Factors Deterred BA English Major Students’ Academic Achievements at Nangarhar University

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Abstract:
Learning academic and professional English is essential for non-native speakers. However, learning this international language is not as simple as students and teachers think in the EFL context. In Afghanistan, students study English language programs up to undergraduate and graduate levels. They join the programs to overcome written and oral communication problems, comprehend English text, and learn language-related issues such as linguistics, EFL research, and macro skills of the English language. The major purpose of this scientific study is to find the factors that challenge students from achieving academic success in BA English studies at Nangarhar University. Moreover, it aims to identify appropriate strategies for implementing creative teaching approaches and their effects on undergraduate students’ academic achievement. This study was conducted through a systematic review of literature and individual interviews. Twenty-four senior and junior students were interviewed about levels of student engagement through semi-structured interviews. The participants pointed out factors such as lack of innovative teaching approaches, shortage of technological tools in the classroom, no or less motivation, outdated teaching materials, lesson extracurricular activities, and students’ weak English background as factors that deter learners from fluent speaking, critical reading, and creative writing. The scientific study found that creative teaching approaches develop critical thinking and help students to become autonomous learners which is important for academic achievement in undergraduate programs.

Keywords: Academic Achievement, BA English, Creativity, Teaching Approaches.

Introduction
Students join undergraduate English studies programs at public and private universities in Afghanistan. The freshmen who enroll in the Faculty of Languages and Literature, English Department think positively about their future and they want to achieve success during college time and after graduation with a BA (Bachelor of Arts) in English studies. However, students are...
unable after four years to obtain the goals they identified on the first day of university. Investigating some factors that impact students’ academic achievements is conducive for future generations. Astarilla (2018) mentioned that English is mandatory for career development and it is beneficial for university students to learn the English language. Some EFL learners are not able to write a short story after reviewing many stories and they are not able to write academic essays and articles that are worthy of publishing in an international journal. Students struggle with communication competencies and reading compression skills after graduation. This situation bothered and demotivated students and instructors from learning English at public universities in Afghanistan. Bolandifar and Noordin (2013) found that experts at universities are looking forward to finding impactful issues that affect the academic achievement of undergraduate students. Some students struggle with presenting academic issues in English due to less practice and confidence. Instructors and learners investigate to find the proper solution for less academic achievement during university. According to Fazed (2013), the purpose of conducting research is to share obtained ideas with the audience with the help of publishing articles in journals. This article’s findings could help lecturers and students overcome the challenges that prevent the academic achievements of students at Nangarhar University (NU).

Study Objectives

This study aims to explore the factors effects academic achievement in undergraduate BA English studies programs at Nangarhar University. It explores perspectives of students about overcoming challenges that can lead to less academic achievement.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be asked:

- What are the causes of not achieving academic success in the BA English program in the EFL context?
- According to the relevant literature and opinions of experts, what effects on academic achievement of BA English studies in the EFL context?

- What are the effects of Creative Teaching Approaches on BA English major students’ Academic Achievements?

Literature Review

Bolandifar and Noordin (2013) defined creativity as the skill through which learners can identify problems, provide solutions, and generate new ideas for the advancement of learning. Implementation of creative teaching approaches has a direct connection with the academic success of students and should not be neglected in the EFL setting. Creativity is crucial in the era of technology for students who study in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context because it incorporates the academic achievement of students.

Kakar, Sarwari, and Miri (2020) defined that developing novelty through teaching strategies and techniques that improve students’ involvement in the process of learning is called creative teaching. Similarly, Jeffrey and Craft (2004) suggested that creative students explore ideas and it motivates students and teachers to perform the task collaboratively. By the same token, Bolandifar and Noordin (2013) indicated that creativity makes the process of learning easy and is a salient component of the learning process. Determination of individual and group activities enhances creativity skills in the classroom. Likewise, Jeffrey and Craft (2004) stated that teaching creativity is essential because it trains autonomous and creative people. Creative teaching helps teachers to have an interesting classroom where every student enjoys the lessons and it happens when teachers avoid single-method teaching (Kakar, Sarwari & Miri, 2020).

Yusuf and Jazilah (2020) revealed that many technological tools are integrated into teaching language; Instagram is one of them. Integration of Instagram with English language pedagogy develops creativity and it helps students perform a given task which can be assigned through Instagram. According to Astarilla (2018), the
Duolingo mobile application helps students learn English and it should be part of teaching and learning the English language. Many mobile applications accelerate the process of learning English (Astarilla, 2018). In the same vein, Rawan Wilson and Sutrisno (2020) demonstrated that mobile application increases creativity and it helps students to learn about vocabulary. Teachers should prepare the atmosphere for learners to use mobile devices. Najmiddinovna and Najmiddinovna (2022) stated that distance-oriented technological tools should be part of education. Creative and innovative pedagogical tools guide education to the right direction and should not be excluded from educational institutions.

