

# Student Deep Learning In Bachelor English Programs Within Pakistani Universities

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## Abstract

The purpose of this study was to contrast undergraduate students' descriptions about transformational teaching practices, and student deep learning in bachelor English programs in selected universities within Pakistan. This study utilized a survey to gather responses from five hundred and twenty three students. A paired sample t test was utilized to examine student differences on these variables in the English language and literature classes. The findings of this study revealed that there were significant differences among undergraduate students on deep learning in the English language and literature classes. The implications for the improvement of English education are considered.

## Introduction

As an official language, English is used in civil administration, bureaucracy, the legal system, and education in Pakistan (Abbas, 1993; Khalique, 2006; Mansoor, 2004). According to Khalique, English is considered a tool to acquire knowledge and skills related to a higher quality of life for people in Pakistan. He indicates that students should have access to good quality English language education (Khalique, 2006). In Pakistan, many projects are in progress to improve English education. Educators and researchers call for changes in the English language teaching for better learning and teaching outcomes. Many studies (Mansoor, 2004; Rahman, 2005; Siddique, 2007) report poor learning and teaching outcomes in the existing system to teach English. Researchers indicated that English language teaching needed improvement to promote quality learning and teaching outcomes.

Rahman (2005) stated:

The level of competence attained is low and students are unable to understand and write, let alone speak English. English is taught through grammar-translation method. Students memorize a large number of rules without acquiring real understanding of the language. They also translate passages from Urdu to English and vice versa. As books are not changed for many years, people write guide books to help students. Thus, students cram lessons such as essays,

from the guide books and get passing grades without acquiring any real competence in English. (Rahman, 2005, p. 9)

Tahir and Qadir (2012) reported that passive learning environments in the English language classroom resulted in student dissatisfaction and poor performance.

Research studies (Biggs, 1978; Trigwell, Prosser and Waterhouse, 1999; Economos, 2013) reported that deep learning approaches are associated with higher-quality teaching and learning outcomes. Deep learning has pedagogical value because students who adopt deep learning approaches develop metacognition in the subject and greater love and passion for learning (Hay, 2007; Nelson-Laird, 2005). These research studies suggest that deep learning approaches have the potential to improve English education in Pakistan.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the attributes of deep learning as they relate to student commitment to master subjects, to perceive connections to multiple experiences and to evaluate their own work in the learning of English as a second language. In addition, this study investigates transformational teaching practices that foster deep learning among students.

## Theoretical Perspective

### Deep Learning

The construct of a deep learning approach came from the seminal work of Marton and Saljo (1976). According to Nelson-Laird, Shoup and Kuh (2005),

Deep learning is represented by a personal commitment to understand the material, which is reflected in using various strategies such as reading widely, combining a variety of resources, discussing ideas with others, reflecting on how individual pieces of information relate to larger constructs or patterns, and applying knowledge in real world situations. In addition, a characteristic of deep learning is integrating and synthesizing information with prior learning in ways that become

part of one's thinking and approaching new phenomena and efforts to see things from different perspectives. (p.4)

Deep learning resulted in student retention of higher grades and development of high order skills (Biggs, 1988; Hacker & Niederhauser, 2000; Ramsden, 2003). Platow, Mavor and Grace (2013) reported the significance of the deep learning approach construct, and the educational value of promoting deep learning among students. According to Ramsden, (2003) high quality learning outcomes were associated with deep learning. Researchers (Entwistle, 1991; Ramsden, 2003; Weigel, 2001) suggested that promoting student deep learning approaches improved the quality of education when professors empowered students to become an active part of the learning process, and to develop an understanding of the real world.

Biggs, Kember, and Leung (2001) recommended that the most effective way for promoting deep approaches to learning was for teachers to be responsible for ensuring that assessment and other contextual elements were constructively aligned. Gordon and Debus (2002) reported that it was important to construct learning environments to encourage deep learning approaches. English, Luckett and Mladenovic (2004) indicated the value of the learning environment to promote deep approaches to learning English as a foreign language. By implementing Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1985), researchers reported that teachers were able to improve students' approaches to learning by providing a better learning context with foreign language literature, and involving them in reflective based writing tasks.

Hall, Ramsay and Ravens (2004) suggested that educators could impact student learning approaches by incorporating certain changes in the learning environment among first-year accounting students. They found that the increase in students' deep approach to learning is connected to reading widely, searching for relationships, and integrating with previous knowledge. The findings of this research are consistent with previous research (Biggs, 1987; English et al., 2004; Gordon & Debus, 2002) that reported a correlation between comprehension and student deep approaches to learning.

Nelson-Laird, Shoup and Kuh (2005) examined differences in terms of discipline and deep learning. Nelson-Laird et al. (2005) concluded that deep learning occurred in all the disciplines. In the discipline of physical sciences students experienced low deep learning. Researchers suggested that certain gaps in the teaching practices in those disciplines encouraged and promoted student surface learning approaches, such as passing exams or getting good grades only.

