

English in Pakistani public education

Past, present, and future

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The article reviews the past, present, and future position of English in the Pakistani language-in-education policy for the Pakistani government schools. The article first traces how the English language came to Pakistan, and underlines the social domains in which English is commonly used at the present time. The article highlights the fact that English has enjoyed the highest social position in Pakistan since the country's establishment in 1947. Taking this fact into account, the article traces historically the status of the English language in the language-in-education policy for the government schools since 1947 to the present time. I argue that students from the elite and non-elite English medium schools end up being more literate in English and having better access to social mobility than the students from the Pakistani government schools because of the low quality education and the poor instruction of English as a subject taught through traditional teaching methods of imitation and memorization. In order to reduce the gap, although the recent National Education Policy (NEP 2009) of Pakistan has recommended not only teaching English as a compulsory subject in grade one onward but also using it as a medium of instruction in grade four onward for the content subjects such as science and mathematics in the Pakistani government schools, the current predicament of Pakistani public education raises questions and controversies about the successful implementation of the policy. The main suggestion of the paper is the fact that since teachers are the major agents of change in realizing such curriculum reforms at their classroom level (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991), their perspectives, perceptions and attitudes must be sought as well as included in such policy making processes. Because the voices of Pakistani government teachers are overlooked in such top-down language policies, this paper implies that the their experiences, attitudes, and perspectives about the present and future role of English in public language-in-education policies need to be explored to better understand the potential future implications for Pakistani teachers and their education. Such steps not only make policies inclusive but also gauge how far such English initiatives are

facilitative in raising the quality of education and developing English language literacy in Pakistan.

Keywords: English in Pakistan, language policy and planning in Pakistan, English as a subject, English as of the medium of instruction, National Educational Policy (NEP, 2009) of Pakistan

Discussing the status of English in Pakistan, Haque (1983) stated that “Although introduced in this country through an historical accident, English has become a pattern of life, and its cultural influence continues to be strong” (p. 7). While Haque noted the impact of English a few decades ago, the importance of English has increased significantly in the country (Mahboob, 2002; Norton, 2010). This paper is an attempt to discuss how the language has gained such significance in Pakistani society in general and the Pakistani public educational system in particular. The paper will, first, document briefly the social status of English in Pakistan. Second, it will provide a short overview of the history of Pakistani public educational policies in the context of the status English has had in the policies since the establishment of the country. Third, it will discuss the current and projected standing of English in the public language-in-education policy. Finally, the paper will attempt to explore the justifications and controversies surrounding the current and the future role of English in public education. It must be made clear at the outset that this paper discusses the role of English *only* in government Urdu/vernacular medium schools. Although the issue of the position of English in Pakistani private schools and Dini madaris (religious seminaries) will be touched on at a surface level, it is not *the prime* focus of this paper. But, before I embark upon showing what social position English has been enjoying in Pakistan, it seems highly important to see how English came to Pakistan. And, after it came, who has been in a relatively better position to access and learn it. The following part, thus, attempts to set forth the situation and then to explain the case of the Pakistani government/public educational system and policy.

Setting the stage: How did English come to Pakistan?

After the British left the Sub-continent colony in 1947, Pakistan was established on the map of the world. The then Pakistan consisted of major two parts: East Pakistan and West Pakistan. East Pakistan separated from West Pakistan in 1971 and emerged as an independent country, Bangladesh. West Pakistan, now called Pakistan, comprises four provinces: Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, formerly known as North West Frontier Province (N.W.F.P).

The four provinces including East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) separated from India because they all shared a religious identity. That is, they all were Muslims. And, since they all were Muslims, they identified more with the Urdu language – the identity marker of Muslims in the subcontinent – than with Hindi or the English language during the struggle for establishing an independent country, Pakistan (Mahboob, 2002, Rahman, 1996; 2002).

However, the Muslim elites, who later became the rulers of Pakistan, were educated in the colonial elite institutes where English was the medium of instruction. As a result, they were being well versed in the English language. And, in their habitus (Bourdieu, 1991), they seemed to identify more with the English culture than with the Urdu culture. In a way, they appeared to be the reified products of Thomas Macaulay's famous *Minute on Indian Education* of February 2, 1835 in which Macaulay had said, "We must at present do our best to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and color, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals, in intellect" (Macaulay, 1935/1854, p. 359). Macaulay was not only the "Law Member of the Governor General's Executive Council" of the then British colony but also "the President of the General Committee on Public Instruction" (Rahman, 2004a, p. 76). Indeed, allowing the Indian elite to be educated in their language, English, and the common masses in other languages was the colonizers' political strategy to create the desired civilized class planned by Macaulay in his speech. This class was to help the British to keep its rule of the colony (Mahboob, 2002; Rahman, 1996; 2002).

Since there are four provinces in Pakistan, and every province has its main first language (L1), the country, in its present form, is a multilingual, multiethnic, and multicultural society (Abbas, 1993). Mansoor (2004) noted that according to the last national census undertaken in 1998, the population of the country speaking first languages/mother tongues in Pakistan is as follows: Urdu speaking people consists of 7.57%, Punjabi speaking 44.15%, Sindhi speaking 14.1%, Pashto speaking 15.42%, Balochi Speaking 3.57%, Seraiki speaking 10.53%, and 'others' 4.66%. Discussing the multilingual milieu, Mansoor (2004) further observed in this context that there are "no less than 24 languages and a number of dialects spoken in Pakistan" (p. 334).

