

English Medium or No English Medium: Parental Perspectives from Pakistan

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Abstract—Medium of instruction plays vital role in the education of children. Being major beneficiary or sufferer, parents' role is integral as one of the major stakeholders in the education policy of Pakistan. This research is aimed to present an analysis of parental perceptions regarding medium of instruction for the education of their children. The present research draws closely on Woolard Schieffelin & Kroskrity's Language Ideology Model (1998) for understanding perceptions of parents for English as a medium of instruction. The researchers conducted 12 semi structured interviews from parents of Hyderabad city by using Maximum Variation Sampling (Seidman, 1998). These interviews were analyzed using Constant Comparative Method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The findings of the study suggest that Pakistan is a multilingual state and the parents' preferences of the language they want to be used in their children's schools are not uniform. Therefore, government should involve parents at grass root level while making education policy for effective outcomes.

Index Terms—language ideology, medium of instruction, perceptions of parents about medium of instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

Language policy and Language planning determine the status of language in the society (Tarhan.S, 2003). It determines the status of any language to be used in various functions, by government, the legal system, media and the educational system. Language policy or language planning is related to political decision (Tarhan.S, 2003). Language is related to not only symbolic function in the society but also with the instrumental use that the speakers employ in the language (Hoffmann, 2014). The choice of Medium of Instruction is related to language policy and planning which affectively shape the perceptions of masses for any language. Pakistan is a multilingual country. There are six major and 58 minor languages spoken in Pakistan (Rahman, 2004). Selection of medium of instruction for the education of children is a challenge for parents in the multilingual countries. Parents feel difficulty to select medium of instruction when there is not one language policy for all. They become indecisive if there is one official language, other national language and third is the language at home. This is general phenomena in many countries of the world especially those countries that remained colonies of British rule. Linguistic magnetism is inextricably linked to a colonial history and a current capitalist economic system (Evan & Cleghorn, 2014). Parents' choice regarding medium of instruction stems from general attitude towards any language in public and the dreams that they attach for their children's future. The selection of language is rooted of being kept marginalized and subservient if educated in the mother tongue. Parents assume that mother tongue "delays access to English commonly viewed as the gateway to modernity" (Heugh, 2005). This linguistic social cognition approach towards English is a deliberate attempt to maintain social order in the society (Woolard, Schieffelin & Kroskrity, 1998).

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

There are mainly two types of systems in education in Pakistan in case of Medium of instruction. First, there was Urdu/vernacular language and, Secondly English as a medium of instruction for the rich people. There was Urdu/vernacular language for masses and English medium for elitists during British rule (Rahman, 1997). After independence of Pakistan (1947), Urdu was declared as a national language and education was imparted in Urdu or Vernacular languages. English was taught as a subject from later grades. English was declared as an official language and Education was given in English Medium to the elites. Sharif Commission (1959) continued the same policy. New Constitution of Pakistan was promulgated in 1973. It was decided that English would be replaced by Urdu within 15 years. However English remained as a subject and Medium of Instruction was Urdu. After Coup of Zia-ul-Haq (1977), Urdu/vernacular was encouraged as a medium of instruction but Private English Medium Schools continued to grow

rapidly for the elites. English was made to be taught from grade 1 rather than from grade 4 in government schools in the rule of Benazir Bhutto (1989). Pervez Musharraf (1999) initiated Education Sector Reform (ESR) and English was made compulsory subject from grade 1 in government schools.

Policies and practices have played major role in the mind set of common people when they see that English is being used in the civil administration and the bureaucracy, in the legal and provincial system of federal and provincial governments, in Defence Forces (Army, Air Force and Navy), in broadcast media and schools of elites so parents perceive medium of instruction for their children through socio-political and socio-economic perspectives of the use of the language. There has been common trend in Pakistan that parents mostly get their children admitted in English Medium Schools. They do so because they want their children proficient in English. It is considered essential vehicle for achieving modernization, scientific and technological development, and economic advancement for self and the country, in short, for improving one's life chances (Haque,1982; Rahman, 1997).

There are many studies on English as Medium of Instruction for L2 learners in different countries of the world. For example, Muthwii (2004) writes about language policy in Kenya that mother tongue (Kalenjin) is used medium of instructions up to class 3. English is the official language and Kiswahili is the national language of Kenya but Parents in Kenya preferred their children get education in English from grade one in order to keep them "at par with those in progressive schools"(Muthwii, 2004). Parents saw many advantages of English Medium Education.

