

A Debate on Pakistan's Education Policy of 2009 with Special Reference to English Language Teaching: Drawbacks and Negation of Ground Realities

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Abstract:

All the education policies implemented in Pakistan have provided special place to English language from early school classes to higher level education. All the efforts were made to educate the masses with the knowledge of English language but the results are unsatisfactory. Lack of early level knowledge of English language leads to the deficiencies till higher level education. The teachers who are teaching English language at primary level face difficulties to teach it because of their own knowledge which they possess about speaking of English language. The current study has focused on this very important issue of language planning in Education policy of 2009¹ and its implications at initial level of education. The researchers have tried to investigate the reasons which create hurdles in the way of

¹ The schools run by Government of Pakistan and the teachers are paid by the Government. These schools do not generate their own budget and all the expenses are covered by the Government of Pakistan.

learners to become proficient English language speakers. It was documented in the draft of education policy 2009 that apart from English language, science and mathematics would be taught in English language. Therefore, the study has also focused on the language training of the teachers. It is a questionnaire based study where fifty teachers from different schools of Bahawalpur Division² were selected for a questionnaire to be filled up. All the teachers are teaching English to primary level students³.

Key words: Education Policy of 2009, Government Schools, Language teachers, Proficient English language learners, Primary level teachers, Bahawalpur Division

Introduction

Proficiency in English language has remained a problem for the students in Pakistan due to different reasons. All the language policies drafted in Pakistan since 1947 have provided due place to learning and teaching of English language but it has been investigated that the learners feel difficulties in speaking and using English language even when they pass their graduation from universities. It has been found that the teaching methodologies are inadequate for the learners to understand and speak English language but, in the present study, it has been focused that whether the Education policy makers took into consideration the knowledge of the English teachers before implementing it as compulsory subject from primary level and making compulsory the teaching of science and mathematics in English.

Similarly, discussing the educational status of masses of Pakistan it has been explained by UNESCO (2010) and UNDP

² The policy which was given in 2009 in which it was addressed that science and Mathematics will be taught in English. It was implemented in Punjab and federal areas of Pakistan.

³ One major region of Southern Punjab which comprises of three districts Bahawalpur, Rahim Yar Khan, and Bahawalnagar. Punjab is the major province of Pakistan.

(2011) that more than 30% of Pakistan's population is living in "extreme educational poverty". It is crucial that stakeholders in both the public and private sectors address the needs of the current educational crisis and invigorate the dialogue with fresh ideas. Researchers, policy makers and the media have tried to investigate the current educational system and provided proposals to make Pakistan's educational and language programs improved after the declaration of Prime Minister in 2011 the "year of Education" (Lyon & Edgar 2010; Mustafa 2011; Rahman 2011).

In the same context, it is the requirement of Education policy of Pakistan to include English language in the syllabus to make the masses more familiar to the language as it has been said by Rahman (2005):

[Pakistan] is now a frontline state helping the United States fight terrorism. At the same time its education system has the potential to *create terrorists*. English is relevant in this context because students who are *least exposed* to it appear to be *most supportive* of intolerant and militant values. (3).

The current study, therefore, has focused on the opinions and reservations of the teachers which they feel when they teach in English language in their classes. That is why; the researchers have taken this very important issue in consideration to expose it. We have tried to find out the obstacles which the teachers face at primary level and their opinions about the EP 2009 which has made it compulsory for them to teach in English language. The teachers are supposed to produce proficient English language learners as this was the aim of the policy but the results have been found vice versa. This study will provide an adequate solution to the problem if it is observed by the Education policy makers.

Literature Review

Education Policies and English language planning since 1947 (taken from Coleman 2010)

It has been found by the researchers that all the education policies implemented in Pakistan have the same manifesto regarding the implementation of English language is concerned. In all the policies since 1947, English has remained a compulsory subject in the curriculum of Pakistani schools and it has also enjoyed the status of political and elite language. The education policies of Pakistan are listed below in the table:

Table 4 : How Pakistan's language in education policy has evolved³⁸

Year	Event	Policy	Implementation
Pre-1947	Colonial rule	Urdu medium for masses, English medium for elite	As policy
1947	Independence	Urdu declared to be national language	Urdu medium for masses, English medium for elite
1959	Sharif Commission	Primary and secondary education in Urdu, higher education in English	No change
1973	New constitution	English to be replaced by Urdu within 15 years; provinces free to develop their own language policies	No change
1977	Coup by Zia-ul-Haq	Islamisation and Urduisation	English taught from Year 4; schools begin to prepare for complete Urduisation of exams by 1989; private English medium schools begin to grow
1989	Benazir Bhutto elected	English to be taught from Year 1	Little effective change
1998	New education policy	No statement regarding language policy	Private English medium schools flourish
1999	Coup by Pervez Musharraf	English to be taught from Year 1 'where teachers are available'	Little effective change
2007	White Paper	English to be taught from Year 1; mathematics and science to be taught through English from Year 6	Little effective change; in Punjab science taught through English from Year 10.
2009	National Education Policy	Science and mathematics to be taught through English in Years 4 and 5; all science and mathematics to be taught through English from 2014	Punjab declares science to be taught through English starting in Year 4 from April 2009

The importance of one language-one nation can be clearly understood by the saying of Quaid e Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah: "The State Language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu

and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan. Without one State language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function". (Jinnah [1948] 2000, 150)

Contrary to the above statement, the constitution of Pakistan has emphasized on the importance of Urdu language but had provided immunity to English language for fifteen years when it was implemented.

