

Perceptions on Status of ‘Urdu’ - the Pakistani National Language, in the UAE: Reflections on the Pakistani Diaspora

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Abstract

The study aims to consider the case of ‘Urdu’, the national language of Pakistan which is part of the largest diasporas in the Gulf region; additionally, finding the perceptions of Pakistani diasporas in the UAE and the role use and status of ‘Urdu’ in the social, professional, economic and cultural contexts of their adopted countries of residence. The data were collected using documentary evidence and reflective insights from long-time residents; collated and analyzed to consider how the use and status of ‘Urdu’ impacts on the role they may play on current and future societal interactions and governmental language policy and planning. Findings opened avenues for emerging themes, answered a variety of critical questions, gave valuable insights in understanding the status of language preservation, development or endangerment. Moreover, findings provide a platform for determining what would need to occur to further preserve and develop Urdu in the given context. If the language appears to be endangered, whether this can be reversed and if it can be, then how this should happen. From a broader perspective, findings, implications, and recommendations can be extended to indigenous languages of other diasporas in the same context.

Keywords: Arabian Gulf, Expatriates in UAE, Lingua franca, Pakistani diasporas, Urdu language

Context of the Study

The Gulf Region

The Gulf region or popularly known as the Gulf states comprises of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, and Oman. These countries constitute the Gulf Cooperation (GCC), founded on May 26, 1981. The GCC aim is to promote coordination between member states in all fields to achieve unity. Furthermore, The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a political and economic union of Arab states bordering the Gulf and is a prime geographical location between the crossroads of the major Western and Eastern economies; developed infrastructure which paves the way to establish and expand business.



The GCC region has also experienced drastic transformation firstly after the discovery of oil as it has become a hub to the fastest growing economies in the world and secondly, after the Gulf war in 1991 following which there has been a mass exodus of expatriates from Kuwait towards UAE and other GCC countries. GCC countries have diversified growth sectors today, such as, tourism, education, finance, logistics, aviation, communications and healthcare which provide business opportunities to foreign corporations and help strengthen investments in extensive diplomatic and commercial relations with other countries.

Arabic is the official language spoken in the GCC countries and it is one of the six official languages of the United Nations that is spoken by as many as 422 million speakers in the Arab countries (UNESCO, 2014). Arabic as a language takes its roots from the Semitic language family and is further a liturgical language of 1.6 billion Muslims across the globe (Pewforum, 2014) as well as many Christians of Arab origin. While Arabic is widely spoken in the GCC countries, English is used as the oft-cited lingua franca of business, commerce and research dissemination. Hence, it dominates other languages spoken by expatriates from Asia, South Asia and South East Asia who reside in GCC countries. These languages include but are not limited to Urdu, Hindi, Farsi, Bengali, Malayam, Punjabi and Tagalog.

The United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is a federation of 7 emirates in the Middle East: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ras al Khaimah, Fujairah, Umm Al Quwain, and Ajman. Expatriates make up more than 80% of the total population and the UAE government is well aware of the importance of culture, history and traditions has continuously worked to preserve its identity as part of the daily life of both expatriates and Emiratis (UAE nationals). The federal government, on the other hand, is simultaneously working on the targeted 2021 vision through bringing in innovative ideas, research, science, and technology at the center of a knowledge-based, highly productive and competitive economy by the time of the federation's golden jubilee in December 2021.

The Emirate of Dubai

Dubai is the commercial, cultural and social heart of the UAE. It has developed over the year to become an international hub that stream-lines a development strategy incorporating six different aspects: people, society, experience, place, economy and the government to keep the primary focus on people and their needs. The population of Dubai is particularly interesting in that a large number of residents are expatriates who live in other emirates yet commute to work in Dubai each day and back each evening. The workforce has recently seen a surge in the government-initiated process of nationalization where employers are required to recruit 20% UAE nationals as part of their workforce. This has seen an interesting rise of linguistic and professional dynamics where workplace communication is a mix of English with Arabic and Asian languages

regardless of the nationality of the speaker. Such an amalgamation of languages is seen to be as a sign of assimilating into the culture.