Evans & Cleghorn (2014) holds that parents in many parts of South Africa "go to great length seeking English as the sole medium of instruction" instead of 11 official languages as per policy in the South Africa and constitutional permission for the choice of medium of instruction for the education of their children.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. *Research Approach*

Since our inquiry of study is about parents' perceptions about medium of instruction for the education of their children, it involves deep understanding of an individual's perceptions and interpret those perceptions for uncovering the truth of the inquiry which we are pursuing. So, qualitative approach aims to investigate the perceptions of individual and "strive to understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors (Cohen. L; Manion. L ; Morrison.K, 2000)".

The objective of the study is to understand perceptions of parents about medium of instruction for the education of their children. It is a case study about parents' perceptions from Hyderabad. We have selected 12 parents whose children study at different schools in Hyderabad and conducted semi structured interviews from them. The goal of semi structured interviews was to explore the perceptions of parents about medium of instruction for the education of their children. The researcher has used Maximum Variation Sampling in the purposive sampling in order to expand more variability. Thus, the researcher has selected parents with a deliberate attempt whose children study different school systems. Bearing this rationale in mind, I adopted qualitative approach for study.

B. *Research Instrument*

Semi-structured interviews are useful to gather in-depth understanding of the issue in case of qualitative research. I needed understanding of perceptions of parents regarding medium of instruction for the education of their children that can easily be uncovered through conducting semi-structured interviews 'since they provide access to perceptions and opinions, they are effective for gaining insight into problems that are not immediately perceptible but that nonetheless cause concern in certain areas or in certain segments of the population (Laforest.J, 2012)'. Thus, I used semi-structured interviews technique as my research instrument to gather information for the answer of my research questions. I prepared protocol for the interview by asking background information, main section and the end part.

C. *Sampling Technique*

I used "maximum variation sampling" (Seidman, 1998) technique as one of the criteria for recruiting participants for the interviews. The researcher, in maximum variation sampling, opts for participants that have diverse characteristics in order to allow a comprehensive picture of the themes to emerge in the data of the study. I used it because I needed parents from Hyderabad Town whose children studied at different schooling systems so that I may be able to explore their perceptions comprehensively regarding medium of instruction for the education of their children.

D. *Data Collection Procedure*

It is of prime important to hunt potential participants for semi structured interviews in qualitative studies so that they may contribute in understating the issue under exploration. I utilized my all resources to select participants for my study. First, I talked to him/her and apprised about my research project. If he/she agreed then we fixed appointment at his/her ease. Participants decided for time and place. I gave him/her consent form for participating in my research project. Before starting to record interviews, I usually had chat general things in mother tongue in order to develop mind of my participants. I offered them choice of using language as they might wish to express freely and comfortably. Most of the participants spoke in Sindhi. Then I formally started with background information of the interviewees. I also jotted down notes in the diary while interviewing. I conducted 12 interviews: 6 from male participants and 6 from female participants. All of them were from Hyderabad and their children studied in different schooling systems. Female

participants were less expressive than male participants. Most of female participants were reluctant. I contacted many females through some references to be part of my research project but they refused quoting certain reasons. However I succeeded in taking interviews from female participants who were mostly in service.

E. Data Analysis Technique

I adopted constant comparative method by Maykut and Morehouse (1994) for the analysis of the data. These researchers used this method from the works of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Lincoln and Guba (1985). There is inductive category coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories in the constant comparative method of analysis of qualitative data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, cited in Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).

IV. THE FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Educational policies and Diversity at education system at grass root level have affected the perceptions of parents. Long inheritance to English from the time of colonization to date has made the people with a view that English is the key to success in every walk of life. Parents' perception regarding medium of instruction about education of their children provide justification for them to pursue for English as a medium of English. Parents shared many ideas from their practical experiences and personal observations. Some of them are discussed as under:

Finding 1: Education in English medium schools is the determining factor for the career of children case of going abroad for pursuit of higher education and for getting good job or success in business.

(a) Going for abroad: Majority of the parents are of the view that English is like passport and a gateway to the world. They think that education of their children in English medium school would provide them better chance round the globe.

“English has an importance and if the children go out of the country there they need English.” **IF2**

Hence, the mother tongue will not play as much important role as English does. Most of the parents generally wish that their children should move with the world which is only possible when one knows English.

(b) Pursuit for higher studies: English is considered as a means to get higher studies in Pakistan or in abroad.

Most of the parents in response to question about the role of English as a determining factor for the career of their children supported English. The ideas of parents reflected that it is very much difficult to carry out the higher studies in abroad having inefficiency in English language. Most of the tests like GRE, TOEFL and ILETS are being taken in English language, which are considered to be pre requisite in terms of getting admissions in foreign institutions. Moreover, the attainment of scholarships solely depends upon the proficiency of English language for seeking admissions in prestigious universities of the world.

