

## A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS OF COMPETENCY-BASED LEARNING AND THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HEC'S UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION POLICY (2023) AT PAKISTANI UNIVERSITIES: THE PREPARATION OF THE GRADUATES FOR JOB INDUSTRY

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### Abstract

*The Higher Education Commission's (HEC) Undergraduate Education Policy 2023, is organized to equip graduates with the essential skills and proficiency to enhance economic growth and manage the thorough needs of diverse job industries. The study reports on an analysis of acquiring competency-based learning and fieldwork, among the goals of UGE policy for career progress. The study is based on a comparative analysis of job-oriented speaking curricula concerning competency-based learning and fieldwork at the graduate level. The qualities of the speaking curriculum, whether it reflects competency-based education and fieldwork at the classroom level. The study's framework on a language teaching model was developed by Richard and Rodger (2001). The research utilizes an exploratory, case study, and qualitative research design. Data was collected through teacher interviews, content analysis, and classroom observations in both public and private universities in Islamabad. The findings indicate that the current curriculum only partially follows HEC undergraduate education policy and partially focuses on competency-based learning to develop speaking skills required in job industries. HEC should strictly order universities to implement fieldwork to proceed with a career properly. Moreover, the study proposes suggestions to enhance the implementation of HEC's speaking curriculum and classroom instruction in higher education, offering recommendations for its effective execution.*

**Key Words:** Competency-Based Learning, Field Work, HEC Policies, Implementation of HEC's UGP 2023.

### 1. Introduction

The standard of undergraduate education offered by Pakistani institutions and universities is far from the standard of educational quality. The low skill levels of the learners and the increased unemployment rate following graduation are indicators of poor quality (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Employers often say that graduates do not have the skills they need, indicating that educational institutions sometimes do not give students enough opportunities to develop essential qualities for the job market. (Ayub et al., 2024). Higher education institutions and policies are essential for contributing to a knowledge-driven and knowledge-based society. As a result, a thorough reform process (Fatima et al., 2020). Since Pakistan's founding, several education plans have been made, but they have yet to address the country's undergraduate education problems. It is widely acknowledged that Pakistani undergraduate education has to be improved and reformed (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Despite the backdrop of higher education's change and influence, HEIs are primarily unable to meet the markets' changing demands and emphasize the value of quality in both teaching and research. This demonstrates general dissatisfaction with education, which undermines the changes

themselves. The role of academic professors in skill development needs to be revised. They are essential hubs for creativity and innovation to raise the country's productivity and competitiveness (Fatima et al., 2020). Lifelong learning encourages individuals to pursue information and skills and apply them in practical settings (Sholeh et al., 2022). By introducing new perspectives and strategies, innovative thinking can challenge established norms and potentially reduce the biases associated with traditional heuristic methods (Shalini & Swati, 2024). It involves providing opportunities for people of all ages across various contexts, including workplaces, families, and leisure activities, and being open to new concepts, skills, options, or behaviours (Sholeh et al., 2022). Higher education institutions can utilize competency models to identify essential skills necessary to address the increasing complexity of student issues (Zhengli & Boonphadung, 2024).

The Education Commission (HEC) handles federal regulations governing higher education in Pakistan. The Federal Model University Ordinance, enacted in 2002 was also intended to reform Pakistan's higher education system (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). In response to input from universities, higher education institutions, and affiliated colleges, HEC amended the UEP-2020 and included ideas to make it more palatable to most of these institutions. Ultimately, the HEC released UEP-Version 1.1, a revised policy, for adoption and implementation beginning in the fall of 2023. The updated UEP is being implemented in Pakistani-affiliated colleges and universities (HEIs) (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). The recently implemented Undergraduate Education Policy has appropriately prioritized the need for practical learning prerequisites. It will partially shift the focus of education from general knowledge to job-oriented training “was stated by Hamid & Rehman [9]” The curriculum for the Bachelor of Science (BS) program is primarily organized into these sections:

1. The components of the education program include the General Education Cluster, which consists of foundational courses, disciplinary or significant courses that focus on a specific subject area, interdisciplinary courses that integrate many disciplines, field experience to provide practical learning opportunities, and a capstone project to demonstrate mastery of the subject. It signifies that 33.33% of the curriculum is dedicated to practical training and preparation for the work market.
2. The practical learning components have been distributed throughout three areas of the curriculum:
  - General Education course on 'Entrepreneurship';
  - Field Experience consisting of 6 to 8 weeks of fieldwork, which will be evaluated by a faculty member in consultation with the field supervisor;
  - Capstone Project to be assessed by the supervisor or faculty member (Hamid & Rehman, 2023).

The 2020 UGE Policy introduced the Practical Learning Lab (PLL), which comprises three areas. Students had to choose one subject based on their needs and aptitude.

