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ARTICLES

LINGUISTIC POLICY AND PRACTICE IN PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR LITERACY AND THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN

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Pakistan, a Federal Parliamentary Islamic Republic with more than 176 million people, consists of four Provinces (Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh) and four federal territories (Islamabad Capital Territory, Federally Administered Tribal Areas [FATA], Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and Gilgit-Baltistan; (Government of Pakistan, 2011).

Classroom Map of Pakistan

Pakistan is a heterogeneous country with many religious, cultural, linguistic, and ethnic groups and is socioeconomically, educationally, geographically,

and ecologically diverse. The country is one of 19 with high linguistic fractionalization, one of 11 with high fragility and conflict levels, one of 34 less developed with large rural population (Pinnock, 2009) and the 145th of the 187 countries with low human development (UNDP, 2011). These figures present a tremendous asset, an opportunity, and a necessity for the republic to practice inclusion, tolerance, and acceptance. However, this very diversity and the ways it has been dealt with have often challenged the country, which suffers from historical hostility between and among groups resulting in state fragility, conflict, and insurgency.

Although Article 25A of the 18th Constitutional Amendment (2010) calls for free and compulsory education for all 5- to 16-year-olds and puts the sole responsibility for this on the state, in 2012, 23% (rural) and 7% (urban) 6- to 16-year-olds were not in school (ASER, 2012, p. 8). One in 10 out-of-school children live in Pakistan and by 2015 there will still be more than six million out-of-school children in the country (UNESCO, 2011, p. 42).

Of those enrolled in school very few are actually learning. Student achievement is falling significantly below the standard curricular levels, with more than 50% of fifth graders not able to cope with second-grade basic literacy and numeracy skills (ASER, 2012). For example, in 2012, more than 64% of fifth graders in Balochistan were not able to carry out a third-grade-level division sum and more than 11% of 10th graders in FATA were not able to read a second-grade story in Urdu or Pashto. Learning levels are "alarmingly" different between males and females across all socioeconomic levels, with the exception of girls who come from the richest income group (ASER, 2012, p. 22). Illiteracy levels in the country are dire and the most vulnerable populations are children who are linguistically diverse (UNESCO, Misselhorn, Harttgen, & Klasen, 2010).

In contrast to this extreme education poverty, the people of Pakistan have a rich linguistic repertoire with about 61–72 languages spoken in the country. A majority of Pakistanis speak or understand more than two languages (Lewis, 2009; Rahman, 2010). About 44% of the population speaks Punjabi, followed by Pashto (15%), Sindhi (14%), Seraiki (10%), Urdu (7.6%), and Balochi (3.6%). Other major languages spoken are Hindko, Kashmiri, Khowar, Kohistani, Brahui, Baryshaki, Arabic, Dari, Persian, and Turkic.

Linguistic map of Pakistan; Source: Fred Bolor, 2009

For historical, political, and other reasons Urdu has prevailed as the national language and along with English—the former colonial and now official language—have been promoted in schools. Urdu is the mother tongue of only about 8% of the population, yet it is widely used nationwide, although in some provinces "there is a certain degree of hostility towards the national

language" (Coleman & Capstick, 2012, p. 15). The proponents of teaching in Urdu argue that one language is essential to maintaining national unity, and this issue has been an important contributing factor to the Sindhi nationalism and the Balochi insurgency.

Unfortunately, 91% to 95% of the country's children have no access to education in their mother tongue, making Pakistan one of 44 countries facing the same issue (Coleman, 2010; Pinnock, 2009; Walter, 2009).

Language Policy and Practice in Education

Since 1947, language-of-instruction mandates have changed many times—all failing to formulate a clear, sustainable, and effective policy. The most recent national education policy was developed in 2009. This policy addressed the issue of language of instruction, suggesting that English be taught as a subject from first grade onward and Urdu and one regional language be included in the curriculum. Starting in fourth grade, science and mathematics should be taught in English only.

The policy does not take into consideration that the vocabulary and cognitive processes involved in teaching and learning a language as a subject with actually teaching and learning a content area through a second language differ greatly in intensity, vocabulary, and methodology (Ball, 2011; Chamot & O'Malley, 1986; Coleman, 2010; Coleman & Capstick, 2012; Fleming, 2006). It makes no clarification about the medium of instruction in primary schools and gives no guidelines for policy implementation to the provincial authorities. And as the power has been returned to the provinces, making them responsible for policy formulation and sector financing, only sporadic and unsystematic efforts across the provinces to develop language-of-instruction policies have been observed.

