

IMPACT OF PERSONALIZED ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING (PELT) ON SPEAKING SKILLS IN GRADE 5 ESL CLASSROOMS: A STUDY IN A PAKISTANI EDUCATIONAL SETTING

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study investigates the impact of Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) on the speaking skills of Grade 5 ESL learners in public primary schools in Punjab, Pakistan, and identifies the effective strategies underpinning this approach. Grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, it employs a phenomenological methodology to explore the lived experiences of 20 purposively sampled ESL teachers through in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis of the data, facilitated by NVivo software, bring in two core findings aligned with the research objectives. First, teachers perceived PELT as significantly enhancing students' speaking skills, noting dual benefits in linguistic competence (e.g., contextualized vocabulary, improved fluency) and psycho-social development (e.g., increased confidence, reduced anxiety). Second, the study delineates a scaffolded framework of effective PELT strategies, progressing from diagnostic and interest-based grouping, through differentiated interaction and feedback, to fostering student agency and reflective practice. The conclusion establishes PELT as a potent pedagogy for this context, while simultaneously highlighting the moderating constraint of large class sizes, which necessitates pragmatic adaptation. The study contributes actionable insights for teacher training, curriculum design, and classroom practice, advocating for the integration of personalized, student-centred methodologies. It recommends future research employing mixed-methods and longitudinal designs to quantitatively measure PELT's impact and test the transferability of its strategic framework.

Keywords: Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT); Language Acquisition; Speaking Skills; English as a Second Language (ESL)

INTRODUCTION

In today's global landscape, English is a crucial medium for communication, with over half of the world's population using it as their first language. Its significance extends across various fields, such as science, technology, and culture, making English proficiency essential, particularly in countries like Pakistan where global participation is vital

(Ilyosovna, 2020). In Pakistani primary schools, English instruction aims to develop four key language skills: speaking, reading, listening, and writing. However, challenges persist, especially in developing speaking skills among Grade 5 students. Factors such as limited access to quality resources, traditional teacher-centred methods,

and inadequate teacher training hinder effective language acquisition (Jamal et al., 2025).

Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) addresses these challenges by tailoring instruction to meet individual students' needs, preferences, and abilities. This approach shifts away from the "one size fits all" model, promoting engagement through customized content and activities (Cai & Li, 2024). PELT incorporates technology, allowing adaptive learning experiences that adjust to students' proficiency levels, thus enhancing motivation and engagement (Leshchenko et al., 2023). Furthermore, PELT encourages peer collaboration through activities like book clubs, fostering both social and linguistic development. By emphasizing differentiated instruction and providing choices in reading materials, PELT creates a more engaging and effective learning environment (Nuraini & Shahbodin, 2015).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In Pakistan, English is increasingly recognized as a vital skill for academic and professional success. However, Grade 5 ESL students face significant challenges in developing their speaking skills due to traditional, teacher-centred instructional methods that often emphasize rote learning over interactive and communicative practices. These conventional approaches limit student engagement and hinder the development of essential speaking abilities, which are crucial for effective communication in English. Despite the importance of speaking skills in language acquisition, many Grade 5 students struggle with fluency, pronunciation, and vocabulary usage. Factors contributing to these challenges include a lack of access to quality English language resources, inadequate teacher training, and limited opportunities for meaningful language practice. Consequently, there is a pressing need to explore innovative teaching methodologies that can better support the diverse learning needs of students. Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) presents a promising solution by tailoring instruction to individual students' preferences, abilities, and interests. However, the specific impact of PELT on speaking skills in the context of Pakistani ESL classrooms remains under-researched. This study aims to investigate how PELT can enhance speaking skills among Grade 5 ESL learners and identify effective strategies that promote engagement and language proficiency.

1.2 Research Objectives

To investigate the impact of Personalized English Language teaching (PELT) on the speaking skills of grade 5 ESL students in a Pakistani Educational setting.

To identify effective PELT strategies that enhance speaking skills and engagement among grade 5 ESL learners.

1.3 Significance of the Study

This study holds significant practical and theoretical value for ESL education in Pakistan. Primarily, it contributes to evidence-based pedagogy by identifying effective, personalized teaching strategies that enable educators to transition from traditional methods toward more engaging, student-centred speaking instruction. By demonstrating how Personalized English Language Teaching enhances both linguistic competence and learner confidence, the research directly aims to improve educational outcomes for Grade 5 students. Furthermore, the findings provide critical insights for curriculum designers and policymakers, advocating for the integration of flexible, differentiated methodologies to address diverse learner needs and promote classroom inclusivity. Lastly, the study establishes a foundational framework for future research, encouraging further exploration of personalized learning across different skills and contexts, thereby enriching the broader field of language education.