“I think that some of the parents give primary importance to mother tongue but one thing what is valuable in future that is to be seen because all education is to survive keeping future needs. When everybody believes that almost more than two billion people of the world speak English language they strongly believe that this is the only source for survival in today's communicative world.” **IM5**

(c) Getting jobs:

Most of the interviewees responded to question

“It has an impact on the future of my child in case of getting job or higher studies.” **IF1**

“He cannot get a job in higher level or he will be frustrated due to his incompetency in English language.” **IF3**

On the contrary, an interviewee male 6 was of the opinion “the use of language having any relation with the future is a question mark? For example, the government has been talking about the implementation of Chinese; but I don't think so that what this perception is all about? We have reached on point where we cannot learn English, Urdu or Sindhi effectively and now the Chinese is being enforced as a language in course. I do not understand the approach of government towards languages. I am also lover of English language but I think that the future of their child is concerned with English language.”

Finding 2: It is pre-requisite for maintaining their status to enroll their children in well-reputed English medium schools.

Some parents viewed that admitting children in English medium schools is because of maintaining status in the society. People usually ask about schooling of children and those parents whose children are getting education in well reputed institutes, proudly tell people about names of schools of their children.

“See if a child is enrolled in an English medium school, he thinks himself superior. Not only the child considers himself superior but I think we, the parents maintain our status by admitting our children in well-reputed English medium school.” **IF 6**

Finding 3: Learning in English medium schools help children learn well and standardized. It will help their children in long run. However, some parents viewed English language as a barrier for the speakers of second language. They thought that English hampers creativity and their children cannot express their ideas freely in English.

Three out of twelve parents (23%) viewed that English help their children learn well.

“English is not a barrier, where my children are learning but English can be a barrier in many other situations because you can see the condition of private schools and the public. I can see this specific context where my children are

enrolled; English is not barrier for them. I have seen one thing; slowly they are giving more importance to English language..." **IM5**

On the contrary, most of the participants (77%) viewed that English language is great barrier in learning for those who learn it as a second language speaker but they preferred English Medium because of it status. Mostly, the teachers in private schools apply the translation method in class for teaching English language. Eventually, the students mostly feel anxiety and they cannot express freely.

"If I talk about my children, they can learn more in their native language rather than in second language but it is a time of giving quality education. It is just like a status symbol for us that if somebody speaks English; he must be educated." **IF 4**

Mother tongue makes learning easy and more rewarding than that of English. Home experiences become supportive to learning at School which is "a condition that guarantees cognitive equilibrium (Iyamu & Ogiegbaen, 2008).

"Learning is related with language. Message is properly communicated and when message is conveyed, we get effect of it in our mother tongue. Foreign language does not convey such affect." **IM2**

"Of course, it has a relationship with learning. The voice of mother tongue reaches to the ears of a child when he is born..... We throw a child all of a sudden in an environment where his language is different from his mother tongue; thus he faces the various barriers of language in his learning." **IM6**

Finding 4: Students do not understand the context of learning because of English Medium so they lack not only in analyzing things but also in expressing their point of view freely.

Some of the parents responded that in primary level, the children encounter a number of complexities like; they face difficulty in comprehension of knowledge and gaining information in class. They can hardly digest the concepts which are very novel to them. Thus, the child cannot incorporate a foreign language in early years of his learning. Ultimately, it leads to the educational decline of the children in case of creativity or analysis.

"You are totally avoiding, you are cutting off contextual reference of contextual relation. That is very much hard and that is very much difficult for the kids. Their background is something else. We are giving them something else. It is like you know, you are making them French child speak German." **IM1**

Some parents replied when asked about problems faced by their children while learning in English medium schools that their children face problems in the earlier years.

"Yes, of course because how does child learn? He learns through similarities first. If we talk about from learning point of view of kids then they use to imitate the language that we use. The way the teacher speaks, children hear it. If there is difference in the language, there will be a problem. I would say, not only at the level of instruction but there could be psychological problems as well" **IM1**

Some of the parents said that their children lack in writing mother tongue because they are getting education in English medium schools. They feel reluctant to do papers of Urdu or Sindhi. So they cram these subjects in order to pass the exams. They can hardly count the numbers in Sindhi or Urdu. So the parents felt it great difficulty for them because of education in English medium schools.

"To be very honest, my children are very much reluctant to read any Urdu passage or prepare themselves for Urdu or Sindhi paper. They are not taking any interest in these subjects. They have there at school that kind of atmosphere where everyone speaks English and children watch such programs where there is not Urdu or Sindhi language being used. They mostly focus on English language. We are the people who have created biasness towards languages." **IF 4**

Attitude of children towards learning mother tongue is inferior to English. Some of parents repented that their children are not interested to learn mother tongue so they cram in the papers of mother tongue. They consider subject of mother tongue boring and difficult in the school.

