

## ANALYZING THE STRATEGIES USED BY ESL TEACHERS TO DIVERSE L1 BACKGROUND STUDENTS

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### Abstract

*This qualitative study delves into the strategies and experiences of ESL teachers in Multan, Pakistan, as they instruct students with diverse L1 backgrounds. Through interviews with 18 educators, the research identified key themes that illuminate effective ESL instruction. Notably, cultural sensitivity and awareness emerged as foundational, emphasizing the importance of acknowledging and celebrating students' cultural diversity. Adaptation of pedagogical approaches, flexibility in lesson planning, collaborative learning, and a commitment to continuous professional development are identified as pivotal components of successful ESL teaching. These findings align with established principles in ESL pedagogy, offering practical insights for educators and policymakers seeking to enhance ESL instruction in multicultural settings. The study underscores the significance of culturally responsive education in fostering language acquisition, intercultural understanding, and inclusive learning environments.*

**Keywords:** ESL teachers, diverse L1 backgrounds, cultural sensitivity, collaborative learning, professional development, multicultural education.

### Introduction

In our ever more interconnected and multicultural global landscape, the significance of possessing the skill to communicate across language barriers cannot be overstated. Within this context, the role of English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers emerges as pivotal (Demiroz & Yesilyurt, 2015). These educators play a crucial role in enabling effective communication, empowering individuals hailing from diverse linguistic backgrounds to not only access opportunities but also forge connections with others, ultimately unlocking their full potential (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022).

As the global population continues its trajectory of diversification, classrooms are transforming into microcosms of linguistic and cultural diversity. Students within these educational settings represent a rich tapestry of native languages and cultural backgrounds (Mattheoudakis et al., 2017). ESL teachers, in navigating this linguistic mosaic, contribute not only to language acquisition but also to fostering a deeper understanding and appreciation of the various cultural nuances present in the globalized learning environment (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023). In essence, their impact extends beyond language proficiency, influencing the development of global citizens who can navigate and contribute effectively in our increasingly diverse and interconnected world.

The challenges faced by ESL teachers are intricate and multifaceted, extending beyond the realm of linguistic disparities to encompass a rich tapestry of cultural nuances, varying educational backgrounds, and unique individual learning needs (Akram et al., 2020). Creating an inclusive and effective classroom environment for such a diverse spectrum of learners demands a sophisticated

understanding of pedagogical principles, the intricacies of language acquisition, and adept intercultural communication skills (Dale-Olsen & Finseraas, 2020).

In the pursuit of excellence, this research endeavor aspires to delve into the arsenal of successful strategies, optimal practices, and innovative techniques that ESL teachers deploy (Kamau et al., 2022). By doing so, it aims to illuminate the nuanced ways in which these educators navigate the complex landscape of linguistic and cultural differences. The ultimate objective is to not only bridge these gaps but also to facilitate the acquisition of language in a manner that ensures the holistic academic and personal growth of students within the ever-evolving and diverse educational milieu. In unraveling the intricacies of ESL teaching, this research seeks to contribute valuable insights that can enrich educational practices and empower educators to meet the evolving needs of their culturally diverse student populations.

Through an exploration of these strategies, this study seeks to provide valuable insights and practical guidance for ESL educators, teacher trainers, policymakers, and stakeholders in the field of education. By enhancing our understanding of how ESL teachers can adapt and thrive in culturally diverse classrooms, we can better equip them to empower their students, foster inclusive learning environments, and contribute to the broader goal of fostering global citizenship and cross-cultural understanding.

## **Review of Literature**

The field of ESL education has evolved significantly over the years, driven by the growing diversity of student populations and the need for effective language instruction. This review of literature delves into key themes and findings from existing research to provide context for the exploration of strategies employed by ESL teachers with diverse L1 background students. Ramzan et al. (2023) have suggested that by recognizing the interconnectedness of writing factors educators can foster more comprehensive development of writing skills in ESL learners.

