

## Improving the ESL Instructors' Communication Skills through ICTs: A Case Study of Barriers to Technology Integration in Language Classrooms

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### Abstract:

*This study discusses the importance of integrating information communication technologies (ICTs) in improving English as a Second Language (ESL) instructors' communication skills at the elementary school level in Pakistan. This study aims to highlight the challenges and barriers ESL teachers face while using ICTs and other technologies like multimedia and smart boards in their classrooms. The purpose of this mixed method, a qualitative and quantitative case study is to diagnose the issues ESL instructors face at the elementary school level in Punjab, Pakistan, through interviews, questionnaires, and two basic questions. Fifty ESL teachers participated in this study through semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and pre and post-tests through controlled and uncontrolled groups. This study concludes that ESL teachers feel more confident in their communication skills after receiving guidelines about using technology for language teaching. They are very eager to learn more techniques and methods to use ICTs in their daily classes; however, certain barriers such as lack of funds, in-service training, proper labs, and shortage of trained staff are the big hindrance in integrating the latest technology into language teaching classes at the elementary level. The significant effect is on the English communication skills of students in rural areas of Pakistan and achieving a high standard of English language communication.*

**Keywords:** Integration of ICTs, Language teaching barriers, Communication skills, Teaching of English to students of other languages, Teachers' Training

### 1. Introduction:

Technology has influenced every field of life, including education, learning, teaching, and personality development, since the introduction of Quality 4.0 in 2015 (Apostolou, 2020). With the advancement in gadgets and machines, language teaching and learning has been changed and revolutionized through ICTs, the Internet of Things, and Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies (Imran and Almusharraf, 2023; Tran et al., 2020). Therefore, the ICTs and other technological tools have a stronger impact on learning and teaching environments, such as teaching approaches, methods, audio-visual aids, and interpersonal communication skills. However, suppose the technology and its latest tool such as ICTs and AI applications are not properly used in language teaching either for the first language or second language. In that case, the instructors lack professional development, including personal communication skills, teaching techniques, and overall performance.

English is a lingua franca globally, and its importance as a second language is growing in the world day by day. Like many other countries, in Pakistan, it is learned as a second language and a medium for instruction in government institutions and higher education courses. Current research determines to solve the problems of ESL instructors' communication barriers in rural elementary schools in Punjab, Pakistan, through teacher training using ICTs for ESL teaching. Pakistan is a developing country, and with the growing importance and the need for the English language, the school education department has to invest more in teachers' training to integrate technology into teaching methods. Recently, a few language teaching programs have been

arranged, such as PEELI by Directorate of Staff Development (DSD) and NOVICE English teachers' program by the American consulate. However, a more focused training and ESL teachers' training and development program with specialization in ESL teaching and teachers' communication skills enhancement should be focused is direly needed. Following the advanced nations, developing countries need to invest in education and adopt modern techniques and approaches to bring changes to their educational system.

For challenges in integrating ICTs in ESL teaching, Gull et al. (2020) describe that the Pakistani education system, particularly for language teaching and language teachers' professional development, is far behind the developed world. Teachers need urgent support in three dimensions to carry good teaching and professional development: one) through pre-induction qualifications where a language degree should be compulsory with technology-embedded courses and workshops; second) in-service workshops and freshers courses to enhance the capacity building of the teaching staff, and third) a short-term faculty exchange program with developed countries where Pakistani teachers can exchange their experiences and professional services for better understanding and learning in a practical way (Gull et al., 2020, p. 303). According to Sattar et al. (2023), the assessment framework makes the students retain repetition instead of testing their analytical and imaginative abilities. The importance of the English language is increasing rapidly, and the students of Pakistan are hardly able to get admission to higher institutes, especially for students with poor backgrounds in English communication like, mostly students of rural areas in public schools Jimenez and Rose (2010) believe that without a supported and efficient effort, students in cycle of learning English have practically no desire for procuring the children and measures of social, social and academic capital that they need to move into advanced education or important work. Therefore, the English language may become a source of success or failure.

Teachers play a major role in facilitating the students in any course; however, this role becomes more crucial for ESL teaching as students learn pronunciation, spelling, and effectiveness of new language through their instructors' professional grooming and communication skills. Students of rural areas of Pakistan hardly communicate in the English language. The condition of students is pitiable. The students of rural areas who get high scores in written English papers are also unable to communicate in English. Teachers in rural areas pay less attention because of less interest in English subjects; as a result, they cannot teach properly. There shortage of qualified English teachers is also a big problem in Pakistan. According to Rafique et al. (2018), the students have no openness to English in their daily life communication. Both students and educators use their local languages or Urdu to convey their message inside the class, and practically no exposure to English. English teachers should be trained separately to teach English as a secondary language.