1. The entrepreneurship Lab encompasses lectures, teamwork activities, proposal writing sessions, contests, presentations, fundraising, start-up, and marketing events.
2. Youth organizations include Green Clubs, Drama Clubs, Book Reading Clubs, University Magazines or Newspapers, University TV or Radio Stations, Debating Clubs, and Student Associations.
3. The Director of Sports oversees regular sports training and practice sessions (HEC, 2020, p. 13; Hamid & Rehman, 2023).

The education system in Pakistan has been in operation since 1947. Pakistan has actively shaped its education system to align with its objectives and aspirations. Despite the passage of seventy years, the educational standard, literacy rate, and productivity failed to meet the necessary threshold (Hamid & Rehman, 2023). Undergraduate education in Pakistan is

governed and formulated by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) and is offered by universities, degree-awarding organizations, and associated colleges (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Through top-notch instruction, cutting-edge research, and inventive thinking, the higher education system not only equips graduates with the creative abilities necessary to support society's transition from a backwards to a modern economy but also serves as a beacon of hope for a brighter future (Fatima et al., 2020). One of HEC's tasks is developing national policies regarding higher education. In 2020, HEC created the Postsecondary Education Reform Unit (PERU) to develop national educational policies and support affiliated colleges and universities in implementing them. Not long after PERU was founded, a team of consultants started working with pertinent HEC and educational institution stakeholders to create a framework for undergraduate education in Pakistan (Bashir & Rehman, 2023).

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Given its importance as a teaching aid, a syllabus must encompass pertinent subject matter and a meticulously structured curriculum focusing on workplace skills. Having a high level of fluency in spoken English can open up numerous opportunities for foreign careers. The Higher Education Commission's endeavours to enhance the educational environment are being impeded by significant levels of unemployment (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). Despite English being the predominant language of instruction, students still need help crafting their CVs, formal letters, practical reports, interviews, and post-graduation interviews. Teachers in educational institutions must ensure that their teaching approaches are congruent with the industry's requirements (Zafar, 2016). Fluency in English has been referred to as human capital. Thus, people need to be more confident while making oral presentations (Yasin et al., 2010). Cognitive development in early schooling is characterized by notable progress in problem-solving, memory, attention, and language (Sirajudeen et al., 2024). According to a study done in the Klang Valley, both employers and graduates concur that communication skills and English language competency are essential for graduate employment (Ayub et al., 2024). Fatima et al (2020) states that education has the best assurances. One of the main goals is to contribute to the labour market and national growth. Recent graduates may need more confidence and better communication skills, especially in English, which could affect their chances of finding a job.

The curriculum design and implementation do not effectively cultivate students' intellectual capacities and appropriately equip them for the industry's requirements (Ayub & Mohammed, 2024). There needs to be more connection between the skills taught in schools and the skills needed in the job market. Many companies are dissatisfied with the quality of candidates available to fill their job openings, even though there are many talented individuals. The industry's rapid growth means that skills are constantly changing, and new abilities are needed. Educational institutions must adapt their programs to ensure that students are equipped with the right skills for the evolving job market (Ayub et al., 2024). In Pakistani education, introducing fieldwork and competency-based learning in universities has presented new practical challenges. Implementing HEC's undergraduate policy 2023 will be problematic and complicated for universities/HEIs and affiliated colleges. The UEP's future rests on our understanding of the policy's underlying ideas ingrained in the liberal arts education paradigm (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Teachers have needed to adjust their philosophies to align with the needs of the revised policy. It is essential to investigate the teaching methods educators use to equip students with speaking competencies that will enable them to work effectively in the workplace, in line with the implementation of the HEC's undergraduate policy 2023. This study examines the practical implications of

undergraduate functional English courses in preparing students for job-oriented speaking activities essential for their future careers. It is imperative to explore the instructional methods educators employ to deliver English language education through competency-based learning and a focus on fieldwork, as these represent pivotal components of the 2023 undergraduate policy. The study seeks to emphasize and evaluate the components within undergraduate curricula, offering valuable guidance for policymakers and educators in their future decision-making and planning processes. More training on curriculum implementation and the absence of defined curriculum norms can make managing the curriculum challenging. Teachers are vital in enhancing English language speaking proficiency by maintaining rigorous standards. Hence, their ability is crucial in effectively implementing the HEC curriculum. Classroom observation provides the optimal opportunity to acquire information and identify the underlying causes of the deficiency in English language speaking skills. Examining the classroom can offer valuable insights into the effective implementation of curriculum and teaching methods to improve speaking abilities. It can also determine whether teachers emphasize developing English language speaking skills necessary for job industries (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). No subsequent studies have been conducted to investigate the present execution of the HEC's undergraduate policy 2023, field experience to enhance speaking skills required at workplaces, competency-based learning evaluation procedures, or the difficulties teachers encounter. This study analyzes the implementation of competency-based learning, focusing on English-speaking assessments. The objective is to enhance the English-speaking skills required in the Workplace in Pakistan. The findings will guide educational changes and benefit teachers, administrators, curriculum developers, and students by supporting learner-centred assessment procedures.

