

## **Improving ESL Classroom Management Practices at Higher Education in Pakistan: A Review of Current Literature and Future Directions**

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### **Abstract**

Effective classroom management (hereafter CM) practices are an imperative for effective second language learning at the higher education level where diverse student needs and academic expectations intersect. On the other side of the coin, English as official and instructional language carries a phenomenal importance in Pakistan, especially on higher educational level. This paper, therefore, reviews the available research literature on ESL CM practices on higher education level in the country and investigates the possibility and significance of a research study on ESL CM practices and to offer constructive recommendations for improvement. The literature review reveals that while some institutions adopt progressive management strategies, many still rely on traditional, instructor-centered methods. The study highlights gaps in faculty training, inconsistencies in institutional policies, and a lack of integration of digital tools for effective classroom management. Practical recommendations include incorporating professional development programs, leveraging ICT tools, and promoting participatory practices. The implications of the study emphasize the need for policy reform and capacity building to ensure classroom management evolves with pedagogical innovations and student needs in higher education. The study is expected to produce literature on the topic and make valuable improvement to the ESL CM practices, and thus ESL learning, on higher education level in the country.

**KeyWords:** ESL Classroom management practices, Higher education level, Pakistan

### **Introduction**

Though Classroom management is a well-defined and highly valued topic in today's language teaching pedagogy, it is, unfortunately, an ignored one in many parts of the world. One can get an inkling into the significance of CM in language teaching by looking at the following definition: "Classroom management is a collection of techniques that teachers use to encourage effective learning by minimizing distraction and disruptions" (Sepulveda 2016, p. 1). The succeeding catchy sentences from the above source can further highlight the importance of CM techniques as employed by teachers for effective learning: If you don't have a plan for your students, they will have one for you (p. 2).

Being proactive is better than being reactive (p.3).

An engaged student is a managed student (p. 2)

The scholars warns that despite having good lesson plans and materials, a teacher cannot manage effective learning if he or she cannot manage class well. Tony Wright (2005) joins the scholar in emphasizing the importance of CM in language education. He, on one hand, declares it the central element of a teachers' routine professional practices; on the other hand, he laments that it is an ignored topic in debates on language education.

The same can be related to Pakistan where there is a dearth of awareness on CM, both in theory and practice. Our experiences as Lecturers in the Department of English and Department of Education, in higher educational institutes in Pakistan, provides a rich insight into the unscientific practices prevalent in English classrooms here in the department, specifically, and in other universities of the country, generally. The important aspects of CM—socio-affective aspects, collaborative work, use of positive language, positive classroom dynamics, classroom routines and practices, differentiated instruction, student-centeredness etc.—as mentioned in the available CM literature are rarely found in practice on higher education level (in the departments). Spurred by the discouraging scenario of CM practice, a brief survey of the research literature on ESL class in the country was conducted but only to find it equally discouraging. There are few studies available on CM and those available on similar topics mostly belong to school and college levels.

#### **Problem statement:**

The above discussion can be summed up in two points: one is the fact that effective leaning cannot happen without good CM; second is the fact that CM practice and research, both, are below par in Pakistan, especially on higher education level. Given this situation, there is a need for a systematic inquiry of the issue that may present a detailed account of the maleficent class practices in the country, judge them in comparison with the standard CM practices as present in the developed countries and suggest solutions for improvement.

#### **Significance:**

English is not only the official language in Pakistan but it is also the medium of instruction in many schools and colleges and all universities. The country, especially its educational system cannot, therefore, afford poor ESL CM practices and the resultant poor learning. The Higher Education Commission of the country has established a separate section under the name of ELTR (English Language Teaching Reforms) in order to improve the language teaching quality in the country. This proposed study has a similar aim—to improve English language CM practices in the country and to add to the research literature on CM in the country which currently falls too short to be satisfactory. The proposed study is, therefore, visualized to be a significant contribution not only to the efforts made by the commission in the country but also to the efforts made by the British Council and the US State Department, in the country and across the globe, with regard to the improvement of English language teaching quality. It is hoped to trigger on further scientific studies of language education in the country and thus enrich both practices and research body.