For a better understanding of the issue, the authors have tried to seek the answer to the following questions through a mixed-method approach. (i) What are the motives behind using ICTs in English language classrooms? (ii) What are the challenges and barriers teachers face while integrating ICTs in the classroom? The significance of this research lies in the improvement of ESL instructors' competence in communication skills and teaching methods. For the social, economic, and cultural development in Pakistan, every teacher and student must work hard and have knowledge of communication because, through communication skills, one can better connect with the entire world. Imran and Ain (2019) argue that teachers' beliefs and priorities significantly affect language learning. Therefore, language teachers play an important

role in developing ESL communication. Hence, this present study focuses on improving ESL communication through teachers' training in rural areas so that every student can get opportunities for higher education and a better job. In doing so, every member from either rural or urban regions of the country would play their role in the development and betterment of the country.

## 2. Literature Review:

### 2.1: ESL Instructors' Perception of Technology:

Many studies (Ding et al., 2019; Doha and Imran, 2020; Liang, 2021; Afzaal et al., 2022) have suggested that teachers' perceptions about the use of technology in their classes go parallel between their classroom use and general perceptions. However, most of the studies concluded that technology strongly impacts teachers' behavior, classroom performance, and expected outcomes. Yasmin and Islam (2018) describe the role of English language teachers in Pakistan and their teaching methodologies, particularly in rural areas. They highlighted that interaction with ICTs is a critical issue, and teachers are not performing their significant role in this regard. The teachers revealed that they lacked the latest information about the integration of ICTs in their personal communication skills development as well as in their language classes because of two factors: one, they do not have access to the latest technology gadgets, and second they lack proper training and helping literature to understand and implement the techniques and methods to improve ESL competence. Imran and Almusharraf (2023a) believe that instructors should be equipped with the latest technology and tools to transfer the knowledge of any subject to the students. Teaching is not simply transferring information to the students; it empowers them to communicate well, critically analyze, and understand all the latest innovations the world is making in achieving their goals. This study further highlights teachers' problems and issues in adopting innovative tools and technologies for teaching and improving techniques.

Moreover, Khan and Khan (2016) explain the problems that students face during English learning the untrained instructors and their traditional teaching methods without using any latest techniques and technologies in their classroom, and become the reason for their failure. They have done case studies to probe further the problem faced by Intermediate students of District Mianwali and Bhakkar, Pakistan. Due to interaction with mother tongues, lack of interest, teachers' training, and many other obstacles in their research, this research aims to solve these problems. Soomro et al. (2016) introduce the best pedagogical techniques used for the teaching of English language and the concept of ESL/EFL practices, which are effective for English learning in Pakistan

### 2.2. Challenges for the ESL Teachers in Integration of Technology:

Various studies (Johnson et al. 2016; Soomro et al. 2016; Rafique et al. 2018; Younas et al. 2019; Imran and Almusharraf, 2023b) have identified four types of challenges that teachers face in integrating technology into their personal, teaching methods and classroom development purposes. one) trained human resources because most of the teachers lack proper training and acquaintance with the use of technology in their classroom; second) funds and specific materials of the schools and teachers' training institute do not have the sufficient funds to arrange and provide the latest technology and gadgets for training purposes, third) Institutional/school environment- if a teacher is trained in using ICTs for communication and teaching, they don't find a supporting environment in the far-off and rural schools where they can apply those techniques and skills, forth) Departmental and parental support- Overall, the focus of the

education department is on students' grades and performance, whereas very little attention has been given to teachers' professional development and capacity-building programs.

Moreover, Shannon (2018) explains the role of English language teachers in rural schools with low numbers of trained English teachers equipped with ICT skills. He says that teachers should collaborate with those groups of professional colleagues who are good in ICTs' sue and also benefit from the teachers' exchange programs if there are any available to excel in their role as professional ESL teachers in rural areas. Similarly, Muhammad et al. (2017) analyze the teaching practices of the English language in Pakistan. They observe that teaching English in the classroom is similar to other subjects. They recommend that the teachers develop English language speaking skills while integrating ICT skills and introduce strategies and techniques for developing the English language.