## 1.2 Research Questions

1. How do universities effectively implement competency-based learning in developing English speaking skills?
2. How do universities implement field experience to increase students' job-specific speaking abilities in the real world?

## 1.3 Research Objectives

1. To assess teaching effectiveness with competency-based learning in developing English speaking skills.
2. To ensure the implementation of field experience in universities to increase students' job-specific speaking abilities in the real world.

## 1.4 Theoretical Framework

The current study's theoretical framework is grounded in the language teaching model (Richards & Roger, 2001). The model consists of three levels. The first level is the approach, which refers to the instructional techniques used to introduce and explain various aspects of the target language, such as its formal and communicative elements. The second level is the design, which pertains to the structure of the syllabus in order to achieve specific goals. Lastly, the procedural level involves analyzing the strategies, approaches, classroom activities, and resources used. The framework developed by Richards and Rodgers in 2001 provides an exemplary paradigm for analyzing the curriculum in this study. The study assessed all levels of this model to evaluate the successful execution and practical application of the HEC undergraduate policy 2023 at private and public universities.

## 2 Literature Review

The implementation of the Undergraduate Education Policy 2020 was closely monitored. It has been noted that the program requires further implementation of practical components. To achieve this objective, the Higher Education Commission (HEC) has released a new

Undergraduate Education Policy, which will come into force in 2023. Compared to the 2020 policy, the 2023 policy enhanced the curriculum's hands-on aspects and changed how the curriculum is categorized and implemented (Hamid & Rehman, 2023). Based on the data gathered, following the essential features of the UEP, the following themes became apparent as the UEP's critical features. Education with a broad focus. b) Learning based on competency. c) Mandatory Internship/Field Experience. d) Final Project. e) Adaptable graduating alternatives, including minors, double majors, and majors (Bashir & Rehman, 2023).

### **2.1 Undergraduate Policy 2023 and Competency-Based Learning**

In making undergraduate policy 2023, Policymakers were attracted to competency-based education because they saw it as a solution to the problem of a shortage of skilled and marketable graduates who could think innovatively and address society's intricate socio-economic challenges (Tarmo & Kimaro, 2021). The policies implemented in 2020 and 2023 have significantly shifted the paradigm towards practical training. Regrettably, Pakistan's education system has predominantly emphasized rote learning and memorization. That is why the higher education system still needs to successfully provide its graduates with the necessary skills, practical experience, and professional expertise. Therefore, the new policies must prioritize this element (Hamid & Rehman, 2023). Competency-based learning was perceived as a method to overhaul the education system and equip graduates with the necessary skills to meet future labour force demands. This strategy for improving the match between the talents of graduate students and the job market's needs shifts education's focus towards proving expertise and applying knowledge and skills in practical settings (Johnstone & Soares, 2014).

Competence-based teaching and learning focuses on creating compelling and immersive learning environments that allow students to participate actively in meaningful learning experiences. The teacher will generate or seek out meaningful situations in which students might naturally encounter the importance and significance of the skills they need to master (Mkonongwa, 2018). Integrating a practical element into higher education enables students to acquire knowledge related to their chosen study area and apply it outside the classroom (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Competence-based learning consists of a combination of knowledge, skills, professional conduct, and interpersonal qualities. The UEP has broadened the scope of expertise from being limited to disciplinary knowledge to encompassing transdisciplinary, epistemological, and procedural knowledge. Integrating distribution (interdisciplinary) courses will enhance students' knowledge foundation. Distribution courses are closely linked to transdisciplinary courses that aid students in consolidating their learning experiences and fostering a disciplinary perspective. As a result of the overwhelming abundance of information on fundamental subjects, numerous novel disciplines have arisen in the modern academic sphere (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). The primary concept behind competency-based teaching and learning is to assist learners in cultivating and constructing their knowledge while maximizing the utilization of others' expertise in their educational journey. Social constructivism is concerned with the principles and concepts that define its framework. To achieve learning outcomes that focus on enhancing individual and personal competencies, it is essential to address the diverse needs of learners to align with their goals and objectives. This necessitates an inclusive approach in which education encompasses conversations between learners and educators regarding expectations, requirements, objectives, options, etc (Mkonongwa, 2018).

Furthermore, these talents are paramount to competing and achieving excellence effectively in the contemporary academic realm. Professional behaviour is an essential component of competence-based learning, encompassing self-regulation, time management, honesty,

intellectual curiosity, and openness. Typically, these behaviours are disregarded in our academic environments. The UEP designates these behaviours as crucial for a student's professional success. Emphasizing these skills will empower the undergraduate education system to equip students adequately (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). People from countries where English is not the primary language have noticed that enhancing their English language abilities can directly result in more job opportunities and increased salary potential, (Ayub et al., 2024).