### **1. The Multicultural Classroom Environment**

One prevailing theme in ESL education literature is the increasing diversity of student populations. Studies have highlighted the importance of creating inclusive and culturally responsive classroom environments. Researchers, such as Szelei et al. (2020) and Kamau et al. (2022), emphasize the significance of recognizing and valuing the cultural backgrounds of ESL students to promote a sense of belonging and enhance learning outcomes.

Szelei et al. (2020) emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive classroom environment that respects and incorporates the diverse cultural backgrounds of ESL students. This cultural inclusivity, as advocated by Banks, forms a foundational element in effective ESL instruction. Furthermore, Kamau et al. (2022) on culturally responsive teaching complements this idea by highlighting the need for teachers to actively engage with the cultural backgrounds of their students to foster a sense of belonging and enhance learning outcomes. Together, these studies underscore the significance of recognizing and respecting cultural diversity in ESL classrooms. Ramzan et al. (2023) have said that vigilant proficiency in English language learning motivation is determined by English learning motivation. Ramzan and Khan (2019) have scrutinized the veiled ideological stance to explore the power issues in print media headlines. Ramzan et al. (2021) have described the manipulation of the public in the hands of politicians in print media statements. Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) have expressed that there is a collusive and pacifier stance in print media headlines which is wrapped in the powerful agenda. Nawaz et al. (2021) have said that there

is an internal bias between the government and opposition wrapped in the current affairs statements in Pakistan. Ramzan et al. (2023) have claimed that omission and errors are the most common types of errors in ESL writing..

## **2. Linguistic Diversity and Language Acquisition**

Understanding the diverse linguistic backgrounds of ESL students is crucial for effective instruction. Cummins (2000) introduced the concepts of Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP), emphasizing the need for teachers to address both social and academic language development in their instruction. Additionally, Krashen's Input Hypothesis has informed ESL teaching methods by highlighting the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition (Bahrani & Nekoueizadeh, 2014).

Cummins (2000) introduced the concepts of BICS and CALP, which have become fundamental in understanding language acquisition among ESL students. His work provides a theoretical framework for ESL teachers to address both the social and academic language development needs of their students. Complementing this, Krashen's Input Hypothesis focuses on the importance of comprehensible input in language acquisition. ESL teachers can integrate Krashen's insights into their instructional strategies to promote effective language learning. These studies collectively inform ESL educators about the linguistic complexities involved in teaching students with diverse L1 backgrounds (Bahrani & Nekoueizadeh, 2014). Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) have expressed that there is a collusive and pacifier stance in print media headlines which is wrapped in the powerful agenda. Nawaz et al. (2021) have said that there is an internal bias between the government and opposition wrapped in the current affairs statements in Pakistan.

## **3. Pedagogical Approaches**

The literature reveals a wide array of pedagogical approaches used by ESL teachers. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach, as advocated by Savignon (2002), emphasizes the use of language for communication rather than rote learning, fostering active engagement among students. Similarly, Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP), developed by Gabillon and Ailincui (2015), offers a framework for integrating language and content instruction to support English language learners in content areas.

Savignon's work (2002) on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers a practical pedagogical approach that emphasizes communication as a central goal of language instruction. This approach aligns with the principles of Cummins and Krashen, encouraging ESL teachers to facilitate meaningful language interactions in the classroom. Additionally, Gabillon and Ailincui (2015) provides a structured framework for integrating language and content instruction, addressing the needs of English language learners in various content areas. The combination of CLT and SIOP demonstrates how pedagogical approaches can be tailored to meet the diverse needs of ESL students.

## **4. Cultural Competence and Intercultural Communication**

The importance of teachers' cultural competence and intercultural communication skills cannot be overstated. Research by Barany (2016) emphasizes the development of intercultural competence as an essential component of language education, enabling students to navigate cultural differences effectively.

Barany's research (2016) on intercultural communicative competence underscores the importance of not only language acquisition but also cultural competence in ESL education. This concept resonates with the ideas put forth by Banks and Gay about creating culturally inclusive

classrooms. ESL educators must possess intercultural communication skills to navigate cultural differences effectively while promoting a respectful and inclusive learning environment.

