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RESEARCH PAPER

Examining the Educational Implications of Federal Board's Objective Papers on English Language Proficiency in Secondary and Higher Secondary Classrooms in Islamabad

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ABSTRACT

Both vocabulary and grammar are considered to be the cornerstone of any language learning, particularly L2 or EFL. The current study investigates the Impact of the Objective Paper of the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad on Secondary School and Higher Secondary School Certificates. The research investigates a thorough analysis of the content given in the objective paper. The main areas of focus in the study are "Vocabulary-based Questions and Identification of Parts of Speech-based Questions." There is a third part of the question which is considered meagerly a Spelling-based Question. The data for this study is gathered through past papers from 2014-2018 for SSC and HSSC FBISE Islamabad through its official website whereas a questionnaire is framed to get the responses from the participants aged between 14-16 years for Secondary School Certificates and 17-19 years old for Higher Secondary School Certificate. The study is significant in digging out the role the objective papers of FBISE (Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad) play in promoting proficiency in the English Language of the students. Qualitative analysis is done with the help of Thematic Analysis and the numeric factual data are presented with the help of graphs. The results of the study show that the objective paper plays a great role in teaching the skills of the English Language.

| **Keywords:** | EFL, Objective Paper, Parts of Speech, Spelling-Based Question, Thematic Analysis |

Introduction

Learning anything is difficult and language is no exception, particularly learning any Second Language. Grammar Translation Method was once prevalent throughout the world as a means of learning and teaching English Language, particularly in the classroom. Pakistan is one of those unfortunate countries where English is neither taught as a language nor purely as literature. Despite these challenges and issues, examinations prove to be very fruitful in honing productive skills i.e. Speaking and writing of the students. The content of the objective papers of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad includes questions related to vocabulary, spelling, and identification of parts of speech. Vocabulary holds the role of backbone in learning any language, especially L2. It is more important than other skills such as listening and reading. As (Lukas et al., 2020, p. 305) vocabulary is "more important than any other skills such as writing, listening, and speaking, etc." Barkat and Aminafshar, (2015) and Reynolds and Shih, (2019) state that "vocabulary knowledge is essential for learning L2."

Similarly, grammar plays a vital role in learning any L2. The basic knowledge of grammar and basic structures of language helps enhance the relationship between the learner (s) and the language itself. The learning of basic structure and identification of parts of speech such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions,

interjections, etc. make the learner familiar with the basics of any L2. Learning grammar and parts of speech in detail can help EFL learners learn how to construct a sentence and later use that correct sentence in speaking and writing. However, experts like Krishna (1981) presented a model "Monitor Theory" claiming that teaching grammar was not as important as input for learning. This contradiction leaves the learners in a state of limbo about the learning and use of grammar in language. Ellis (2009) puts forward two approaches to instructions for grammar namely 'implicit and explicit".

Although opinions on the best ways to teach grammar may vary, it is important to recognize that grammar is the foundation of all English language ability and thus plays a central role in students' English language skills.

The identification of parts of speech can also be of great use in improving the writing of the students. Fakhrudin (2019) conducted research and found that "learning parts of speech improved the writing skills of the students." Since vocabulary and parts of speech hold a significant place in learning EFL or L2, this study is going to be conducted to investigate the role or impact the Objective Paper of the Federal Board of Intermediate Islamabad plays in teaching the English language.

The current study aims to find out how the objective question paper plays its role in the learning of the English Language among students at Higher Secondary and Secondary school certificates. It also focuses on the impact a question paper can create in improving English Language learning through its content.

Literature Review

Research on English vocabulary learning activities has been done by past meta-analysts and synthesists', who have studied this field from various viewpoints. For example, a meta-analysis carried out by Webb et al. (2020) focused on research examining "four types of intentional vocabulary learning activities, including word lists, writing, fill-in-the-blanks, and flashcards" (Webb et al., 2020, p. 1).