### 2.3. Improvement in ESL Teachers' Performance with ICTs:

Noor and Shabaz (2015) show the ground realities of English language teachers, the significance of teachers' training, and the problems English language learners face in Pakistan. They suggest that the concerned authorities should effectively facilitate the learners and the teacher training process. Bashiruddin and Qayyum (2014) highlight that most English language teachers in the public and private sectors have no degree in English subject. Most of them are self-motivated, and others teach English to students because of administration. They have no relevant qualifications to teach the English language. They suggest that we should hire teachers who specialize in the English language.

Alam and Bashiruddin (2013) introduce how to enhance students' English Oral communication skills. They analyze that old traditional methods of teaching should replace the new methods. Teachers should communicate in the English language in the classroom for the improvement of the English communication of students. Jafri et al. (2013) present the English background of the students to predict their English speaking skills at the secondary level in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. They take 60 male students in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, analyze them, and indicate their speaking scores in the classroom. Only 53% of students influence English-speaking scores. They show the significance of English speaking and recommend that English-speaking skills will improve if teachers teach English as a language, not as a subject. Nawab (2012) indicates the teaching method of English teachers in the Chitral district of KPK province at the secondary level. This study introduces new ways and methods to improve English learning through teacher training in rural areas of Pakistan. It also focuses on primary and elementary English language learning that needs to be refined for a strong secondary base.

### 3. Research Methodology:

This study is carried out through a mixed method involving both qualitative and quantitative approaches. The descriptive and analytical methods are used to investigate actual communication skills problems in ESL teachers' competence and teaching in rural areas of Pakistan. The data was collected from fifty ESL teachers from the Sahiwal division randomly based on their qualifications and teaching roles from twenty-five elementary schools located in rural areas. All these selected populations responded to semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and pre and post-training cum workshops tests voluntarily. For study design, two types of tests are taken: pre-test and post-test, conducted after applying the new techniques and using ICTs. For a better understanding of the problem and the solution, teachers divided into experimental and control groups.

Two main resources are used to conduct this study: one is the training of teachers for ICT usage and implementation in rural areas used to improve ESL communication so that the students of rural areas improve their ESL communication skills. Second, audio-visual aids such as multimedia projectors and audio/video recorders are used in the post-test to show the animation to students and teachers, which helps in a better understanding of the English language.

#### **4. Theoretical Framework:**

The theoretical framework for the study draws upon several key theoretical perspectives. Firstly, it utilizes the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework (Niess, 2016; Jammeh et al., 2023) to emphasize the convergence of technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge in ESL instruction. The Diffusion of Innovations Theory by Rogers (Sahin, 2006) elucidates the stages of technology adoption and diffusion, while the SAMR model categorizes the depth of technology integration. Social Learning Theory (Firmansyah and Saepuloh, 2022) is applied to understand how ESL instructors acquire the skills and confidence to integrate ICTs, while contextual factors and the Community of Practice concept are considered for understanding barriers and collaborative learning. Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (Foot, 2014) examines societal influences, and the role of educational policy and leadership is recognized in shaping technology integration. Together, these theories provide a comprehensive foundation for analyzing the integration of ICTs in ESL instruction and the associated challenges in elementary schools in Punjab, Pakistan.

#### **5. Data collection:**

Data is collected from pre and post-tests, semi-structured interviews, and questionnaires. Fifty teachers from rural area elementary schools are selected who have been teaching English as a foreign language for the last three years and divided into two groups, twenty-five in each group named as control group and another named as experimental group. The pre-test was conducted based on the regular traditional teaching method and observed during their classroom lessons. After the pre-test, they were divided into control and experimental groups. The experimental group was trained with new methods, approaches and techniques for how to ICTs in professional development for the next 30 days and the controlled group was trained with same old traditional teaching methods. After 30 days post-test was conducted, and both groups' teaching methods and communication skills were observed. Then collected results of both groups were analyzed. The teachers who were trained with old traditions (control group) had less attention and interest in the class, while the trained teachers (experimental group) showed improvement in-class activities, teaching methods, behavior, and, most important, their communication skills improvement.

The other tools used for data collection were semi-structured interviews and questionnaires. Each ESL teacher took 15 to 20 minutes to answer the open-ended ten questions. Similarly, a standard questionnaire was designed to assess the ESL teachers related to their qualifications, experience, ICT knowledge, training, prominent challenges in their classes, and future plans for capacity building.