## **2.2 Undergraduate Policy 2023 and Applied Knowledge**

The curriculum in Pakistan should effectively equip students with the necessary skills and knowledge to fulfil significant obligations. The educational system in Pakistan places a greater emphasis on theoretical knowledge rather than practical application. Students must possess adequate skills and knowledge to effectively address contemporary society's difficulties. Instructing students on new technologies and their practical uses is imperative, as these skills are essential for their job search. Unemployment in Pakistan is further exacerbated by the lack of practical education (Ayub & Khaleel, 2024). Consequently, numerous interdisciplinary academic programs are gaining acceptance as mainstream academic fields. In essence, proficiency in the contemporary world entails more than expertise in a single area. However, it is essential to understand various disciplines and their impact on the primary field of study. The range of talents has expanded beyond motor skills, including soft skills such as communication, proficiency, quantitative reasoning, analytical and problem-solving abilities, and critical and creative thinking. Competencies are comprehensive, encompassing various aspects, and hence, the educational method must also be thorough and integrated. The globalization of the English language emphasizes the growing need for individuals to possess exceptional communication abilities in English, as well as the associated challenges and concerns around this language (Ayub & Lodhi, 2016). The UEP intervention aims to increase the skill base of undergraduate students, equipping them with a modern skill set that will lead to success in the 21st century. These soft abilities are not limited to a single discipline. They are distributed throughout the program (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). The Undergraduate Education Policy (UEP) for 2023 aims to establish specific behaviours that will enhance students' success in their professional lives after graduation. Interpersonal traits like empathy, self-efficacy, and teamwork are essential to competence-based learning. These talents may not be imparted in a traditional classroom environment. To enhance students' practical skills, the UEP program has included a compulsory internship or field experience and a Capstone project. In the past, internships and projects were limited to disciplines such as Management Sciences, Psychology, and Medicine. All students in the UEP are required to complete an internship and participate in a Capstone project. These two primary activities aim to foster the development of interpersonal qualities in students, including empathy, self-efficacy, and teamwork (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Constructive learning refers to acquiring knowledge and skills through active engagement and participation, where learners construct their understanding and meaning from the learning materials and experiences (Mkonongwa, 2018). The UEP requires all students to participate in a compulsory Internship/Field Experience lasting 6-8 weeks. An internship is a professional learning opportunity that provides valuable and practical work experience in a student's chosen field of study or career interest. This opportunity allows for the practical application of knowledge acquired in the classroom to real-world scenarios. Incorporating a pragmatic component into tertiary education empowers students to gain expertise in their selected field of study and develop the capacity to implement it outside the confines of the lecture hall (Deuster, 2009). Internships offered through the UEP for BS programs will carry three credit hours and will be evaluated by a departmental committee,

including the supervisor. The student's performance during the internship will be recorded and included in their academic transcript. According to research, the learning outcomes of an experiential education program can be classified into five categories: personal, interpersonal, academic, employment, and civic (Raman & Pashupati, 2010). The recently developed Internship program is highly organized and beneficial for students in facilitating a seamless transition from academic to professional life. The instructor will grade the field experience in collaboration with the supervisor in the field. The site supervisor will liaise with the Internship office and the faculty supervisor. UEP stipulates that the site supervisor must provide orientation to the intern and explain organizational aspects and the nature of work at the Internship site (Bashir & Rehman, 2023). Education is widely acknowledged as a critical factor in promoting economic growth in the present period. Most individuals are attracted to an education system that provides rigorous professional training. Given Pakistan's elevated poverty rates and below-average income levels, the country must enhance its financial capability to offer education together with viable employment prospects effectively. Consequently, employment is progressively becoming the central focus of the entire system. The emerging phenomenon in Pakistan, as emphasized in the study (Pakistan, 2017, p. 77), is to develop a robust correlation between the curriculum and the industry/business sector to secure gainful employment for graduates in the labour market. The Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 aims to enhance the system's comprehensiveness and practicality (Hamid & Rehman, 2023).

Functional English is an essential HEC curriculum course designed to improve academic achievement and advance career advancement. Functional English aims to improve learners' competence in the four essential aspects of communication: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. This tool assists students in comprehending the mechanics of speech, precisely articulating English phonemes, and speaking English with suitable emphasis and tone. After careful examination of the present circumstances, it has been observed that universities dedicate only 3 to 4 hours per week to teach 'Functional English' for a typical semester lasting 3 to 4 months. The HEC Functional English program incorporates compulsory core courses in the English language that must be completed during the four-year duration of BS programs (Ayub & Mohammed, 2024). According to HEC, effective communication is an essential part of education for achieving job success. The functional English course prioritizes essential components of the English language, such as grammar, vocabulary, and practical application in real-world situations. The expository writing course aims to improve students' academic writing skills, with a specific focus on developing their talents in technical and report writing (HEC, 2023).

