

Bilingual Education System at Primary Schools of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT: *A nation's growth rests upon multiple factors but among those the most vital asset is its educated people serving and contributing towards its development and prosperity. It implies that education is the key factor in the growth of any nation, and in a multilingual and multicultural society like Pakistan, it becomes imperative that the medium of instruction in education system needs to be addressed. This research article aims to explore if a system of bilingual education at primary schools of Pakistan can be proposed, in which the basic knowledge and information will be provided to the students in their native language at primary level. It also aims to investigate if a bilingual education system can successfully be implemented and run in a society like Pakistan which is linguistically well diverse. The rationale of this research article stems from the need that the teaching of basic concepts in different subjects and provision of knowledge in the native language to the students at primary schools lead to increased cognitive development (Bloom's Taxonomy) and self confidence. It lies within the paradigms of Qualitative research and the results are reflected through the analysis of the questions put forward by Tucker, G. Richard (1999) regarding the prospects of bilingual or multilingual education system in multilingual societies, and recommendations made by Luis Enrique López (1999) for the successful implementation process of a bilingual education system.*

Key words: Education, Bilingualism

Introduction

Pakistan has two official languages: Urdu (7.57%), which is also the national language and serves as the lingua franca in Pakistan, and English. Additionally, Pakistan has four major provincial languages: Punjabi (44.15), Pashto (15.42), Sindhi (14.1), and Balochi (3.57), as well as two major regional languages Saraiki and Kashmiri. Other languages spoken in Pakistan include Bengali, Potwari, Kalash, Khowar, Shina, Balti, Buruhi, Hindko, Farsi and the rest. Keeping this rich heritage of Pakistan in mind, at the time of its independence, confusion arose as to what language should be adopted as the medium of instruction. Since then, lack of political stability has not led any government to adopt realistic and practical steps in resolution of this issue. In order to resolve this issue, a clear language policy needs to be devised, which would help in laying out a clear path for uniformity to be achieved in the education system throughout Pakistan.

The regional civilizations of Pakistan have a significant historical inheritance. Therefore, languages are pure, rich and alive in their certain areas of dominance. Most of the languages are written in Persia-Arabic script with a modified form. Much of the Persian and Arabic vocabulary is absorbed by these languages. Owing to language demographics, dialects of some languages get variance in terms of distance. Therefore, major languages have a variety of dialects. All the languages are rich in their literature and cultural inheritance.

At present, in the education system of Pakistan, English and Urdu are being promoted and the education to the children is provided in these two languages. In the elite schools, the entire education is provided to the pupils in English, whereas in the government schools, Urdu is used. In a multilingual country like Pakistan, pupils come from different communities and ethnicities for whom neither English is their first language nor is Urdu. They receive their primary and secondary education in languages that are second or third languages to them. Consequently, they face problems in comprehending conceptual ideas and the process of their cognitive development slows down.

Research Questions

1. Can a system of bilingual education at primary schools of Pakistan be proposed?
2. Can a bilingual education system successfully be implemented and run in a multilingual society like Pakistan?

Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to propose a system of bilingual education in primary schools of Pakistan keeping the practical implications of the proposed system in mind. This study also aims to investigate if a bilingual education system can successfully be implemented and run in a society like Pakistan which is linguistically well diverse.

Significance of the Study

As discussed earlier, Pakistan is a well diverse multilingual and multicultural society where more than 70 languages are spoken. Despite this fact the entire education system is based on two dominant languages which are Urdu and English. The students in the government schools are given their primary education in Urdu and in the private sector schools more emphasis is laid upon English. As for more than 90% population of Pakistan, neither of these languages are the native languages, students struggle to comprehend the knowledge provided to them. Research indicates that the cognitive development and comprehension abilities of the students who are given the basic primary education in the native language are better than the ones who are given the basic primary education in the second or third language.

Literature Review

UNESCO proclaimed 21st February as International Mother Language Day in its General Conference in November 1999. The first Mother Language Day ceremony was held at the Headquarters of UNESCO, and its Director-General Koïchiro Matsuura, in his opening speech said, "languages are not only an essential part of humanity's cultural heritage, but the irreducible expression of human creativity and of its great diversity." he added "Favouring the promotion of linguistic diversity and the development of multilingual education from an early

age helps preserve cultural diversity and the conditions for international understanding, tolerance and mutual respect.”