Khoshgowar and Pandey (2021) reported communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity are the most essential skills in the 21st century. And yet, Elias, Ping, and Abdullah (2011) reported that lecturers and learners complain about the teaching and learning process in the EFL context because of utilizing the teacher-centered approach shortage of modern classrooms. Bolandifar and Noordin (2013) stated creative thinkers propose various solutions to students' and lecturers' problems. Yusuf and Jazilah (2020) reported that lecturers can use social media platforms such as Instagram to prepare creative activities. There are skills that every student needs for successful academic achievement as they prepare to study in prestigious universities after successful graduation from the BA program.

Methods and Materials

This study was performed through an exploratory qualitative research design. Interviews were conducted with 24 participants which included 12 juniors and 12 seniors. Students were selected for in-depth interviews through random sampling. Additionally, the researchers reviewed, evaluated, and synthesized the targeted articles based on the keywords (creativity, innovative teaching approaches, English language, BA program, Academic achievement in EFL). The chosen articles were published between the years 2010 to 2023 in highly indexed journals.

Sampling Method

Random sampling was used for choosing respondents for in-depth interviews from the Department of English at NU. For collecting primary data, the semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 BA English studies students at Nangarhar University. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Then, the collected interviews were recorded, analyzed, and reported using systematic coding and categorization in the Microsoft Word program.

The literature part of this qualitative study focuses on secondary data which includes reliable articles. This study concentrated on textual data and the articles selected were collected from Google Scholar, Academicjournals.org, the Education Resources Information Center (ERIC); and HMIC (Health Management). Random sampling was utilized in this study and samples were assembled purposefully and the articles were thematically synthesized after careful note-taking, evaluating, and interpreting processes. At first, the targeted articles were reviewed and after this, the themes of the articles emerged.

We have chosen a hundred articles in the first attempts. They included discussions of Creative Teaching Approaches and factors deterring EFL students’ Academic Achievements ideas in many contexts especially the ideas link with EFL setting. These articles were collected based on keywords. Secondly, we reviewed the abstract of 100 articles and selected only 50 articles that were near to my research topic. Ultimately, the reviewers reviewed 50 articles carefully and selected 30 articles for annotated bibliography. The samples were collected through purposive sampling. The systematic review process is implemented as below.
Data Collection and Analysis

The data for the study was collected through semi-structured interviews and a review of some scientifically valid articles. Interviews were conducted with twenty-four participants. There were eleven open-ended questions followed by interviewers’ questions. The interviews were recorded, and transcribed for better results. Moreover, the researchers reviewed, evaluated, and synthesized the targeted articles that were collected from the databases (Google Scholar, ERIC, Elsevier, EBSCO Essentials, and so forth).

Findings

English is the language of education that is spoken as a first, second, and foreign language across the world. In this exploratory study, the results were achieved through a systematic review of articles and semi-structured interviews. The semi-structured interview questions related to the second major research question of this study. The interviews findings were reported thematically as follows. The participants stated six major factors that affect their academic achievements in BA English studies at Nangarhar University.

In Afghanistan, high school graduates loved the faculty of medicine and engineering; therefore, those who passed to English studies program remained without goal and internal motivation. The respondents said they enrolled in the Department of English by chance through the entrance exam (Kankor), so at the beginning of the first semester they attended the classes without targeted goals.

Based on the interviewees’ perspectives, the factors that prevented BA English studies from academic achievement were teaching through traditional classrooms and the implementation of traditional teaching methods which deterred students from academic success. Near all participants recommended the implementation of group work and class discussion in the EFL classes in the Department of English at Nangarhar University. During the interviews, students talked about the importance of constructive feedback and they suggested that direct and indirect feedback enhance students’ academic success. Lecturers should have made the lessons easy and understandable for students.
and they have to provide clear guidelines for projects and assignments.

Similarly, according to Kakar, Sarvari, and Miri (2020), creative teaching is the utilization of new teaching strategies and techniques that enhance students’ participation. Variation of practices and exercises assist learners in taking an active part in the classroom. Also, Rababah and Melhem (2015) demonstrated that creativity is salient for education, especially for English language learning. They integrate various types of teaching and learning approaches and strategies that fit the students’ needs (Kakar, Sarvari, & Miri, 2020). Creativity is important for learning various skills of English and it is considered as a skill of language (Rababah & Melhem, 2015). Besides working for creativity, it is also important to enhance students’ confidence. Creativity and confidence pave the ground for students to take some risks in the classroom.