Since Schmitt (1997) carried out his research into the vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs) that Japanese learners adopt and thought to be useful, a few further studies have been carried out using Schmitt's (1997) taxonomy of vocabulary learning strategies in many nations, including Thailand. However, most of these studies concentrated on the frequencies of VLSs that English language learners utilized and how those frequencies related to the learners' vocabulary size or language proficiency.

However, Fan (2003), Lip (2009), and Wu (2005) investigated the connections between the VLSs their students used and the VLSs they thought were beneficial or useful.

A systematic review of digital word card programmers for vocabulary learning was conducted by Nakata (2011). Nakata (2011, p. 17) found out that the majority of digital word card programmers "have been developed in a way that maximizes vocabulary learning" in this systematic review of nine different programs.

Parts of speech are one of the major portions of English grammar. Traditional grammar uses the term "part of speech" to categorize words according to their functions (Nordquist, 2020). Furthermore, according to the British Council (2022), parts of speech show the categories in which each word is listed according to the grammatical or lexical function that it carries. Similarly, word classes that are included in speech include nouns, pronouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, determiners, and interjections (Finegan, 2008 & Nordquist, 2020). Waghmare (2022), however, only acknowledges eight cases where the determiner is not included.

Various types of research have been conducted in this area. Some of the research conducted before focuses either on the strategies of vocabulary learning or on the role of [arts of speech in learning structures of language in general. This study, as far as the researchers have found out, is unique as it tends to investigate the role of question papers particularly the Multiple-Choice Questions (Objective papers/MCQs). This study will include a detailed content analysis of the Question paper, and a questionnaire will be given to the students of the selected classrooms to get responses. Thematic Analysis of Braun and Clarke (2006) will be used to analyze the open-ended responses from the participants.

Material and Methods

In this section, the methodology of the research is presented among its data collection tools, methods, and analysis. The study is qualitative and quantitative and for the data collection, a random method of selection is used and analysis is done through mixed method.

Research design

This research is both qualitative and quantitative. Quantitative research entails numerical and statistical data whereas qualitative research includes critical evaluation of the data through close reading of text and content of the objective question papers and responses of the participants.

Methods of data collection

The data for the present study has been collected using two methods: firstly, the objective papers of both Secondary School Certificate Part II and Higher Secondary School Certificate Part II have been downloaded from the official website of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education Islamabad. Objective Papers from 2014-2018 have been selected for comprehensive content analysis in line with the impact these objective papers create in the student's learning of the English Language. Secondly, the data is collected through a questionnaire (s) (given in the appendix) from students of Higher secondary and secondary levels. A targeted classroom of Islamabad Model College for Boys Sector H-9 Islamabad has been selected for the Higher Secondary School Certificate whereas a targeted classroom of Federal Government School No. 03 Rawalpindi for Secondary School Certificate has been selected for getting responses for critical evaluation of the data.

Methods of data analysis

Quantitative data is presented statically with the help of graphs whereas Thematic Analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) is used for the qualitative analysis of the responses to the questionnaires.

Quantitative analysis represents numeric data including numbers and statically driven data. Qualitative analysis represents data through close text readings and based on the codes given in the data, certain themes are driven for certain results and conclusions.

Data Analysis

The objective papers of English (compulsory) at the Higher Secondary School Certificate of the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Islamabad from 2014-2018 comprised four major categories of questions i.e. information-based, grammar-based, vocabulary-based, and spelling-based.

Information-based MCQs are questions based on the information given in the prescribed textbooks. Grammar-based MCQs are the questions whose answers are based on the identification of parts of speech or the identification of a unit of grammar.

