. The university hires new language teachers with limited consideration of previous teaching experience; the only criteria for permanent faculty members are that they must have a first-class postgraduate degree, and they must impress in their job interview. Temporary teachers (who are hired to teach exclusively on the ESL programme) are only required to have a second-class postgraduate degree and to pass a walk-in interview (UoS, 2011b). Once they have passed their job interviews, applicants (temporary and permanent faculty alike) begin teaching as soon as they have been appointed, with no induction or teacher training beforehand.

It was found that the university neither arrange any in-house training for the ESL teachers, nor does it allow faculty members to attend training provided by external organisations, including the HEC. This is largely due to the high teacher–student ratio. There are 31 faculty members (both permanent and temporary) at IELL who are responsible for teaching ESL courses to almost 8,000 first- and second-year students across all university departments, an average teacher–student ratio of 1:258. Additionally, permanent faculty members also teach major subjects (i.e. those related to literature and linguistics). Since teachers' timetables are already tightly packed, there is little time to devote to training sessions.

6.3.4. *Relations between ESL teachers and the administration*

The timetables for each department are prepared by their respective Deans of Faculties. While preparing timetables, Deans do not consult with ESL teachers. Most of the ESL teachers arrive on campus using university transportation. UoS provides transport for students and teachers; the arrangements are fairly sophisticated, and cover distances of up to 40 km away from the Jamshoro campus. However, in practice, the management of transportation is largely ineffective, which leads to buses carrying students and teachers arriving late on the campus. In the light of this erratic transport service, most teachers prefer not to have classes timetabled for the first period. However, the Deans of Faculties tend to schedule ESL courses in this first period. This reflects the subject's low prioritisation in comparison to major subjects, and means that ESL teachers using university transport invariably arrive late for their classes. It is important to note that the majority of ESL teachers are unable to afford personal modes of transport, and so are reliant on the university transport services; temporary teachers are paid PKR. 400 (\$4) per hour, earning an average of PKR. 10,000–15,000 (\$100–150) per month, while junior permanent teachers earn PKR. 36,000–45,000 (\$360–450) per month.

Ultimately, the logistical issues which teachers face mean that a 50-min ESL lesson soon becomes a 40-min lesson; since at least 10 min are required to record students' attendance in a large class, lesson time soon drops to no more than 30 min. Similar problems arise when ESL teachers must travel between departments in order to teach successive classes.

6.3.5. *Assessment policy*

The university's capital—higher education for all—is also reflected in its assessment criteria. Since the university has an inclusive admissions policy, average assessment standards are perhaps

unsurprising, as this ensures that students from poor educational backgrounds and lacking general academic skills can still gain degrees. This approach also has implications for ESL assessment, which is based on (1) students' attendance in the classes [10 marks], (2) a final presentation/assignment [10 marks] and (3) a final unseen paper-based examination [80 marks]. In the following discussion, these assessment methods are considered in more detail, and it is argued that the ESL assessment criteria reflect the university's overall attitude towards the ESL programme.

1. As discussed in the previous section, the low prioritisation of the ESL programme adversely affects the quality of teaching. In turn, this leads to students' lack of motivation to attend classes. Assigning marks based on attendance is therefore one of several strategies to encourage students to attend classes, and one which has been largely successful in maintaining attendance rates. However, attendance alone does not guarantee learning.

2. In order to encourage students' participation in classes and to develop their confidence, they are required to give assessed 10-minute presentations (10 marks) at least once a semester. As mentioned earlier, an average 22 ESL classes are conducted on average per semester; it is therefore hardly feasible for 200 students to each give 10-minute presentations every semester. This poorly conceived approach to assessment suggests that the university's language policy, which promotes students' participation in ESL classes, conflicts with its admission policy, which promotes the entry of large number of students.

Once the impracticality of the presentation-as-assignment in large classes was acknowledged by the university, an alternative assignment was suggested. If teachers are unable to hear presentations from all the students, they can instead set students a 2,000 word written assignment. These assignments have become particularly common among ESL teachers in the light of their large class sizes and limited contact time per semester. However, teachers remain overwhelmed by their workload, and so feedback on these assignments is rarely provided for students.

3. At the end of every semester, students must sit a written examination. The paper includes multiple choice questions (MCQs), filling in blanks, writing summaries and essays and responding to open-ended questions. Although teachers we interviewed reflected fairly favourably on this written examination highlighting the comparatively improved quality of papers, they also expressed concerns that, in contrast to the aims of the assessment in the course outline, which emphasises that four English language skills should be assessed (listening, speaking, writing and reading), this examination only assesses writing skills.