### **5. Technology and ESL Education**

The integration of technology instruction across education has gained momentum (Akram et al., 2021). Similarly, it has gained attention in ESL education (Pazilah et al., 2019; Nawaila et al., 2020). Research by Chapelle (2010) highlights the potential of technology, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), to enhance language learning experiences, particularly for digitally literate students.

Chapelle's exploration of technology (2010) in ESL education highlights the potential of digital tools, such as computer-assisted language learning (CALL), to enhance language learning experiences. Integrating technology aligns with the principles of CLT and SIOP by providing opportunities for authentic language use and engagement. The incorporation of technology into ESL instruction can further support ESL teachers in meeting the diverse needs of their students. Further, Ramzan et al. (2023) have also expressed the overlooked potential of social media as an instrument to boost ESL students' engagement and performance. Moreover, Ramzan et al. (2023) have suggested that the influence of social media is helpful for educators and policymakers. Furthermore, Ramzan et al. (2023) have confirmed that teachers are able to incorporate various helpful technical collaborative strategies

### **6. Professional Development for ESL Educators**

Supporting ESL teachers in their professional development is another critical aspect. Forte and Blouin (2016) stress the significance of ongoing training and development to ensure teachers remain effective in addressing the evolving needs of diverse student populations.

Abacioglu et al. (2022) and Forte and Blouin (2016) stress the importance of ongoing professional development for ESL educators to remain effective in diverse classrooms. This theme ties back to the need for teachers to continuously adapt their practices in line with the evolving research and best practices in ESL education, as discussed in the previous studies.

In conclusion, the literature review underscores the multifaceted nature of ESL education in diverse classrooms. It highlights the importance of creating culturally responsive environments, understanding language acquisition processes, and employing effective pedagogical strategies. Additionally, the review emphasizes the role of technology and ongoing professional development in enhancing ESL instruction. This foundation sets the stage for the subsequent exploration of strategies employed by ESL teachers to meet the unique needs of students with diverse L1 backgrounds.

### **Methodology**

This qualitative research study employed a phenomenological research design to explore and understand the experiences, perceptions, and strategies employed by ESL teachers in Multan, Pakistan, when instructing diverse L1 (first language) background students. Phenomenology was chosen as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences and perspectives of participants (Smith (2013), offering valuable insights into the complexities of ESL education in a culturally diverse context.

### **Participants**

The study involved 18 ESL teachers from various educational institutions in Multan, Pakistan. The participants were selected purposefully to ensure diversity in terms of teaching experience, educational settings (e.g., public schools, private language institutes), and student demographics.

The inclusion criteria required participants to have a minimum of three years of ESL teaching experience.

### **Data Collection**

The primary data collection method employed was semi-structured interviews. An interview guide consisting of open-ended questions and prompts was developed to facilitate discussions with the participants. The questions were designed to explore their experiences, challenges, and effective strategies in teaching ESL students from diverse L1 backgrounds. Interviews were conducted face-to-face, ensuring a conducive and comfortable environment for participants to share their insights.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study adhered to ethical guidelines for research involving human participants. Informed consent was obtained from all participants before the interviews. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and their identities were anonymized to protect their privacy. They were informed about their right to withdraw from the study at any point without consequences.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis followed a systematic process:

Firstly, audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim, ensuring accuracy and completeness. Thematic analysis was then employed to identify recurring themes and patterns in the data. Data coding involved a systematic process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding, following the guidelines outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software, was used to assist in organizing and analyzing the data. Later, to enhance the credibility and validity of the findings, member checking was conducted. Participants were provided with summaries of their interviews and were given the opportunity to verify the accuracy and interpretations of their responses.

