

Opinions of Parents, Teachers and Students towards English as Medium of Instruction at Primary Level

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Abstract

This study concerned to know the opinions of parents, teachers and students towards the most fundamental issue, the choice of medium of instruction at primary level in Pakistani schools. The main objective was to know the level of comfort with mother tongue, national language and English as the medium of instruction of learners, their parents and teachers. The study has also checked their level of comprehension of different subjects in these medium of instructions i-e mother tongue, National language and English. The researcher hypothesized that all the stakeholders including the learners, teachers and parents are not satisfied with the English is the medium of instruction at primary level. The Target population was learners, their teachers and parents of primary schools of district Bukkar and Kasur. The sample of 80 learners, 25 parents and 20 teachers were selected randomly. The age range of learners was from 9 to 11 years and among 25 parents 11 parents were with rural background and 14 were from urban areas. The experience range of teachers was from 5 to 21 years. The following instruments were used to collect the data: 1) Semi structured interviews were conducted with teachers to know the opinions of teachers about different options for medium of instructions, 2) Focused group discussion sessions were conducted with 5 groups of learners from class 4 and 5 to know the level of satisfaction of learners about the medium of instructions and, 3) semi-structured interviews with parents of the students to have their views about the medium of instruction in the schools. The researcher personally approached to respondents to collect the data. The results of the study concluded that the young learners are dissatisfied with foreign language (English) as a medium of instruction in their classes. They have to exert much while decoding the contents of foreign language, therefore, they prefer to be taught in their regional language or mother tongue for better comprehension. The majority of teachers were disagreeing to the medium of instruction in foreign language. The large numbers of teachers, preferring the mother tongue as the medium of instruction as compare to those who preferred the foreign language. The majority of parents preferred the mother tongue based instruction.

Key words: Foreign language, parents, primary schools, medium of instruction.

Introduction

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Man is a crown of creation, when he is equipped with knowledge he proves wonder. He seeks knowledge throughout his life. He feels, observes experiences and then tries to develop his cognitive ability. "Education is the systematic process of instruction for the development of character or mental power" (Mehboob et al, 2011, p:43) in this regard his journey directs from concrete objects to the abstract ideas. Education is a process of overcoming natural inclination and substitution in its place habits acquired under external pressure (Dewey J., 1961). At very early stage a young learner acquires some sort of information from his home by observing the concrete objects then he marches towards the formal education. Broadly speaking, education stands for the means through which people may live from one generation to the other. Generally, it occurs through any experience that has a formation effect on the way one thinks, feels, or acts in its narrow technical sense, education is the formal process society positively transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another e.g. instruction in schools. According to Munazza (2007) the modern writers:

"In twenty first century the aim of education is only just to transmit knowledge but to make learners autonomous" (P:28).

Pakistan is a developing country, it won her independence from British, and therefore, its educational system is deeply influenced by the western mode of study. The education system is overseen by the ministry of education and provincial governments. The curriculum is mostly designed by the federal government. The literacy rate ranges from 45% Islamabad to 20% Kohlu district. The medium of instruction in most of the schools is Urdu. "Pakistan has five major indigenous languages Pujabi, Pushtu, Sindhi, Siraiki and Bluchi while the national language is Urdu. The language used in the domain of power (like the officer corps of the armed forces) is English, as it was during British rule". (Tariq Rahman, 2010. P.32). The government as well as policy makers have always tried their best to achieve the academic objectives according to the demands of the modern era. As:

"Education is the real investment of a nation as the future of a nation depends entirely on the generation that is being prepared for the purpose of leading the nation". (Afzal, 2005.P:23).

The federal government, ministry of education looks after education in the whole state; the federal government mostly assists in curriculum development accreditation and some funding. In past, Urdu remained a medium of instruction up to

the primary level but in the current scenario the government as well as the policymakers is emphasizing English as the medium of instruction. The use of English was inevitable for system maintenance; the ruling elite were trained to do their official work in English. English performance continued to be the official language of Pakistan. (A.R.Haque, 1982)

“In Pakistan the quality of education is on the decline in spite of the fact that the present government has initiated drastic measures in uplifting the quality and quantity of education. Quality of teachers especially at primary level is still questionable. It is evident that without teachers transformation we cannot transform the education system for improving the quality of education”. (G. R. Memon et al, 2010.P:123)

In Pakistan the medium of instruction in school is mostly in regional languages. It has been practicing since the emergence of the state. The government being inspired by the British system has been trying and experimenting English as the medium of instruction in the primary schooling.