However, because of the Muslim masses' attachment to Urdu in past and the need for national cohesion and integration amongst the provinces, the rulers of Pakistan selected *only* Urdu as the national language of the country – "the mother tongue of only 7.57% of Pakistanis" (Mansoor, 2004, p. 334). The Urdu language was conceptualized as a tool to build one nation, develop national unity, and play the role of the language of wider communication amongst the people(s) of the provinces. While the "Urdu only" policy did help the language to be the language

of wider communication to a certain extent, it did not help develop national unity (Mahboob, 2002, p. 3). The Urdu only policy resulted in delegitimizing other languages and language identities. The disintegration of East Pakistan and its emergence as Bangladesh, and the occurrence of severe language riots in Sindh in 1970s, for instance, exhibited the complexity of the sociolinguistic situation of the country (Rahman, 1996; 2002).

Further, for a number of reasons, it was decided that English would be the official language of Pakistan. This decision was made based on the following factors: (a) the Muslim elite, who later became the rulers of the country, were “trained” in English language (Haque, 1983, p. 6); (b) these elites were inclined toward English culture; (c) English was the official language of the then British colony and, thus, all official business of government was conducted in the English language; and, finally, (d) English was thriving as an international language around the world.

Discussing this situation in terms of how English came to Pakistan when the country was established, Haque (1983) viewed that “The use of English was inevitable for system maintenance: the ruling elite were trained to do their official work in English” (p. 6). In a similar vein, Abbas (1993) stated, “The country inherited from the British massive machinery that used the systems, as well as the language, of the empire” (p. 148). While both these viewpoints help to see how English became the language of power in Pakistan (Rahman, 2002), Abbas’s opinion also goes beyond this point and touches upon another crucial issue. He mentioned the “massive machinery that used the systems” which the rulers “inherited.” In the social domain of education, one of the aspects of that intangible massive machinery was the British colonizers’ intentional political strategy to create a particular class from the elite to rule the country.

After the establishment of Pakistan, her rulers, directly or indirectly, materialized this strategy of creating a specific class to rule the country. They translated this plan largely by creating an infrastructure and providing opportunities to their class to get educated in elite English medium schools and devoting only meager funding to the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools where the common masses studied; and, where English was taught as a subject through the traditional teaching methods of repetition and memorization (Hoodbhoy, 1998; Rahman, 2004b). Given the unequal access to opportunities for learning English, Haque (1983) observed, “English in Pakistan is more the language of Macaulay than of Shakespeare” (p. 7).

The present Pakistani educational scenario, therefore, may still be characteristic of this asymmetrical division in terms of access to becoming proficient in English (Shamim, 2008; Rahman, 2004b). Discussing the educational milieu of Pakistan, Coleman (2010), for instance, mentioned major four types of educational systems prevalent in the today’s Pakistan: “private elite English medium schools,

private non-elite ‘English medium’ schools, government Urdu medium schools, and dini madaris (madrasa) [religious seminaries]” (p. 19). Unlike Coleman (2010) who used the ‘government Urdu medium schools’ category, I, by drawing upon Rahman (1996; 2002; 2004b), prefer calling these schools government Urdu/vernacular medium schools. I do so to clarify that not all government schools are only Urdu medium. They are also Sindhi medium and Pashto medium schools in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces respectively.

Because of the status of English as an official language, it not only holds the top position in the linguistic hierarchy of Pakistan but also has the highest symbolic power (Bourdieu, 1991) in Pakistani society (Mahboob, 2002; Mansoor, 2004; Norton & Kamal, 2003). No wonder, then, that every student has a strong desire to learn English and be able to get a job in either the government or private sector. Before we discuss what has been the status of English historically in government educational system and policy, and how have the students from government Urdu/vernacular medium schools been learning the language, I discuss below the social position of English in today’s Pakistan. I do so to demonstrate how the language has earned such symbolic power and the topmost place in the Pakistani linguistic hierarchy (Bourdieu, 1991).

Status and position of English in social domains of Pakistan

Pakistan follows the 1973 constitution at present. The Constitution (1973) lays out the following national language policy (Rasool and Mansoor, 2007, p. 222):

Article 251

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 measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.

Urdu has been designated as the *national* language and English as the *official* language of all the people(s) of Pakistan. In addition, as written above, English was designated as official only for the first fifteen years. That is, Urdu was conceptualized as both the *national* and the *official* language replacing English after 1988. This, however, did not happen until September 7, 2015 – after forty-two

years – with a verdict of the Supreme Court of Pakistan (Haider, September 8, 2015). It has been observed that the burgeoning influence of English as the lingua franca all over the world in general and as the language of power in Pakistan and meager measures undertaken so far for Urdu corpus planning in particular may prevent Urdu from stepping into the role envisioned in the constitution in future, too (Mahboob, 2002; Mansoor, 2004; Rahman, 1997; 1999).

Abbas (1993) noted the “major functions” of English in Pakistan which help to see how English has become the language of power. His discussion also helps to explain how the language has earned its uppermost place in Pakistani linguistic hierarchy. He wrote that English is the main language of “the Civil Administration and the bureaucracy, which includes both the federal and the four provincial governments,” i.e., Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Second, it is the principal language of the Pakistani legal system of both federal and the provincial governments: “the Supreme Court and the four provincial High Courts conduct their proceedings in English.” Third, it is the major language of the “Defense Forces.” Not only is English used in “the design and training of all the components of armed forces, i.e., the Army, Air Force, and Navy,” but it is also the “language of communication for all office work” in the armed forces (pp. 148–150).