Pakistani Expatriates in Dubai

According to a report (BQ, Magazine, 2015) Pakistan comprises of a population of more than 1.2 million, which makes it the 2nd largest population in the UAE, thus representing 12.5% of the country's total population. The Pakistani populace in the UAE is quite distinct as they consist of people coming from all over the country including Punjab, KPK (Northern province), Sindh, Baluchistan and, Azad Kashmir. Pakistani expatriates in the UAE are predominantly resident or employed in Dubai and Abu Dhabi with Dubai alone registering about 400,000 of them. Following this, the second-largest number of Pakistani groups are established in another two emirates of the United Arab Emirates: Sharjah and Ras-Al Khaimah. While the majority of Pakistani expatriates are Muslims, there are also Hindu, Christian and, other minority religions.

When a mass migration of Pakistani was underway to the Middle East, a significant number of them moved to the UAE. The migrating population consisted of both skilled and semi-skilled workers with the majority being unskilled and blue-collar workers. The Pakistani population resident in emirates of Dubai, Sharjah and, Ajman has outgrown the local Emirati (UAE national) population in these areas.

Ethnic groups belonging to the Pakistani community include Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Balochis, Muhajirs and other minor communities such as Saraikis, Kashmiris and Hindkowan. There is also a small number of Pakistani migrants belonging to the United Kingdom and Canada who reside and work in the UAE. Interestingly, more than 500,000 Pashtuns from northern Pakistan and Afghanistan are also residing in the UAE.

There are strong economic ties between Pakistan and the UAE because it is one of the 2nd largest bilateral trading partners of Pakistan. The economic strata of the UAE is comprised of a large amount of skilled and semi-skilled Pakistani workforce. Almost 80 percent of the work-force from Pakistan is part of the blue-collar industry, whereas 20 percent belong to the white-collar industry. Pakistanis have also recently been ranked as one of the second largest nationality to buy the property in the UAE (Gulf News, July 8, 2018). Pakistanis are also known to be dynamically involved in the land's establishment, share-holding services and sectors.

Interestingly, United Arab Emirates is also a secondary source for providing settlements to Pakistan, which also added up to \$2.9 billion back in 2012. Pakistanis also rule over the transportation district of the land, work in banks and run Pakistani restaurants that are popular with every nationality living in the country.

Social and Cultural Associations in Dubai

There are several organizations which represent Pakistanis in Dubai Some of them are as follows:

1. Pakistan Business Council (PBC)
2. Pakistan Association of Dubai (PAD)

3. Pakistan Professional Wing (PPW)
4. Institute of Chartered Accountants of Pakistan (ICAP)- UAE Chapter Wing
5. Institute of Business Administration (IBA) Alumni - UAE Chapter

These associations are a community network for Pakistanis living abroad. They propel the social and cultural interests of Pakistanis settled in Dubai providing a community development and support platform through a promotion of activities embracing language and culture that involve Pakistanis Expatriates community in the UAE.