The current study assessed competency-based learning and field experience with English language speaking skills. University teachers are expected to develop lectures encompassing the entirety of HEC's undergraduate strategy for 2023. The lectures are structured to be presented over 15-20 sessions, with each lesson lasting 110-120 minutes. Functionalists assert that the primary objective of universities should be to concentrate on equipping students with the necessary skills and knowledge to succeed in future employment and contribute to the growth and efficiency of the workforce. This study investigates the undergraduate-level speaking curriculum developed by universities and endorsed by HEC, which is vital in enhancing employment prospects (Ayub & Mohammed, 2024).

### 3.Methodology

The study only focused on two segments of HEC's undergraduate policy, competency-based learning and Applied knowledge. Pakistani universities prepare their own functional English curricula after approval from the HEC. So, the study analyses the functional English curriculum aimed at developing job-oriented speaking skills at the graduate level. The study

was exploratory and case study, so data was collected from three public and three private university in Islamabad. The study utilizes a qualitative research design that employs the selected content analysis prepared by the four university teachers (three from public and three from private universities), interviews (twelve university teachers), and classroom observations (thirty-two). The study focuses on undergraduate education policy 2023, particularly concerning practical training for undergraduate students. The data was collected from October 2023- March 2024. The data obtained was compared with the essential component (competency-based learning) of undergraduate education policy 2023, and the student's practical training was examined. Significant focus is placed on the features of practical training and the use of competency-based learning to succeed in a career, as outlined in the undergraduate education policy 2023. The study's findings, recommendations, and conclusions are based on the analysis of this policy. The content, interviews, and classroom observations that were reviewed were not overwhelming and could be coded manually. As a result, the researcher compiled the documents by generating the following codes.

- Social Constructivism Theories
- Team Work
- Teacher Centered
- High cognitive level
- Students' Interaction
- Field Work

After generating codes data was analyzed and compared with HEC's undergraduate policy's element competency-based learning.

#### 4.Results

The study's analysis shows following results.

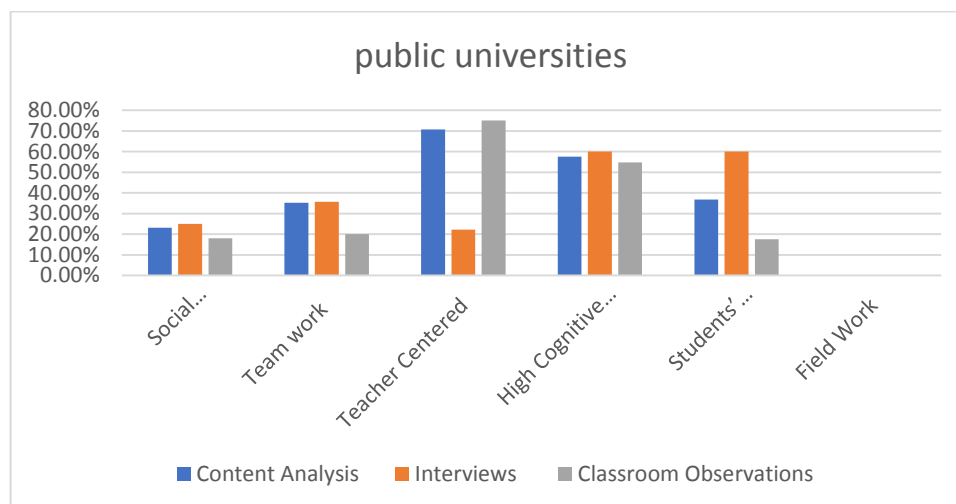
**TABLE 4.1: Career Oriented Curriculum at Public Universities**

Public universities	Social Constructivism theories	Team work	Teacher Centered	High Cognitive levels	Students' interaction	Field Work
Content Analysis	23.1%	35.2%	70.7%	57.5%	36.8%	0%
Interviews	25%	35.7%	22.2%	60%	60%	0%
Classroom Observations	18%	20%	75%	54.8%	17.6%	0%

The analysis presented in Table 4.1(public universities) highlights the less important encouragement of the social constructivism theories on approximately 23.1% of the speaking tasks within the HEC-selected curriculum, 25% in interview analysis and 18% in classroom observation. The analysis presented in Table 4.1 highlights the less encouragement of teamwork, approximately 35% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 35.7% in interviews analysis and 20% in classroom observation. The analysis highlights the less encouragement of the student's interactions with teachers and other learners, approximately 36.8% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 60% in interviews analysis and 17.6% in classroom observation. The analysis highlights that teachers usually follow teacher-centred approaches in teaching speaking skills at the graduate level, approximately 70.7% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 22.2% in interviews analysis and 75% in classroom observation. The analysis presented in Table 4.1 highlights the high level of cognitive domain while teaching speaking skills, approximately 57.5% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 60% in interviews analysis and 54.8% in classroom observation. The analysis from the selected curriculum, interviews,

and classroom observation shows that universities are not offering field experience outside the classroom to develop speaking skills required in the workplace.