Fourth, English has also earned its place in both Pakistani electronic and print media. According to the Pakistani Federal Bureau of Statistics, in the context of print media, for instance, 215 newspapers and periodicals were published in English in 1999, and this number jumped as high as 290 in 2005 (Pakistan Federal Bureau of Statistics). Fifth, English is the key language in Pakistani private and public educational systems. It is almost the sole medium of instruction in all the government and private higher educational institutes in Pakistan. Abbas (1993) underlined the fact that English is so central in the public educational system that “failure in English means failure in the entire examination” (p. 154). And, finally, English is also used in trade and commerce domains along with Urdu at the national financial centers and banks (Abbas, 1993).

When such is the leading position of English in Pakistani society where a Pakistani may not imagine getting a public or private job if s/he is not literate in English, one may wish to know what the position of English is in the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools, the schools where the great majority of poor Pakistani students study (Lynd, 2007; Qureshi & Shamim, 2009). Below, I briefly discuss the status of English from the establishment of the country to 1999, the year General Pervez Musharraf overthrew a democratic government through a military coup and became the ruler. Backed mainly by United States Agency for International Development (USAID), his government initiated the mega reforms in public education that later evolved and appeared in the recent National Education Policy (2009).

English in government/public vernacular medium schools

I draw upon Coleman (2010), Mahboob (2002), Mansoor (2005), and Shamim (2008) in discussing the status of English in the language-in-education policy of the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools. But, before I do that I want to clarify an important point here about how the provinces in their language-in-education policies adopted the national language policy mentioned in the 1973 constitution.

The constitution of 1973, in effect, did allow the provinces to use their first languages (L1s). Their use, however, was legally made subservient to the national language, Urdu. Moreover, L1s were not given the national status that was given to Urdu (Mansoor, 2004; Rahman, 1996). However, as far as that meager constitutional allowance to promote provincial languages was concerned, some of the then provincial assemblies, such as those of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, adopted Urdu rather than their first languages as the official languages of their provinces during the then politically-charged era of 1970s. Sindh, however, was the only province that adopted Sindhi as the official language for its province (Haque, 1983; Rahman, 1996).

All the provinces acknowledged, legalized, and channeled the national language policy in their government educational systems accordingly. In effect, they followed the policy in practice before the political decision was taken (Rahman, 1996). Punjab, Balochistan, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, for instance, not only used Urdu as the main medium of instruction but also as a compulsory subject in their government educational systems. Sindh employed Sindhi as the sole medium of instruction and Urdu as a compulsory subject in many school districts. It also used Urdu as the medium of instruction and Sindhi as a compulsory subject in certain urban areas. English, however, was learned and taught as a compulsory subject in all four provinces often from later grades, e.g. grade six (Haque, 1983; Rahman, 1996). The following table – taken from Coleman (2010) and adapted based upon Mahboob (2002) and Mansoor (2005) – may provide a brief overview of the language-in-education policy, particularly in the context of the status English.

Table 1. A brief overview of English in public education

| Year | Event | Policy | Implementation |
|------------|---------------|--|----------------|
| Pre – 1947 | Colonial rule | Urdu/vernacular medium for masses & English medium for elite | As policy |

continued

Table 1. (continued)

| Year | Event | Policy | Implementation |
|------|--------------------------|---|---|
| 1947 | Independence | Urdu declared to be national and English official language | For masses, education in Urdu/vernacular medium; English as a subject mostly from later grades, e.g., Grade 6, through government English textbooks taught through grammar translation methods. For elite, education in English medium in private institutes through quality textbooks and student-centered teaching methods; Urdu taught as a subject. |
| 1959 | Sharif Commission | Primary and secondary education in Urdu/vernacular medium, higher education in English | No change. |
| 1973 | New Constitution | English to be replaced by Urdu within 15 years, provinces relatively free to develop their own language policies | No change. Only the province of Sindh officialized its main language, i.e., Sindhi in 1972. The then provincial governments of Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan preferred using Urdu as the official language of their provinces. English continued to be taught as a subject. |
| 1977 | Coup by Zia-ul-Haq | Islamisation and Urduisation | For masses, although English started as a subject from grade four, the Urdu/vernacular medium schools began to prepare for complete Urduisation of exams by 1989. For elite and well-to-do families, private English medium schools kept growing. |
| 1989 | Benazir Bhutto elected | English to be taught from grade one rather than from grade four. | Little effective change |
| 1998 | New education policy | No statement regarding language policy | Private English medium schools kept flourishing. |
| 1999 | Coup by Pervez Musharraf | First, English to be taught from grade one 'where teachers are available'. Later, English as a compulsory subject from grade one from April 2003 in all state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools. | Little effective change at the initial stage. Education Sector Reforms (ESR) were initiated which not only made English a compulsory subject but also envisioned employing English as medium of instruction from grade one in state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools. |

As one can observe from the above table, there are chiefly two types of educational systems marked by the medium of instruction through which they deliver education: high-quality English medium schools for the elite and poor-quality Urdu/vernacular medium for the non-elite masses. In addition, it appears that students studying in the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools mostly started learning English as a subject from later grades, e.g. grade six. Non-elite private English medium schools flourished because people wanted their children to learn English earlier and better than the way the state-owned vernacular medium schools taught. Although Shamim (2008) discussed that these non-elite English medium schools do not use English as the sole medium of instruction in principle, they perform better than vernacular medium schools (South Asian Forum for Educational Development, 2010).