However, fewer than 25% of the world's approximately 200 countries recognize two or more official languages, with a mere handful recognizing more than two (e.g., India, Luxembourg, and Nigeria). However, despite these conservative government policies, available data indicate that there are many more bilingual or multilingual individuals in the world than there are monolingual. In addition, there are many more children throughout the world who have been and continue to be educated through a second or a later-acquired language, at least for some portion of their formal education, than there are children educated exclusively via the first language. In many parts of the world, bilingualism or multilingualism and innovative approaches to education that involve the use of two or more languages constitute the normal everyday experience (Dutcher, 1994; World Bank, 1995).

The use of multiple languages in education may be attributed to numerous factors, such as the linguistic heterogeneity of a country or region, specific social or religious attitudes, or the desire to promote national identity. In addition, innovative language education programs are often implemented to promote proficiency in international language(s) of wider communication together with proficiency in national and regional languages.

The decision of what language will be used for instruction is based on a country's language policy. Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) explain what language policy comprises of and how it works, as “language planning is a body of ideas, laws, beliefs, and practices intended to achieve a planned change”. According to Rubin and Jernudd (1971), “language planning is a deliberate, though not always overt, future oriented change in the system of language code and/or speaking in a societal context”.

Many countries have a language policy designed to favour or discourage the use of a particular language or set of languages. Although nations historically have used language policies most often to promote one official language at the expense of others, many countries now have policies now to protect and promote regional and ethnic languages whose viability is threatened.

(WordiQ.com)

The official policy of the state since 1947 is to promote Urdu as a national language and as a symbol of national identity and integration. It was realized that though Pakistan must provide the scope for growth to its provincial language not merely as medium of instruction but also as 'instrument for the dissemination of culture'. At the same time it was felt that something should also be done to ensure unity among these diversified cultures and their languages and therefore Urdu was felt to be the language which could do the job of a unifying force.

However, there have been some problems in the realization of this plan, the major one being 'English'. It was the medium of instruction established by the British for the elites. After partition this trend continued. Despite all efforts of successive governments in the last six decades to oust English and replace it with Urdu, English continues to flourish and remain for all purposes the second official language of Pakistan. This has led critics to state that there is an inherent contradiction between the states official or 'overt' policy and the real or 'covert' policy, whereby English remains for all purposes the language of power. The reasons attributed to this are that English is used by elites in Pakistan, that is, by the upper classes, especially the bureaucracy and the army, who have command over the language due to their 'English medium schooling'. English is also seen as a passport to success and prosperity as the best jobs in the governmental, non-governmental and international bureaucracy are reserved for those who are fluent in English. In this Endeavour to replace English with Urdu as the sole official language or the language of Pakistan within the country, the provincial and regional languages are neglected and have not become the major part of language policy as such.

Methodology

This research article lies within the domain of Qualitative Research Paradigm to investigate if a bilingual education system can successfully be implemented and run at primary schools of Pakistan keeping in mind that Pakistan is a multilingual society with several cultures and languages. In Strauss and Corbin (1998, 17) view, a qualitative research can be defined as,

By the term 'Qualitative Research we mean any type of

research that produces findings not arrived at by statistical procedures or other means of quantification. It can refer to research about persons' lives, lived experiences, behaviours, emotions, and feelings as well as about organizational functioning, social movements, cultural phenomenon and interactions between nations.

Thus, in qualitative paradigm findings are arrived at not by any statistical data but by reasons behind various aspects of behaviour.

Many of the world's languages have yet to be written, codified, or elaborated. Furthermore, there are no materials available for initial literacy training or for advanced education; nor are there teachers who have been trained to teach via many of the world's languages. These are all issues that have been identified as crucial by the World Bank (1995) in a recent report of priorities and strategies for enhancing educational development in the 21st century. Therefore, it should be ensured that there is material available for initial literacy training, and if not, then reservations should be made for their acquisition. Teachers should be trained in their first languages. (Tucker, G. Richard, 1999) reports a number of important questions to be addressed whenever parents, educators, and administrators discuss the prospects of multilingual education for their communities. These questions are reported here under;

1. What are the explicit or implicit goals for formal education in the region?
2. Is there general satisfaction throughout the region with the level of educational attainment by all participants (both those who terminate their education relatively early and those who wish to go on to tertiary studies)?
3. Is the region relatively homogeneous or is it heterogeneous linguistically and culturally, and how would bilingual education complement the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the community?
4. Does the region have an explicit or implicit policy with respect to the role of language in education, and how would bilingual education fit or not fit with this existing policy? Is this policy

based upon tradition or the result of language (education) planning?