Literature Review

2.1 English as Global Lingua Franca

The hegemony of English as the world's primary lingua franca is an uncontested sociolinguistic reality. It functions as a universal medium, facilitating cross-national communication in diplomacy, commerce, science, and culture (Smokotin et al., 2014). This global status is not merely functional but deeply consequential, acting as a bridge across linguistic divides in international forums (Meyer, 2004), a prerequisite for careers in multinational corporations (Crystal, 2003), and a conduit for the global diffusion of knowledge and innovation (Graddol, 2006). For individual nations, proficiency in English correlates strongly with enhanced economic development, greater access to global education and research, and improved integration into the world economy (Crystal, 2003; Graddol, 2006).

2.2 The Strategic Imperative of English for Pakistan's Development

Within the specific context of Pakistan, English proficiency transitions from a general advantage to a strategic national imperative. Scholars position it as a critical lever for progress across multiple domains:

Economic & Professional Empowerment: Fluency in English is directly linked to better employment prospects, particularly in international sectors, research institutions, and global organizations, enhancing the employability of the Pakistani workforce (Hussain, 2012).

Diplomatic & Scientific Engagement: It is essential for effective diplomacy, allowing Pakistani representatives to participate meaningfully in international discourse (Nayyar, 2007). Simultaneously, as the dominant language of science and technology, English is indispensable for accessing and contributing to global innovation (Gupta, 2010).

Cultural Diplomacy & Soft Power: English serves as a vehicle for Pakistan to project its cultural heritage globally, fostering cross-cultural understanding and soft power (Anwar, 2008).

2.3 Deconstructing Speaking Skills: The Core Dependent Variable

Effective speaking is a complex, integrative skill far beyond simple utterance. It is a cornerstone of communicative competence and personal empowerment. The literature identifies several interdependent components crucial for oral proficiency:

Linguistic Competence: This includes fluency (smooth, continuous speech), accurate pronunciation and articulation, appropriate intonation, grammatical range and accuracy, and a wide, context-appropriate vocabulary (Richards & Schmidt, 2013; Derwing & Munro, 2015; Celce-Murcia et al., 2019).

Paralinguistic & Strategic Competence: Effective body language, including gestures and eye contact, is vital for reinforcing meaning (Knapp & Hall, 2014). Furthermore, metacognitive strategies for planning, monitoring, and repairing speech are key to effective communication.

2.4 Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT): The Pedagogical Intervention

The limitations of traditional, one-size-fits-all pedagogy have led to the evolution of learner-

centred approaches, culminating in the concept of Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT). PELT is an umbrella pedagogical framework that tailors instruction to individual learners' needs, preferences, proficiency levels, and goals.

PELT synthesizes insights from several key educational paradigms:

Learner Autonomy & Self-Direction: Emphasizing the learner's active role in setting goals and managing their learning process (Benson, 2001).

Adaptive Learning: Utilizing technology to adjust content difficulty and pacing based on learner performance.

Meaningful Engagement: Employing task-based and collaborative methods where language is used to achieve real-world outcomes (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Differentiation: Systematically modifying content, process, product, and learning environment to meet diverse learner needs (Tomlinson, 2021).

2.5 Core Elements and Procedures of PELT Implementation

Effective PELT implementation is cyclical and diagnostic, involving key elements and procedures:

Needs Analysis & Goal Setting: The foundation is a diagnostic assessment of each learner's speaking strengths, weaknesses, interests, and goals (Brown, 2007).

Customized Learning Pathways: Development of individualized plans with tailored objectives, materials (including authentic resources like media and podcasts), and activities (Harmer, 2007).

Flexible, Strategy-Rich Instruction: Employment of a variety of methods (e.g., task-based learning, role-play, project-based learning) chosen for their relevance to the learner's profile (Nunan, 2004).

Technology Integration: Use of language apps, digital platforms, and multimedia to provide interactive, self-paced practice and immediate feedback (Chapelle & Jamieson, 2008).

Formative Assessment & Feedback: Continuous, tailored feedback on speaking performance is crucial for guiding improvement and adjusting instruction (Nunan, 2004).

Fostering Reflection & Autonomy: Encouraging learners to reflect on their progress and strategies promotes metacognitive awareness and self-regulated learning (Benson, 2001).