#### **Goals and Objectives:**

The research study should aim at achieving the following objectives:

- To prepare a systematic record of the current CM practices in the country on higher education level
- To give recommendation about improving CM practices in the country

## **Research Questions:**

Following are the research questions answering which, through systematic research, will help achieve the above mentioned objectives:

What are the current CM practices in Pakistan on Higher education level?

How can the current CM practices be improved in the light of the research?

## **Literature Review**

This brief survey of the available literature testifies the statement made in the introduction that there are few studies on CM practices in Pakistan on higher education level, and that those available on matching topics focus on different educational levels or different aspects of teaching quality rather than CM. Many of them do not view teacher in class but rather view him through the prism of their training programme and vice versa.

Malik and Behlol (2014), while trying to present a model to ensure quality teacher training in Pakistan, deplore the poor quality of teacher training programmes in the country. They believe that in the absence of technical and conceptual expertise and many other requisites, the initiation of new programmes that are aimed to be at par with the developed countries is always problematic and confounding for the poor students. This should be noted that their paper, which works through questionnaire, is about teacher training in general with no specific focus on ESL though it applies equally to this also.

Teevno (2011) bases his mixed-method study on teaching and learning of English on Secondary level, in Sindh, though without any specific focus on CM, and expresses his dissatisfaction with the teaching standard, teacher training programmes, and curriculum (Afzal & Rafiq, 2022).

Nawab (2012) bases his study on school level in Chitral—a remote district of the country—and reports that English is taught in the schools just like other subjects, for instance, social study and history. Translation method does not spare time for practice. Among other factors responsible for this, he mentions lack of teachers' training. It should be noted that the study does not focus on CM practices specifically.

Bashiruddin and Qayyum (2014), while trying to develop English school teachers' profile across the country through a questionnaire, report that most of the teachers had their qualifications in disciplines other than English. Like many of the cited studies, they also put emphasis on teachers' training.

Tahir and Qadir (2012) come closer to the topic i.e. CM; however, their main focus is on how CM practices affect the socialization of the beginning teachers on college level in the Punjab province. Their study is quantitative and seeks the teachers' own perception about the relationship between their CM practices and their socialization. The study, therefore, needs to be supplemented with qualitative investigation and the researcher's in-depth observation, since most often the subjects' perceptions, especially when judged quantitatively, are not reflected in their actual practices. In fact, the scholars themselves recommend that further studies with larger samples should be undertaken in order to further explore relation between CM practices and socialization of beginning English teachers on college level (Rafiq, Kamran & Afzal, 2024).

Manzoor, Ahmed and Gill (2015) carry out their quantitative study on nursery level in the province of Punjab to find out the relation between motivational expressions and learning on students' part. The study reports that the motivational expressions inspired good behavior and learning.

In his qualitative research, Rind (2015), tries to find out how second language learning is affected by the gender identities and roles that are socially constructed. His study affirms that the socially constructed gender identities and roles do have an impact on the student learning though some students were found to exercise choice and agency against the socially constructed norms.

Soomro, Memon and Memonc (2016) investigate contemporary pedagogical techniques used in teaching and learning English as a second or foreign language in Pakistan. The research aims to introduce the concept of ESL/EFL best practices for effective language teaching in Pakistan. A questionnaire is used to collect information from twenty English language teachers from two public sector universities. The results show that teachers are attached to outdated techniques and activities, face problems applying new techniques in large multilevel classrooms, and lack of willingness to adopt innovative techniques. The study emphasizes the need for modern pedagogical strategies and ESL/EFL best practices in English teaching and learning in Pakistan. It suggests that outdated teaching strategies do not create a better learning environment and hinder learners' participation (Rafiq, Afzal & Kamran, 2022). The study underscores the importance of incorporating these strategies at multiple levels.