Review of Related Literature

Kangas (2009) upholds that when the young learners come to school, they can easily express themselves in their mother tongue about existing everyday things in a face-to-face situation in their own environment where the situation is clear: they can see and touch the things they are speaking about and they get immediate feedback if they do not understand. They speak fluently, with a native accent, and they know the basic grammar and many concrete words.

According to Quijano (2008) the language the child can easily understand – the child's first language, or mother tongue – for coaching lesson contents in the first 6 years of his schooling, not only empowers the child to instantly master the curriculum contents, but in the process, it supports the value of the child and his cultural and language heritage.

Malone (2007) discussed in detail about the choice of language in the following way:

“The choice of the language...is a recurrent challenge in the development of quality education... Speakers of mother tongues,

which are not the same as the national...language, are often at a considerable disadvantage in the educational system...”

Susan Malone, Kathmandu, 2007 describes those Children whose first language is not used at school ... experience lower levels of learning and are much less likely to be able to contribute to a country ‘economic and intellectual development.

Methodology

Participants

The Target population was learners, their teachers and parents of primary schools of district Bukkar and Kasur. The sample of 75 learners, 25 parents and 25 teachers were selected randomly. The age range of learners was from 9 to 11 years and among 25 parents 11 parents were with rural background and 14 were from urban areas. The experience range of teachers was from 5 to 21 years.

Research Instrument

The following instruments were used to collect the data: 1) Semi structured interviews were conducted with teachers to know the opinions of teachers about different options for medium of instructions, 2) Focused group discussion sessions were conducted with 5 groups of learners from class 4 and 5 to know the level of satisfaction of learners about the medium of instructions and, 3) semi-structured interviews with parents of the students to have their views about the medium of instruction in the schools. The researcher personally approached to respondents to collect the data.

Results & Discussions

The approach of the young learners towards multilingual education was determined through group discussion, interviews of their parents and teachers. The following table shows the percentage of the level of understanding of the topic that was discussed with the thirty learners, seventy five young learners from each of grade II,III and IV were introduced the topic of ‘Root & Shoot system’ in three media of instruction and then the results were calculated on the basis of the level of understanding as shown in the following table:

Table 1

Analysis on the basis of Medium of Understanding

Grade	Total No of Students	Level of F.L		Level of N.L		Level of M.L	
		Students	%	Students	%	Students	%
II	25	0	0	5	20	20	80

III	25	0	0	10	40	15	60
IV	25	1	10	8	32	17	68

According to the above table, 80% of the young learners of grade-II responded well when they were approached in their regional language their cooperation was easily sought. They not only responded but also showed their willingness to carry on the learning process. Later on, they were instructed in national language (Urdu). Eight out of ten did not understand the topic of discussion, but when they were taught in the foreign language (English) all of the students seemed unable to understand the idea. Even it was noticed that they were surprised and looked wondered. In case of grade-III, 60% students understood the topic in mother language and 20% in national language whereas no one out of ten understood the topic in foreign language. Similarly, the young learners of grade-IV 68% students responded in mother language 32% in national language and only one out of ten students understood the topic in foreign language.

Analysis of the interviews of Teachers

Twenty five (25) teachers from the twenty schools of the two districts were interviewed. Their interviews were sought according to the open ended questionnaire (annexture-2). These interviews were recorded in electronic devices and then transcribed. The result obtained from the last question (closed ended) of the questionnaire was plotted in the following pi graph:

Table 2

Teachers views regarding Medium of Understanding

Total No of teachers	Favor of foreign language		Favor of National language		Favor of Mother language		Favor of All	
	teachers	%	teachers	%	teachers	%	teachers	%
25	1	5	5	25	15	60	4	20