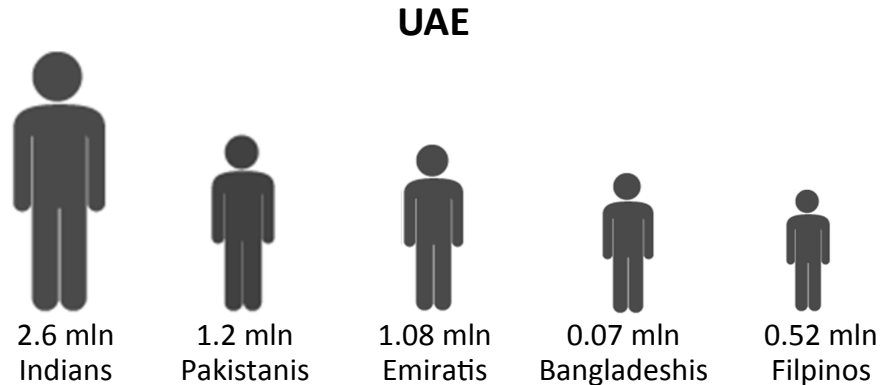
Community Schools in Dubai

Rehman (2011) reports that about 16% of the UAE population comprises of Pakistanis and approximately 700,000 live in Dubai. Many Pakistani community schools that impart education to the children of Pakistani expatriates in the UAE. However, there is often the question of whether there are better educational opportunities for the Pakistani expatriate children in Dubai. Pakistani community schools in Dubai offers the Federal Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education (FBISE), a system that follows matriculation. These community schools provide students with the best learning environment and opportunities at a lower cost and are approved by the Knowledge & Human Development Authority (KHDA) in Dubai which is a quality assurance body operating under the Dubai Government. This, unfortunately, has an impact on the hiring of less qualified teachers at a lower salary and leaves limited options for parents who cannot afford expensive schools that are the hallmark of Dubai.

Pakistani Diaspora

The Pakistani migration movement consisted of mostly unskilled workers who settled in Britain to work in the country's textile mills. When the Second World War hit Britain's textile mills, the country opened doors to those who could work for them while their workers joined the armed forces. The majority of Pakistani settlements were initially from northern Punjab and the Azad Kashmir belt which formed their small communities in Britain. This further led to Pakistani professionals settling in Britain. The Pakistani diaspora here invested in the homeland economy; this was followed by influx to the Middle East during the 1960s as it appeared easier to get here by sea.

Pakistani expatriates are actively involved in the UAE property market making the country's business, investment and service sectors as the second-largest source of remittances to Pakistan. Pakistani expatriates rank among the top ten investors in UAE, specifically, the second largest nationality involved in the property business in Dubai, alone. Since it is a principal destination for many Pakistani expatriates, it a second home for them (Ali, 2015).



(Source: Daily Pakistan **Global**, published on April 13, 2015)

The Use of Urdu in Dubai

Urdu has long been in use in the Middle East and Dubai since the first migrants appeared here through the sea. In contemporary Dubai, most Emiratis are fluent in the use of Urdu. The reason for this is Emirati males marrying Pakistani females or Emirati children having Pakistani mothers. Emirati males also tend to marry Indian females generally from the state of Hyderabad where the spoken language is similar to Urdu in Pakistan. That apart, several Emirati households employ nannies from the sub-continent thereby exposing their children to the Urdu and/or Hindi. Hence, regardless of whether or not Pakistani expatriates communicate in Urdu, Emiratis tend to infuse their Spoken Arabic with Urdu vocabulary quite often.

Perceptions of Urdu as a national Language in Dubai

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan placed Urdu as Pakistan's solitary national language that was also guaranteed as the official dialect of the state. A sub-clause of the Constitution permitted the utilization of English up to the point when those changes were made; while another sub-clause licensed territory to promote local dialects alongside Urdu. This importance is not only given on the mother soil but is promoted in host countries of residence.

According to a recent report published in a local daily newspaper in Dubai, *Gulf Times*, 2018, the top five languages used throughout the UAE are English, Arabic, Urdu, Malayalam and, Hindi. The anonymous perceptions shared by expatriates of various nationalities signifies the importance of the 'mother tongue':

One of the main ways to expand Urdu is to make more and more text and material available in Urdu either as newly created indigenous work or through the translation of works from other languages, not just literature, but also scientific works so increase the general knowledge of the populace. I think that in this regards the newspapers, journals and magazines are not enough. We should have additional material available

in Urdu that can be used as a reference material not just in schools, but also in colleges and universities. (May 02, 2017)

The languages and cultures that exist today are themselves the result of a fusion of languages and cultures that have blended over millennia, and this process is ongoing. Societies and cultures do not remain static. Of course, the transitional phases are not without periods of adaptation. However, unlike countries such as Germany, France, and China, Pakistan is made up of several distinct cultural and linguistic groups united into one political entity. Also, Pakistan's history includes the introduction of English to the linguistic mix, and it has acquired a local flavor and isn't all that much of a foreign language now. It has made communication and business opportunities easier for the country and its people. Disregarding the other languages and English (which itself is an Indo-European language) in favor of only Urdu would be doing a disservice to the country. (May 02, 2017)

The United Nations too supports the importance of mother tongue and fears that of the world's 6,000 dialects almost 1,000 are hardly spoken in general and the rest are at risk of disappearing altogether. There is a general anxiety towards a perseveration of languages to retain cultural identity and heritage in the multilingual world. According to a UNESCO report over half of the world's languages are endangered and to promote linguistic diversity and multilingual education, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) celebrates February 21 as an International Mother Language day (Gulf times, 2018).