The study by Tahir, Iqbal, and Qureshi (2018) study reveals that ESL teachers in their early career face different challenges in classroom management, including large class sizes, inexperience with ICT-based audio-visual aids, adapting to new teaching techniques, variations in cognitive approaches, and ultimately impacting their performance.

Ali (2021) study explores proactive classroom management strategies and lesson planning for teaching English at the higher education level in Pakistan. The research reveals that ESL teachers set objectives like presentation, production, and practice stages in lesson planning. They also use behavior and discussion-based strategies for proactive classroom management. The study enhances understanding of language teachers and encourages further research at the tertiary level, contributing to the knowledge of pedagogical management and planning of language teachers.

Hussain, Dawood and Bux (2023) study on classroom management in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classes at QUEST Nawabshah, Pakistan, emphasizes the importance of effective communication in EFL classrooms. They suggest improving instruction clarity, encouraging interactive teaching methods, and addressing learner issues like passivity and fear of making mistakes. The findings suggest that effective classroom management strategies can create a supportive learning environment, leading to improved motivation and achievement among EFL students.

Yousuf (2023) discusses effective classroom management techniques in English teaching, including setting clear expectations, cultivating positive relationships, using positive reinforcement, implementing consistent discipline, managing time effectively, using diverse teaching methods, leveraging technology, strategically arranging seating, ensuring clear communication, incorporating student voice, addressing issues promptly, and reflecting and adjusting. The article emphasizes the importance of effective time management, diverse teaching methods, technology utilization, strategic seating arrangement, clear communication, and prompt problem-solving.

Arshad, Anwar and Shoaib (2024) in their article “Nexus of Classroom Environment and English Language Learning Skills in Higher Education in Pakistan” highlights the positive correlation between classroom environments and English language learning skills among university students. The study suggests that improving classroom settings can enhance language acquisition, leading to better academic success and future career opportunities. The

authors recommend that educational institutions focus on creating supportive and engaging classroom environments to improve English language learning outcomes among university students in Pakistan.

Shaikh, Khan and Ahmed (2024) study examines the challenges of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation at Pakistan's higher secondary level, focusing on English language teachers' perceptions of CLT as a student-centered approach to developing speaking fluency and communicative competence. However, they face challenges such as lack of professional training, time management issues, low English language proficiency, lack of motivation, exam-oriented education, overcrowded classes, inappropriate seating arrangements, improper timetables, lack of materials and resources, classroom confined language practices, and inadequate tools to assess students' communicative competence (Rafiq, Iqbal & Afzal, 2024). The study provides valuable insights for ELT teachers, academic administrators, and educational leaders, and offers a roadmap for effective CLT implementation at higher secondary level.

### **Critical Overview of the Literature**

A critical overview of the above survey of literature renders the following relevant points:

1. The literature survey confirms that few studies directly focus on classroom management practices in higher education in Pakistan, primarily at the school and college level.
2. The studies mostly reflect over teaching quality in general without specific observations of CM practices.
3. Studies primarily focus on teacher training and teaching quality, not classroom management (CM) practices. Some studies, like Malik & Behlol (2014) and Teevno (2011), highlight issues in training but do not explicitly discuss CM. Their findings suggest a gap between training and classroom realities, which can influence CM practices. Nawab (2012) and Bashiruddin & Qayyum (2014) acknowledge teacher qualifications and training in English education but do not investigate classroom management as a discrete phenomenon.
4. Three studies have studied factors related to CM, but only as isolated factors at different levels. Manzoor, Ahmed, and Gill (2015) studied motivational expressions at nursery level, while Tahir and Qadir (2012) studied CM as a contributor to beginning teachers' socialization at college level. Rind (2015) studied the role of constructed gender identities in second language learning at university level. Tahir & Qadir (2012) addressed CM directly, but its quantitative design and reliance on teachers' self-reported perceptions were limited. Recent studies by Ali (2021), Hussain et al. (2023), and Yousuf (2023) provide valuable insights into CM strategies, challenges, and proactive approaches, focusing on tertiary-level English instruction and practical CM techniques like lesson planning, student engagement, and technology use.
5. Research like Soomro et al. (2016) investigated barriers to effective CM and highlighted the persistent reliance on outdated teaching methods and resistance to modern pedagogical practices, often due to teacher reluctance, large classroom sizes, and lack of institutional support.
6. Research by Arshad et al. (2024) and Shaikh et al. (2024) highlights the link between classroom environments and communicative competence practices, emphasizing the need for engaging environments and addressing challenges faced by teachers.
7. Studies reveal recurring themes such as the need for targeted CM training in teacher education programs, inadequate professional development for ESL/EFL teachers, structural challenges like class size and lack of resources, and a disconnect between pedagogical theory and classroom reality.