Vocabulary-based MCQs are the questions whose answers are based on synonyms, antonyms, or an idiomatic phrase or phrasal verb. Spelling-based MCQs are the questions whose answers are based on the correct identification of spellings:
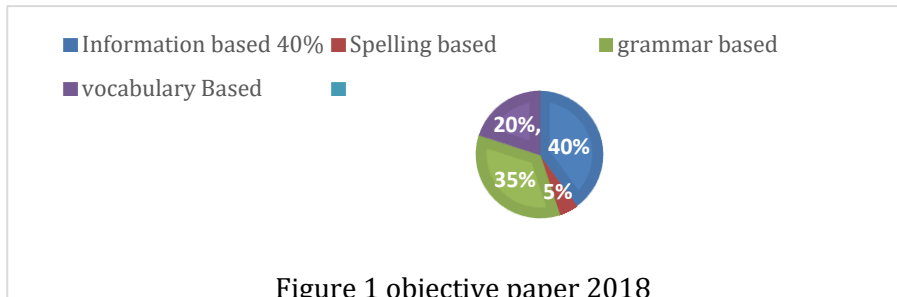

Figure 1 objective paper 2018

Figure 1 describes the percentage of the questions—20% of the total paper comprised vocabulary. Information-based questions occupied the highest place with 40%. Spellings comprised a meager 5% of the paper. 35% of the paper comprised of grammar-based questions:
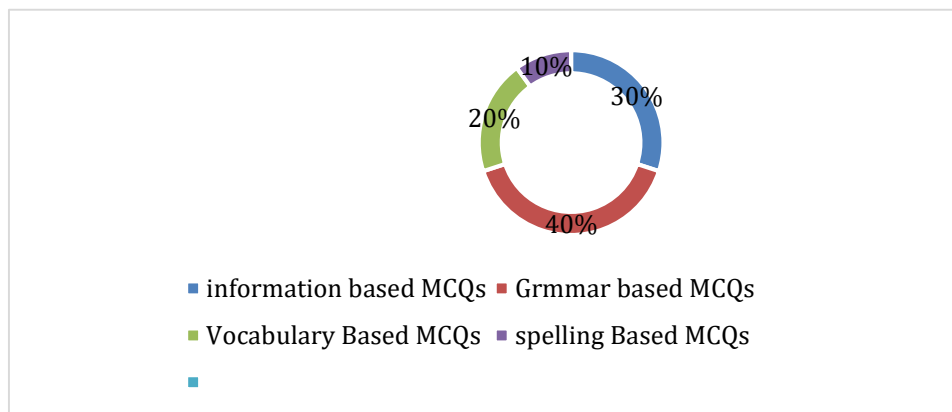

Figure2 Paper of 2017

Figure 2 represents the question-wise percentage of the paper of 2017. Grammar-based MCQs comprise a major part of the paper with 40% which is 5% more than the paper of 2018. Similarly, information-based MCQs comprise 30% of the paper which is 10% less than the 2018 paper. Coming to the MCQs of vocabulary, it is 20% of the total paper without any change in its weightage in both years i.e. 2018 and 2017. Spelling-based questions comprise 10% of the total paper which is double of the 2018 paper:
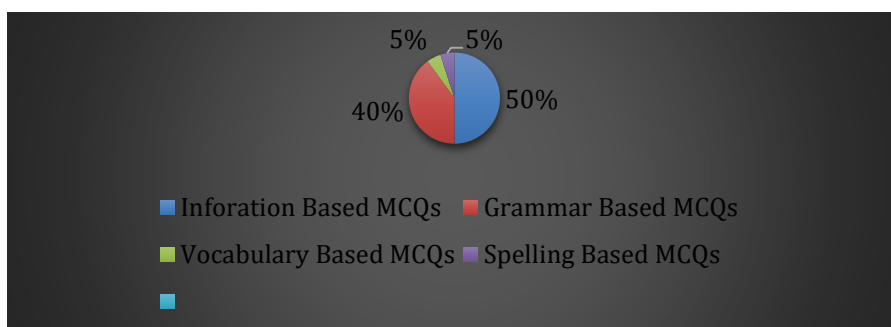