If you seek a career in France, Italy, Spain, Germany or any other European country, the local language is essential. I think it should be the same here as well. There should be a certain level of Arabic literacy mandatory for every foreigner seeking a career here. I am a foreigner here and I don't mind it. As an American Muslim, I am trying to learn Arabic, I'm also learning French. My husband from Morocco speaks four languages. I think it is important to learn many languages and keep them alive. I think it is very important we teach our children many languages too. (Gulf Times, 2018)

It is evident from the public perceptions shared that while preserving the native language is deemed necessary, there is also the desire and need to learn the host countries language for assimilation, acceptance, and appreciation of the local culture and customs.

Aim of the study

This paper analyzes the varied demographics of the expatriate community in the Arabian Gulf and suggests that many lingua francas may be used to convey meaning in social, professional, economic and cultural contexts. The paper aims to examine whether the UAE should consider expatriate indigenous languages (other than English) when planning and making their language policies, and to further consider the case of 'Urdu', the national language of Pakistan being the largest diasporas in the UAE. The study also focuses on finding the perceptions of Pakistani diasporas in the UAE and the role use and status of 'Urdu' in the social, professional, economic and cultural contexts of their adopted countries of residence.

Research Questions

1. To what extent is Urdu marginalized or self-marginalized in the UAE?
2. To what extent are opportunities afforded by the host society to use and preserve Urdu in the UAE?
3. What role, if any, might Urdu have in UAE language policy and planning?

Literature Review

General Overview of Language planning and policy

Language planning is a generic term and often denotes multiple meanings in education. It also links as a synonym for language policy but more specifically refers to the goals of language planning. Haugen (1959) initiated the term 'Language planning,' defining it as a whole system, guiding writers and speakers in a non-homogenous speech community for a social change and further to have an impact on language planners to implement decisions undertaken by governments and all other authoritative bodies who look after language regulations for the public in general.

Kloss (1967) points out the importance of status planning with regards to the language rights of the minorities which includes several language varieties that link with communication, medium of instructions and official language. Ferguson (1983) moves one step further from status planning to types of language planning which he feels can not only change the function and use of different varieties within the speech community but can have a deeper impact on the structure of language itself.

Keeping the backdrop on how and what language planning can cause to society at large, Karam (1974) argues that problems associated with language can be solved directly if we work towards nonlinguistic ends. Language planning could be defined as an effort to solve language problems and not influence language behavior. These problems cannot be solved in isolation within a region or a nation because they have a direct connection with situations such as political, social, economic scientific, cultural and religious aspects that impact on the smaller boundaries such as the ethnic groups.

Language planning cannot be specifically confined to a larger entity. It needs to take into account smaller networks respecting their structural and functional properties,

for example, the linguistic heterogeneity or homogeneity of individuals. This is where communication networks play a vital role in operating language planning which ultimately leads to social change through the diffusion of planned innovation.

The goals in language planning leading to language policy should be to systematically monitor change whether planned or unplanned, for individuals or organizations. This could be possible through decision-makers predicting the consequences of alternative language policies which can help evaluate the net benefits of these alternatives language policies.

A study by Lambert and Tucker (1972) found the importance of mother tongue as a valuable asset in a larger community; many opportunities are extended and explored outside homes, classrooms, and neighborhood and have a positive impact on the middle-class, well- educated parents who have been part of the life-long residents of the community. Fillmore et al. (1992), offer clear guidelines to educators on designing educational programs that look into academic and language development of ethnolinguistic minority children. The framework they suggest as likely to bring about change in language planning can be implemented through diffusion of social innovation, marketing, politics and decision making. This is seen to ultimately influence the potential adopters of communicative innovation at different levels.