5. What priorities are accorded to goals such as the development of broadly based permanent functional literacy, the value of education for those who may permanently interrupt their schooling at an early age, and the power of language to foster national identity and cohesiveness?
6. Are the language(s) selected for instruction written, codified, standardized, and elaborated?
7. Is there a well developed curriculum for the various levels/stages of formal education--that is, a framework that specifies fairly explicitly a set of language, content, cognitive, and affective objectives that are then tied to or illustrated by exemplary techniques, activities, and supported by written materials?
8. Are sufficient core and reference materials available for teachers and students in the language(s) of instruction? If not, are there trained individuals available who can prepare such materials.
9. Are there a sufficient number of trained and experienced teachers who are fluent speakers of the language(s) of instruction and who are trained to teach via that language(s)?

Similarly, according to Luis Enrique López (2000), bilingual education programs would have to make sure that careful attention is given at least to the following components in the implementation process:

First language linguistic elaboration in order to facilitate its ample use as the main language of education in the different areas of the school curriculum as well as to empower children belonging to subaltern societies in general and to indigenous societies in particular in order to reinforce these children's self-image, self-respect and confidence in their ethno linguistic group's main vehicle of everyday communication; such elaboration such initially pay attention to lexical development as well as to the creation and development of a variety of styles

and registers to facilitate the use of indigenous languages in conveying content related to the different curriculum areas and particularly in a de-contextualized manner;

Effective first language development through the inclusion of a specific language arts program in the pupils' first language through at least the complete primary education cycle of six to eight years, emphasizing literacy and the production of written texts; the emphasis on the production of written texts should be closely related to the need to contribute, on the one hand, to the development of a wide range of genre and to a written literature in the indigenous language, and, on the other hand, to the broader aim of promoting the literalization of indigenous societies and their inclusion in the written world;

Effective second language teaching and learning constructed on the basis of the children's first language development, in order to prepare them to function efficiently in a society where now at least two if not three languages are needed; on this basis, children should also be given the possibility to learn an additional or third language; second language development should pay attention to the different language arts and transcend the socio communicative sphere of language use in order to prepare the children to also resort to the second language as a medium of learning;

Curricular diversification and enrichment based on an intercultural perspective so as to satisfy the learners' basic learning needs and to take seriously into account the specific socio cultural and sociolinguistic contexts the children belong; in so doing, the school becomes a necessary link between the children's inner world and the wider society and looks for complementarity rather than opposition between traditional society knowledge and practices and those more characteristic of the West;

Content-based instruction in both languages once the children have acquired cognitive academic language

proficiency in the second language; careful attention should be given to language distribution and use in the classroom so as to avoid the risk of constraining the first language only to those curriculum areas or components more closely related to the traditional knowledge and practices;

Efficient teacher education, both pre and in-service, in order to prepare the bilingual educators needed not only to implement these new programs but also and more importantly to design the new strategies needed in the specific situations and cases where a bilingual scheme needs to be developed; such educators should also develop the social and cultural competencies necessary for recognizing and actively accepting and promoting the education role the local communities and its members should play in the development of the bilingual education program;

Discussion

These questions need to be observed and analyzed in the Pakistani context. The explicit or the implicit education goals for formal education in the country are to provide primary education to its pupils in the national language which will create an air of unity among all the communities living in the country. Pakistan is included in the third world countries with a stressed economy and high financial debts. As a result of this, a very negligible portion of budget is allocated to the sector of education. Therefore, the facilities and funds provided to the educational institutes are sub-standard and scarce, especially in villages and in the remote areas of Pakistan. It results in a general dissatisfaction with the level of educational attainment by all participants (both those who terminate their education relatively early and those who wish to go on to tertiary studies).

It also needs to be considered that Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural society. The provincial and regional divisions are not based upon linguistic grounds. Consequently, even within the provincial and regional areas, native speakers of various languages exist because of which no single native language can be used in these areas for the

provision of basic education and knowledge in the first language of pupils at the primary schools.