The 1973 Constitution was promulgated with Article 251 stating:

1. The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.
2. Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.
3. Without prejudice to the status of the National language, a Provincial Assembly may by law prescribe measure[s] for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.

General prospective about English Language

Ramirez *et al.* (1991) have investigated that non English speaking students took five to seven years to get proficiency in English language regardless from the kind of bilingual education program offered to them whether it was strong bilingual education program or weak Bilingual Education program. Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) proposed a similar idea, in the same context, that the proficiency of the language learners was dependent on two things; academic criteria or oral proficiency and they further concluded that the non English speaking students could attain proficiency in English language after spending four to seven years in learning English language.

The NEP 2009 is proposing that students in Pakistan, of particular concern those coming from non-English speaking households, should be able to “pick up” English in subject courses after four years and then go on to only English-medium classrooms.

Rahman seems to be unhappy with the suggestion and he explains that only four years are not sufficient for Pakistani students to get command on English language as they use two to three languages outside the classroom due to the linguistic disparity in Pakistan. In the same context, Coleman (2010) explains that EP 2009 has emphasized on the role of English language and stressed to learn it. It is a laudable act by the policy makers because the need of English language is increasing day by day. “It does not necessarily imply that English should be used as a medium of instruction. In fact a persuasive argument has been made that this ‘democratising’ approach may ultimately lead to widespread illiteracy, rather than literacy, in general and particularly in English” (19).

Teachers' Perspective

Urdu is Pakistan's national language whilst English has the status of ‘official language’. However, there are believed to be 72 living languages in the country, not including English (Lewis 2009).

English is taught as a compulsory subject in all the educational institutes of Pakistan and the process of teaching English language starts from the primary level. But it depends upon the availability of the teachers who can teach English language or the books which are being taught in English language. There are only few schools where English medium section is available (Coleman 2010, mentions an email received from Fauzia Shamim)

English is an examination subject

It is widely recognised that the primary function of teaching

English in schools in Pakistan is to prepare pupils for examinations. The students who pass examinations in English get a wide opportunity to get jobs. It is a general perspective that less knowledge of English language is a hurdle in the way of students to get good jobs. Hence, it is generally believed by the masses of Pakistan that English has got lot of importance for social welfare and social status. Without the knowledge of English, the survival seems bit difficult to the masses in Pakistan (Javed Ahmad Malik 2010). In this context, it has been observed that the learning of English is compulsory for the students to enter in any good department for good job. The example of CSS (central superior services) is witness as there are two papers of English language and it has been observed that the number of failures in the exams have fallen to wide range to English essay and English precise (www.fpsc.gov.pk). English is taught as a compulsory subject and the students are bound to pass it to promote to the next class till their fourteen years of education. It is a dilemma for the students and the think tanks of Education of Pakistan that the higher number of failures in graduation exams (exams conducted to grant graduation degree in Pakistan) are those who fail in English (see results www.pu.edu.pk, www.bzu.edu.pk, www.iub.edu.pk, etc) The results can be seen at the websites of the universities which illustrate that the students fail even after studying English for fourteen years as compulsory subject. Hence, the teachers are forced to make the students pass the exams not to make them proficient language learners.

English teachers do not use English

Coleman (2010) has briefly explained the methods of school teachers when they teach English language in their classes. They have got their set parameters and can not come out of the set circle as it will decline the number of students who pass the exams. He explains that a text is read loudly by the teachers in English and then explained in Urdu or local language to make

the students understand what is being said in the lesson. The process continues and the teachers tell the meanings of the difficult words in Urdu or local language. Sometimes, English words are also used to explain the meaning. The students follow the same lessons addressed by the teacher. In the same way, the method of teaching grammar does not include any extra lesson in it. Usually, the teachers write the grammar rules and the sentences on board and then ask the students to note down the same in their note books.

The English language teachers have the responsibility to do the above exercises in the class in order to produce good results. In this way if the teacher teaches for more than twenty years the learners will never become proficient learners of second language.