Consequently, if a state is linguistically diverse, it becomes challenging to oppose any indigenous language by speakers of other languages residents in the state. This implies that no indigenous language will have the leverage to be widely spoken, other than their inner circle of native speakers. Indigenous language can, however, also act as a change agent in situations where the symbolic value of language and its context are imposed over the language used by the larger community. For instance, in India, two-third of the states have their official language while the rest of the states have specified either English, Hindi or Urdu as their sole official language (Apte, 1976 b). Conclusively, the act of non-regional languages as being the official state languages reflects on the linguistic tolerance by the state boundaries pinning the strengths of political and economic situations rather than cultural rivalries.

Status of Indigenous Language, Language Policy and Planning in Countries of origin

Urdu

The status of Urdu and English as a prestigious language is mostly seen as a symbol of honor since the birth of Pakistan in 1947. While the two languages are a source to status in jobs and education, the ruling class in the country enjoy the status of both the official and national languages but the problem that needs to be highlighted is the languages of the marginalized group; excluding them from the domain of education, literacy, and power (Shah & Pathan, 2016; Pathan, 2012). Rahman (cited in Pathan et al., 2018) further draws attention to the Urdu language as a symbolic entity for the ruling elites in Pakistan where Urdu and Islam are looked upon as a powerful tool to preserve national integration and identity while ignoring the indigenous languages. This has further

resulted in critiquing the policy-makers who have a hand of not promoting the indigenous people and their languages. The ethnic-nationalists in Pakistan challenge the view of Urdu and English as 'killer languages' in a sense that it has caused to marginalize people's indigenous languages and culture, sabotaging their heritage and resulting in the loss of intellectual, philosophical and spiritual experiences. Conclusively, languages play a vital role in maintaining one's identity; not just in communication but also pertaining deep-rooted ties to people's lands, so, if a language is lost, everything attached to it is lost.

The Status of Expatriate Indigenous languages in Host Countries

Arabic

According to media (Quora, 2016), many reflective views indicate the status of expatriate indigenous languages in Dubai. As the question probes: 'Do children of expatriates born and raised in Dubai, normally speak Arabic?' The respondents ranging from students, teachers, parents, professionals answer from their lived experiences. For example, one of the students in Dubai comments:

"Children born in Dubai usually just speak English, since that is the most commonly used language around. One rarely finds a situation or place where speaking Arabic is a necessity in Dubai".

Another respondent commented:

"It depends when they were born or lived in the country. I grew up in the UAE and at the time I had to get a special request from a Sheikh to my school's headmaster to allow me to do one year of Arabic, so I can now read it, but I speak it like a 3yo (they gave me a kindergarten teacher). However, I understand that now foreign kids also have to learn it at school, which in my opinion is a great move. I guess if they make an effort to speak it, it's a bonus!"

Arabic/English

Recent media news (Gulf, 2011) on the status of Arabic in Dubai reports threats to Arabic due to the trends toward the global language and it is a worrying stage for the future of many languages, including Arabic. Wardeh (2018), an expert linguist predicts that the world is expected to fall from 6,000 today to 600 in 90 years for the numerous languages spoken due to the dominance status of English. Since English has overshadowed other indigenous languages of the GCC countries, including Arabic in the pluralistic context of Dubai, the expert views gave way to a debate on a global TEDx event. This alarming situation can take only one generation to lose their language, particularly if preference is given to English than a native language of the region.

The published report (Lawati, 2011) also indicates that Parents are pushed to communicate with their children in English resulting in a loss in Arabic skills and not

much gain in English skills. Dubai has a more weakening status of Arabic at home because of the trend to the demographic situation in the city.

Language Policy and Planning in Host Countries

Language policy and planning have favored the Arabic language as a quasi -monolingual policy in the UAE, however, this has left out the indigenous languages to be marginalized based on nationalistic and religious arguments.

Language policy and planning also lies under the responsibility of the UAE government responsibilities, moreover, most of the higher institutions in the UAE use English as the main language of instructions in schools, universities, workplace, and restaurants. This pragmatic approach (switching to English) is purely based on the needs of the region but is causing the disappearance of Arabic in the UAE.