One may, thus, see who could have better access and more chances to economic and social mobility in terms of learning English and getting a white-collar job in Pakistani society. Indeed, those well-to-do families who studied in elite English medium institutes, knew English, and had strong connections in the upper class. From this perspective, while the military ruler Zia-ul-Haq initiated the teaching of English from grade four for the state-owned Urdu/ vernacular medium schools, he focused more upon promoting Urdu and a certain version of Islam for the masses than on improving English in their education. In 1989, Benazir Bhutto announced English be taught as a subject from grade one in the public schools; however, it was not implemented comprehensively.

It was not until General Musharraf's coup in 1999 that mega reforms were instituted in the educational sector throughout the country. At first, he went with the Benazir's policy of starting English from grade one where teachers were available for teaching English. Later, his government initiated major changes in the educational sector that not only made English a compulsory subject but also envisaged using it as a medium of instruction in the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools (Mahboob, 2002). I discuss below the reforms that evolved and appeared in the shape of the recent National Education Policy (2009), the policy that determines the present and future status of English in the state-owned Urdu/ vernacular medium schools.

Education sector reforms (ESR)

The Education Sector Reform Assistance (ESRA) Program End-of- Project Report (USAID, 2008) wrote that "with the advent of the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) Action Plan 2002–2006, Pakistan embarked upon an ambitious national educational reform agenda" (p. 1). The agenda, in effect, was based upon the following three

major goals: “(i) to promote quality education; (ii) to produce responsible, enlightened, and skilled citizens; and (iii) to integrate Pakistan into the global framework of human-centered economic development” (USAID, 2008, p. 1). These chief goals were thought to be in consonance with the UNESCO’s Dakar Declaration, Education for All, and Millennium Development Goals global programs (USAID, 2008).

In order to achieve the agenda, the then General Pervez Musharraf’s government initiated a mega project, namely, the Education Sector Reform (ESR), for the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools (Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan (GoP), March 2004). The reforms “outlined seven principal objectives” of which objective three is relevant to the issue discussed here; this objective aimed “to improve education quality through curriculum reform, teacher training, and reform of the examination/assessment process (USAID, 2008, p. 1). In sum, the reforms were intended to overhaul the public educational system; and, this overhaul included refurbishing the curriculum from grade one to twelve, introducing a new scheme of studies, increasing the academic year from 170 to 210 days, revamping teacher education, setting up a new national examination system, reviewing previous educational policy critically and presenting a new education policy in 2009 based upon a critical review of the previous national educational policies.

This refurbishing of the government educational system, in effect, consisted of about twenty-two policy decisions (Ministry of Education, GoP, see *Appendix A*); of which two explicitly mentioned the present and future role of English in the public Urdu/vernacular medium schools. The number eight policy decision, for instance, wrote, “English language has been made compulsory from class 1 onwards.” Additionally, number eleven mentioned that “Introduction of English as the medium of instruction for Science, Mathematics, Computer Science and other selected subjects like Economics and Geography in all schools in a graduated manner was endorsed” (p. 1).

In the context of starting English as a compulsory subject, The Development of Education, National Report of Pakistan – a report to review the education sector reforms – confirmed that “Study of English language has been made compulsory in all schools from April 2003” (Ministry of Education, GoP, July, 2004, p. 9). Further, as far as how the policy measure of English as a medium of instruction would be initiated in the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools was concerned, a new Scheme of Studies (SoS) was announced through the press release on June 29th, 2006 (Ministry of Education, GoP, 29th June, 2006). The SoS, also presented to the then Prime Minister, mentioned clearly which courses or subjects would be taught in English medium and which in the Urdu/vernacular medium (Ministry of Education, GoP, February 2006). Below is a table listing the courses/subjects envisioned to be taught in English language medium at certain grade-levels.

Table 2. English as a medium of instruction in the SoS

| Grade level | Subject/Course | Medium of instruction | Group |
|-------------|---|---|-------------------------|
| 1 to 2 | Mathematics | English | – |
| 3 | Mathematics Science | English | – |
| 4 to 5 | Mathematics Science | English | – |
| 6 to 8 | Mathematics Science Geography History Computer Education (Applied Technology) | English English English/Urdu/Vernacular English/Urdu/Vernacular English | – |
| 9 to 10 | Mathematics Physics Chemistry Biology | English English English English | Science |
| 9 to 10 | Mathematics | English | Humanities |
| 11 to 12 | Biology Physics Chemistry | English English English | Pre- Medical |
| 11 to 12 | Mathematics Physics Chemistry | English English English | Pre-Engineering |
| 11 to 12 | Mathematics Physics Computer Science | English English English | Pre-Computer Science |
| 11 to 12 | 0 | | Humanities |
| 11 to 12 | a. Business Mathematics b. Business Statistics a. Principles of Commerce b. Computer Skill/Banking a. Principles of Accounting I b. Principles of Accounting II a. Principles of Economics b. Economic Geography | English English English English | Commerce Group |

continued

Table 2. (continued)

| Grade level | Subject/Course | Medium of instruction | Group |
|-------------|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 11 to 12 | Laboratory Technology/Imaging Technology/Operation Theater Technology/ Ophthalmology Technology/ Physiotherapy Technology/ Dental Hygiene Technology | English | Medical Technology |
| 11 to 12 | a. Food and House Management b. Food and Nutrition | English | Home Economics |
| | a. Management for Home and Farm b. Clothing and Related Arts | English | |
| | a. Child Development and Group Behavior b. Childcare and Home Nursing | English | |

With regard to its implementation, the press release through which the SoS was announced stated that the SoS would be implemented in the state-owned schools in part from 2007; and, it would be fully functional from 2011. That is to say, science and mathematics would be taught in the English language medium from 2011 all over Pakistan. English as a compulsory subject from grade one was already put into action in April 2003. So far as the medium of instruction for other subjects/courses was concerned, the SoS did allow the provinces to use Urdu or their vernaculars as media of instruction (Ministry of Education, GoP, 29th June, 2006).