Aim of inclusion of English language in Education policy 2009

Ministry of Education (2009) has illustrated that the importance of English can not be denied as it has become an international language and its knowledge is essential to get progress. It has been declared that Urdu is national language and it is a source of cohesion and integrity inside and across the borders among Pakistanis (4). English has been recognized by the EP 2009 as a language which is essential for international purposes and Urdu is a language which is used at national language. Keeping in view the importance of English, it has been made compulsory for all the students to start studying it from class I to class V. It has been illustrated in the policy that all the instructions to the students must be given in English after passing class V (20). The policy could not define the status of the teachers who will instruct the students in English language. It can be understood that the instructions can not be given at this level unless some certain steps are taken to improve the language skills of the teachers.

Research Methodology

It is a questionnaire based study where fifty primary school teachers were asked to write their comments after every question. The ages of the teachers varied from 28 to 40 years. Out of the total data, 35 male and 15 female teachers were requested to participate in the research .The questionnaire consisted of five qualitative questions about teaching of English language. The teachers were not asked to write down the answers in English as many of them felt inconvenient to write the answers in English language. The questions were written in English and the same questions were translated in Urdu⁴ for the convenience of the teachers to understand the questions properly. The results were analysed according to the opinions of the teachers. The results have been presented through graphs.

Research Questions

1. What are the views of the English teachers about teaching English at primary level schools⁵?
2. Were the teachers provided adequate training of English language when the policy was implemented or after that?
3. Do the teachers feel confident of themselves to impart adequate knowledge of English language to the students at primary level schools?

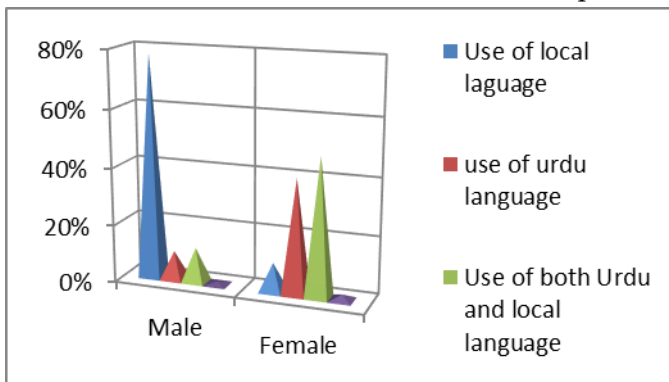
Research Analysis

78% male teachers commented while answering to the first

⁴ Urdu is the national language of Pakistan which is used in schools, colleges and universities. Pakistani students belong to different local languages but Urdu is a language which almost all of them can understand.

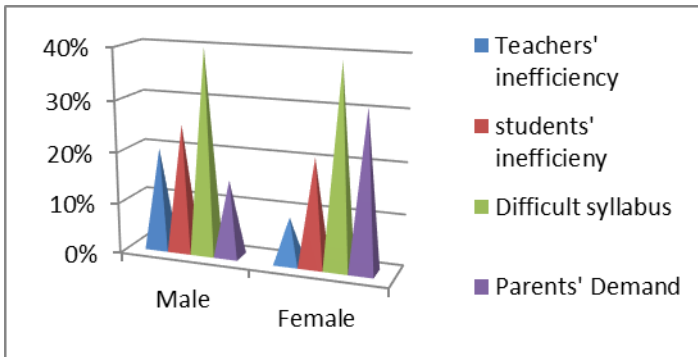
⁵ Pakistan has established schools which impart education from the very beginning of children when they start attending schools. These schools teach the students from KG group to class five. All the schools or parts of the schools which impart education till 5th standard are known as primary schools

question of the questionnaire that they use the local language which is Punjabi or Saraiki when they teach English to their students. They commented that this method is convenient as the students easily understand what is said by the teacher. 10% male teachers favoured the use of Urdu language in the class and 11% stressed the use of Urdu and local language in the class. 1% teachers agreed that small sentences of English are used by them in the class. 10% female teachers said that they use local language in the class. 40% female teachers took a stance that they use Urdu language when they teach English in their class. 48% opined that a mixture of Urdu and local languages is necessary for the students to understand the lecture. 2% female teachers agreed that they use small sentences of English in the class. They also mentioned in their answers that, sometimes, they have to switch from Urdu to local language when the students do not understand their lecture. None of the teachers mentioned the use of small sentences of English language in the class or to provide chance to the students to speak small and broken sentences of English. They commented that the results of the students will be affected as this activity requires lot of time in the class. Moreover, there is no importance of speaking skills as far as the results of final exams are concerned. They opined that the students have to write in their exams but not to speak.



Graph no.1- Kind of language used in the class

20% male and 9% female teachers wrote that they are not capable to teach in English language. 25% male and 21% female teachers opined that the students are not efficient towards learning of English language. 40% male and 39% female teachers explained that the syllabus which they are supposed to teach is difficult for them to understand. 15% male and 31% female teachers mentioned that the parents demand good marks of their children instead of their proficiency in English language.