Methodology

As this study is exploring an issue with a “wh” type of questions to explore the participants’ understandings and perceptions of Urdu language in the Gulf, it is best suited for this type of research tradition to be paired with the constructivist-interpretivist paradigm of inquiry (Butin, (2009). The interpretive research paradigm reflects naturalistic, constructivist, and qualitative features (Robson, 2002). Thanh and Thanh (2015) state that: “Researchers who are using interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods often seek experiences, understandings and perceptions of individuals for their data to uncover reality rather than rely on numbers of statistics” (p. 24). This correlates with Marshall and Rossman’s (1999) argument that “for a study focusing on individual lived experience, the researcher could argue that one cannot understand human actions without understanding the meaning that participants attribute to these actions, their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, values, and assumptive worlds” (p. 57). For this purpose, this research study employs qualitative data collection methods since there are occasions that necessitate the utilization of such methods to explore a particular topic or phenomenon (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015).

Method of Data Collection

This study utilizes semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool, which is considered a suitable tool when seeking people’s perceptions of an issue in qualitative research (Coleman & Briggs, 2002). Moreover, it is the most common type of qualitative data collection tool amongst researchers (Patten & Newhart, 2017). The choice of employing semi-structured interviews was made due to the participant’s flexible structure, which offers the interviewees more freedom to express their viewpoint (Flick, 2002; Coleman & Briggs, 2002; Plowright, 2011) and allow the researcher to develop unexpected themes and issues which emerged during the conversation (Cohen & Manion, 2002). The interview questions were developed based on the guidelines given by Lorelle and Lawley (2000) and Sudman et al. (1996).

For the interviews, open-ended questions and probes were mainly written in the light of the literature reviewed on the topic; however, some questions were framed while drawing on the researchers' experience and observation of the target phenomena in GCC countries.

The interviews were conducted in the English language since all the interviewees could communicate and eloquently expressed themselves in English which allowed the researchers to easily understand and transcribe their viewpoints. Each interview took approximately 20 to 30 minutes, which were audio-recorded and transcribed word for word.

Participants

The participants of this study were conveniently selected based on convenience of location and availability. The participants included high school, college and university students who were not on vacation; teachers; parents, professionals, blue-collar workers. All of them have been long term residents of Dubai. The identities of all the participants were protected and all the extracts presented in this study are designated pseudonyms. They were conveyed the purpose of the study and given the right to withdraw at any stage of the study.

Data Analysis

The qualitative data were inductively analyzed using the interpretive phenomenological analysis approach (Patton, 2002; Silverman, 2016). A framework was developed by repeatedly reading through the interview transcripts to make sense of the interviewees' views and establish patterns. "Reading, and re-reading through the data, once more, forces the researcher to become intimately familiar with those data" (Marshall & Rossman, 2006, p. 158). In our initial reading, important information was highlighted which could inform the research objectives. Throughout the analysis process, an inductive and iterative approach was followed and the data were manually coded that led to various codes and categories. Initial analysis resulted in 98 open codes. Identical codes were merged that led to 17 major categories. In the last stage of data analysis, five key themes emerged from 17 categories which aimed at answering the four research questions. We deliberated at length to confirm that the categories were data-led and not predetermined or constrained by previous research (Dornyei, 2010). The outcome of this data analysis exercise conferred an in-depth understanding of the data on us, which facilitated the process of further condensing of the categories.

Findings

This section of the paper discusses the qualitative findings gathered through semi-structured interviews. The quotes cited in this section are representative of the participants' views.

1. The Use of Urdu in Social and Professional Context

The participants in the UAE context make no significant use of Urdu language, particularly in their professional settings. It may be due to their diverse workplace contexts where people from different nationalities with different L1s operate, thus, English becomes their main means of communication. However, at home, while communicating with their kids or siblings, Urdu becomes their natural choice.