### **Trustworthiness and Rigor**

To ensure trustworthiness and rigor in the research process, the study employed several strategies:

Firstly, data triangulation was achieved by collecting data from multiple sources, including interviews with ESL teachers and relevant literature. Secondly, ongoing discussions and debriefing sessions were held with colleagues familiar with qualitative research to ensure reflexivity and avoid bias. Thirdly, a detailed audit trail was maintained, documenting all stages of the research process, including data collection, analysis, and interpretation.

## **Results**

### **1. Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness**

The interviews revealed that ESL teachers in Multan emphasized the significance of cultural sensitivity and awareness when teaching students with diverse L1 backgrounds. Participants acknowledged the importance of understanding their students' cultural norms, values, and communication styles. They believed that this awareness not only fostered positive teacher-student relationships but also created inclusive and respectful classroom environments.

Teacher 1: "In my class, we have students from various backgrounds - Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, and more. It's crucial to be aware of their cultures and customs. For example, during Ramadan, I make sure to schedule activities that are sensitive to those fasting. It shows that we respect their traditions."

Teacher 2: "Absolutely, cultural awareness is a game-changer. I had a student from Gilgit-Baltistan, and initially, he seemed reserved. But when I started incorporating elements from

his culture into our lessons, like discussing their beautiful scenery and traditions, he opened up and became more engaged in class."

## **2. Adaptation of Pedagogical Approaches**

ESL teachers frequently discussed their adaptation of pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of their students. They emphasized the use of varied teaching techniques, including visual aids, real-life examples, and experiential learning, to make lessons more engaging and comprehensible. Many teachers also highlighted the incorporation of students' native languages when necessary to clarify concepts and promote understanding. According to few teachers:

Teacher 3: "You have to be creative in your teaching methods. For instance, I noticed that using visuals and props helped my students grasp concepts faster. When teaching vocabulary, I often use pictures, and it's amazing how much it aids comprehension, regardless of their L1."

Teacher 1: "I had a student from Uzbekistan who was struggling with grammar. I decided to use storytelling and examples from his own culture. We'd analyze stories from Uzbek literature, and it made a huge difference. He felt more connected to the material."

## **3. Flexibility in Lesson Planning**

Flexibility in lesson planning emerged as a prominent theme among the interviewed teachers. Participants shared their willingness to adapt and modify lesson plans based on the evolving needs and progress of their students. This adaptability allowed teachers to tailor instruction to individual learning styles and language proficiency levels, ensuring that no student was left behind. As per some teachers:

Teacher 3: "Sometimes, you plan a lesson, but it's not clicking with the students. That's when you need to pivot. If I see confusion in their eyes, I pause and ask if they're getting it. If not, I rethink my approach right there and then."

Teacher 4: "Each class is different. What works for one may not work for another. You need to gauge their comprehension level, and if it's not where you expected, it's fine. Be willing to spend more time on a topic if needed. The goal is learning, not rushing through the syllabus."

## **4. Collaborative Learning and Peer Support**

Teachers emphasized the value of collaborative learning and peer support in ESL classrooms. They encouraged group activities, peer tutoring, and cooperative projects that enabled students to learn from each other's linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This approach not only promoted language acquisition but also enriched students' intercultural experiences. Few teachers stated:

Teacher 2: "Group projects are a hit in my class. I once had students from diverse L1 backgrounds working on a project about their favorite festivals. They not only learned from each other but also built friendships beyond the classroom."

Teacher 5: "Peer tutoring is fantastic. I often pair a student who's proficient in English with one who's struggling. The mentorship helps the struggling student build confidence, and the tutor reinforces their own knowledge."

## **5. Professional Development and Lifelong Learning**

Participants highlighted the importance of continuous professional development and lifelong learning. They recognized the dynamic nature of ESL education and the need to stay updated with emerging pedagogical techniques and resources. Several teachers expressed their commitment to attending workshops and seeking advanced certifications to enhance their teaching skills. According to few teachers:

Teacher 3: "I believe in continuous learning. Last summer, I attended a workshop on the latest ESL teaching techniques. It transformed the way I approach my lessons. We owe it to our students to stay updated."