Figure 3 Paper of 2016

Figure 3 is a data representation of the 2016 paper. 50% of the paper comprises information-based MCQs which is the highest compared to the 2018 and 2017 papers 40% and 30% respectively. Grammar-based MCQs are 40% which is 10% more than the 2017 paper. Unlike in 2018 and 2017 20% of each paper, vocabulary-based MCQs have dipped down sharply and are a mere 05% in this paper. Spelling-based MCQs encompass 05% of the total paper:
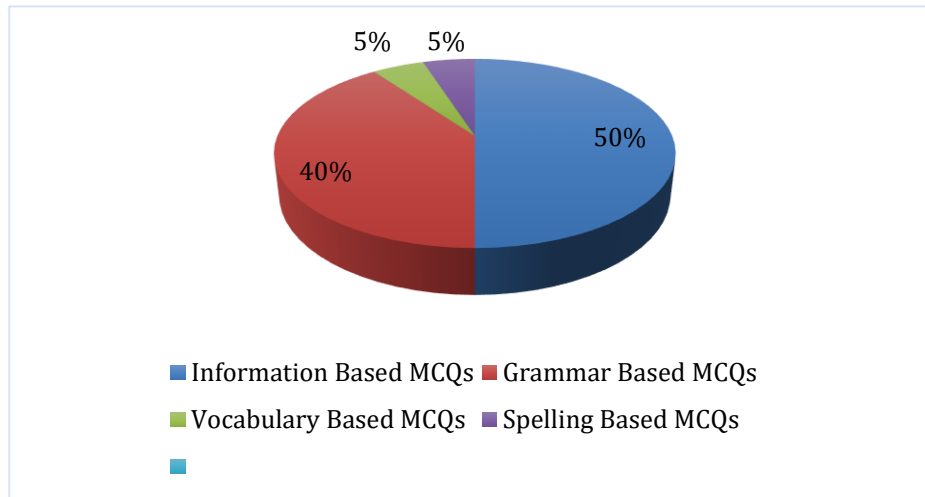

Figure 4 Paper of 2015

Figure 4 represents the data of the 2015 paper in terms of the percentage of categories of questions. It is a verbatim copy of the 2016 paper in terms of the percentage of each category in the paper. Information-based MCQs contain 50% of the paper. Grammar-based MCQs constitute 40% of the paper whereas vocabulary and spelling constitute 5% paper each.
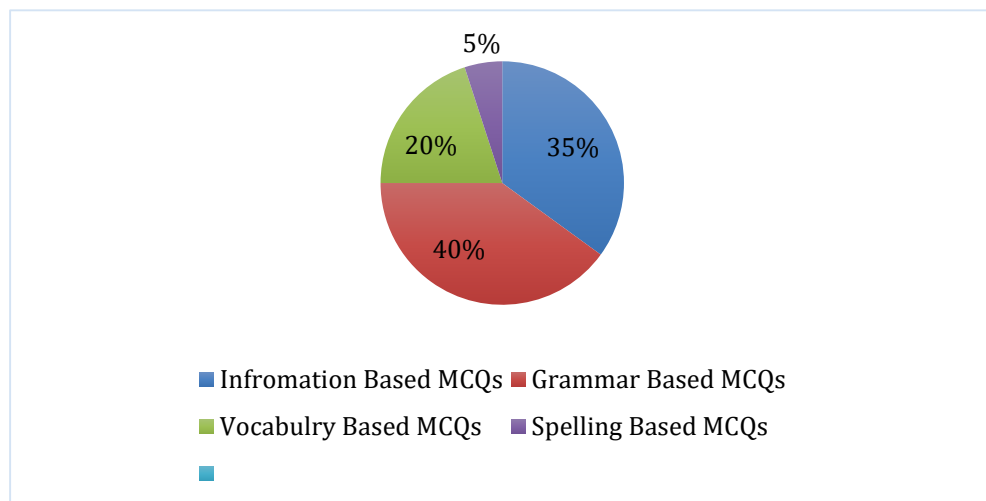
Figure 5 Paper of 2014

Figure 5 above illustrates the data from the 2014 paper. Grammar-based questions frame the major portion of the paper with 40% of the question while the lowest portion 05% is made up of spelling-based questions. Information-based questions form up 35% of the whole paper whereas 20% of the paper is made up of vocabulary-based questions. This is interesting to note that the percentage of questions in the 2014 paper is identical to the 2018 paper. A graphic similarity has been observed in the papers of 2015 and 2016 with the same percentage of questions.