I always use English to communicate with my colleagues from other countries whereas with my countrymen I use Urdu. (Participant 6)

English is my workplace language whereas Urdu is my preferred language at home. (Participant 3)

English. I feel I am more fluent in English. When I was at work (teaching pre-school), I had to speak English as it was the requirement. At home speak some Urdu with my husband and friends but my primary language is English. (Participant 10)

I don't find it easy to converse with family members in English. We often code-switch to English, but that's only occasionally. (Participant 7)

The participants' quotes suggest that they are all fluent in English; however, they rarely use it at home. Moreover, it is used as a Lingua Franca to communicate with peers, friends or colleagues who cannot speak Urdu.

2. Urdu as a Means of Communication with Children

The interview transcripts indicate that half of the parents as participants in this study are aware of the importance of Urdu as a national language and its lack of proficiency can have bearings on their children's identity. Therefore, they prefer to use Urdu at home while interacting with their kids and encourage them to speak in Urdu instead of English at home.

As a parent, I communicate in Urdu because if I don't, I feel I can lose my mother-tongue so will my children. (Participant 1)

We make sure to communicate in Urdu as it's our national language. (Participant 3)

My kids' first preference is Urdu and after that English, because in Pakistani colleges and at home the medium of instruction is Urdu. (Participant 6)

I urge them to speak in Urdu with their siblings and Pakistani or Indian friends. (Participant 2)

On the contrary, half of the participants have a different approach as they encourage their kids to express their views in English. As a result, English becomes their preferred language. The parents believe that Urdu might be a national language, however, English is important for their academic and professional success and they must master it at a younger age.

English should be spoken at home with the child. It develops their fluency and enhances their lexical resources. In terms of answering Why? I would say this is a demand of the international market to fit in we have to make sure as parents we are preparing them for the future. (Participant 5)

My son prefers to speak in English because unfortunately, that's the only language he knows and speaks, we've have not taught him any other language. (Participant 2)

English is the preferred language for our child. (Participant 5)

My son feels awkward speaking Urdu badly and with a foreign accent but manages to communicate in English and Urdu. (Participant 7)

Difficult for kids to communicate in Urdu as they didn't hear much here in Dubai. (Participant 10)

They cannot achieve academic and professional excellence without being proficient in the English language. (Participant 8)

The excerpts also suggest that the children are not fluent in Urdu who often find it difficult to convey their messages in their national language since English is the most used language both at home and in schools.

3. Preserving Urdu Language in the UAE

The data suggest that Urdu is considered a language that has no significant role in people's professional or academic circles outside Pakistan. In UAE, it appears as the parents are conscious about their kids' English proficiency and thus encourage them to speak in English. Owing to this trend, it seems as Urdu is going to fade away soon. Nevertheless, the participants expressed their firm belief that Urdu can gain its grounds in this part of the world if necessary steps are taken in this regard. Schools can play a vital role to preserve Urdu in the GCC states by integrating it into existing curriculums. The following excerpts indicate what the participants consider appropriate for sustaining the Urdu language in UAE.

Living outside Pakistan gives us fewer opportunities to speak in Urdu but it's most unfortunate that when we meet with Pakistanis, I feel parents don't encourage their children to speak in their

native language, Urdu. Hence, Urdu is a dying language. However, it can be turned around if only parents are made aware of the importance of our native language. (Participant 9)

A major part is played with the parents to help develop the language but schools in the Gulf can help in sustaining the language. It often becomes very difficult for parents to preserve the mother tongue at home and even though there are communities where one can interact with the same language but due to the busy school routine in Dubai, there is hardly any time to take children elsewhere. (Participant 1)

I just feel that growing up with learning Urdu as a subject was a burden on me, I found the subject very dry and so to make a language easier to learn, it should be made fun in learning the language at early years. You can easily fall in love with this language, it's a beautiful language. A lot can be done but unfortunately in Dubai. There's a lot of literature and stuff for older kids but not much is available for younger ones where they can be exposed to the language. (Participant 2)

Participant 2 has highlighted the beauty of the language which can easily attract the speakers. As it has a rich literature, children can easily develop their interest in its poetry and prose. As a result, speakers can keep the language alive through developing their linguistic proficiency in Urdu.

4. Initiatives to Preserve Urdu Language in the UAE

Based on the experience and observations in the UAE context, the participants have suggested various initiatives to preserve Urdu language and other regional languages. The data show that regional languages are part of their social, professional and academic identities which cannot be separated from the speakers.

