

EDUCATION SYSTEM: FOCUS ON TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN PAKISTANI INSTITUTIONS

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INTRODUCTION

This paper provides an overview of historical, political, social and educational background aimed at understanding the education system of Pakistan with a particular emphasis on teaching of English. This will help us understand the problems that educational institutions in general and universities in particular are facing in terms of the quality of education, the quality of expertise, the availability of basic resources of teaching and learning, and rural and urban divide. The chapter starts by looking at the English language in its historical perspective with an examination of the language policies of successive governments. The chapter then examines current teaching of English in Pakistani institutions. In the end conclusion suggests that uniform policies of education can create a national integration and just economic and social order.

HISTORICAL, SOCIO-CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL MILIEU

The history of English language in Pakistan can be traced back to British rule in Indian subcontinent. On 7th March 1835 at the instigation of Lord William Bentinck, the parliament passed a resolution, which stated that the main objective of the British government would be to promote European literature and science. To achieve this aim the English language was made the language of communication and instruction:

The British developed their language policies to replace Persian, which was the official language of the Mughal Empire, with English as official language of the government. Mahboob (2002:15).

The plan was geared up to set-up schools and colleges aimed at converting native Indian population into brown English men. The change was aimed at westernising people by making them aware of English values and traditions at higher level. This involved the study of literature by authors like H.G Wells, James Joyce, D.H. Lawrence, Greek drama, restoration comedy, Dr, Johnson, the romantics, Gerard Manley Hopkins, Sartor Resartus etc. (Baumgardner 1993: 9 and Mahboob 2002). However access to English was not universal. The policy was primarily implemented in urban areas, and the rural areas remained unaffected (Mahboob 2002).

Pakistan became independent in 1947. It had been separated from India on the basis of Islamic ideology, which emphasised that Muslims should have their separate homeland. At the time of independence Pakistan was a federation of 5 provinces i.e. Punjab, Sindh, East Bengal (now an independent country known as Bangladesh), NWFP (North West Frontier of Pakistan) and Balochistan. Bengal and NWFP were the only provinces that used a single language i.e. Bengali and Pushto respectively whereas the remaining three provinces used more than one language. For example Punjab has Punjabi and Siraekee languages, Sindh has Sindhi and Urdu languages, and Balochistan has Balochi, Brahvi, Pushto, Lassi and Hazrgee. Given the complexities of linguistic practices in the different provinces the choice of a national language was a problem. The freedom movement of Pakistan adopted Urdu as a national language partly because it was the language of Muslims of India.

Urdu was used as a symbol of Muslim nationalism during the independence movements by the all India Muslim League and served as a symbol of Muslim unity. (Mahboob 2002:19)

This brought the Urdu speaking population and Bengali speaking population into conflict with each other. The majority Bengali population wanted their language to be the national language. In the face of this conflict a three-language structure policy was adopted with Urdu as the national language, one

language from each province as the official provincial language and English as the official language for correspondence. English was retained as the official language mainly to carry out the business of the state and it continues to be the official language of the country till today. The constitution of Pakistan and by-laws of the state, major policy documents at federal and provincial levels are written in English. In addition, information about technology, economics sociology and statistics is available in English (Haque 1993).

After independence all governments retained English as the medium of instruction but this was only effectively implemented in military schools and elite schools. These are the school that the children of bureaucrats, military journals and politicians have attended (Mahboob 2002)

In 1971 East Bengal got independence from Pakistan and the controversy between Urdu and Bengali was over once and for all. The Bhutto government continued the policies of his predecessors and English continued to enjoy the status of official language.

1979-1988 saw a change in the role of the English language in Pakistan. General Zia toppled the Bhutto government with the help of military coup. The main slogans of his regime were 'Islamization' and 'Urduisation'. Schools were instructed to either switch to Urdu language or to their provincial languages. This government also introduced Arabic as a compulsory subject in schools. English, however, was retained as a compulsory subject from class 6 onwards. This policy was applied on government schools but private and elite schools remained unaffected. Later on Zia government reversed its policies to some extent and allowed the use of English language but only for science subjects (Mahboob 2002).

In 1998 Zia was killed in a plane crash and Benazir Bhutto became Prime Minister, her government did not last long. She was

removed and Nawaz Sharif took over the power. Both these leaders came to the power twice and were removed by the military. During the times of Benazir and Nawaz Sharif the political instability was at its height and neither of these governments came up with any language policy.

ENGLISH TEACHING INSTITUTIONS IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan has various categories of schools such as: elitist schools, private elitist schools, private non-elitist schools, vernacular schools, and madrassahs. The quality of education in general and teaching of English in particular varies from school to school. The following section therefore will look at these categories of schools.

Elitist Schools

Rahman (2001) divides elite schools into three categories (a) state influenced elitist public schools; (b) private elitist schools (c) private non-elitist schools (p:243).

State influenced elite schools are divided into three categories i.e.