Platow et al. (2013) recommended that student deep learning approaches to learning involved professors' efforts to understand students' prior interests, skills and abilities, learning context, and actual time and resources to

engage in deep learning approaches. Phillip and Graeff (2014) introduced in-class simulation in the accounting class to help students develop deep learning approaches. Phillip and Graeff recommended that active learning strategies like the use of simulation in the classroom exposed students to a concrete, real world experience. They concluded that professors should use active learning strategies to encourage students to understand the abstract concepts and their application in the real world.

Nelson-Laird et al. (2014) concluded that deep approaches to learning influence students to adopt positive attitudes towards a range of literacy activities. They suggested important implications for higher education. Researchers recommended creating developmentally appropriate environments for the students in educational institutions.

To make the cognitive gains suggested by this study, educators of first-year students needed to enact practices that more frequently encourage students to examine the strengths and weaknesses of their own views, and towards a lesser degree, integrate ideas from various sources, including diverse perspectives in their academic work. In short, first-year students made academic gains when asked to engage metacognitive processes, including reflecting on themselves and integrating divergent perspectives into a formative, working epistemology (Nelson-Laird et al., 2014, p.427).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Burns (1978) coined the term transformational leadership that explained leaders' and followers' engagement to higher levels of morality and motivation. Bass (1985) elaborated the conceptualization of transformational leadership and included the following characteristics:

- (a) **Idealized Influence or Charisma:** The leader exhibits certain qualities such as possessing a vision, gaining trust, respect and creating optimism. This charismatic leader inspires and excites his followers. In this way he wins respect and admiration from his subordinates.
- (b) **Inspirational Motivation:** The leader presents himself as a role model for his followers as he clearly communicates a vision. In this way a leader is able to raise the confidence of his subordinates to share leaders' vision and goals.
- (c) **Individual Consideration:** The leader is seen in the role of a coach and a mentor. He focuses on the individual needs of his subordinates, and provides feedback for their personal growth. Overall, a leader using this component of transformational leadership exhibits his concerns for the individual follower's developmental needs.

(d) Intellectual Stimulation: This component of transformational leadership is based on the assumption that transformational leaders stimulate followers to rethink their existing values and beliefs. To intellectually stimulate his followers, a leader provides his followers with interesting and challenging tasks and stimulates them to solve problems (Bass, 1985).

### Methodology

#### Participants

Tahir (2015) conducted a study using a validated survey distributed to 523 undergraduate students across the province of Punjab, Pakistan from seven public and private universities. Consent was obtained through a form letter sent to participants. Participants were 134 male and 355 female students whose ages ranged from 17 to 25 years. All students were enrolled in bachelor English programs. Responses of 490 students were complete, yielding a response rate of 97 percent. Seventy-nine participants were enrolled for less than one year, 106 participants were enrolled for one year, 101 participants were enrolled for two years, 57 participants were enrolled for three years, and 146 participants were enrolled for more than three years in the program.

#### Survey Instrument

A 47-item survey developed by the author was used in order to collect data regarding student descriptions of English professors' teaching practices and student deep learning in the English language and literature classes in bachelor English programs. Responses to questions were in Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree) for individualized consideration, intellectual simulation, professorial charisma and deep learning. Considerate Intellectual Stimulation was identified as a new variable as a result of factor analysis using principal component analysis and a rotational method of varimax with Kaiser Nominalization. It merged together two variables of individualized consideration and intellectual stimulation for transformational teaching (see Table 1.1).

#### Research Question One

How do undergraduate students differ in their descriptions of professorial charisma, considerate intellectual stimulation, and student deep learning in the English language and English literature classes within Pakistani universities?

Table 1.2 reports the paired sample statistical analysis of the variables of considerate intellectual stimulation, charisma, and deep learning in English literature and language classes.

**Table 1.1**  
*Scale Reliability Post Factor Analysis, Items, and Sources*

Dimensions	Items	Numbers of Items	Alpha Coefficient a	
			Literature	Language
Deep Learning	53, 54, 56, 51, 52, 49, 57, 50, 48, 46, 55	11	.833	.833
Charisma	33, 30, 34, 36, 32, 37, 29, 35	8	.783	.789
Considerate Intellectual Stimulation	40, 41, 47, 39, 43, 44, 38, 42, 45	9	.802	.830

**Table 1.2**  
*Paired Sample Statistical Analysis of Variables*

Pairs		M	N	SD	SEM	t	df	p
Pair 1	CIS-Literature	33.08	489	4.73	.25	1.02	488	.306
	CIS-Language	32.86	489	5.07	.27			
Pair 2	Charisma-Literature	28.31	490	5.54	.21	.678	489	.261
	Charisma-Language	28.24	490	6.10	.22			
Pair 3	DL-Literature	41.74	490	6.24	.28	2.47	489	.014
	DL-Language	41.17	490	6.63	.29			

The variables were analyzed to see the differences in student descriptions in English literature and English language classes. Overall, **Table 1.2** students indicated that there were no significant differences among the variables except deep learning ( $p=.01$ ). There was a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of deep learning in literature (41.74), and mean scores of deep learning in language (41.17) and  $p < .05$ . In order to determine which items were different for students in the English language and English literature classes, a frequency analysis was performed for the variables of deep learning.