**FIGURE 4.1: Career Oriented Curriculum at Public Universities**



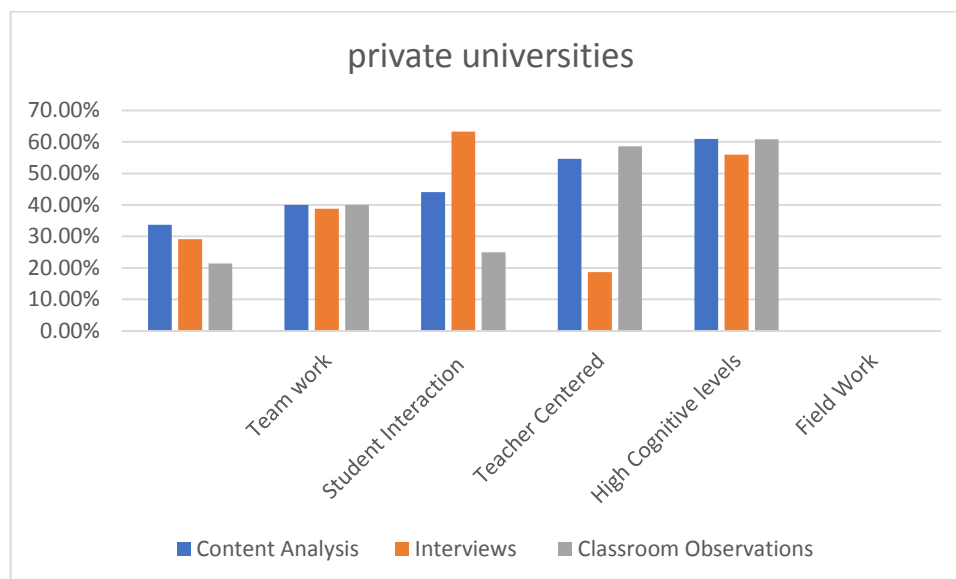
Competency-based learning and field experience in selected curricula, interviews and classroom observation for teaching job-oriented speaking skills at graduate level in public universities shown in Figure 4.1.

**TABLE 4.2: Career Oriented Curriculum at Private Universities**

Private universities	Social Constructivism theories	Team work	Student Interaction	Teacher Centered	High Cognitive levels	Field Work
Content Analysis	33.7%	40%	44.1%	54.7%	61%	0%
Interviews	29.1%	38.8%	63.3%	18.7%	56%	0%
Classroom Observations	21.4%	40%	25%	58.6%	60.9%	0%

The analysis presented in Table 4.2 (private universities) highlights the less important encouragement of the social constructivism theories on approximately 33.7% of the speaking tasks within the HEC-selected curriculum, 29.1% in interview analysis and 21.4% in classroom observation. The analysis presented in Table 4.2 highlights the less encouragement of teamwork, approximately 40% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 38.8% in interviews analysis and 40% in classroom observation. The analysis highlights the less encouragement of the student's interactions with teachers and other learners, approximately 41.4% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 63.3% in interviews analysis and 25% in classroom observation. The analysis highlights that teachers usually follow teacher-centred approaches in teaching speaking skills at the graduate level, approximately 54.7% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 18.7% in interviews analysis and 58.6% in classroom observation. The analysis presented in Table 4.2 highlights the high level of cognitive domain while teaching speaking skills, approximately 61% within the HEC-selected curriculum, 56% in interviews analysis and 60.9% in classroom observation. The analysis from the selected curriculum, interviews, and classroom observation shows that universities are not offering field experience outside the classroom to develop speaking skills required in the workplace.

**FIGURE 4.2: Career Oriented Curriculum at Private Universities**



competency-based learning and field experience in selected curricula, interviews and classroom observation for teaching job-oriented speaking skills at the graduate level in private universities shown in Figure 4.2.

The current English-speaking curriculum and its comparison with competency-based learning and teaching are shown in Table 4.3. It is based on the emphasis of the current curriculum at the graduate level on teaching English-speaking skills required at the workplace and the way of teaching and learning in competency-based learning.