1. Public schools: These schools are often called as great public schools which are modelled after the aristocratic English public schools. For example Aitchison public school Lahore is often compared with Eton Public School in England.
2. Armed forces schools: These schools involve Fauji foundation schools, Pakistan Air Force Schools (PAF), Navy schools, customs schools, Pakistan International Air Lines (PIA) schools etc.
3. Federal government model schools: These schools are also partially controlled by the army.

These are government influenced elite schools, which cater to the needs of elite class specially army, bureaucracy and politicians. Children of employees and beneficiaries get concession in the fees of these schools (see Rahman 2001).

Being pre-dominantly under government influence, textbooks for these schools are written in English and are

monitored and published by government's own textbook boards. The content of books mostly revolves round anti-India sentiment. These schools provide education in English, which is affordable to the children of military, bureaucracy, and to the employees of these institutions. However, Rahman (2001) points out that these schools are inaccessible to ordinary people.

This means that English medium schooling can be obtained either by the elite of wealth or that of power (Rahman 2001:244).

There is another category of elite schools, which are run by private organizations and are discussed below:

Private elitist schools

Private elitist schools were run by missionaries in 1960s. These schools encouraged students to speak English inside the class as well as outside in informal situations and were based in various cities of Pakistan. For example St. Mary's was based in Rawalpindi and Burn Hall was located in Abbott Abad. Students of private elitist school were perceived by vernacular people as 'being glib-tongued, snobbish, European attired boys and forward educated counterparts' (Rahman 2001:246).

The place of these schools has now been taken by various chains of schools e.g. Beacon school systems, City school systems, Roots, Foebles etc. Children from rich and powerful backgrounds attend these schools. The admission fees in these schools range from Rupees 15000 to 50, 000 and monthly fees ranges from 1500 to 7000 rupees. When educated from these schools, children have opportunities to join multi-national organisations at home and abroad (see Rahman 2001).

Private non-elitist schools

Another category pointed out by Rahman (Ibid.) is private non-elitist schools. These are the schools which are also established by some private groups to cater for the needs of low income groups. The monthly fees range from 50 rupees to 1500

rupees per month, which is much lesser than the private elite schools, however higher than the vernacular schools. In theory, these schools claim to teach most of subjects in English language however it rarely happens. It is because the teachers themselves do not have any English schooling background therefore they teach English at a very basic level. Their teaching mostly follows rote learning and spoon feeding models. Different series of these schools would be found not only in cities but in small towns also under various names e.g. language enhancement achievement program, Hira English medium school, Siqara school systems etc. (see Rahman 2001).

English in the vernacular medium schools

According to Rahman (2001) schools where the medium of instruction is a vernacular such as Urdu or Sindhi treat English as a Foreign rather than a Second Language. Teachers and students have lower levels of English, mainly because of a lack of exposure to English outside and inside the classroom. Rahman, based on his own observation of some school lessons, says that teachers read out English books word by word and line by line for students and expound meaning to the students:

According to a report of 1982, which evaluated the teaching of English in 20 Urdu medium high schools in Lahore district, it was found that the students could not speak or understand English nor could they read it for pleasure or write anything creative in it (Rahman 2001: 253).

The vernacular medium schools are ignored in terms of allocation of funds:

Barely four per cent of government expenditure was allocated annually for education, health, and social sectors. Moreover, when one considers that most of this expenditure was targeted towards the urban middle class, there was virtually no provision for the education or health of the largely illiterate and malnourished population (Noman, 1990: 18)

Apart from the categories of schools mentioned above there is yet another category of schools where children can get education known as Madrassas.

Education at Madrassas (seminaries)

These schools provide education to the people who live below the poverty line and are marginalised in the society.

More than 80 percent of the madrassas student in Peshawar, Multan and Gujranwala were found to be sons of small or landless peasants, rural artisans or village imams of the mosques. The remaining 20 percent came from families of small shopkeepers and rural Labourers. (Rahman 2004:312)

These Madrassas charge no fees but provide basic amenities of life e.g. food and shelter to students. English language teaching in these schools is largely resisted however some schools run by Jamat-e-Islami, provide English education to students at B.A level. Some other Madrassas known as 'Wafaqul Madaris' teach English but centrally control the textbooks, which are published by their own personnel. The content of the books involve Islamic personalities and continents of the world. Yet another chain of Madrassas known as Dawat-e-Islami provide English education in which they use textbooks, published by different book boards. Students are often involved in memorisation of certain lessons. All these madrassas are controlled by their own central organizations (Rahman 2001, 2004).

Though discriminated by state policies and an unjust economic system, some of the ignored sections of society are aware of the importance of English language. They see English language as a source of their survival because it will lead them towards globalization, which will in turn make their future bright. This became evident from the study carried out by Mahboob (2002) in Karachi University in which he collected data from 245 undergraduates. The instruments used were questionnaires. Students were given questionnaires in their language classes and were required to return the next day. 245 questionnaires were returned out of 280.