2.6 Synthesizing PELT and Speaking Skill Development for Young Learners

The convergence of PELT principles and the components of speaking skills presents a powerful model for ESL instruction. For Grade 5 students, personalized speaking activities might include:

Goal-Oriented Tasks: Designing speaking tasks around a learner's personal interests (e.g., describing a favourite game, explaining a local festival) to boost motivation and relevance (Willis & Willis, 2007).

Differentiated Practice: Providing varied support and challenge; some learners may focus on fluency through structured dialogues, while others work on intonation and pronunciation through digital storytelling tools.

Peer Collaboration in a Supportive Environment: Using peer-assisted learning activities (Topping, 2005) where students engage in role-plays or discussions, offering each other feedback in a low-anxiety setting personalized by peer dynamics.

2.7 Navigating the Research Gap: A Step towards Current Research

The literature firmly establishes the importance of English speaking skills for individual and national advancement in Pakistan. It also provides a robust theoretical and practical foundation for Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) as a responsive and engaging pedagogical approach. However, while the potential synergies between PELT and oral skill development are strongly implied, there is a discernible gap in empirical, context-specific research. Specifically, there is a lack of focused studies investigating the tangible impact of structured PELT interventions on the discrete components of speaking skills (fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary in use, etc.) among young ESL learners, such as Grade 5 students in the Pakistani public or private school context. This review therefore sets the stage for the present study, which aims to contribute precisely this needed evidence, exploring how and how effectively PELT strategies can be operationalized to enhance speaking proficiency in the target setting.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study, guided by an interpretivist paradigm, employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of public primary school teachers in Punjab, Pakistan, regarding Personalized English

Language Teaching (PELT). The target population comprised all grade 5 ESL teachers within this setting, from which a purposive sample of 15-20 teachers was selected to ensure participants had direct experience with PELT strategies. The primary research tool was a semi-structured interview protocol, developed based on an extensive literature review. Its content validity was established through expert review by one applied linguistics specialist and two English language teaching expert, and its reliability was ensured via a pilot study and the maintenance of a detailed audit trail. Data was collected through in-depth, one-on-one interviews, conducted either in-person or virtually, which were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The research procedure adhered to strict ethical protocols, including obtaining informed consent and ensuring participant anonymity.

3.1 Data Analysis

The data analysis adhered rigorously to the principles of thematic analysis within a phenomenological framework, employing an iterative, six-phase process to address the two research objectives. Following verbatim transcription of all interviews, the researcher immersed themselves in the data through repeated readings to gain a holistic understanding of the teachers' lived experiences. Initial coding was conducted using NVivo (version 12), generating descriptive codes directly from the transcripts. These codes were then systematically organized into potential themes through a process of constant comparison, where data within and across transcripts were continuously contrasted and refined as adopted by Gull et al. (2023). The software facilitated this management of codes and the visualization of thematic relationships. To specifically investigate the impact of PELT on speaking skills (Objective 1), themes were developed around perceived changes in students' linguistic competence (e.g., vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, fluency) and psycho-social dimensions (e.g., confidence, anxiety, willingness to communicate). For identifying effective PELT strategies (Objective 2), analysis focused on aggregating coded data on instructional practices, materials, and assessments that teachers consistently linked to enhanced engagement and oral proficiency. Emerging themes were reviewed and refined at multiple stages first in relation to the

coded extracts, then against the entire dataset to ensure they accurately represented the collective experiences. Credibility was strengthened through member checking, where preliminary interpretations were shared with a subset of participants for validation. The final stage involved defining and naming themes, resulting in a structured thematic framework. The interpretation and representation of findings were then articulated through rich, descriptive narratives, supported by direct quotations and synthesized in thematic matrices, to provide a nuanced exploration of both the multifaceted impact of PELT and the specific pedagogical strategies deemed most effective by the participating teachers.

3.2 Data Interpretation

Data interpretation involved an iterative process of constant comparison and member checking to enhance credibility, with findings represented through detailed descriptive narratives and thematic matrices to address both research objectives: elucidating the perceived impact of PELT on students' speaking skills and identifying the specific strategies deemed most effective for enhancing engagement and oral proficiency.

Findings of the Study

Guided by the phenomenological analysis of in-depth teacher interviews, the study's findings are presented as two core thematic constructs directly aligned with the research objectives, reflecting the collective lived experiences of the participants.