"My daughter is in grade seven and she was so reluctant yesterday; she was trying to cram each and every word of a question in Urdu. We know that cramming and understanding are two different things. She was trying to cram all the things and she was reluctant and uneasy to understand the things. She was having the pronunciation problems in Urdu like the word; "Shams-ul-Ulema" which is totally a pathetic situation." **IF 4**

Finding 5: Learning in mother tongue enables children better comprehension, develops creativity, bridges experiences at home with learning at school and enhances the vocabulary to express freely.

Most of the parents are of the opinion that mother tongue is a key to the comprehension of all subjects in early years of learning. It provides many opportunities to the child when he begins his studies in primary level. Hence, it is the right of a child that he must be taught in mother tongue for better learning. It makes the things easy because the children take much interest in a language which is used at home and in the neighborhood. The children also use the same language with his class fellows for the sake of interaction and communication.

"I believe mother tongue is like oxygen to life. It is something that a child carries. The first word of the child is in mother tongue. This is deep-rooted in us, biological speaking or emotionally speaking. Mother tongue is such language that can never be compromised at all." **IM5**

Most of the interviewees responded that the mother tongue helped the child learn better as compared to second language. It helped the child to understand the ambiguous ideas easily. The child does not face much difficulty in getting his primary education. The child begins to put his interest in the ideas which are explained in his/her mother tongue. It makes the concepts more lucid which are hardly understood in a foreign language.

“It is very important in the early five years of child as it is proved in science and research that children should be taught in mother tongue.” **IM1**

“Mother tongue should be taught first because the child will not understand properly in English Medium School because it is new to him, but he can understand well in mother tongue because it is his own language.” **IF1**

One interviewee was of the opinion that there should be integration of experiences children have at home with learning at school. If experiences at school do not bridge or coordinate with the environment out of school then, the children will face complexities and cognitive imbalance. So mother tongue plays vital role to supplement home experiences with learning at school.

“If the language being taught with, is mother tongue then the children can easily share feelings, experiences and learning with their parents, they can express in mother tongue. Thus the mother tongue plays an important role in learning. So it is very important. Even we also easily share our experiences in mother tongue.” **IM3**

Finding 6: Some parents consider the medium of instruction when they enroll their children at school whereas; some of the parents do not because it depends on the affordability; not on the choice.

Some of the participants were of the view that they considered the medium of instructions before admitting their children in schools. It was an arduous job for the parents to choose school for their children. Parents consider it important because it was ultimately to shape the future of their children. Parents often take advice and suggestions from their relatives and friends.

“I had gone to school and had seen the syllabus before admitting my child. The children of my colleagues also studied in that school and I saw the course when they brought the books for the binding. I found the course very informative and interesting. All subjects were taught properly so I analyzed all benefits and then admitted my children there.” **IF3**

V. CONCLUSION

Perceptions of parents regarding medium of instruction were embedded with common trends. They seemed unaware of the consequences of learning of child that occur medium of instruction. Government has failed to deliver in providing one system of education. People prefer to send their children to private schools and there is mushroom of private schools. The rapid change round the globe and easy access to mass media has affected the mind of parents. It is a transition phase. Most of the parents acknowledged that there are many difficulties in learning English in early years of education even then they prefer English because they think that there is quality education. There are more future chances. It is a status symbol which guarantees them of better life of their children ahead. Most of the parents think that English Medium Education would enable their children to move with the world and lead a successful life.

A. Limitations of the Study

The first limitation of the study is that, this study solely employed qualitative research design in which a few educated parents of urban area from Sindh were included; therefore the findings of this research cannot be generalized. Secondly, this study only included parents' perceptions regarding the medium of instruction about Education of their Children whereas the teachers' perceptions were not included who would have given better insight into this issue. Lastly, the data was not triangulated to confirm the findings by designing questionnaire on the emerged themes from the qualitative findings. This would have further validated the findings of the study.

B. Implications of the Study

The issue of medium of instruction has been the major concern among researchers quite recently; therefore plethora of research has been done in the past to know the views of teachers and students regarding the medium of instructions in different social settings. However, scanty of research is available on parents' views regarding medium of instruction about the education of their children. Therefore, this study would aware language policy makers in Pakistan to know the perceptions of parents' regarding the medium of instruction about the education of their children. Secondly, the findings of this study would also significantly contribute to the existing knowledge on the issues of medium of instruction in educational institutes in Pakistani context. Lastly, this study would also benefit those researchers in Pakistan who are currently working on language policies.

C. Suggestions for Future Research

Since this study employed qualitative research design, future research can include mixed research design to determine the strong validity in the findings. The current study only interviewed educated parents, the future research should also include the voice of uneducated parents so that unbiased results can be generated. The future study can also include the perceptions of teachers, students and parents in the same study on the issue of medium of instructions to complement the findings of the study.

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