Thus, in Sindh, Sindhi is the only provincial language that is used in lower administration, judiciary, and education. Yet, although the medium of instruction in public schools is Sindhi (97%), Urdu (2%), and English (1%; ASER, 2012, p.18), linguistically diverse children in several areas of the province are still denied a meaningful education by the exclusion of their mother language in school (Rafiq, 2010).

In Punjab, the country's most populous province, with about 100 million people, the popular but unfortunate English Language Initiative emerged recently and has been implemented in public schools. The medium of instruction in public schools is English (50%) and Urdu (50%; ASER, 2012, p. 18), textbooks are now printed in English and primary and secondary teachers are urged to use it as the medium of instruction. Yet, although the majority of teachers are not fluent in English or do not speak it at all, it is expected that after two weeks of language training, they should be able to teach effectively in English to children whose mother tongue is Punjabi or another provincial language.

In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa there is greater awareness and appreciation of the diversity of the provincial languages and of the benefits of instruction in the mother tongue. The government, with the support of development partners, initiated an effort to standardize the alphabets of Seraiki, Khowar, Kohistani, and Hinko while involving local communities, experts, poets, writers, religious leaders, and other stakeholders. This effort led to the Mother Tongue Education Bill (2011) according to which, from 2012–2013 and in the areas they are spoken, the regional languages are to be taught as compulsory subjects in Grades 1–7 and by 2017–2018 in Grades 8–12. However, this policy has not been implemented as intended. The medium of instruction is Urdu (66%), Pashto (30%), and English (3%; ASER, 2012, p. 18).

In Balochistan, although Balochi is spoken by the majority of the population in the province, it is not the official language, and Urdu is the medium of instruction in 100% of the government schools (ASER, 2012, p. 18). Balochi is taught at the University of Balochistan in Quetta, at the Balochi Academy, and is used in radio, television, and publications. It was introduced in the 1990s as the language of instruction in primary schools, but the policy was short-lived primarily because of negative attitudes toward the language and disagreements on its proper orthography and use (Jahani, 2004). In FATA, government schools use Urdu (80%), Pashto (17%), and English (2%); in Gilgit Baltistan, Urdu (68%) and English (32%); and in Azad Jammu and Kashmir, Urdu (97%) and English (3%; ASER, 2012, p. 18).

Language of Instruction and the Curriculum

In Pakistan the curriculum and language of instruction vary depending on the type of school, the province, or federal territory. The elite private schools, the schools run by the armed forces, and many of the low-cost private schools use English. Of the 41 home languages recorded by ASER, only Sindhi, Urdu, Pashto, and English are used in government schools (ASER, 2012; Coleman & Capstick, 2012). The religious schools, the *Madrasas* (or *Madaris*) use varying media, including Arabic and are usually the schools of the very poor.

The last national education curriculum was developed in 2006–2007 and set language learning standards for Urdu and English but not for other Pakistani languages. It was developed under the auspices of the Federal Ministry of Education, Curriculum Wing (now abolished with the 18th Amendment) in collaboration with UNESCO, the Education Sector Reform Assistance Program, experts, educators, and other stakeholders. It has been largely debated and although initially adopted by the provinces, it will eventually be abandoned as a consequence of the devolution.

The 2006–2007 curriculum claimed to be focused on student learning outcomes and based on the principles of inclusion, nondiscrimination, tolerance, acceptance of diversity, gender equity, responsible citizenship, promotion of peace, and avoidance of extremism, war, and radicalization. However, there is a mismatch between its principles and its practices. Textbooks do not reflect the colorful mosaic of the diverse languages, cultures, or religions of the country. Lessons portray only Muslim heroes and do not include minorities or women heroes, artists, scientists, and poets. Women and girls are presented assuming traditional roles at home. Many lessons are about nationalism and glorifying wars, and very few link religion, nationalism, and peaceful coexistence.

