



Multilingualism in Pakistan's Education System: Policy, Practices and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

The system of education in Pakistan reflects an enriched multilingual and multicultural reality, yet policies and practices are unable to balance that diversity for effective instruction. This paper aims to provide an overview of Pakistan's education system through the lens of multilingualism i.e., examining its policy, practices, challenges, and prospects. It is aimed at to unearth how lingual policies are shaped and implemented, which key challenges are faced by learners and instructors in a multicultural context and what prospects are accessible for inclusive education. The study points out that key challenges include the rift between multilayered languages i.e. regional, national, religious and official language along with inequitable access on the part of learners and inadequate training of the teachers. On the contrary, the study highlights that community-driven initiatives, reforming language policies, balancing cultural identities, and improving accessibility can offer pathways for better prospects. Situating Pakistani multilingualism within a global avenue, the study offers insights into the current policy, practices, and obstacles on one hand and offers opportunities for an enabling linguistic diversity on the other hand.

1. Introduction

Pakistan is a country situated in the heart of Asia with multilingual and multicultural diversity. Although Urdu is deemed as the language of nation, yet English is the language of offices as well as the mode of imparting education at various level of educational strata. Urdu is deemed as a sign of backwardness as well as a stigma. Policy makers are devoted to promote English as a ways and means of instruction even from primary level from many decades though without being attaining any fruitful results. The need of the hour being emphasized time and again among the literacy and scholarly sphere is to instruct in the mother language equally asserting and focusing on other regional, national and international languages. Currently students are entangled among mother, regional, national, international and religious language that is Arabic. There is no harmony and interactive connection among these with resulted in poor academic as well as communicative barriers. It is also being neglected that each and every language bring its cultural dimensions when being adopted and implemented.

Rahman (2003) asserted the fact that in Pakistan six key and over fifty minor languages are being spoken, uttered, comprehended and being implicated at various levels and regions. Most of these languages belong to the category being declared

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Indo Iranian branch having Perso-Arabic script. Most of the lexical choices of these languages are either derived from Persian and Arabic or from Turkish. Most of the languages are being uttered in various regional background and diversity and on the basis of ethnical groups from various geographical circles such as “Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Muhajirs, Balochis, Hindkowanis, Chitralis and Other smaller groups” (Wikipedia, 2013). In spite of all the lingual diversity Rahman is of the view that Urdu and English are deemed to be the language of power, authority, dominance, media, corporate sector and that of imparting education. It is also highlighted the sad fact that children here are devoid of being imparted education in their mother language. The percentage of children who are not instructed in their mother language is other 90% (Coleman et, al., which is quoted in Gouleta, 2013).

It has also pinned point that state is favoring these two lingual brands at the cost of neglecting other local, regional and ethnic vocals which has created *ethnic identity crisis* among the speakers of other languages. It has also stigmised these languages indicated English as supreme and tool of driven ideology, culture and supremacy among the mobs at one hand and inferiority complex on the other Rahman (2003). “one language, one religion, one nation” in the form of Urdu is being imposed at various strata for quite a few decades. This concept has erected a lingual and cultural crisis within the society resulted in chaos and unrest among the people of various regional dialects. The most pathetic and worrying is the linguistic and cultural conflict being observed at educational level. Torwali (2013) has dissected monolingual or bilingual concept of imparting education with Trojan horse which strike down the very intended goal for which mended.

It is a sad fact that majority of the people in Pakistan are unable to either speak, converse or communicate in these two dominated lingual brands i.e. Urdu and English. An English language instructor and advisor from British council Capstick (2010) drew the conclusion after his observation, study and experience that if children are being trained and educated in their innate language it will create harmony, mutual respect and more collaborative and peaceful society as compare to now but less attention has been directed to resolve the issue rather same out dated policies are being implemented and executed. It has further worsened the situation that regional and local languages are being dried up and the speakers of those languages are decreasing with the passage of time which has shaken the linguistic as well as the cultural diversity being attached to national identity as multilingual and multicultural region. The situation has broadened the social, economic, cultural and lingual conflict among the people of various sects.