Table 1
Categories of questions coming in the objective papers from 2014-2018

S No	Category of Question	% from 2014-2018
1	Information Based	41
2	Grammar Based	39
3	Vocabulary Based	14
4	Spelling Based	6

Table 1 shows the % of the various categories of questions coming in the papers from 2014-2018.

Each paper included 20 multiple-choice questions, resulting in a total of 100 multiple-choice questions. 41 questions focus on direct information, involving events, names, places, and numeric details. Additionally, 39 questions center on grammar, encompassing various parts of speech such as nouns, pronouns, adjectives, verbs, adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, clauses, phrases, and tenses. There are 14 questions dedicated to vocabulary, covering synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic expressions.

Content Analysis of the MCQs

41% of questions are based on direct information from the textbook which includes names, events, places, dates, etc. These questions have no relationship with language learning, rather such questions are placed here to make students read the textbook extensively. However, grammar, vocabulary, and spelling-based questions tend to add to language learning.

Table 2
Quantitative content analysis of the questions of the papers 2014-2018

S No	Part of Speech	Year of Question	Analysis
1	Noun		No question about nouns.
2	Pronoun	2017,2016, 2015,	The question of pronouns has come three times. In 2017, the question of identification of indefinite pronouns was given. Similarly, the identification of relative pronouns is asked in 2016 and 2015.
3	Adjective		There is no question regarding adjectives.
4	Verb	2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014, 2014	In 2018, the question about the identification of the modal verb was asked. Similarly, in 2017,2016, and 2014 identification of linking verbs is asked. In 2018, the identification of intransitive verbs is given in the question. Again in 2014, the identification of infinitive verbs was questioned.
5	Adverbs	2018, 2016, 2016	During all these years the identification of adverbs is given in the questions.
6	Conjunctions	2018,2017, 2016, 2015,	Identification of different types of conjunction is given in the questions.

7	Prepositions	2018, 2015,	In 2018, an identification-related question was asked whereas, in 215, a question related to the use of prepositions was asked.
8	Interjections		No question.
9	Verbal	2018, 2016, 2015, 2014,	Identification of verbal (gerund, participle, and infinitive) is given in the questions.
10	Sentences	2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014	Identification of types of sentences both function (Imperative, assertive, interrogative, exclamatory, optative) and structure-based (simple, compound, complex) are given in the questions.
11	Phrases	2018,2017, 2015,2014, 2014,	Identification of various types of phrases is given in the questions.
12	Clauses	2018, 2015, 2014,	Identification of various types of clauses is given in the questions.
13	Others	2017, 2017, 2017, 2016,	Others entail structures of the sentences, structures of passive voices, and identifications of complements, direct objects, indirect objects, etc.
14	Spellings	2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014	Expect for 2017, where 2 questions are given based on spellings, every year there has been one question regarding the spellings.
15	Vocabulary	2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014	A total of 14 questions related to vocabulary have come in the papers. The questions include synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic phrases.

Data Analysis of the Objective Papers of Secondary School from 2014-18

Table 3
Objective Paper of 2018

S No	Content	%
1	Grammar Based	40
2	Information Based	40
3	Vocabulary based	13
4	Spelling Based	07

Table 3 above describes the objective paper of 2018 of the Federal Board. The paper comprises 4 types of questions i.e. grammar based which is 40%. Similarly, information-based is also 40%. 13% of questions are asked based on the vocabulary items whereas 07% of questions are based on spellings of the words.

Table 4
Objective paper of 2017

S No	Content	%
1	Grammar Based	53
2	Information Based	13

| 3 | Vocabulary based | 27 |
| 4 | Spelling Based | 07 |

Table 4 above describes the objective paper of 2017 of the Federal Board. The paper comprises 4 types of questions i.e. grammar grammar-based which is 53%. Similarly, information-based is also 13%. 27% of questions are asked based on the vocabulary items whereas 07% of questions are based on spellings of the words.