The majority of first- and second-grade textbooks are unsuitable for young children—especially those whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction. They have long passages, complex texts and layouts, and the texts written in Urdu use the Nasta-liq script (the “cursive” nonlinear form of Arabic), which makes it very difficult for young learners to become readers. This puts children from linguistically diverse and poor households at a great disadvantage.

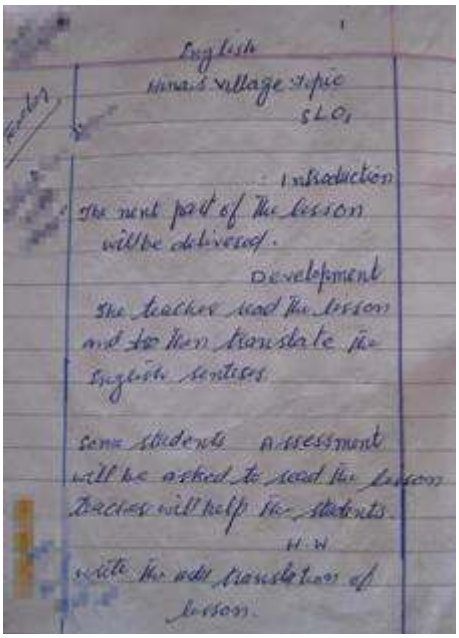
First Grade Students Copying from The Board

Literacy attainment becomes more difficult when schools have very limited resources. Teacher and student absenteeism hits government schools like a plague. It is estimated that about 13% of teachers and 18% of students (in Sindh 40%) are absent on a daily basis (ASER, 2012, p. 8). “Ghost teachers,” teachers no one has ever seen, are on the payroll; corporate punishment is present, and, in some cases, children suffer serious or fatal injuries as a result. In some areas, parents—especially those of girls—are reluctant to send their children to school because they find the curriculum irrelevant to their own culture, the school has no boundary walls or sanitation facilities, or they fear that extremist religious groups may threaten their families’ lives and safety.

School Fountain

In Punjab, the top-down monitoring system implemented by the government to monitor schools’ compliance with existing mandates is called the *Roadmap* (see picture below).

This approach helped improve several quantitative indicators, such as teacher presence in class, preparation of daily lesson plans, and dissemination of textbooks. However, a heavier emphasis must be placed on qualitative indicators such as lesson quality and relevance, language of instruction, and effectiveness of instruction and assessment. Submitted lesson plans, for example, are done for the most part to pass inspection requirements without much substance or pedagogical appropriateness.


English
Hina's village topic
SLO:
Introduction
The next part of the lesson will be delivered.
Development
The teacher read the lesson and then translate the English sentences
Some students will be asked to read the lesson Teacher will help the students.
Assessment
H.W
write the urdu translation of lesson.

Approved Lesson Plan

Therefore, monitors visiting the schools to record compliance must be knowledgeable and well-trained educators to adequately evaluate lesson plans and classroom practices.

Conclusion

The development of specific policies and practices to address the issues of language of instruction and effective teaching for the poor is critical to engage and retain more children in school who are actually learning, as well as in tackling the education emergency in Pakistan. Individuals' right to education can be actualized when policies are based on learning theory and research, and are designed not for their popularity but for their effectiveness

and sustainability. The education of culturally and linguistically diverse children must be considered from a holistic point of view, actively involving parents, families and communities, all in the context of Pakistan's sociocultural, ethnic, economic, and political complexity as well as the security situation in the country.

Tackling illiteracy and teaching children how to read and write in the primary grades in a language they speak and understand must be education's primary focus. Instructing children in "broken" English from teachers who do not speak the language themselves only perpetuates illiteracy's vicious cycle and gives false hopes to millions of families who dream of a better life for their children. Parents and stakeholders must be made aware that instructing children in a language they speak and understand will not only improve the latter's knowledge in the content areas; it will also help them learn other languages (e.g., Urdu, English) efficiently and effectively (Patrinos & Velez, 1996).

Addressing issues related to quality of teaching, such as lack of accountability, teacher absenteeism, and systemic corruption in education, and creating safe and child-friendly schools for all girls and boys are central to any educational reform in Pakistan. Teacher education and professional development must focus on improving instructional and assessment practices for culturally and linguistically diverse students, and a comprehensive education policy must address the language of instruction as one of the most essential contributors to children's learning in this challenging country.

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