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**MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION:  
A STUDY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES**

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**ABSTRACT**

*Medium of instruction plays vital role in imparting quality education. This study analyses the issue of medium of instruction in Pakistan. It critically presents review of language policies in Pakistan and discusses role of language planning and bilingual education in the context of education in Pakistan. This study found that medium of instruction is politically handled in Pakistan. Furthermore, it was also found that there is gap in the educational policies and the international research. The study suggests that in Pakistani context also additive Bilingual education should be introduced that ascertain the mother tongue education in the early education of child.*

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**Keywords:** Educational Policies, Medium of Instruction, Language Planning, Bilingual Education, Multi-Lingual Society.

**INTRODUCTION**

Bilingual education is widely recognized as a standard way to cater to the educational needs and address the issues related to status of languages in the multilingual countries. Pakistan has been facing challenges related to medium of instruction since its inception in 1947. Educational policies, education commissions and education plans have been made to achieve educational targets but the objectives have not yet been achieved mainly because of unresolved issue of medium of instruction. In this regard Pakistan can learn a lesson from the experiences of North America, Kenya, Canada, South Africa and other countries.

**REVIEW OF LANGUAGE POLICIES IN PAKISTAN**

Pakistan is a multilingual country. There are 6 major and 58 minor languages (Rahman, 2004). Urdu was made national language of Pakistan soon after independence. Deliberate efforts were made to

use Urdu as an official language instead of English. Education in Pakistan suffered because the issue of language of instruction was politically handled. Decisions were made with some other motives instead of providing quality education and ground realities were ignored. Mother tongue education was sidelined or ignored. Efforts were made to make people think as one unit and their cultural, social, ethnic identity was merged into Pakistani identity which has Islam and Urdu as pillars. According to Census 1998, Punjabi is spoken around 44.15%, Sindhi 14.10%, Pashto 15.27%, Saraiki 10.53%, Balochi 3.57%, and Urdu 7.57% in Pakistan. All educational policies and plans have worked for the development of Urdu. From Advisory Board of Education 1948 to the establishment of Muqtadira Qaumi Zaban (National Language Authority) in 1979, Urdu was kept to be medium of instruction in all provinces of Pakistan. All examinations were to be taken in Urdu from 1989. This was done with a political vision with a view to keep people united. On the other hand, English medium schools worked to cater elite class and to produce people for high posts to inherit colonial rule.

Two systems of education were allowed to continue which affected people. This division raised differences at every level between vernacular schools and English Medium Schools, between low private schools and elite private schools and between Cambridge system of education and government system schools. Two classes of people grew and continue to grow side by side. One is made to rule and feel privileged because of being educated in English medium and the other to be ruled and to serve. This major division gave birth to an inherent conflict in the minds of the people.

The conflict is not only at the policy and practices but also as a theory of bilingualism. There are no skilled teachers and no resources at schools. How one would expect the results if 56% of government sector school teachers and 62% of private school teachers gave low score in language testing system (PEELI, 2013).

Pakistan is a country where English is a second language. There is need of proper language planning to cater linguistic needs of diverse groups on the contrary political decisions were made to symbolize so called linguistic unity. For proper language planning it should be noted very carefully that language planning in multi-lingual society involves bilingual education.

Bilingualism refers to the situation of knowing two or more languages. It is related to interdisciplinary phenomenon therefore definition may differ in view of its existence in varying degrees in one or more language domains. Linguists have offered multiple definitions of bilingualism which have resulted in a terminology like categories, scales, and types of bilingualism.

#### **TYPES OF BILINGUALISM**

Early and late bilingualism is related to age factor. Result varies considerably because of age. An early bilingual is refers to infant or child bilingual “who has been in contact with two languages from birth (Hoffman, 1991:33)”. Late Bilingualism refers to either acquisition of second language in a natural setting or learning second language through formal way by using language learning materials or attending courses, etc. (Hoffman, 1991:33).