#### **6. Results and Data Analysis:**

After the pre-test, observations indicated the class behavior and method of teaching of teachers, which shows that most teachers do not plan lessons for their classes. Only a few teachers were found with partial plans. Even teachers are not familiar with the format of lesson

planning. The observations showed that the class activities of teachers during class teaching, the most common classroom activities are reading text and translating it into Urdu or the mother tongue. Even teachers used their mother language for communication with students in class mostly. When the teacher finishes reading, they ask the student to read it. Teachers are not practicing the students' language skills or grammar learning. English is taught as a subject, not as a language. They spend most of their time in reading and translating books. In interviews, some teachers claimed the education system, and some believed this was due to a lack of resources. Observation has shown that English subject teaching is like other subjects such as general science and social studies in schools. During the pre-test, it is observed that the majority of teachers giving English classes are not qualified. They are not English-qualified teachers. Some teachers were self-motivated to teach English, and some were forced by authorities to teach English.

After the pre-test, the teachers were divided into experimental and controlled groups. The control group is trained with old traditional methods, but the experimental group is trained with new techniques and methods using projectors and multimedia because nowadays, people are more interested in social media and information technology. In training, teachers are trained in how they plan their lessons for class and make schedules. They are trained to attend the teacher's workshops properly. They also trained to use multimedia and projectors for their lectures. They trained to communicate with students in English and teach English as a language. After 30 training days, a post-test is conducted, and data is analyzed carefully.

To determine the success rate, data is analyzed carefully. Then, find the pre-test and post-test results as in Figure 1. After comparing the results of the pre-test and post-test, Figure 2 shows in the pre-test, most of the teachers are unaware of the lesson planning for class teaching. Trained teachers used new methods and approaches for their classes and plan their lessons for class teaching. The results show that some control group teachers do not plan their lessons yet. The following figure 1 shows ESL teachers' responses during interviews about their understanding, skills, and performance before and after workshops and training sessions for integrating ICTs in their classrooms for students' best performance, personal grooming, and professional development. The responses were surprising as most of the teachers from fifty participants admitted that after ICTs-based workshops and training sessions, they gained a lot of new skills and found huge differences between their traditional and new teaching techniques and methods embedded with technology. However, there were few teachers, 20%, who were uncomfortable with the new technology and innovative teaching styles because of their command of traditional teaching methods. Surprisingly, about 10% of those ESL teachers did not say anything in response to the interview questions. They opted not to comment on any question for two reasons: 1) they do not know much about the impact of the latest technology and have very little knowledge about how to use it, and 2) they were teaching English language classes as a substitute teachers because there were no qualified ESL teachers available in schools, that's why they preferred not to comment on the interview statements.

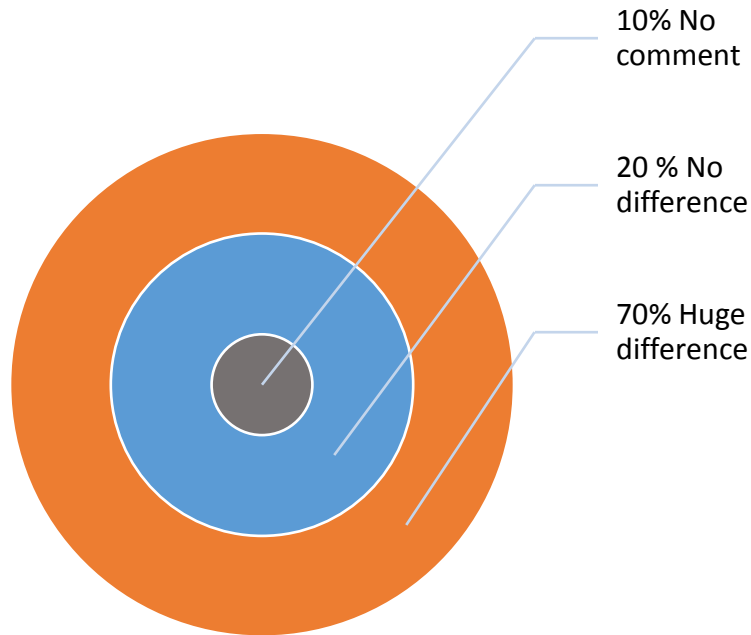


Figure 1: Pre and post-tests assessment for ESL instructors' perceptions about ICTs' role in their personal and professional development.

However, the following Figure 2 shows the ESL teachers' classroom engagement and performance after their training in ICTs-based innovative and traditional methods.