Table 5
Objective Paper of 2016

S No	Content	%
1	Grammar Based	40
2	Information Based	13
3	Vocabulary based	40
4	Spelling Based	07

Table 5 above describes the objective paper of 2016 of the Federal Board. The paper comprises 4 types of questions i.e. grammar based which is 40%. Similarly, information-based is also 13%. 40% of questions are asked based on the vocabulary items whereas 07% of questions are based on spellings of the words.

Table 6
Objective Paper of 2015

S No	Content	%
1	Grammar Based	54
2	Information Based	33
3	Vocabulary based	13
4	Spelling Based	00

Table 4.11 above describes the objective paper of 2015 of the Federal Board. The paper comprises 4 types of questions i.e. grammar grammar-based which is 54%. Similarly, information-based is also 33%. 13% of questions are asked based on the vocabulary items whereas 00% of questions are based on spellings of the words.

Table 7
Objective Paper of 2014

S No	Content	%
1	Grammar Based	67
2	Information Based	00
3	Vocabulary based	26
4	Spelling Based	07

Table 7above describes the objective paper of 2014 of the Federal Board. The paper comprises 4 types of questions i.e. grammar grammar-based which is 67%. Similarly, information-based is also 00%. 26% of questions are asked based on the vocabulary items whereas 07% of questions are based on spellings of the words.

Over 5 years, there has been fluctuation in the % of papers but the categories of the questions have remained unchanged. There have been four classifications of the questions which have consistently occurred in the objective papers.

Table 8
Quantitative content analysis of the questions of the papers 2014-2018

S No	Part of Speech	Year of Question	Analysis
1	Noun	2017,	There has been only one question about the identification of nouns in the year 2017.

2	Pronoun	2018, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2015, 2014,	Questions regarding the identification of pronouns have occurred every year and even in 2018, there were 2 questions about pronouns.
3	Adjective	2017,	Only one question regarding adjectives has appeared in the papers in the papers.
4	Verb	2014,	There has been only one question regarding the identification of verbs in the exams.
5	Adverbs	2018, 2017, 2015, 2014,	During all these years, adverbs are identified in the questions except in 2016.
6	Conjunctions	, 2015, 2014,	Identification of different types of conjunction is given in the questions in the years 2015 and 2014.
7	Prepositions	2017, 2016, 2014, 2014,	Except in 2018, there has been a question regarding the correct use of prepositions.
8	Interjections		No question.
10	Sentences	2016, 2015	Identification of types of sentences both function (Imperative, assertive, interrogative, exclamatory, optative) and structure-based (simple, compound, complex) are given in the questions in 2016 and 2015
11	Phrases	2017, 2015, 2014,	Identification of various types of phrases is given in the questions.
12	Clauses	2017,	Identification of various types of clauses is given in the questions.
13	Others	2018, 2018, 2018, 2017, 2017, 2016, 2016, 2015, 2015, 2015, 2014, 2014, 2014,	Others entail structures of the sentences, structures of passive voices, verbal, and tenses identification, correct structures of conditional sentences, etc.
14	Spellings	2018, 2018, 2017, 2016, 2014,	Expect for 2018, where 2 questions are given based on spellings, every year there has been one question regarding the spellings. But, there has been no question of spellings in 2015.
15	Vocabulary	2018, 2017,2017, 2017, 2016, 2016, 2016, 2016, 2016, 2015, 2015, 2014, 2014, 2014, 2014,	A total of 15 questions related to vocabulary have come in the papers. The questions include synonyms, antonyms, and idiomatic phrases.