There is no single study that accounts for most of the CM aspects on higher educational level as mentioned in the introduction part. They are socio-affective aspects, collaborative work, use of positive language, positive classroom dynamics, classroom routines and practices, differentiated instruction, student-centeredness etc.

## **Conclusion**

The literature on Classroom Management (CM) practices in higher education settings in Pakistan is limited, with few studies exploring CM strategies, particularly in English Language Teaching (ELT) at the tertiary level. Issues such as poor teacher training, outdated methods, inadequate classroom environments, large class sizes, lack of motivation, limited ICT use, and insufficient professional development are common. Recent studies, such as those by Ali (2021), Hussain et al. (2023), Yousuf (2023), Kamran et al. (2022) and Arshad et al. (2024), often focus on pedagogical techniques or classroom environments rather than CM as a distinct area of study. Research on CM is limited in sample size and methodological scope, relying heavily on teacher self-reports and quantitative tools. The current body of research supports the claim that CM practices in Pakistan's higher education, particularly in ELT contexts, are under-researched and lack systematic documentation. Evidence-based studies are needed to describe existing practices and evaluate their effectiveness in diverse higher education contexts.

## **Implications**

### **1. Practical Implications**

The research emphasizes the need for university teachers to adopt structured and student-centered classroom management strategies, encouraging reflection on their practices and creating inclusive learning environments. It also suggests redefining teacher training content to incorporate hands-on strategies relevant to higher education, with trainers modeling effective CM practices and supporting teachers in managing behavioral, motivational, and instructional challenges. Effective CM practices can lead to improved student motivation, participation, and academic outcomes in higher education classrooms.

### **2. Policy Implications**

The lack of emphasis on classroom management in higher education policy documents calls for the recognition of classroom management as a core component of teaching quality. This necessitates revisions in national education policies and university-level teaching standards. Curriculum reforms should mandate the inclusion of classroom management courses in graduate and postgraduate degrees, and guidelines on minimum competencies should be defined and assessed during teacher evaluations.

### **3. Research Implications**

The study highlights a significant gap in empirical research on CM at higher education level in Pakistan, urging future researchers to explore this area more rigorously using mixed methods, classroom observations, and longitudinal designs. This research advocates for the creation of localized CM frameworks for Pakistani universities, recommending comparative studies across public and private sectors higher education institution, rural and urban settings, and different provinces to identify diverse CM challenges and solutions.

## **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are proposed to uplift Classroom Management (CM) practices in ESL classrooms at higher education level in Pakistan.

1. To conduct empirical research to observe, record and document CM practices at ESL Classrooms at various universities using mixed-methods approaches.

2. To integrate CM training into language teacher education programs, focusing on practical strategies such as proactive planning, behavior management, time management, learner engagement, and technology use.
3. To promote continuous professional development (CPD) workshops for university ESL teachers, focusing on reflective teaching, classroom observation, and peer feedback.
4. To strengthen institutional support by ensuring smaller class sizes, flexible seating arrangements, and access to ICT tools.

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