We're known by what language we speak. It's our basic identity, so the policymakers should consider its integration in the national language policy. As UAE is a diverse and multilingual society, I would say everyone's native language should be given due importance. (Participant 1)

Similar to what participant 1 suggested, other participants also expressed their views and recommended various steps to preserving the Urdu language in the UAE.

- 1) local languages should be included in our curriculums*
 - 2) some TV channels and newspapers should promote local languages*
 - 3) parents should encourage their children to use their first language.*
- (Participant 8)

The textbooks that we studied as children should return to the syllabus and no child should be given the option of quitting Urdu as a subject. (Participant 9)

Perhaps children should be required to learn their 'mother tongue' in schools like they do in state schools in Singapore. (Participant 10)

The role could be further to integrate the Urdu language in the GCC as over 70% of the people are from either Pakistan or India in the UAE. Hence, there is a certain element of planning in integrating Urdu, however, this doesn't seem to be extremely evident everywhere. (Participant 3)

The above quotes indicate the participants' acute understanding of the issue. The inclusion of Urdu language and other regional languages in school curriculums and promoting them through electronic and print media can encourage speakers to use the language and help sustain it in GCC. Although the participants recommend language policy changes in the UAE context, they also deem the parents' role important in this respect. They believe that the major push or motivation should come from parents to provide children with the most conducive learning environment for the Urdu language.

5. The Status of Urdu Language in UAE

The qualitative data shows who can communicate in Urdu, there is little or no attention paid to its existence. The data suggest that all regional languages have been largely ignored due to the dominance of English. Moreover, there is a serious lack of prospects or plans that can help preserve Urdu as a regional language in the UAE.

Now that English has taken over as the main language, the country's native language has been greatly marginalized. The host society is hostile towards Urdu. No opportunities to preserve Urdu. (Participant 6)

There should be more initiatives where one can be exposed to the language but I feel it's not easily available in Dubai. I don't know if it's available. (Participant 2)

Currently, there is little to none. The UAE does not have any initiatives that I am familiar with to promote Urdu, other than offering it as self-taught language in some curriculums. This isn't enough, however, to teach the younger generation to use and preserve Urdu, and the backlash of this is the younger generation that cannot to properly speak, read and write Urdu. (Participant 3)

To be perfectly honest, parents here encourage their children to use English as it is not only the language of school instruction but also a lingua franca. The GCC states are obviously into promoting the English Language because of the rapid socio-economic changes going on and I do not think they have any planning for preserving the Expats' local languages. It is the responsibility of the parents to look for opportunities wherein their children can acquire and use their local language. (Participant 8)

The above excerpts also indicate the dominant role that the English language plays in marginalizing other regional languages in the context of GCC as it is a lingua franca spoken and understood by residents of all nationalities residing in UAE. Due to its socio-economic significance, foreigners feel motivated to learn and master English instead of their native languages, such as Urdu. Consequently, any effort to preserving Urdu becomes futile.

Conclusion and Implications

The paper draws attention to the policymakers of the UAE to make changes on the linguistic human rights because practicing one's mother-tongue is to preserve one's identity. The qualitative findings of this study have highlighted the significance of Urdu as a lingua franca in the Arabian Gulf. As the language is spoken and understood by a large number of expatriate communities, i.e. Pakistani, Indian, Bangladeshi, it is important participants of this study have voiced their concerns regarding the decline of Urdu usage as English has become the main mode of communication for children in the UAE schools. The dominance of the English language at school has a direct impact on the students' L1 since they find it easy to converse in English. Consequently, the Urdu language loses its importance among the youth which will ultimately lead to the identity loss of the students. Bearing this bizarre situation in mind, this study has raised the all-important issue of speakers' L1 which is Urdu and their national identity that is associated with their national language. The various suggestions put forward by the participants can enhance the status of Urdu language in the UAE. Future research can consider this phenomenon from the policymakers' perspective to understand the underlying reasons, factors, and motivations that might influence their decision of incorporating Urdu language in school curricula.

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