Teacher 7: "I recently completed a TESOL certification online. It was challenging, but it's already making a difference in my classroom. It's important to invest in our own growth so that we can provide the best education to our students."

These five key themes represent the core strategies and approaches employed by ESL teachers in Multan, Pakistan, to effectively instruct students with diverse L1 backgrounds. Cultural sensitivity, adaptable pedagogy, lesson flexibility, collaboration, and a commitment to professional growth emerged as critical components of their teaching practices. These findings provide valuable insights for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders interested in enhancing ESL instruction in multicultural contexts.

## Discussion

The findings of this study, drawn from qualitative interviews with ESL teachers, shed light on several critical themes that have significant implications for ESL education in multicultural settings. In this discussion, we will explore how these findings align with previous studies and provide suggestions for educators and policymakers in light of the present study's insights.

The first result, the emphasis on cultural sensitivity and awareness among ESL teachers aligns with the works of Kamau et al. (2022) and Szelei et al. (2020). Recognizing and respecting the cultural backgrounds of students is foundational to creating inclusive and respectful classroom environments. This aligns with the notion of culturally responsive teaching, which promotes student engagement and academic success. Therefore, curriculum developers should create diverse teaching materials and resources that reflect the cultural backgrounds and linguistic diversity of ESL students. This can help teachers in adapting their pedagogical approaches more effectively.

The finding, adaptation of pedagogical approaches to meet the diverse needs of students resonates with Bahrani and Nekouezadeh (2014) study. It emphasizes the importance of active, experiential learning and aligns with Cummins' (2000) BICS and CALP framework. The incorporation of native languages, as highlighted by Teacher 4, is also supported by research showing that leveraging students' L1 can aid comprehension (Robillos, 2023).

The theme of flexibility in lesson planning echoes the importance of differentiation, a key concept in ESL education (Crosthwaite et al., 2021). ESL teachers recognize that one-size-fits-all approaches may not work in diverse classrooms. The willingness to adapt and modify lesson plans aligns with the dynamic nature of ESL instruction.

The promotion of collaborative learning and peer support aligns with the idea of a socio-constructivist approach (Vygotsky & Cole 1978). Collaborative activities and peer tutoring, as mentioned by teachers, not only facilitate language acquisition but also promote intercultural understanding and cooperation. It is therefore essential that schools should foster inclusive and supportive classroom environments where cultural diversity is celebrated. Encouraging teachers to share successful strategies and learn from one another can promote a collaborative teaching culture.

The commitment to professional development and lifelong learning among ESL teachers aligns with the work of Omar and Rashid (2019). Continuous training and education are essential in staying updated with best practices in ESL instruction. Educational institutions and policymakers should invest in ongoing training and professional development opportunities for ESL teachers.

Workshops, certifications, and courses on cultural sensitivity, innovative pedagogical techniques, and language acquisition strategies can enhance teachers' effectiveness (Akram et al., 2022). In addition, further research is needed to explore the long-term effects of these strategies on student outcomes. Collaboration between researchers, educators, and policymakers can lead to evidence-based practices that benefit ESL students.

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight the importance of cultural sensitivity, adaptable pedagogy, flexibility in lesson planning, collaborative learning, and professional development in ESL education. Aligning these findings with previous studies offers a comprehensive framework for improving ESL instruction in multicultural settings, ultimately leading to more effective language acquisition and enhanced intercultural competence among students.

### Conclusions

In conclusion, this qualitative study of ESL teachers in Multan, Pakistan, reveals the central role of cultural sensitivity, adaptable pedagogy, flexibility in lesson planning, collaborative learning, and a commitment to lifelong learning in effective ESL education. These findings align with established principles in ESL pedagogy and underscore the importance of creating inclusive learning environments. To optimize ESL instruction, educators and policymakers should prioritize professional development, diverse teaching resources, and supportive classroom settings, ensuring that ESL students with diverse L1 backgrounds receive a well-rounded and culturally responsive education, fostering language acquisition and intercultural competence.

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