2:

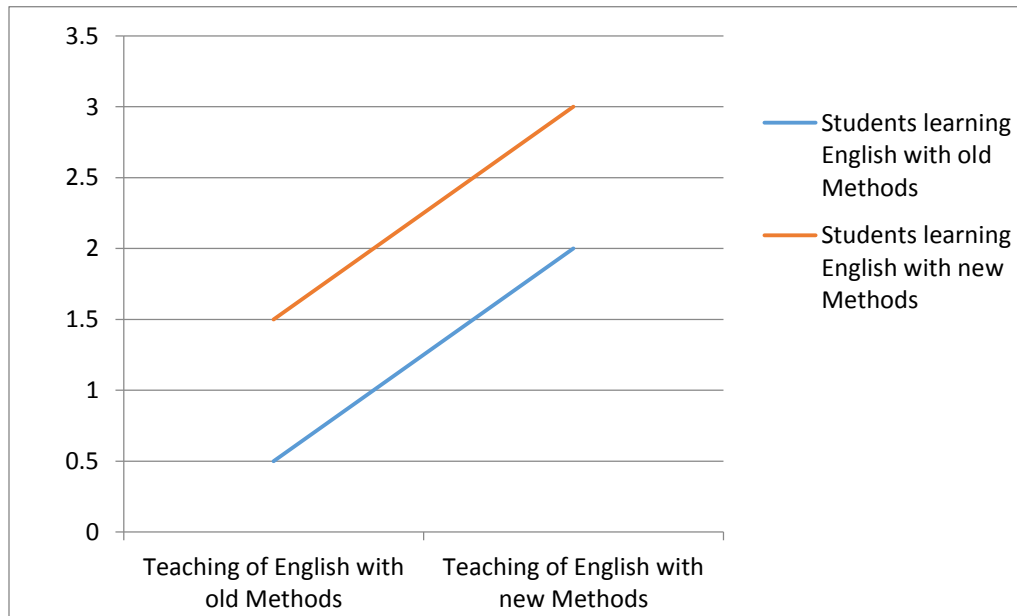


Figure  
ESL

teachers' classroom engagement and performance after their training in ICTs-based innovative and traditional methods

After the post-test, it is observed that the students learning the English language with ICTs and new techniques understand their lecture easily and improve their English learning. The experimental group teachers start teaching students with new methods, which prove beneficial for English learning students in rural areas, as in the above graph. Teachers of the experimental group adopt new methods and use English as a communication medium, improving students' English communication skills in rural areas.