As far as the explicit or implicit policy with respect to the role of language in education is concerned, a tug-of-war between English and Urdu has been in progress almost since the creation of Pakistan. Urdu is the national language and lingua franca of Pakistan and acts as a unifying force to connect all provinces of the country. English on the other hand, is the language of elites and the co-official language of the country. It is considered as the language of power. Several governments over the decades have tried to shift the power status of English to Urdu but in vain. In this given scenario, it looks improbable that bilingual education system will make its way very easily within the existing education policy.

Most of the language spoken in Pakistan have an ancient heritage, and are codified, standardized, and elaborated. But the medium of instruction in education is in English and Urdu. Since English and Urdu are the only languages used as medium of instruction in education, an absence of a well developed curriculum for the various levels/stages of formal education that is, a framework that specifies fairly explicitly a set of language, content, cognitive, and affective objects that are then tied to or illustrated by exemplary techniques, activities, and supported by written materials in other language are found absent.

Also, the core and reference material available for teachers and students in the language(s) or instruction are insufficient, but given a moderate period of time, there are capable people of the language(s) of instruction, who can develop quality core and reference material. There, also, exists a scarcity of sufficient number of trained and experienced teachers in the language(s) of instruction. If the system of bilingual education is implemented, the teachers will have to be given formal teaching training in the language(s) of instruction which will require a great deal of time and funds.

Conclusion

In the Pakistani society, a strong feeling of general dissatisfaction regarding the education system exists because of the frequent change in the education policy with the change of every government. The resources provided to education are not enough at most levels and mainly at the

primary level. A very negligible portion of budget is allocated to the sector of education because of which there remains almost always scarcity of funds for the educational projects. The facilities provided to students, teachers, and staffs at primary education level are sub-standard. It is found that the explicit or implicit goals for formal education in the country are to provide the primary education to its pupils in the national language. The study attempted and emphasized upon the irregularities and the non-homogeneities of the bilingual education system in Pakistan which should be seriously worked upon by the educationists. It not only discussed the importance and necessity of mother tongue as a medium of instruction at primary level, but also highlighted the cultural and linguistic diversity of Pakistan. Although, mother tongue serves as the best mode of instruction at the primary school level for the cognitive growth of pupil, Urdu, the national language, which is the second language for most Pakistanis as well, is preferred. One reason for this is the fact that Urdu acts as the only lingua franca of the country and most Pakistanis have a certain level of competency in this language. Another reason is that, the division of the provinces and the districts are not based on linguistic grounds. Within every area of Pakistan, people of different ethnicities are found. So even if a system of bilingual education at primary schools is set up, there would be many children for whom the language used in the school might not be the first language, which makes it very difficult to pursue the idea of the implementation of bilingual education system in Pakistan. English can also not be preferred over Urdu as it is the language of elites, and unlike Urdu, does not act like a lingua franca to connect the linguistically diverse communities and ethnicities of Pakistan. However, pilot research to see the effectiveness of a “Bilingual Education at Primary Schools of Pakistan” should be conducted. For this purpose, special schools should be established in all the provinces of Pakistan with homogenous groups of students speaking the provincial languages, and teachers should be trained to teach the basic curriculum at the primary level in the native language of the pupil.

Recommendations

Bilingual education should be made a part of the education policy of the country. It may be difficult, risky and costly to implement the new system of bilingual education at primary schools on the national level. Therefore, a study/rather series of studies are required to pilot the proposed system in order to see the possibility of the practical

implications of the system. Randomly chosen schools both from the private sector and the government based schools should be selected with pupils speaking the same mother tongue. Instruction in the indigenous language aiming at developing the language skills as well as other subject areas should be given importance as it will also contribute to learning the language of wider communication since the competencies developed in the indigenous language are strongly related to those necessary for communicating in the language of wider communication. So, for the first three classes in the primary school, all the subject knowledge should be provided to the pupils in their mother tongue with Urdu being a compulsory subject alongside other subjects.

Teachers should also be able to understand, speak, and use the language with a high level of proficiency. Teachers should be well trained, have cultural competence and subject-matter knowledge, and continually upgrade their training. Development of the mother tongue should be encouraged to promote cognitive development and as a basis for learning the second language. Parental and community support is essential therefore their involvement should be made essential.

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