Secondly, political, economic, and social conditions are other factors that affect students’ academic achievements. Many students have low-class families and their parents cannot afford their class expenditures. However, the university provided a free hostel for those who came from far from provinces and districts.

The third point that influenced academic success are shortage of technological tools inside the classroom and on campus. Students do not have access to virtual libraries and less access to physical libraries with updated books. The textbooks are outdated and they have lessons that do not meet the 21st-century learners need. Additionally, the findings of a study which was conducted by Yusuf and Jazilah (2020), revealed that students appreciated the integration of Instagram because it develops creativity in the English language learning process. In the same way, curriculum, pedagogy, andragogy, and learning environment should be prepared based on creative thinking because it impacts on academic achievement of students (Bolandifar & Noordin, 2013).

Another important issue that all participants discussed was the importance of motivation and they talked about less motivation in their classroom. Yavuz and Hol (2017) found that teachers are the main characters in the EFL context and they can develop positive thinking inside the classroom regarding learning English. Teaching and learning EFL is very difficult and their success cannot be measured simply. Alqurashi (2019) mentioned motivation played a crucial role in the academic achievement of English majors in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It helps students to achieve the targeted goal so motivation activates the cognitive process of learners. In the same token, Alrabai (2017) explained self-esteem and self-awareness assist students in overcoming challenges and achieving their goals. The EFL/ESL students who have self-esteem have good communication skills and they have a positive attitude toward learning English. Therefore, self-esteem granted academic achievements of students who study in an EFL context. Likewise, both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations help students to learn English in the EFL context. EFL teachers should learn about pedagogical strategies and techniques through participating in training and workshops (Mohammed, 2016).

The students who have good communication and reading comprehension skills develop these skills through personal struggle and hard work. The participants mentioned students who have good financial situations start basic English in private academies and enhance their English competencies over time. Also, Zeynali, Pishghadam, and Fatemi (2019) described that students have to believe in themselves and they should develop their abilities through consulting with instructors and teachers. There are some factors such as social, cultural, and psychological can that directly or indirectly affect learning. Finally, Students who enrolled have various backgrounds in English study and started English courses in the BA program with multi-level students. Teaching and learning in Large classes are complicated. Therefore, it impacts of students’ academic success.

Alrabai (2016) stated in many EFL contexts such as Saudi Arabia EFL teachers function as knowledge providers instead of facilitators which prevents students from becoming
autonomous learners. Teachers used GTM (Grammar Translation Method) in EFL class. Additionally, Alqurashi (2019) mentioned implementation of various language-learning strategies in the field of learning English field prevents them from obtaining academic achievements. Another factor that caused underachievement in the English major is the lack of teaching experiences and insights. There are EFL teachers who do not participate in the local and international TESOL conferences and training sessions.


Implementation of a packed curriculum is another factor that presents students with academic success. Alrabai (2016) explained large multi-level classrooms can prevent students’ academic success because each individual is unable to interact with students regarding their problems. Alrabai (2016) mentioned students believed that memorization is the only way to gain academic success and they attempt to memorize new words and definitions of grammatical terms. Mohammed (2016) stated many teaching strategies help students to overcome language learning anxiety. Sajid and Siddiqui (2015) reported that EFL students can learn academic writing through practice and performance.

**Discussion**

Respondents mentioned that traditional teaching methods directly affect their fluency, academic writing skills, and comprehension skills. The attendees asked for innovative and creative EFL teaching approaches. Besides, the learners work hard to stop the machine learning that they performed during secondary and high school. Creative ideas grow when teachers and students consider them seriously and trust the importance of creativity. Moreover, creativity is a fundamental need of undergraduate learners and it should be considered by policymakers and teachers in educational institutions. Similarly, Elias, Ping, and Abdullah (2011) identified that English language classes should be the real venue for developing creativity and they must be cheerful for students who practice various skills of the English language. For example, instructors had better facilitate the activities that promote students' thinking.

Junior and senior students mentioned a shortage of technological tools in their classrooms in the Department of English at Nangarhar University. Large multi-level classes and little equipment can make it hard for faculty to apply different teaching approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching approaches. Students are habituated to a teacher-centered approach and they are not preparing to adapt themselves for a student-centered learning approach. When the EFL teacher applies innovative teaching methods in the class such as problem-based learning and inquiry-based learning, the students ask the lecturer to provide a lecturer which seems interesting for participants in the short term but it affects their academic achievement. Therefore, there is an urgent need to bring change to the education system of Afghanistan (Elias, Ping & Abdullah, 2011). Critical thinking and creativity are the two salient skills for promoting the county’s higher education system. For instance, it helps students to generate ideas in various disciplines, especially in the field of teaching and learning languages.