Objective 1: The Impact of PELT on Speaking Skills

The analysis revealed a consistent perception among teachers that PELT positively impacts grade 5 ESL students' speaking skills across two interrelated dimensions: linguistic competence and psycho-social development. Linguistically, teachers observed marked improvements in students' vocabulary appropriation and use, noting that personalized topics allowed students to employ new words with greater relevance and retention. One participant stated, "When they speak about their own family or favourite game, the words stick. They use them again without prompting." Furthermore, enhancements in fluency and grammatical awareness were reported, attributed to increased practice in low-anxiety

settings. Psycho-socially, the most profound impact was on student confidence and reduced speaking anxiety. Teachers described a transition from reluctance to voluntary participation, with a participant explaining, "The shy ones, when they see their own interest being valued, they slowly start to raise their hand." This fostered a greater willingness to communicate in English, both inside and outside the classroom, establishing a virtuous cycle of practice and improvement.

Objective 2: Effective PELT Strategies for Engagement and Proficiency

In identifying effective strategies, teachers emphasized adaptable frameworks rather than fixed techniques, culminating in three key themes. First, diagnostic and interest-based grouping was foundational; strategies such as preliminary speaking assessments, interest inventories, and flexible small-group formations based on shared hobbies or proficiency levels were deemed crucial for initial engagement. Second, differentiated interaction and feedback emerged as central to maintaining progress. This included employing multimodal materials (e.g., using a student's favourite cartoon clip for dialogue practice), tailored speaking tasks (e.g., role-plays based on personal aspirations), and personalized, immediate corrective feedback focused on one improvement area at a time. Third, the strategy of student agency and reflective practice was highlighted as highly effective for sustaining engagement. Allowing students choice in topics, incorporating peer-assessment in familiar contexts, and maintaining simple learning journals where students noted new words they used, were reported to foster ownership and metacognitive awareness of their speaking development. However, teachers also consistently noted the pragmatic challenge of large classes, necessitating the creative adaptation of these ideal strategies within existing constraints.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study establishes that, from the perspective of Punjab's public primary school teachers, Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) constitutes a potent pedagogical approach for enhancing ESL speaking skills in grade 5. The findings affirm that PELT's efficacy stems from its dual impact on both linguistic competence through contextualized vocabulary acquisition and improved fluency and psycho-

social development, primarily by boosting confidence and fostering a greater willingness to communicate. Furthermore, the research identifies a scaffolded framework of effective strategies, progressing from diagnostic and interest-based grouping, through differentiated interaction and feedback, to cultivating student agency and reflective practice. Crucially, while these strategies are perceived as transformative, their successful implementation is moderated by contextual constraints, notably large class sizes, underscoring the necessity for adaptive and pragmatic application within the Pakistani educational setting.

Recommendations of the Study

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the implementation and understanding of Personalized English Language Teaching (PELT) in similar contexts.

A. For Stakeholders

1. For Teachers and School Administrators: It is recommended that schools facilitate professional development workshops focused on the pragmatic adaptation of PELT strategies for large-class settings. These workshops should move beyond theory to provide concrete techniques for interest-based grouping, managing differentiated feedback, and fostering student agency with limited resources.
2. For Curriculum Developers and Teacher Trainers (e.g., TEVTA, PDE): Teacher training curricula and in-service programs should be updated to integrate modules on PELT's scaffolded framework—diagnostic assessment, differentiated instruction, and reflective practice. Emphasis should be placed on developing teachers' skills in conducting simple diagnostic interviews and creating flexible, interest-based speaking activities.
3. For the Punjab Education Department and School Leadership: To mitigate the primary constraint identified, education authorities are recommended to explore policy adjustments and support mechanisms. This could include providing schools with supplementary multimedia resources for personalized learning, reconsidering teacher-student ratios where feasible, and formally recognizing and allocating time for teachers to develop personalized learner profiles.

4. For Material Designers and Publishers: Textbook and educational resource developers are encouraged to design modular and adaptable speaking activities that allow for personalization. Resources should include optional, multi-level tasks and prompts that enable teachers to tailor content to diverse student interests and proficiency levels within a single classroom.

B. For Future Research

1. It is recommended that future studies employ a mixed-methods or experimental design to quantitatively measure the specific impact of PELT strategies on objective speaking proficiency metrics (e.g., fluency rate, lexical diversity), thereby complementing the rich qualitative perceptions gathered in this study.
2. Further research should investigate the application and effectiveness of the identified PELT framework in other educational contexts, such as different provinces of Pakistan, varying grade levels, or private school settings, to test its transferability and identify context-specific modifications.
3. A longitudinal research design is recommended to examine the sustained effects of PELT on students' speaking skills and confidence over an extended period (e.g., one academic year), providing insights into the long-term viability and developmental impact of personalization in language learning.

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