Although some teachers indicated an interest and a willingness to innovate their assessment methods, they maintained that university's administration does not support them in this. One of the teachers highlighted challenges to new assessment methods arising from lack of facilities like the availability of photocopier machine, printing facilities, charts and markers. The same teacher argued that even with all the required facilities, they would not be able to assign grades to students' assignments. As the university follows a standard examination and grading policy, it does not allow individual teachers to assign marks on classroom activities. He argued that not assigning marks affect the motivation of students to take these assessments. He further noted that teachers' workload and responsibilities mean that it is not feasible for them to actively promote the case for innovative assessment methods to the university administration; when teachers had attempted to introduce new initiatives, the administration remained unsupportive.

In brief, UoS's assessment policy seems to focus on encouraging class attendance and participation, and the university's approach to assessment does seem to have improved over time. However, the assessment policy at UoS seems to be failing to achieve desired results, mainly because the policy is more suited to small class sizes (e.g. the end-of-semester presentation/assignment). Although the quality of the written exam has improved over time, it continues to assess reading and writing skills alone. Listening skills are excluded from assessment criteria largely due to a lack of AV

aides in classrooms. Finally, no support is provided to teachers seeking to introduce interactive assessment methods. In order to maintain a uniform assessment system across the university, the administration appears to penalise teachers who do not follow the prescribed pattern.

6.3.6. *Role of QEC in ESL programme*

In line with HEC's quality assurance policy, UoS established the QEC in 2006. The official, overarching aim of the QEC is to "develop the programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education and commitment to continuous quality improvements" (UoS, 2011c), while one of the specific objectives is "to review the quality standards and the quality of teaching and learning in each subject area" (UoS, 2011c). However, in practice, QEC is limited to "paperwork". Each teacher is required to fill a course progress Performa for each subject in the end of every semester. Most of the information in the Performa is based on the number of classes, number of students, the material used and kind of assessment taken. However, the teachers we interviewed usually sent the progress reports on the major subjects, ignoring the ESL courses. Surprising, this oversight was not noticed by the QEC. In spite of official policy statements, then, it seems that the university has minimal interest in the quality of the ESL programme. As mentioned earlier, the designation of the ESL courses as minor introduced to satisfy HEC criteria has meant that it does not receive adequate support from the university on many levels. Teachers' performance is one of these negatively affected areas, as teachers do not devote an adequate amount of their time to the programme, and invest minimal effort in improving its quality.

6.3.7. *Learning resources related to ESL programme*

Libraries can play an important role in supporting and enhancing students' experiences of second language learning (Parkes, 2006). However, the state of various department libraries at UoS reflects the poor state of the ESL programme. During fieldwork, we visited libraries in the IELL, Faculty of Pharmacy, Institute of Business Administration (IBA) and Information and Technology (IT) department. In the IELL library, three books related to English language learning (i.e. *High School English Grammar and Composition* by Wren and Martin (2005); *English Grammar in Use* by Raymond Murphy (1994); and *Practical English Usage* by Swan (2001)) were found. No similar books were found in any of the other libraries visited, in spite of the fact that all these departments offer ESL courses. Institutional influences are therefore also negatively affecting the way in which students can learn; in this case, the lack of ESL books in department libraries means that students are unable to reinforce their learning through personal reading. Officially, the IELL has provided a further reading list (along with the objectives and a detailed outline of the ESL programme) as part of a Self-Assessment Report for the QEC. Clearly, students are unable to access these books through the department library, and moreover, certain books on the reading list; *An Advanced English Grammar* by Christopherson and Sandved (1969); *ABC of Common Grammatical Errors* by Turton (1995)) are not easily available anywhere in Pakistan.

7. Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated the ways in which UoS's institutional policies and practices are shaped by its position in the field of higher education, and in turn, how these institutional influences shape teaching and learning in the ESL programme. It considered how UoS operates within the field of higher education in comparison to other universities of Pakistan, and revealed that UoS defines its capital, higher education for all, by offering admission to students who have been rejected by other universities and/or cannot afford private universities' high fees. This approach evidently provides disadvantaged groups with access to higher education. However, it has also reduced the quality of education offered by the university, which has mainly occurred as a result of the university's attempt to accommodate a large number of students with limited resources. This is partly reflected by the large class sizes (150–200) across the university. In order to meet the language needs of disadvantaged students from non-elite English and vernacular-medium schools, UoS offers the ESL programme. This initiative aimed both to improve students' English language skills in their first two years, and to fulfil requirements set by the HEC. However, the university's treatment of the ESL programme significantly affects teaching and learning in the ESL programmes, in terms of its policies

and practices, in relation to faculty hiring, teacher training, the relationship between the administration and ESL teachers, the number of students in ESL classes, the assessment criteria, ESL quality assurance and learning support resources including libraries. The university's policies and practices importantly influence students' motivation to study in the ESL programme, as well as their participation in classes, their relationships with teachers and their examination performance (Memon, 2014; Pathan, 2012; Rind & Alhawsawi, 2013; Rind, 2015; Shahriar, 2012). Teachers' relationships with the university administration, their teaching approaches and performance, their attitudes towards students and their perceptions of the programme quality are all similarly affected.

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