In fact, initiating English not only as a compulsory subject but also as a medium of instruction from grade one revolved around the agenda of the Education Sector Reforms (ESR). The agenda, as aforementioned, was “(i) to promote quality education; (ii) to produce responsible, enlightened, and skilled citizen; and (iii) to integrate Pakistan into the global framework of human-centered economic development” (USAID, 2008, p. 1). Indeed, the discourse of quality education – the quality education elite attained in their schools in the English medium – was not only equated with initiating English as a medium of instruction in Urdu/vernacular medium schools for masses, but it was also held that this step would help close the yawning gap between those who became literate in English in elite schools and those who could not become literate in English in the state-owned schools. Thus,

by planning to start teaching in the English language medium, the policymakers envisaged Pakistan joining the world in “human-centered economic development” (USAID, 2008, p. 1).

Above all, this policy move of starting English as a medium of instruction seemed to be leading the state-owned educational system toward bilingual education (Table 3). Sindh, for instance, would not only use Sindhi as a medium of instruction but also English as a medium of instruction in future. The case appeared to be similar for the other three provinces too: Balochistan, Punjab, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa would not only use English as a medium of instruction but also Urdu/vernaculars as a medium of instruction.

Table 3. Future bilingual educational scenario in/of Pakistan

| Province | Medium/Media of instruction | First language use | Second language use | Foreign language use |
|--------------------|--|---|--|--|
| Sindh | Sindhi + English (for Sindhi speaking) Urdu + English (for Urdu speaking) | Sindhi (in many parts of Sindh) Urdu (in those parts of Sindh where Urdu speaking community lives) | Urdu (for Sindhi speakers) – as compulsory subject Sindhi (for Urdu speakers) – as a compulsory subject | English – as a compulsory subject and as a medium of instruction |
| Punjab | Urdu + English | Punjabi + Seraiki not learned or used widely | Urdu + English – as a compulsory subjects and as a medium of instruction | – |
| Balochistan | Urdu + English | Balochi + Brahvi + Pashto + Sindhi not learned or used widely | Urdu + English – as a compulsory subjects and as a medium of instruction | – |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | Urdu + English + Pashto (in some areas of the province) | Pashto (learned or used in some areas of the province) | Urdu + English – as a compulsory subjects and as a medium of instruction | – |

Because English was going to be a medium of instruction in the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools – the schools which were poorly funded and managed, which produced the lowest learning outcomes as compared to even non-elite English medium schools, and which suffered from severe social ills such teacher absenteeism, a dearth of academic resources and facilities, etc. – the decision fired

heated debate in the national print and electronic media of Pakistan (see opinion pages of *Dawn* from April 2007 to August 2007).

The debate implied that the following issues and controversies surrounded the status of English as a medium of instruction in the future language-in-education policy: (a) Whether the teachers of government Urdu/vernacular medium schools had enough proficiency and proper training to teach in an English language medium; (b) whether pre and in-service teacher education courses were relevant and robust to train teachers to teach English as a subject and use it as a language medium in large classrooms; (c) whether it was theoretically justified to teach children abstract concepts of science and mathematics in a language which no one spoke around them, not even their teachers, especially when considering that, first, these children were already being taught in a second language, Urdu, and not in their mother tongues and, second, a huge number of students, particularly in rural areas, dropped out of schools before reaching grade six; (d) whether government would ever prioritize education sector in a true sense by allocating adequate funds, academic resources and facilities, and, by increasing teachers' social status and salaries; (e) whether there was any study informing how the macro policy decision of English as a compulsory subject had been enacted in micro class contexts of urban and rural regions since April 2003; and (f) whether starting English not only as a compulsory subject but also as a medium of instruction from grade one in the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools would improve the quality of the public education. I discuss below how this debate, provoked by the decision of starting English as a medium of instruction from grade one, paved the way for the present and future role of English in the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools.

Current and projected status of English in the government schools

The debate co-occurred with the critical review of previous national educational policy – one of the measures taken under the Education Sector Reforms (ESR) (Ministry of Education, GoP, July, 2004). The review, viewed as a “landmark and timely exercise,” was undertaken because the Ministry of Education, GoP “realized that rapid developments on both domestic and international fronts had overtaken the objectives and the projections of the existing policy, and that a new articulation of the educational priorities and future of Pakistan was needed in light of the Devolution of Power, the Millennium Development Goals, the Education for All” (National Education Policy Review, Ministry of Education, GoP). The review was conducted through a rigorous design that included many steps, all of which were carried out having taken the provincial governments and their pertinent

education departments into confidence. Before the review team could present a new policy in 2009, it presented two white papers (Aly, December, 2006 & Aly, February, 2007). Both the papers lamented the existing plight of various aspects of the government Urdu/vernacular medium schools. Indeed, their discussion and recommendations were in the background of the debate the new scheme of studies (SoS) in general and the measure of launching English as a medium of instruction had stirred.