The findings of the study showed that the majority of students would prefer to study in English language as compared to Urdu and their L1. Also the majority said that English should be the medium of instruction at school level and at university level.

The researcher further asked the respondent as to why English language is useful for them. Their responses revolved around the themes, which are given below.

- English is language of communication. If they do not learn it they will remain backward.
- English helps to gain the knowledge of the world.
- One cannot gain higher education without learning English
- No professional development, no jobs without English language
- Which ultimately means 'no English no future' (p:31)

The study clearly highlights the importance of English language teaching among youth who want to get modern education with particular emphasis on English.

The whole situation discussed above shows how the policies of successive governments have affected education in general and teaching of English in particular at school level. The effects of school education are present in the higher education. Students educated in elite schools join private universities where as students educated in non-elite schools and in vernacular schools join public sector universities. The public sector universities have been treated in similar way as vernacular schools in terms of funding, resources, teacher training, and syllabi. The focus of discussion for this chapter would now move on to English language teaching in the institutions of higher education.

English in the Institutions of Higher Education

The teaching of English at university level is generally carried out at Masters level for the students who does major in

English literature. Also universities in the province of Sindh offer B.A (Honours) courses followed by one year of Masters course. Along with two subjects of Major in English literature, students take a range of compulsory subjects including English as compulsory in which students are taught reading skill and grammar. Also students are required to take two subjects as electives from a wide range such as Political Science, International Relations, Islamic Culture, Muslim History, Sociology, Philosophy, Economics, Social Work etc.

Some universities such as Karachi University, Punjab University and Baha-u-din Zakaria University Multan offer ELT, linguistics and American literature as optional courses (Rehamn 2001). However, Karachi University offers one year M.A in linguistics to those who have already done M.A in English literature.

The universities of Pakistan in general have remained a focus of discussion in the media in terms of quality of education, activities of students, activities of teachers and methods and materials of teaching. For example Houdbai (2005:10) paints the picture of universities of the country in the following manner.

Pakistan has almost a hundred universities now. Not one of them is world class. Truth be told, not even one of them is a real university, if by a university one means a community of scholars engaged in free inquiry and the creation of knowledge. Take for example the Quaid-i-Azam University in Islamabad, reputed to be Pakistan's best. Academic activities common in good universities around the world are noticeably absent. Seminars and colloquia, where faculty presents for peer review the results of their on-going research, are few and far between. Public lectures, debates, or discussions of contemporary scientific, cultural, or political issues are almost non-existent. The teaching at QAU is no better. Rote learning is common, students are not encouraged to ask questions in class, and courses are rarely completed by the end of the semester. This university has three mosques but no bookstore. It is becoming more like a madressah in other ways too. The faculty are more concerned with money and promotions than

research, teaching, or bringing their knowledge to bear on the myriad issues facing our society. Among the students there are many burqas (veils) and beards, but minuscule intellectual or creative activity. All student unions are gone, and ideological disputes have evaporated into the thin air. Instead of left vs right politics there is simple tribalism. Now Punjabi students gang together against Pakhtoon Students, Muhajirs versus Sindhis, Shias versus Sunnis, etc. Some campuses are run by gangs of hoodlums and harbour known criminals, while others have Rangers with machine guns on continuous patrol. On occasion, student wolf packs attack each other with sticks, stones, pistols, and automatic weapons. There are many campus murders. Most students have not learned how to think; they cannot speak or write any language well, rarely read newspapers, and cannot formulate a coherent argument or manage any significant creative expression. Dumbed down, this generation of Pakistanis is intellectually handicapped. Like overgrown children, students of my university now kill time by making colourful birthday posters for friends, do "istikhara" (fortune telling), and wander aimlessly in Islamabad's bazaars.

Houdbai's Journalistic description matches most of the universities of the country.

The historical, political, and social survey shows that Pakistani society does not have uniform system of education, which can ensure national cohesion and social integration. Rather the educational policies of different governments have created divisions in society. The divisions can be seen at social and economic levels. The most important divide, which has occurred is rural urban divide. The reasons for discriminatory policies of different governments in terms of educational systems are further illustrated below:

These various systems of education in Pakistan reflect the British policy, it also served the same purposes by creating two classes of people: one that was to be trained to govern people and the other to produce sub-ordinate staff (see Mahboob 2002:22)

The current government is keen to raise the level of education. The Higher Education Commission (HEC) is revising,

modernising and revolutionising education albeit only at higher level (Mahboob 2002). This further raises the questions as to how to raise the level of education at grass root level.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined the historical, social, political and educational perspectives, focussing largely on educational policies of successive governments, which have created a divide in the society in terms of education in general and teaching of English in particular. The HEC has undertaken laudable efforts to raise the quality of education at higher level however what is missing here is educational policies which are uniform in their nature and which can provide equal opportunities of education to the people of all sections of society. This may further create national integration and just social and economic order.

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