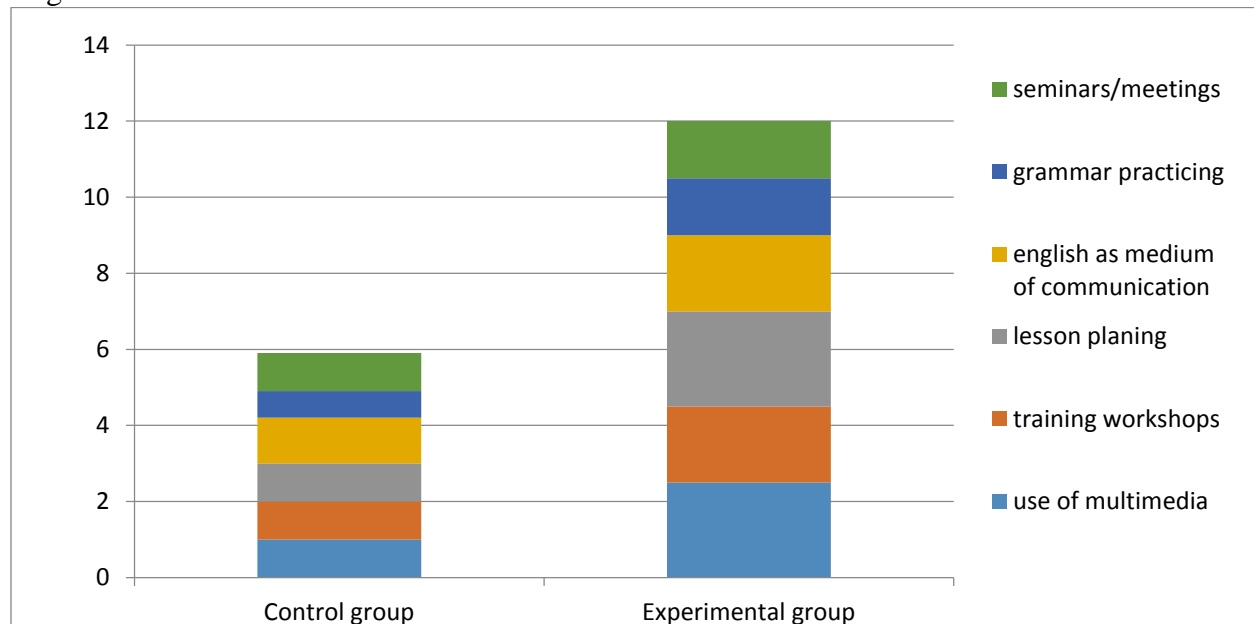


Figure 3: Improvement of Teachers after teachers' training

Experimental group teachers started using multimedia and projectors in their classes so students understood their lectures properly. Teachers started practicing student grammar learning and language skills. They started to teach English as a language, not as a subject. After proper training, teachers also started practicing grammar in class. Teachers started using the English language as a medium of communication in class. As students listen to teachers in class the whole time, students start learning to communicate in English in their classes. The teacher's behavior with students and the class also changed. With the help of multimedia, both students and teachers show more interest. Authorities should ask the government and related communities to fill their resources and for qualified teachers in the English language. As the results in Table 1, the experimental group showed better results.

Data is analyzed after collecting data from the pre-test and post-test to find out the results. It shows that the results in the post-test are better than the pre-test. Further, the experimental group teachers better understand class activities, lesson planning methods, and the teacher's role over the control group teachers.

Table 1: Results of pre and post-tests of ICTs embedded training/workshop sessions



Training methods	Pre-Test Result		Post-Test Results	
	Success %	Control Group Result%	Experimental Group Result %	
Teachers training workshops	40%	35%	75%	
Use of multimedia projector	52%	20%	72%	
Lesson planning	45%	30%	75%	
English language as medium for communication in class	40%	30%	70%	
Practice of grammar	35%	35%	70%	
Attending Seminar/meetings	45%	30%	75%	

The experimental group teachers understand the importance of lesson planning compared to the control group teachers and pay less attention in class. Teachers trained in multimedia know the value of modern technology and use it for their class activities and management. English teachers teach English not only as a subject but as a language also. Experimental group teachers must attend their workshops properly, which helps them manage their class activities and other roles. Teachers use the English language in the classroom for communication with students, which is helpful for students, and they learn to communicate in English and understand better, as in Figure 2. The control group teachers do not practice grammar in class compared to the experimental group teachers. The percentage of the pre-test is less than the post-test because teachers are unaware of new techniques and methods of teaching students and way to communicate with students, so that students have better opportunities for learning English and can easily communicate in English.

**Table. 2:-** The use of technology is emphasized to improve communication skills in the class

	Frequency	Cumulative Percent	Percent	Valid Percent
SD	05	10.5	10.5	10.5
D	07	24.5	14.0	14.0
Neutral	N	33.5	9.0	9.0
A	21	76.5	43.0	43.0
SA	12	100.0	23.5	23.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>50</b>		<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The questionnaire results highlight that most ESL teachers 33 (21+12) agreed with the statements that (i) *the use of technology is important for future learning and advancement.* (ii) *ICTs help to improve personal and professional communication skills.* (iii) *No one can get the desired results from their classes without integrating the latest approaches and innovations.* (iv) *Teachers' persona strongly impacts learners' achievements and responses.* (v) *Traditional methods and techniques should be upgraded with the help of ICTs.* While among fifty respondents, only 12 (5+7) didn't agree with these statements and opposed them. Only 05 respondents remained natural, and they didn't decide their opinion.

### **7. Conclusion:**

This research paper suggests that the practice of teaching English must be replaced. Old traditional methods replaced new techniques, approaches, and teaching methods of the English language. The old traditional approaches of teachers to teach English are not satisfactory. However, teachers are not only responsible for this, the flaws in the existing system and poor education system. This paper highlights the problems and techniques to solve this problem because English is needed to learn for the country's development. Data was collected from pre-test and post-test, which were analyzed carefully. This data highlights that the trained teachers show better results in class regarding ESL communication in rural institutes than the control group. Teachers' training is important so that they are familiar with their aim of teaching and new teaching methods. Results indicated that teachers should attend workshops, seminars, and conferences, such as DSD, PEELI, and Novice teachers' training, pre-service, and in-service training. It is required that the instructors' schooling programmers reconsider the necessities of educators and paraprofessionals and help their preparation to serve the requirements of English language students more readily. Ultimately, using ICTs and new approaches is necessary to improve the quality of English learning in Pakistan.

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