**TABLE 4.3: Comparison b/w Current Speaking Curricula with Competency Based Learning**

S. No.	Current Speaking Curriculum	Competency Based Learning
1.	High emphasized on cognitive processing theory. Less emphasized on social constructivism theories.	This necessitates an inclusive approach in which education encompasses conversations between learners and educators regarding expectations, requirements, objectives, options. Teaching methodologies must also be carefully aligned with the specific psychomotor, cognitive, and affective learning domains. Social constructivism is concerned with the principles and concepts that define its framework.
2.	Individual role of student	Constructive learning refers to acquiring knowledge and skills through students' interaction in active engagement and participation.
	Times dependent classroom	The primary goals of competence-based teaching and learning revolve around the ability to develop skills beyond the limit of time.
3.	More teacher centered	Teacher will generate or seek out meaningful situations in which students learn the skills they need to master. Competency based learning is not teacher centered approach.
4.	High emphasizes on presentation skills and less on	It is concluded that students develop and present their understanding and skills via individual speaking exercises, often in the form of presentations. Competency-based learning is for

	teamwork.	developing comprehensive competency and focuses on the development of all speaking skills required at the workplace regardless of time
5.	Focus on high cognitive level (analysis)	The direct use of high-level cognitive domains at the graduate level could be more admirable. Teachers should focus on all bloom's cognitive taxonomy levels to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The competency-based learning is designed to effectively deliver the curriculum and evaluate students' performance at basic levels, such as memorization and comprehension of material knowledge, rather than focusing on applied learning and mastery. Competency-based learning caters to students' needs at their current level to guarantee that each student can succeed according to the same rigorous standards required at universities and job.
	Place excessive emphasis on curriculum coverage	Place excessive emphasis on development of competencies
	More focus on grammar	Focus on grammar. And absence of real-world application, makes exam-based curricula instead of focus development of competencies required at work place.
	No field work	Competency-based programs prioritize the acquisition of competencies, encompassing information, abilities, and values necessary for effectively engaging in real-world tasks
6.	Partially implemented	The absence of fieldwork, which prevents competency-based learning implementation.

#### 4.1 Discussion

The study indicates that although competency-based learning with applied knowledge has attracted policymakers, its implementation in public and private universities is highly restricted due to a lack of resources, understanding, and skills and the inferior orientation of university teachers.

Competency-based learning is structured to individualize learning and cultivate advanced cognitive abilities, such as analysis, evaluation, and problem-solving, (Mkonongwa, 2018). Competency-based programs prioritize the acquisition of competencies, encompassing information, abilities, and values necessary for effectively engaging in real-world tasks (Sturgis & Casey, 2018). Competence-based teaching and learning necessitates teachers reviewing and enhancing their teaching and learning methodologies. Gabriel's (2010) study discovered that teachers had difficulties implementing highly interactive teaching methods, such as problem-solving and discovery, which are particularly valuable in a competence-based teaching and learning environment. The conventional teacher-centric method is no longer suitable for learners to exhibit proficiency in their acquired skills (Mkonongwa, 2018). The increasing prevalence of English as a worldwide language, particularly in Pakistan's education system, is causing stress in oral communication due to the attitude of their instructors. The supervisors' formal, reserved, and authoritarian pressure on learners leads to pupils' lack of interest and motivation (Ayub & Lodhi, 2016). The teacher-student connection is crucial for promoting efficient and successful teaching and learning. The primary goals of competence-based teaching and learning revolve around the ability of teachers to effectively utilize interactive and participatory teaching methods and create an environment conducive to

children's education. Students arrive at the classroom equipped with specific knowledge and skills. The preexisting information that learners possess is a crucial factor in facilitating effective teaching and learning. Teachers need to establish a welcoming and engaging learning environment to promote the exchange of knowledge and skills between learners and teachers in the classroom (Mkonongwa, 2018). Job seekers can improve their chances of getting hired in a competitive job market by presenting a well-prepared resume. In today's globalized workforce, where English is the dominant language of business, employers often have specific expectations and requirements for their employees' English-speaking abilities (Ayub et al., 2024).

The direct use of high-level cognitive domains at the graduate level could be more admirable. Teachers should focus on all Bloom's cognitive taxonomy levels to teach students from diverse backgrounds. The competency-based learning is designed to effectively deliver the curriculum and evaluate students' performance at basic levels, such as memorization and comprehension of material knowledge, rather than focusing on applied learning and mastery (Mkonongwa, 2018). Competency-based programs prioritize all students' independent acquisition of skills and knowledge, allowing them to progress at their speed (Tarmo & Kimaro, 2021). To effectively implement competency-based teaching and learning, it is crucial to consider the individual learner's needs and learning styles. This involves allowing sufficient time for the learner to acquire and consistently demonstrate the expected competencies, which include knowledge, skills, and professional behaviours (Mkonongwa, 2018).