The white papers discussed and recommended how English be used in the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools. The first white paper, for example, advised that English as a subject should start from *grade three from 2008*, and that English as a medium of instruction for mathematics and natural sciences should start from *grade four* rather than *grade one* as envisioned in the new SoS (Aly, December 2006, pp. 31–32). Although the revised version of the white paper (Aly, February, 2007) repeated that English as a medium of instruction for mathematics and natural sciences should start from grade four, it had no mention of teaching English as a subject (pp. 34–35), perhaps because its writer realized that English as a subject had already been put into practice from grade one since April, 2003.

Based upon the review and recommendations, the National Education Policy (NEP) – “a consensus policy agreed to by all the provincial and area governments” (Ministry of Education, GoP, November, 2009, p. vii) – was presented in November 2009 by the then Pakistan Peoples’ Party (PPP)-led democratic government. It noted the unequal access to learning English prevalent in the country. Discussing the social divide in Pakistani society in terms of proficiency in English between the students of elite English medium schools and those of government Urdu/vernacular medium schools and religious seminaries, the NEP 2009 wrote that:

A number of factors lead to the differences that allow students of the elite schools to do better. Management resources and teaching quality are their main strengths. Most of these elite schools follow the Cambridge or London University O/A level systems that have a different curriculum, assessment system and textbooks. A major bias of the job market for white-collar job appears in the form of a candidate’s proficiency in the English language. It is not easy to obtain a white-collar job in either the public or private sectors without a minimum level proficiency in the English language. Most private and public schools do not have the capacity to develop the requisite proficiency levels in their students. English language also works as one of the sources for social stratification between the elite and the non-elite. Employment opportunities and social mobility associated with proficiency in the English language have generated an across the board demand for learning English language in the country.

(Ministry of Education, November 2009, pp. 19–20)

Having discussed the situation, the document recommended certain policy actions. I quote below those that are directly relevant to my discussion:

1. Ministry of Education, in consultation with Provincial and Area education departments, relevant professional bodies and the wider public, shall develop a comprehensive plan of action for implementing the English language policy in the shortest possible time, paying particular attention to disadvantaged groups and less developed regions.
2. The curriculum from Class I onward shall comprise English (as a subject), Urdu, one regional language and mathematics, along with an integrated subject.
3. The Provincial and Area Education Departments shall have the choice to select the medium of instruction up to Class V.
4. English shall be used as the medium of instruction for science and mathematics from Class IV onwards.
5. For the first five years, provinces shall have the option to teach mathematics and science in English or Urdu/official regional languages; but after five years the teaching of these subjects shall be in English only.
6. Opportunities shall be provided to children from low socio-economic strata to learn English language.
7. A comprehensive school language policy shall be developed in consultation with provincial and area governments and other stakeholders. (Ministry of Education, November, 2009, p. 20)

The new policy made it mandatory that English should be taught as a subject from 2009 in all government Urdu/vernacular medium schools. The policy action, in a way, validated and perpetuated the decision of teaching English as subject taken under the Education Sector Reforms in April 2003 (Ministry of Education, GoP, July, 2004, p. 9). However, unlike the policy measures taken for the new Scheme of Studies (Ministry of Education, GoP, February, 2006) in which it was decided that English as a medium of instruction for science and mathematics would start from 2011 in grade one, the new education policy actions postponed that decision for five years. That is, English as a medium of instruction would not be implemented until 2014. Furthermore, most importantly, the policy recommended that English as a medium of instruction be used from grade four onward rather than from grade one onward. The policy, however, did provide the option to start teaching science and mathematics in the English medium before 2014, if any province wished to do so.

Thus, the present status of English in the contemporary language-in-education policy in the state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools appears to be as follows (Table 4). English is taught as a compulsory subject in principle in grade

one onward all over Pakistan. And as far as English as a medium of instruction is concerned, the current Pakistan Tehreek-Insaf (PTI)-led government of the province of Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (formerly known as North West Frontier Province – NWFP) has recently “decided to change the medium from Urdu to English from grade one onward in the government schools from the last academic year commencing from April, 2014” (Dawn, October 22, 2013). The province of Punjab had already announced that they would start teaching science and mathematics in English language medium from the academic year of 2011. The Punjab province has implemented this step by converting all government Urdu medium schools to English language medium ones. The province has provided the same rationale for converting its schools to English medium that was evident in the agenda of Education Sector Reforms (ESR): “decision [of initiating the English medium] aims at competing with the globalized world in the field of knowledge” (The School Education Department, Government of Punjab).

So far as the other two provinces are concerned, Sindh and Balochistan have still to decide regarding the recommendation. In a recently issued policy document, Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh has stated that “comprehensive language policy is prepared, approved, and its implementation process is initiated by 2016” (Sindh Education Sector Plan (SESP) 2014–2018, p. 267). The policy statement suggests a comprehensive language policy is being prepared. English medium may be initiated in 2016. The Education Department, Government of Balochistan, has written,

The BESP considers teaching in mother tongue at the primary level as critical to cognitive development of the child. It also looks at language related problems of higher classes where Urdu and English courses have been designed on unrealistic assumptions about children’s capacity. To undertake the changes the BESP recommends a comprehensive study that would help in preparation of a new language policy and plan for schools. (Balochistan Education Sector Plan 2013–2018, p. iii)

Since the province of Balochistan takes mother tongue education serious at primary education level, it may perhaps not implement the English medium policy measure as recommended in NEP 2009.