Additive bilingualism refers to the addition of a second language which has not only positive linguistic consequences but also social and cognitive abilities. We can take the example of Franco-Russian bilingualism in the period of Tsars for better understanding. Similarly Singapore can be quoted as present instance where Mandarin and English are used with positive status. Subtractive bilingualism is different from additive bilingualism in the sense it denotes to the learning of L2 at the expense of the aptitude already acquired in L1. This happens when linguistic minorities feel need to learn socio- economically prestigious language in order to better social mobility. We can take the example of the speakers of vernacular in former English/French colonies (Hoffman, 1991). Most of the people in Pakistan prefer English as a medium of instruction from the early education of their children. Private School system is greatly based on subtractive bilingualism in Pakistan where mother tongue is ignored and Second Language (Urdu or English) is taught from the beginning as a medium of instruction. Pakistan needs additive bilingualism which does not cost the sacrifice of mother tongue for learning other languages. It rather collaborates a firm footing for better results in L2. The threshold hypothesis by Cummins (2007) stated that mother tongue plays vital role in getting proficiency in the second Language.

It was recommended in the survey of language education conducted by UNESCO in 1951 in the worldwide that “every effort

should be made to provide education in the mother tongue” irrespective of functions /status of language in question (Eastman, 1983:83). Children prefer getting education in their mother tongue in those countries where there is equal status of two or three languages. These languages hold equal respect and are official, such as Switzerland, Belgium and Canada. However, pupils in many countries of the world are not given fundamental right to education in mother tongue. They do not get education in mother tongue or receive it partially in mother tongue.

**Bilingual Education in North America:** North American educational practice seems to be one of the references of the early practice of bilingual education. Educating minorities by teaching those English is generally perceived as bilingual education in United States (Hakuta, 1990a). There are multi-cultures and multi-languages in U.S that poses threats to face the challenges of multilingualism despite its homogeneous linguistic profile.

There is equal status of English and French in Canada so implementation of bilingual education is in a different way keeping in view of different socio-political dynamics in Canada. There are positive results of bilingual education especially in French immersion program in Canada and it attracts most of the children from middle class.

**Bilingual Education in South Africa:** We can take the example of South Africa for understanding issues related to medium of instruction in Pakistan because South Africa has 11 official languages. People have constitutional right to opt for medium of instruction for the education of their children but most of the parents go for English as medium of instruction in South Africa (Benson, 2004; Bunyi, 1999; Busch, 2010; Cummins & Hornberger, 2007; Wolfaardt, 2005). Parents are more incline to get their children educated in English because it is linked to current capitalist economic system (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014). The importance of English as the language of prestige and intelligence cannot be denied in comparison with mother tongue. Setswana and English are official languages of Botswana but English only was made the language of instruction from grade 4 and “there was absolute silence on the role of other languages in building national unity” (Mooko, 2009 quoted in Evans & Cleghorn, 2014).

Wolfaardt (2005) mentions that people are more inclined to getting their children educated in English from the beginning in Namibia. They do not give preference to transitional bilingual program. There is official additive bilingual policy in Africa that offers education in the mother tongue of child for first three years with additional language (English) and then transfer into English medium education only from grade 4. These schools are not equal to initial English medium schools because state owned schools usually remain lacking in terms of resources and quality teaching (Evans & Cleghorn, 2014, Bloch, 2009; Lombard, 2007).

**Bilingual Education in Nigeria:** Issues related to medium of instruction in Nigeria are not different than those in Pakistan. There are 400 indigenous languages in Nigeria and three exogenous languages: English, French, and Arabic. Mother tongue education is still a debate. There are people with two different ideologies: one preferring linguistic pluralism and the other is vernacularization. Mother tongue education policy is supported on the basis of its benefits. According to Mohanlal (2001) and Blake (2004), the purpose of education is to impart values to individual that are universally recognized and correlated these values with the ethnic values and cultural norms of learners' community otherwise there is a gap between education system and the society. This gap is found in colonial education in almost all colonies in Africa. Akinnaso (1991) supported Mother Tongue Education (MTE) for variety of reasons in Nigeria. First MTE is freedom from linguistic colonialism and it is basic human right of a child. Secondly, MTE works like bridge between learning at school and experiences at home. Third, MTE is the best medium which develops cognitive processes of child in a better way. Fourth, MTE provides mental, psychological, social, emotional adjustment to literacy at school. Fafunwa (1977) mentioned in his book the Education Anachronism in Africa that children learn best in their mother tongue but most of the parents emphasize English Medium instruction in schools. Sahika Tarhan (2003) writes "English in Nigeria has a gate keeping role, so an earlier switch to English starting from primary school is ideal. Parents prefer English because it provides a window to the global information about economy, science and technology." But scholars like Fafunwa (1975), Bamgbose (1977) and Urevbu (2001) viewed that foreign language is

a barrier to effective education. National Policy on Education emphasized mother tongue education in Nigeria. It says:

- At the pre-primary levels, Government will ensure that the medium of instruction will be principally the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community.
- At the primary level, government will see to it that the medium of instruction in the primary school is initially the mother tongue or the language of the immediate community, and at later stage, English.

The opinions to adopt mother tongue education or English are still divided. Most of the parents prefer English medium education however mother tongue medium policy is considered as a revolution in education in Nigeria.

The logical point in making is that North America with vast multi lingual population prefers bilingualism; South Africa with 10 national languages implements bilingualism and Nigeria with 400 languages can work out for additive bilingualism. Pakistan also needs to review its language policy and address the medium of instruction issues.

#### **MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION ISSUE IN PAKISTAN**

Linguistic diversity is beauty of Pakistan but politician used language as a tool to suppress or surpass some groups. Mother tongue education in the early years of education of a child is the born right of an individual and language of dream and meditation is mother tongue of an individual. Language is a learning gateway of an individual to the conscious world but language is weaponized and polarized to widen the gap between “Have” and “Have not” in Pakistan. Educational policies in Pakistan treated issues related languages in embedded manner. Their decisions were pre occupied with the spirit of Islam and Urdu which created linguistic and cultural conflict among other minor groups. Bengali Language Movement in 1948 and language conflicts in 1971 & 1972 culminated in the divorce of one part of Pakistan. Sindhi-Mohajir conflict was created on the name of languages which resulted in the riots (Rahman, 1997). Had there been clear language policy in the form of bilingual theory, there would not have been such deteriorating educational conditions in Pakistan. Imposing Urdu, Arabic, Chinese and English in order to achieve

political pursuit, and sidling mother tongue i.e. Sindhi, Siraiki, Punjabi, Pashto or Balochi in Pakistan, have played havoc with education system. Why there cannot be mother tongue and second language in Pakistan like North America, Nigeria, Kenya, Canada other countries of the world. Bilingual education safeguards the right to mother education in the early years of education and provides solid footing for second languages like English or Urdu. Global Education Monitoring Report of UNESCO (2016) issued policy paper that mentioned the importance of mother tongue education. It said that mother tongue education should be given importance in educational policies and children should be taught in a language they understand and the same language should be used in the classroom in the early six years of education.

There are 423421 primary schools in Sindh where 2802824 students are enrolled. There are 67% private schools in Karachi, 53% in Hyderabad and 9-10% in the rural areas of Sindh. Medium of Instruction in government schools in mostly Sindhi or Urdu but there are most of the private schools in English medium. There is no one model to address the grave issue of medium of instruction. People are more inclined to enroll their children in private schools where there is English medium education from beginning. The huge divide into the media of instruction between private and government schools have created issues which can be addressed by implementing research based successful models of bilingualism.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Pakistan is the land with multi-ethnic groups. There are linguistic, social, and cultural diverse groups that owe to their respective identity. "Imposing a dominant language through a school system has frequently been source of grievance linked to wider issues of social cultural inequality" (Global Education Monitoring Report, 2016). Pakistan has already borne the fruits of linguistic conflicts in the country. It is time to review language policy and launch additive bilingual education which is likely to address the grievances of all stake holders in the country. It will recognize mother tongue education in the early years education of child and later to second language i.e. English in order to avail opportunities of the world.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

- Bilingual education system should be introduced and smooth transition from first language (mother tongue) to second language (official language) should be schemed out.
- Teachers should be trained to understand bilingual education and teach accordingly.
- Curriculum should be schemed keeping cultural and social diversity of the people.
- Language policy should recognize the importance of mother tongue and give it due status.

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