2. Multilingualism in Pakistan

Pakistan being one of the most populated country of the world with an approximately over 220 million people. Being a substantial Muslims country which according to Miller (2009) has the largest Muslims after Indonesia having over 96% of the population as Muslims. However, peoples belonging to other regions and ethnic groups are also there. It is a country which is linguistically and culturally a diverse country. Due to complex historical, social and lingual reasons it has a national language Urdu that is spoken and comprehended by the minority of the population instead of being the mode of communication of the majority. It is the lingual brand that is being utilized exclusively in urban areas. It is also the medium of instruction to the extent that the education and instruction of public area schools is concerned. But according to the census of 1998 only 8% of the population of the country is consuming it as there communicational and linguistic tool for interaction. Being the language of North muslims of India it is the first language of very few percent of the people in spite of all the focus being directed for its nourishment at state and societal levels for over many decades.

Rahman (2010) has summed up it as “since a very powerful section of the bureaucracy (being Mohajirs) spoke Urdu as its mother tongue, there was an element of cultural hegemony concerning the special status of Urdu. One major consequence of Urdu’s privileged status has been the ethnic resistance to it”. In view of Lewis (2009) in a study of Institute of Linguistics there are 72 living lingual brands that are there in Pakistan. Although this claim has been declared as exaggeration by Rahman (2010) who asserted that there are 61 living lingual brands in the country among them majors of these can be summed up as:

Table 1

Adapted from Coleman, H., & Capstick, T. (2012)

| Standard name | ISO code | Alternative names | Standard name | ISO code | Alternative names |
|-------------------|----------|------------------------------|------------------|----------|---------------------------|
| Arabic | (arb) | - | Kashmiri | (kas) | - |
| Balochi, Eastern | (bgp) | Baluchi | Khovar | (khw) | - |
| Balochi, Southern | (bcc) | Baluchi | Kohistani | (mvy) | - |
| Balochi, Western | (bgn) | Baluchi | Korean | (kor) | - |
| Balti | (bft) | - | Pahari | - | Dialect of Pahari-Potwari |
| Bashgali | (bsh) | Bashgaliwar, Kati, Nuristani | Pahari-Potwari | (phr) | - |
| Bengali | (ben) | Bangla | Phalura | (phl) | Palula |
| Brahui | (brh) | - | Punjabi, Eastern | (pan) | Gurmukhi, Punjabi |
| Burushaski | (bsk) | - | Punjabi, Western | (pnb) | Lahnda, Punjabi |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|-------|--------------------------------|------------------|-------|---------------------------------------|
| Chinese, Mandarin | (cmn) | Putonghua | Pashto, Northern | (pbu) | - |
| Chinese, Yue | (yue) | Cantonese | Potwari | - | Pothohari (dialect of Pahari-Potwari) |
| Dameli | (dml) | - | Seraiki | (skr) | Saraiki |
| Dhatki | (mki) | - | Shina | (scl) | - |
| English | (eng) | - | Sindhi | (snd) | - |
| Farsi | (pes) | Persian | Swedish | (swe) | - |
| Finnish | (fin) | - | Torwali | (trw) | - |
| Gawar-Bati | (gwt) | Gowari, Gawri | Urdu | (urd) | - |
| Gujari | (gju) | Gojri | Wakhi | (wbl) | - |
| Hindko, Northern | (hno) | Hindko | Hindko, Southern | (hnd) | Hindko |
| Kalasha | (kls) | Kalash, Kalashamon, Kalshmondr | | | |

English being the language of international communication has also made its way in Pakistani context either at state or at educational sphere. However, its role and place are very intricate as a language of state, armed forces and tool of higher instruction. Deemed as the lingual mode of elite and upper class of the society who has ruled over since independence. To Rahman (2010) a distinctive assortment of English do exist and flourish in Pakistan with certain provisions and diverticula. While talking about the current scenario with respect to lingual fashion in Pakistan Shamim (2011) termed it as “linguistic apartheid”. Rahman has also dissected this “educational apartheid between the English - medium elite schools and the Urdu - medium schools for the masses” (2004).