Table 4. The current and projected status of English in Pakistan

| Provinces | English as a compulsory subject | English as a medium of instruction |
|--------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Sindh | In grade one since April 2003 | In grade four from 2016? |
| Punjab | In grade one since April 2003 | In grade four from 2011 |
| Khyber Pakhtunkhwa | In grade one since April 2003 | In grade four from 2014 |
| Balochistan | In grade one since April 2003 | ? |

New developments after the National Education Policy (2009)

Before I delineate further the justifications, issues and ambiguous areas surrounding the current and projected status of English in government Urdu/vernacular medium schools, it is important to mention briefly the recent major developments after the education policy. In 2011, the then government of Pakistan implemented some changes to the constitution of 1973. These changes, named the 18th Amendment, have decentralized certain federal subjects. This decentralization allows the provinces to be autonomous in principle to a certain degree and to make decisions on their own in certain policy sectors. In the sector of education, for instance, the provinces have been allowed to design their curriculum, set standards, and formulate their language-in-education policy up to grade twelve. Curriculum designing, setting standards, and forging language-in-education policy after grade twelve, however, have been designated as the federal subjects (Ministry of Education, GoP, January, 2011). In this context, public teacher education all over the country, which starts after grade twelve, comes under the federal purview.

Interestingly, while the amendment has been made and passed, it is observed that the amendment will never ever be fully implemented due to the centrist mindset prevalent in certain bureaucratic circles, which does not want provinces to be empowered (*Dawn*, 17th September, 2011; Siddiqui, 2011). It, therefore, appears that although the impact of 18th Amendment seems to shadow the National Education Policy (2009), the policy (2009) – produced after a rigorous and lengthy review of four years and with the full consensus of all the relevant official stakeholders of all the four provinces – may resist the impact of the 18th amendment and survive, at least as far as teaching English as a subject and using it as a medium of instruction are concerned. That is to say, although the provinces may develop their own language education policies taking the 18th amendment into account, English shall be given the same place in the policies due to its highest status in Pakistan society. This is what I understood when I contacted an official of the then Ministry of Pakistan, Government of Pakistan (GoP). He was of the view that none may deny the escalating influence and usefulness of English in our society/world in general and in education in particular. Therefore, English as a subject is already in practice in the government schools all over Pakistan. And, with regard to English as a medium of instruction, the province of Punjab is already following what has been decided in the policy. The other provinces will also, most probably, follow the policy of starting English as a medium of instruction soon. He further opined that the present role of the Ministry of Education, GoP under the 18th amendment is to facilitate: “The ministry will be facilitating the provinces in future” (A.H., personal communication, September, 08, 2011).

Justifications and controversies

The observations made by the official make more sense when one reads between the lines of the new National Education Policy (2009). While the document discusses the position of Pakistan in comparison with other countries at various places, the first chapter of the policy, in effect, puts forward the rationale for the present and projected role of English in the public language-in-education policy. Discussing globalization and competitiveness as global driving forces, the policy presented a table of the global competitive index (GCI) of Pakistan and compared it with the neighboring countries. This section of the policy concluded by saying, “It can be seen that in education and health related indicators, Pakistan falls behind all other countries. It has to be realized that even the sustainability and improvement of other indicators depend on education” (Ministry of Education, GoP, November, 2009, p. 5). In another place, it wrote,

On the Education Development Index, which combines all educational access measures, Pakistan lies at the bottom with Bangladesh and is considerably lower than Sri Lanka. A similar picture emerges from the gross enrolment ratios that combine all education sectors and by the adult literacy measures. The overall Human Development Index (HDI) for Pakistan stands at 0.55, which is marginally better than Bangladesh and Nepal but poorer than other countries in the region.

(Ministry of Education, GoP, November, 2009, p. 7)

In addition, it is also important to repeat here that the forging of this new policy was one of steps taken under Education Sector Reforms (ESR) whose agenda, as aforementioned, was to “(i) to promote quality education; (ii) to produce responsible, enlightened, and skilled citizens; and (iii) to integrate Pakistan into the global framework of human-centered economic development” (USAID, 2008, p. 1).

All these policy justifications and rationales imply that the use of English, not only as a compulsory subject but also as a medium of instruction, among other measures, would help Pakistani state-owned Urdu/vernacular medium schools become abodes of quality education and enable Pakistan to compete with other countries in the region and become a knowledge-based economy. However, structural issues such as meager allocation of funds, poor provision of academic and physical facilities, inefficient mechanisms of in-service training, inadequate accountability system, and zero input from teachers and practitioners in such policy formation processes have bred many social controversies, concerns, and ambiguities concerning the efficacy of such policy (Hussain, 2005; Mitchell, Humayun, & Muzzafar, 2005; Rahman, 2005; Shah, 2005). The aforementioned debate in the Pakistani national print media may also exemplify such controversies and con-

cerns about the quality of education in the government schools in general and the status of English in future language-in-education policy in particular.