15 out of 25 teachers were disagree to the medium of instruction in foreign language and 25% teachers asserted to use national language as medium of instruction and only 5% teachers who were the heads of the schools preferred the foreign language as medium of instruction according to new educational policy. The large numbers of teachers, preferring the mother tongue as the medium of instruction as compare to those who preferred the foreign language, has generated the following themes:

Reasons: Lack of proficiency in the foreign language proved a handicap in the way of teaching. The teachers showed their inefficiency in the promotion of the foreign language. They claimed that they, themselves were incapable to teach the basic ideas in the foreign language. The rigid socio-culture environment forced the large number of teachers not to use the foreign language as a medium of instruction other than the mother tongue as the medium of instruction. Most of the teachers showed their helplessness to motivate the young learners to be taught in the foreign language and claimed that they were quite unsuccessful in their approach of teaching in the foreign language. Teachers complained against the current educational policies which were implemented without detailed analysis of the prevailing circumstances systematically. The teachers were mostly undergraduate (PST) they themselves need a proper training for the development of their own language. The new objectives cannot be achieved till the training of the teachers or the appointments of new staff at least master level who can first comprehend the ideas at their own end and then impart the same to the young learners.

Parents views in favour of the medium of instruction: 24 fathers and 1 mothers of the young learners, selected from the twenty schools of the two districts were approached to seek their opinion regarding the medium of instruction in the schools of their children and analysis against the choice of the medium of instruction among the mother tongue based, national language and in the foreign language:

Table 3
Parents views regarding Medium of Understanding

Total No of Parents	Favour of F.L		Favour of N.L		Favour of M.L		Favour of All	
	Parents	%	Parents	%	Parents	%	Parents	%
25	1	5	5	25	15	60	2	10

The above table indicated that 60% parents preferred the mother tongue based instruction 25% parents liked the national language whereas only 1 mother wished their young ones must be taught in the foreign language. Those who preferred M.T. based MLE program argued 10 percentage of the parents who preferred the foreign language as a medium of instruction shows that most of the parents were not agree with this new policy of education department. The high percentage of the parents who prefer mother tongue based education in the early schooling of their young learners show their convenience and preference

Reasons: The young learners can easily understand the ideas in their mother tongue. As the language used in the perception of concrete objects of routine proves helpful in

the perception of abstract ideas. They could not help their children in the process of learning in the foreign language. They cannot afford such environment as helpful for their studies in the foreign language. The cultural hegemony does not allow to adopt foreign language. The parents claimed that they had rigid socio cultural values that cannot easily be changed

Recommendations

From the above mentioned reasons the following suggestions would be made:

- Before launching such program as the medium of instruction at macro level the government or the policy makers should keep in view the educational level of the teachers .They should not imposed such policies with out proper surveys regarding the need analysis. The young learners should be provided with learned teach who can easily solve their educational problems.
- The teachers should be provided with certain materials so that they may be affected by the foreign culture and language. The material may be in soft or hard form and also certain seminars should be organized for the promotion of the foreign language.
- Motivation is necessary for the comprehension of the ideas being taught in the foreign language .Certain training programs should be arranged for the teachers of the young learners .These programs should be composed on the basis of psycho linguistics so that they may be able to motivate the young learners for the promotion of the foreign language.
- The government and the policy makers should have a detailed analysis of the prevailing situation of the circumstances .These scientific surveys may provide the base for the formulation of the syllabus according to the current demands.
- At least master degree holder teachers should be deployed for the teaching of the young learners .These teachers can easily impart the requisite information about the ideas involve in their course contents.
- Language learning is the innate capacity of a child, he acquires the language of his regional and home without any difficulty. He listens to his family members and other peers and then tries to reproduce the same sounds. as he begins this practice since the development of his senses, he becomes habitual and accustomed to the same sounds and their production. Hence the overlap of the foreign language creates disturbance for the young child.
- The parents have very low knowledge of foreign language therefore, they cannot solve the linguistic problems of pair young once and they are not well to do enough to engage special linguist for the promotion of the foreign language.

- The people who are living from hand to mouth claim they it would be impossible for them to provide modern devices for the development of the foreign language. Even they have no T.V. sets in their homes.
- The cultural hegemony also proves a handicap in the way of the development of the foreign language in the presence of stronger cultural and linguistic values. The people of the selected areas were not ready to have a change in their culture.

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