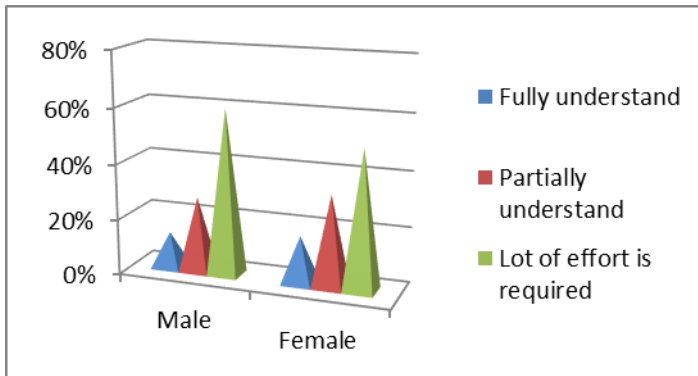


Graph no.2 Difficulties in teaching English language

Answering to question no.3 of the questionnaire, the teachers explained that they are hardly called for training of English language. 70% male and 67% female teachers wrote that they are scarcely called for training and if they are called the duration of training does not exceed 2 months. Moreover, the trainers do not focus to improve their English language abilities instead they focus to teach them how to teach and how to manage the class. The duration and syllabus of the training do not meet the requirements with the difficulties which they face while teaching to their classes.

Question no.4 of the questionnaire was arranged up to three categories. The results achieved are: 13% male and 17% female teachers supported that their students do not face any difficulty to understand English language. 27% male and 33% female teachers opined that their students partially understand

English language. 60% male and 50% female teachers wrote that they face many difficulties to teach English to their students and they have to put lot of effort to make them good enough to secure good marks in the exams.



Graph No.3 Students' understanding level of English language

Teachers were asked to mention some useful suggestions for the policy makers to take into consideration and only 60% of the total selected population put forward their views. They mentioned that the policy makers must observe the ground realities and the difficulties of the teachers which they face at school level. They must organise some useful workshops for the teachers before the implementation of any policy. The teachers must be trained to accept the changes in language policy and in doing so; they will be able to produce good results. They suggested that the students in Pakistan especially those who live in villages do not get any opportunity to improve their English language skills because they usually belong to uneducated families and they do not get any useful support from their parents as far as the English language proficiency is concerned. So, the policy makers must organize language teaching and language improving workshops to train the teachers once in a year. According to them the duration of the programs must contain four months of training and the focus should be to improve the language skills of the teachers. They also suggested that the syllabus should be made easier for the

convenience of the teachers as well as the students. Some of the teachers strongly opined that the teachers must be instructed to improve the speaking skills of the students which may prove useful for them in their higher education and job opportunities.

Discussion

The results have shown that only the documentation of the policies does not work properly. The policy makers of education have to think about the clauses which they have introduced in EP 2009. Some additional clauses are necessary to be added in the language policy to improve the language skills of the students. The researchers have found that the debate on this topic is essential and it must be addressed at higher level to improve the quality of the education at lower as well higher level. The students who study in Oxford level schools become good learners and users of English language at an early age but the situation in the government schools is getting aggravated day by day. If the same facilities are provided in the governments the results can be obtain. It is difficult for a poor country like Pakistan to higher highly paid teachers who can produce useful results but it may be easy for the government to train the present teachers working in government schools. The abilities of the teachers at primary level will lead the students to attain success at higher level of education. In the current study, the results have shown that the ground realities of teaching English are somehow not taken in consideration by the authorities. Teachers face difficulties to teach English language to the students and the teachers who teach science and mathematics in English language also face difficulties. The researchers have observed that the similar difficulties of the students in using English language at university level. The students who have got their early education from the government schools do face difficulties while using English language even at university level. The results have also shown

that the teachers are willing to improve their English language abilities which in long run will be useful for the students. The teachers are ready to improve the language skills of their students if they are provided opportunities to do so.

Conclusion

In a nut shell, the improvement in higher education is at the mercy of school level education which is has been ignored for decades. English language skills at primary level are vital for the students because of the importance of English language in Pakistan. The suggestions made in 'discussion' may prove helpful to attain good results. There are many aspects of this core issue to be researched and investigated. It is the duty of the policy makers, researchers, educationists, linguists, and the teachers to work on this topic to find out more useful ways to improve the English language skills at early level of school education which will ultimately improve the quality of higher education in Pakistan.

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***A participant in a focus group discussion with ETTE trainers from Islamabad, 13th March 2010.

****Shamim 1993:187-188 and 193 and Shamim 2008:240.

*****Dr Hina Hussain Kazmi, Program Manager (English), USAID, interviewed in Karachi on 4th March 2010]

(All the references in the brackets [] with the symbols *, **, ***, ****, ***** have been taken from the report of Colem, 2010)