The most ambiguous and overlooked area, replete with concerns and controversies about the present and future status of English in the national language-in-education policy, seems to be the unheard public teachers' community. What seem to affect the policy most are, indeed, the teachers who realize the policies in their classes. They are mostly the ones whose discourse, in the shape of their voices, experiences, perspectives, perceptions, and attitudes toward the future bilingual educational policy, is entirely absent in the debate. Therefore, a number of unexplored issues need to be addressed: How is the policy step of English as a compulsory subject translated (taught) at the micro local class level? What issues or problems do government elementary Urdu/vernacular schoolteachers face when teaching English in the schools? Most importantly, what are the teachers' perspectives on the policy and the changes in instruction it necessitates? These are all areas that need to be researched in order to disambiguate the situation from the local teacher's perspective. The teachers' perspectives and opinions can help provide implications as to how well have the policy measures worked or are working, and what needs to be done to help them work better.

Conclusion

The paper reviewed the past, present, and future standing of English in the Pakistani public language-in-education policy. By briefly tracing how English language came to the country, it highlighted the social domains wherein English is commonly used. Taking the social position of English into account, the paper documented briefly the status of the language in the public language-in-education policy since the establishment of the country to the present time. The paper also showed that, because of the low quality education, and the poor instruction of English as a subject through traditional teaching methods of imitation and memorization in public Urdu/vernacular medium schools, students from the elite and non-elite English medium schools end up being more literate in English and having better access to social mobility.

In order to decrease the yawning gap between those who end up being able to learn English and those who do not and to create an English-proficient citizenry which will lead Pakistan to establish itself as a knowledge-based economy in the globalized world, the recent National Education Policy (2009) has recommended not only teaching English as a subject but also using it as a medium of instruction for content subjects from 2014. While the reasons provided for the present and projected role of English in the country may be justified, given that the globalization

is driving many countries to adopt English in their curricular reforms, the contemporary deplorable plight of public education in Pakistan raises many questions and controversies about the successful implementation of the policy.

The paper underlines the fact that since teachers are the major agents of change in realizing curriculum reforms at the classroom level, their perspectives, attitudes, and experiences should weigh most amongst all the stakeholders in the country (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991). Because the voice of Pakistani public teachers is missing, this paper suggests that their experiences, attitudes, and perspectives about the present and future role of English in public language-in-education need to be explored to better know what the potential future implications may be for Pakistani teacher education. Such investigations may also gauge how far such English initiatives may be raising the quality of education and developing English language literacy.

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Appendix A. Education sector reforms (policy decisions)

1. Uniform Academic Session from 1st of September throughout the country.
2. Free Education up to Matriculation.
3. Provision of missing facilities in schools.
4. Provision of free textbooks.

5. Grant of scholarships and incentives to girl students.
6. Composite examination at Matric level throughout the country from 2007.
7. Composite examination will be introduced in 2009 for HSSC.
8. **English language has been made compulsory from Class-1 onwards.**
9. The grievances of a particular sect / community addressed by removing controversial books in Northern Areas. However, in next review/revision:
 1. Emphasis to be placed on language and literature learning instead of repetition of topics of Islamiyat in language learning i.e. Urdu/English textbooks etc.
 2. Overlapping and duplication of contents in various subjects needs removal and the contents of subjects need to be examined to make them non-controversial.
10. Social Studies for classes VI-VIII bifurcated into History and Geography and will be taught as compulsory subjects from the academic year 2006. The curriculum prepared and notified and provincial textbook boards preparing the books for these subjects.
11. **Introduction of English as medium of instruction for Science, Mathematics, Computer Science and other selected subjects like Economics and Geography in all schools in a graduated manner was endorsed.**
12. Budgetary allocations for education from existing 2.7% of GDP to be increased to 4% of GDP.
13. Revise curriculum to ensure that:
 1. Technical stream of education is introduced from class 8th.
 2. Information Technology/ Computer education is introduced from lower classes.
 3. All duplication of subjects is eliminated.
 4. Contents do not reflect thinking of any particular sect/school of thought.
 5. Ethics, moral education and Haqooq-ul-ibad be included and stressed.
 6. Curriculum be upgraded to ensure latest developments/ideas in science and technology are included and it is progressive with vertical and horizontal linkages.
14. Marks allocated for practical examinations in Science and Social Science subjects will be reduced from 25% to 15% due to inadequate lab facilities available in the country. It will be applicable for examinations to be conducted in the year 2007.
15. Registration of private sector educational institutions be done on the pattern of madaris.
16. Format of the question papers for the Board examinations will be revised. The papers will have three parts:
 1. (i) 20% will be objective questions. The questions will have multiple choices.
 2. (ii) 50% questions will be for short answers.
 3. (iii) 30% questions will be for descriptive answers.
 4. During the year 2006 teachers will be trained to prepare the children to answer the questions on this pattern.
 5. Question papers will be prepared in this format from the year 2007.
17. Reduction in number of elective subjects at SSC and HSSC.
18. College level education be run by provincial education departments.
19. Availability and accessibility of schools particularly in rural areas.
20. Setting up of NTEVTA be expedited to ensure:
 1. **Vocational Schools:** at each Tehsil and at industrial clusters. All dropout from schools be encouraged to enroll.

2. Polytechnic Institutes: at District level for matriculates to produce technicians /supervisors.
 3. Technical Colleges: 4/5 in each province for F.Sc. qualified students to produce technical graduates.
21. Teacher's status and recruitment of female teachers.
 22. Strategy for National Textbook Policy.

Retrieved from the website of the then Ministry of Education, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad (www.moe.gov.pk) on September, 12, 2011

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