In addition, Students talked about the shortage of motivation in their classes. In colleges, it is the lecturers’ responsibility to develop students’ productive and receptive skills with the help of creative thinking. The Academic Writing Course lecturer integrates students with creative activities. Rababah and Melhem (2015) revealed that creativity is important for teaching and learning writing skills. For example, writing starts with choosing interesting and novel topics which is impossible without creativity in the
teaching and learning process. The instructors who use the process approach of writing recognize the barnstorming stage of the writing process. In this stage, the writers think about the topic and pen down the ideas that come into their minds. For example, teachers have to consider various domains of learning such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains in activities. The activities may be in the form of problem-solving, authentic tasks, and group work. Khoshgowar and Pandey (2021) stated the question-and-answer section of the lessons is not used very well by EFL instructors because they ask questions that develop memorization instead of critical thinking. If the writing skills lecturers develop activities that engage students and boost students’ critical thinking, it helps students to write good creative and academic texts.

Furthermore, the participants had concerns about limited extracurricular activities. According to Tahsildar and KABIRI (2019), English as a Foreign language teachers do not pay enough attention to speaking skills, so many students do not perform well in speaking skills. Teachers must show enough empathy to students who have less confidence and prepare activities that assist learners in performing well in front of an audience. Developing oral communication skills of students impacts their academic achievement, so the lecturer should develop fluency and accuracy from the initial day of the semester.

Less implementation of online applications is another reason that hinders the process of effective English learning in non-native English-speaking countries. In many regions, students do not have access to the internet and virtual library. It is a common phenomenon that the integration of technological tools benefits students. For example, college students enjoy providing and receiving feedback via Instagram, WhatsApp, and so forth and they always look forward to having access to the internet and technological tools. The integration of online applications inspired students to perform some tasks outside of the classroom. Ahmed (2019) mentioned names of mobile applications such as Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp, and PDFs that brought revolution in the field of education in the 21st century. According to Ahmed (2019), “Today’s students are known as digital natives or members of the internet generation” (p.62). Additionally, the author revealed the importance of the WhatsApp application which inspires learners to work on reading and writing skills everywhere. If they want to succeed in their master’s and PhD abroad, they ought to acquire these skills.

Homework stress and prevent learners from active class participation. Many students cannot handle stress easily because they grew up in war-stricken areas and do not have access to the basic facilities that college students need in the current area. Rana and Mahmood (2010) stated test anxiety is another cause of the underrated college students’ academic achievement. Lecturers should develop rapport and pave the ground for students’ engagement in class activities. For example, lecturers should prepare some extracurricular activities that enhance students’ confidence and let them become autonomous learners. Maintaining a friendly classroom where the ground rules are hung on the wall and every person respects the ideas of others. Class behavior can help students to take part in class discussion without hesitation. To avoid stress, students should accept mistakes as a learning strategy. Academic advisory committee can take active part in motivating students for learning English. Every university has students counseling departments where students share their academic and personal concerns. Counselors help students to learn for better future.

**Conclusion**

In summary, students’ motivation is very essential for studying the English Language in an EFL context. Online sessions from overseas instructors can easily motivate the learners and visiting foreign countries especially English-speaking societies through culture exchange programs helps to become fluent speakers. Students must be part of conferences where experts talk about the importance of English language learning and teaching. Furthermore,
self-awareness programs for students also help them study English with confidence and future-oriented goals. Integration of innovative teaching methods, overcoming learning stress, and developing modern classrooms support the academic achievements of undergraduate BA program students at Nangarhar University. Souriyavongsa, Rany, Abidin, and Mei (2013) reported that an unstandardized curriculum, lack of qualified instructors, shortage of background knowledge in students, and deficiency of confidence and commitment of students are the main factors that affect students’ performance in EFL setting. Administration, lecturers, parents, students, and other stakeholders can solve the problems. Solving these problems requires an expert team and enough budget. Young generations are the backbone of society. Hence, the Ministry of Higher Education should solve the problems and they have to provide good facilities for students who study at private universities. Instructors have to take some intensive courses to advance their teaching skills. Teachers should be part of the study because they can easily talk about teaching methods that they use in the classroom. We recommend a quantitative study on the same topic to specify the factors the effects academic achievements of EFL students. It is much better to include lecturers in the same study and have their perspectives on the issues.

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