Data analysis of the questionnaire's response from the participants

20 participants aged between 15-18 years are given a questionnaire with questions related to the impact the content of the objective-question paper creates in their learning of English language learning. The participants are selected randomly from both levels i.e. Higher Secondary School Certificate and Secondary School Certificate.
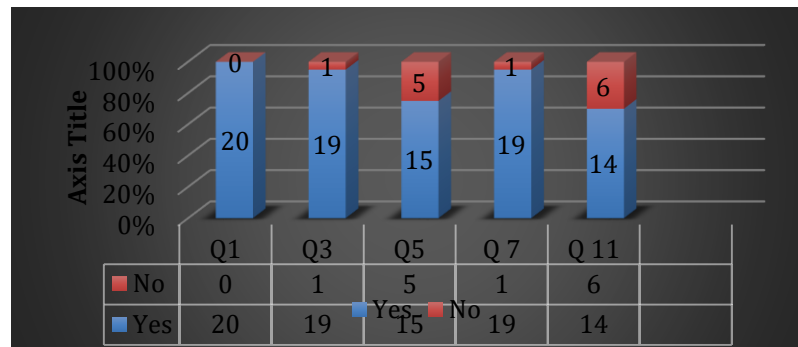
	Q1	Q3	Q5	Q 7	Q 11
No	0	1	5	1	6
Yes	20	19	15	19	14

Fgiure 6 Response of the participants to the questions asked in the questionnaire

The figure shows the responses of the participants to the questions which are asked in the questionnaire. In response to Q 1, does vocabulary play a part in learning the English language? All 20 participants responded that yes it does play a part in learning the English language. In response to Q 03, Does the preparation of vocabulary for the paper help you learn new vocabulary? 19 participants responded that it does help them while one participant believed it doesn't. in response to Q 5: Do you use the vocabulary learned from the paper? 15 participants have said yes and 5 have said no. in response to Q 7Are the spellings useful for you in your learning of English? 19 participants said yes and 1 participant said no. In response to Q 11, do you think that identification of parts of speech is appropriate for learning English Language Education? 14 participants responded yes whereas 6 of them responded No.

Open-ended questions are also given for response (see in the appendix) to see how these questions coming in the objective paper help the participants improve their English language learning skills.

A close analysis of the data shows that a more dominant response theme in learning the English Language is vocabulary. Respondents of the questionnaire believe that the vocabulary-based question given in the objective paper helps them a great deal in their learning of the English language. It benefits them in many ways i.e. it enhances their word limit. It also increases their knowledge of language. The preparation of the question vocabulary helps them in their writing in the subjective paper, writing in formal or informal settings, and helps them a great deal in their speaking. It also improves their connection with language. It sharpens their productive modules i.e. speaking and writing. Likewise, in response to the question about spelling and their role in improving their skills in English Language, all the participants think that this question perfects them in their accuracy of writing. Correspondingly, the participants term that the question of identification of parts of speech helps them in multiple facets. It is believed that preparation of such types of questions helps them get familiar with various parts of grammar, structures, various rules of grammar and their rule-based usage helps them master language more and more. In the same vein, when the participants go through close reading parts of speech, it opens new avenues of English Language for them. Overall, the participants are seen to believe that questions coming in the objective paper based on vocabulary, identification of parts of speech, and spellings have helped in improving their overall understanding of language in terms of writing, speaking, and reading.

Conclusion

The present study aimed to investigate the impact of the Objective paper on Higher Secondary School Certificates and Secondary School certificates in English Language

learning. The study was conducted to see how the content of the objective paper particularly, vocabulary-based questions, spelling-based questions, and questions based on the identification of parts of speech contribute towards the English Learning End- cation. During research, the data under analysis showed that except for the question based on direct information from the text, all other questions in the paper play a role in the development of English Language learning. Productive modules of language such as speaking and writing are improved with the help of vocabulary and spelling-based questions to help bring accuracy and perfection to the language. Also, the questions of identification of parts of speech help students get familiar with language structures, parts of speech, etc. which helps them not only in their course of academic journey but also in using language in their practical lives ahead.

The research has significantly indicated that vocabulary and understanding parts of speech substantially contribute to language learning, particularly in the context of English. This study suggests a potential extension of these findings into pedagogy and aims to explore the influence of curriculum, classrooms, and teaching methods on the effective impartation of English language skills at both academic and personal levels in the future.

The present study can be a pathway to conduct such studies to gauge the role of question papers in improving the proficiency of the English language in the functional courses being taught in various universities in allied departments. Similarly, a verbatim study to investigate the role of subjective type question papers of various boards in improving English language efficiency can be conducted at both Secondary School and Higher Secondary School Certificate levels.

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