While in another occasion Rahman has pinned it down the entire phenomena in rather in cataclysmic mode as “By supporting English through a parallel system of elite schooling, Pakistan’s ruling elite acts as an ally of the forces of globalisation at least as far as the hegemony of English is concerned. The major consequence of this policy is the weakening of local languages and the lowering of their status. This, in turn, opposes linguistic and cultural diversity, weakens the ‘have - nots’ even further and increases poverty by leaving the best - paid jobs in the hands of the international elite and the English - using elite of the peripheries.” (2010a, p. 30)

3. Policy, Practices and Challenges in Pakistan

As discussed earlier English has enjoyed a major role as a lingual brand among elite and ruling class. It is being deemed as sign of supremacy not only in elite and state level, but efforts are being devoted to promote it by means of instruction in language as well as in educational policies for many decades. Urdu which was a mode of imparting learning in at least in public institution has been consciously tried to replace with English. It is a sad fact that a very large number of population in Pakistan is unable to speak, understand and communicate in the said language. But this factor is being ignored in recent educational policies and education is being planned to impart in this language on the name of modernism, progress and social status consciousness which has created unrest and lack of interest in the overall system of education at various levels from both the children and their parents.

Pinnock (2009) is of the notion that if the people are being instructed in a foreign or national language to which majority of the population of the country is alien then it clearly indicates the concept that majority or at least a very large number of the mobs are being consciously kept out of the progress of education. Because they are either unable to cope with the situation or they consider it a flaw on social, religious or moral grounds. To him, in Pakistan 91.62% people speak and communicate in their mother tongues which are totally neglected in all policies in general and in current policy in particular which is indicative of the fact that 92% of the total population is being cornered out in a policy which is meant for the entire country. That is perhaps the major reason behind the educational backwardness of the people in the country since its emergence in 1947 till the very date.

There exists a widening gap between the tongue or language being spoken at home and in educational institutes which results in poor and decreasing participation of children in the process of learning. Zubair Torwali, (2010) acted as head of the “*Centre for Education and Development*” in the valley of Swat valley, quoted an instance to clarify the situation as: “The literacy rate in the town of Bahrain in Swat Kohistan is 12% for males and a mere 1.5% for the female population. Among the many factors behind this sorry state of education is the fact that an alien language is used by teachers. Local residents speak Torwali, a language different from Pashtu. For the past decade or so, all teachers at the primary level in the area have been Pashtu speakers, whose language the children could not understand. This has pushed away a lot of students from the school and the result is the low literacy rate.”

The existing gap not only results in lack of interest and participation in educational process but also give birth to many social, economic and moral decline among the children who are unable to participate in the process. It can be measured and estimated with the far-reaching effects resulted in unemployment, unrest, frustration and indecency among young. As majority of the population in Pakistan lives in rural areas so situation is being further worsened. To Pinnock (2009) if the situation remained

the same and no efforts are being devoted to improve the situation then there are sure short chances of “drastic exclusion” from instruction in rural areas and it will affect the goal of *education for all*. 34 countries are facing similar chances to which Pakistan is no exception. In this regard vulnerability of the situation can be visualized from the core point that Pinnock’s have delineated as “excluding linguistic communities from education because they do not understand the language used to teach contributes to political instability and conflict” (2009, p. 8).

4. Solutions and Recommendations

In order to adequately handle and come up with practical steps to bridge the gap and conflict the issue following steps can be taken into consideration;

- Govt. need to take practical steps to promote multilingual policy to discourage monolingual setup which is a bone of contention among the people of different lingual groups.
- Consensus need to be built among all the stakeholders before the preparation of educational policy so that adequate representation and suggestions from all and sundry can be kept in view.
- Cultural and lingual diversity need to be promoted and enhanced at state as well as societal level to discourage monolingual or bilingual educational setup.
- Multilingual textbooks and study materials need to be prepared so as to let all the people of the country to participate effectively in the educational process.
- Mother tongue should be encouraged, promoted and replicated keeping in view the scenario of each and every region.
- In order to bring harmony and road to move forward intercultural debate and participation must be encouraged and promoted.
- Foreign language should be learnt and promoted but it must be ensured that it must not affects our social, cultural and moral values.
- General agreement must be set up to learn, use and promote all the languages rather than mere Urdu or English.
- Language development and learning courses must be inculcated in the curricula to bridge the gap and to save the regional languages to be lost completely.
- Due considerations and awareness campaign and programs must be arranged on print and electronic media to dearth the inferiority complex among the people of different regions and languages others than Urdu and English.
- For the said purpose adequate resources and funds are need to be allocated so that objectives can be attained purposefully.

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