**Table 1.3** presents the frequency analysis for comparing the difference of undergraduate students' descriptions of deep learning in English literature and the English language classes.

There were more students in English literature classes (67.3 percent) than students in language classes (almost 59 percent) who agreed that they tried to relate what they had learned in one subject to what they already knew in other subjects. More students in languages classes did not agree (40.4 percent) than students in literature classes (32.5 percent).

### Discussion and Implications

The frequency analysis revealed that *Item 56: I try to relate what I have learned in one subject to what I already know in other subjects*, contributed to the significant difference between the groups. This finding was aligned with recent research. Nelson-Laird et al. (2014) investigated the first-year students' approaches to learning, and found that student integration of ideas from various sources

was significant for student deep learning. In conclusion, if professors prompt students to associate new knowledge with their existing knowledge, students relate the knowledge in one subject to another subject and will adopt deep approaches to learning.

In this study, literature students reported greater levels of deep learning experiences. Researchers (Economos, 2013; Nelson-Laird et al., 2005; Ullah, Richardson & Hafeez, 2013) found that students adopted different learning approaches across subjects. Economos reported that education students experienced greater levels of deep learning as compared to business students. Similarly, Nelson-Laird et al. (2005) found differences in student approaches to learning by discipline areas. They found that students in social sciences scored higher on a deep learning scale compared to business management and science students. Likewise, Ullah et al. stated that students in the arts and social sciences had positive attitudes towards their program of study, and adopted a deep approach to learning as compared to students in science and management groups.

The undergraduate students in English literature classes in this study reported experiencing deeper approaches to learning as compared to the English language group. Findings of this study are consistent with Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Shihi (2012) who examined university students' descriptions of courses (literature, linguistics and language) in English programs in Oman. Forty-two percent of the students who majored in language arts preferred to study just literature courses. Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Shihi argued that the varied material in literature courses such as dramas, novels, poetry, and short stories promoted student deep learning experiences.

**Table 1.3** Frequency analysis for Deep learning Item 56

*56 - I try to relate what I have learned in one subject to what I already know in other subjects.*

English Literature	N	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-Strongly Disagree	5	1.00	1.00	1.8
2-Disagree	32	6.5	6.5	7.3
3-Somewhat Agree	123	25.1	25.1	36.9
4-Agree	197	40.2	40.2	77.3
5-Strongly Agree	133	27.1	27.1	100
Total	490	100	100	
English Language	N	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-Strongly Disagree	4	.8	.8	1.8
2-Disagree	33	6.7	6.7	7.6
3-Somewhat Agree	161	32.9	32.9	32.7
4-Agree	169	34.5	34.5	72.9
5-Strongly agree	123	25.1	25.1	100.0
Total	490	100	100	

One of the conclusions from this study is that students in the literature group experience deeper approaches to learning as professors in literature subjects encouraged students to integrate ideas from various sources as compared to the language group. Students in literature classes experience deep learning as literature subjects and discussions helped them enhance their critical thinking, develop wisdom and insights, achieve freedom of expression, and exercise diverse world views. Likewise Eastman (2014) finds how literature motivates students to deep learning by exposing them to various arguments, contradictions and complexity in different genres.

Students in language classes report less deep learning experiences and describe language classes as having less room for subject integration as compared to literature classes. The results of this study imply that the structure of language courses needs to be evaluated as there is the possibility that students in languages classes adopt surface learning approaches that promote rote memorization. In addition, professors' teaching practices might be influenced by the structure of the language course that encourages rote memorization. Similarly, Al-Mahrooqi and Al-Shihi (2012) report that linguistic and language courses are more theoretical, and promote student rote learning. Likewise Geer and Wing (2000) indicate that when students are aware of the fact that classroom activities and assignment do not require application and synthesis, they do not develop commitment and passion to learn more.

The study of English language and literature students in Pakistan reveal that deep learning is valuable to promote quality teaching and learning outcomes in BS English programs. The results of this study suggest that there is a need to improve deep learning experiences for language classes in BS English programs. Haggan (1999) posits that students will appreciate literature if they have sufficient proficiency in the English language. The interdependence of the language and literature is highlighted by Cronin (2014). He indicates that teachers of English should encourage the English language learners to enhance their literacy to increase their understanding of literature.

A change in the learning environment for undergraduate students in language classes should maximize student deep learning experiences. Aharony (2006) found that students adopted a deep approach to learning of English as a foreign language when there was a change in their learning environment. Nelson-Laird et al., (2014) labelled this a developmentally appropriate environment that encouraged deeper approaches to learning among students. They postulated that teachers should promote students to think critically, encourage them to combine ideas from different sources and stimulate their metacognitive processes.

Based on these findings in this study, English professors should enact teaching practices that promote deep learning experiences for students in all English programs. Professors should give curricular experiences in the classes

where students examine the strengths and weaknesses of their views, integrate ideas from different sources, and include diverse perspectives in their assignments. Professors' teaching practices should be based on giving students challenging tasks as students learn to synthesize and integrate information from various sources. One limitation in this study is the lack of input from the professors regarding deep learning experiences. I would recommend that future researchers survey the English professors to determine if their understandings of deep learning are aligned with those of their students.

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