The main observation from this analysis is that teaching speaking skills for job industries at both public and private universities in Pakistan at graduate level programs is strictly limited to time, which directly contradicts the fundamental principles of competency-based learning. Specifically, the focus on a set timeframe for covering the course material contradicts the fundamental principles of the competency-based model, which prioritizes personalized and flexible learning at one's own pace (Tarmo & Kimaro, 2021). At the graduate level in the Pakistani context, teachers emphasize a limited range of academic achievements and overlook that student achievement relies on a comprehensive set of fundamental abilities, including social-emotional skills and the practical application of knowledge. In Pakistan, classes operate on a time-dependent basis, and no extra time is given. At the university level, teachers often excessively emphasize curriculum coverage and neglect to reflect the actual learning (Mkonongwa, 2018). The curriculum content is structured according to conventional disciplines with vague limits and fixed timetables. Every student from a diverse background is expected to acquire an identical body of knowledge, irrespective of their interests or requirements.

Moreover, there is no substantiated proof of learning differentiation being influenced by any specific criterion. Instead, the curriculum requires standardized content and consistent learning activities, which are expected to be mastered simultaneously and at the same speed. The most prominent characteristic of the competency-based learning program is its focus on utilizing learner-centered pedagogies for teaching and learning. In line with conventional competency-based models, the objective is for tutors to promote the building of knowledge by student teachers by utilizing various strategies, tools, and pathways (Tarmo & Kimaro, 2021). Due to structural limitations such as insufficient instructional materials and resources, student teachers heavily depend on transcribing notes from the chalkboard. Learning in this situation has mostly emphasized acquiring knowledge in a specific subject rather than developing the necessary skills to effectively teach that subject matter (Tarmo & Kimaro, 2021).

Nevertheless, according to Mosha (2012) inadequate implementation of competence-based teaching and learning might lead to a regression to traditional teaching approaches among teachers. Competency-based learning caters to students' needs at their current level to guarantee that each student can succeed according to the same rigorous standards required for college and job readiness (Ayub et al., 2024) states that language educators and educational institutions should prioritize enhancing the oral communication abilities of language learners. By implementing explicit instructions and integrating suitable exercises in the educational setting, students will enhance their oral proficiency and develop self-assurance, enabling them to communicate effectively in their personal and professional endeavours. The most crucial part of HEC's undergraduate education policy and competency-based learning needs to be included in selected curricula, interviews, and classroom observation, which enhance learning through real-life field experience. The UEP mandates that all students take a mandatory Internship/Field Experience of 6-8 weeks. This professional learning experience offers meaningful, practical work related to a student's field of study or career interest. It is an opportunity to apply knowledge gained in the classroom with practice in the field (Bashir & Rehman, 2023).

## 5. Conclusion

The Undergraduate Education Policy 2023 has appropriately prioritized enhancing the practical components of the Undergraduate curriculum, recognizing its relevance in the current context. Most graduate students aspire to secure higher positions in the job market, but the Pakistani education system still needs to provide adequate guidance (Hamid & Rehman, 2023). This investigation has determined that teaching speaking skills to prepare young graduates for job industries in Pakistan combines characteristics from traditional education and Competency-Based Education (CBE) models. Simply put, the HEC's undergraduate policy 2023 was created after analyzing the need for modern education in Pakistan to prepare young graduates to develop social and economic needs. When the data was gathered (October 2023-january 2024) for this study, it was discovered that there needed to be opportunities for students to engage in fieldwork within private and public universities, which went against the policies established by the Higher Education Commission (HEC). Ayub stated that the main objective was to equip students with the necessary skills to apply in real-world work environments. Both internal and external influences hindered the adaptation of English-speaking skills. In Pakistan, communities are multicultural and face difficulties in acquiring a second language. It was frequently noted that for most students in Pakistan, English is not considered a second language but rather a third language (Ayub, 2020). Following the HEC's policy 2023 and competency-based paradigm, the universities and higher education institutes can focus on learner-centred pedagogies, enabling students and university teachers to assume responsibility for acquiring the desired competencies required at the workplace. By effectively executing HEC's undergraduate education policy in 2023, students can enhance their comprehension of their topics and acquire the knowledge and expertise required to excel in fiercely competitive employment markets (Ayub et al., 2024).

## 5.1 Recommendation

To align job-oriented curricula with competency-based learning, HECs, universities, and policymakers must train teachers at the graduate level to advance students' competencies to access careers. Findings indicate that the HEC, Ministry of Education, universities, and higher education institutes must take the lead in implementing HEC's undergraduate policy and ensure teachers strictly follow the principles and practices of competency-based education and policy objectives to prepare graduates to access careers. If teachers express

positive feelings about practical teaching then it helps develop practical skills (Sağlam et al., 2024).

### Declarations

**Ethics Approval & Consent to Participate:** This study was conducted with the institution's formal approval to gather data. Consent was obtained, and privacy was ensured.

**Conflict of Interests:** Not applicable.

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