

Relevance of Research Studies on the Medium of Instruction for Pakistan

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Abstract

The Medium of Instruction (MOI) plays a significant role in any education system. The issue of appropriate selection of MOI has been controversial among the educationists, policy makers, teachers and parents due to multiple reasons domestic, foreign, professional or economical. This problem becomes more severe in multilingual countries like Pakistan. Multiple research studies have been conducted all over the world to find out and highlight the impact of MOI (mother tongue, the national language, official language or foreign language) on the learning performance of the students at different levels. The careful perusal of the findings of these studies clearly reflects the significance of MOI in the academic circle. The present study has been conducted to have an analytical review of these researches on MOI. The findings of sixteen research studies conducted in different areas of the world have been elaborated for the guidance of policy makers, educationists, teachers and parents in Pakistan. The findings of these research studies have been concluded collectively which reveal that the choice of MOI is influenced by double standards of the people at authoritative positions, objective oriented thoughts, professionally oriented approach as well as biased and prejudiced inclinations of the people towards languages and native speakers. A careful appraisal of the present study may guide the people towards the right decision on MOI in future.

Keywords: *relevance, research, study, medium of instruction*

Introduction

Humanity cannot survive without communication. It is because mutual understanding and cooperation are mandatory for the growth and continued existence of the generations. Communication without language is scanty. Language is the great blessing of Allah Almighty for the whole of humanity. The use of language in terms of its styles is controlled by the nature of the relationship between two persons or among the people who interact. Usually, there are three famous language styles which are being followed by the people of this world. These styles are known as formal, semiformal and informal. Knowledge is transferred from one individual, nation, community or society to other individuals, nation, community or society through these social or communal interactions. People of these societies keep on changing their roles as receivers and senders or



speakers and listeners in accordance with the demands of existing contextual situations. In the systematic approach to teaching and learning formal setups are established and formal meetings are called upon to settle the relevant issues. Selection of a language for systematic/formal education is finalized in language policies all over the world. The Medium of Instruction (MOI) (the language for education) is the most important element of language policy. In the multilingual world, the decision on MOI has never been an easy task. Sometimes un-deliberated decisions on MOI result in linguistic conflicts which cause severe threats to the unity of a country or state. In certain cases, political monopolies and democratic gains also influence the right choice for MOI. These political influences might be external as well as internal. Expert and experienced educationists and linguists have favored mother tongue as an appropriate choice for the MOI but it is not feasible for all especially for the multilingual countries. However, it can be managed in the early stages of education. In the multilingual countries like Pakistan, MOI has been a controversial issue. Different education commissions and boards were formulated but their decisions could not be formulated in true letter and spirit. Since the independence of Pakistan, English (although a foreign language) has been a dominant MOI in elite class schools and colleges, and with the passage of time, support for English as the MOI has increased manifold.

The difference of opinion in language policy regarding the suitability of MOI is not specific to Pakistan. The trend is very common in the post colonial countries. There is not a single but more factors are involved in the selection of a language as MOI, not excluding the relative value placed upon it (Swilla, 2009). The dominance of English as the MOI is solely due to its critical importance as a source of educational success and access to the elite class or influential community. So the people from elite class decided in the favor of English as a foreign language for the education and bright future of their children (Laitin, 1992). This study has reviewed various studies conducted in different countries of the world on the face of the earth which highlight the significance of MOI and elaborate the phenomenon of change of the medium of instruction (COMOI) in terms of its pros and cons in various settings. A careful perusal of the study might convince the educationists and language policy makers for insightful deliberations and review of their policy decisions for better education of the future generations in their respective countries through appropriate choice of MOI.

Rationale for the Study

Language is undoubtedly a very important tool of social interaction among the human beings. Successful communication requires efficient as well as the proficient application of language in informal, semiformal or formal interactions among the people of the same society or different societies. A specific language which is used for the formal education of the people at different levels (Montessori, Primary, Elementary, Intermediate or Graduation etc.) is known as the medium of instruction. The MOI plays a very significant role in the formal education of the people. It is required to be selected and managed with extreme care. COMOI if not managed appropriately may cause the

disturbance in the learning performance of the learners or students. A number of research studies have been conducted in the different span of time all over the world which elaborates the significance of the language of instruction or the MOI along with its impacts on the learners if the MOI is changed at different stages or levels. Majority of the researchers, educationist and linguists prefer mother tongue as the most suitable option for the MOI. But it cannot be made possible for multilingual countries like Pakistan. Some experts suggest that at the initial stage up to primary or elementary or secondary level mother tongue may be used as a MOI and then it may be switched to the national language. It is worthwhile to be mentioned here that in case of Pakistan mother tongue is ignored in majority cases. However, national language is adapted as MOI from primary to secondary level in public sector school and colleges and then at higher secondary level MOI is switched from national language to foreign language. The situation in private and elite class schools and colleges is quite different, where foreign language is adopted as MOI from the very initial level of education. In the present scenario, it is deemed necessary by the researcher that various studies conducted on different issues of MOI may be referred and discussed to highlight the consequences of wrong choice of MOI for the learners in terms of learning performance. Present study has been conducted to achieve the same objectives.

Discussion

The available literature on the issue of MOI has been studied in detail and a number of studies have been discussed in the following paragraphs in terms of their findings. The outcomes of these studies are appropriately referred to the problems for accurate contextual understanding. The studies have not been selected from a particular area on the globe rather they represent all the affected areas all over the world especially the post-colonial countries. Here, follows the deliberations and discussions on the issue of MOI:

- i. A study was conducted by Nisar and Ahmed (2011) to compare the learning achievements of the students being taught through English MOI and Urdu MOI at the intermediate level in the institutions of Pakistan. It was discovered that students of English-medium schools performed better than the students of Urdu-medium schools in the subjects of English and Physics, whereas no major variation was noted in the subject of Urdu. Consequently it was suggested that English should be used as MOI for science subjects at secondary level. This study suggests that Pakistani students have developed equal proficiency in both the languages (English and Urdu) in terms of their learning performance which might be difficult to justify.
- ii. According to the outcomes of a study carried out by Kayambazinthu (1998) vocational, scholastic and educational setup in the continent of Africa was obviously and strongly attached, and professionalism of a candidate was justified at the base of academic achievements. He further informed that in Malawi, a former British colony like Pakistan and India, in spite of small English speaking urban elite

class community, English was a favorable option for education as MOI because of job security and social prestige.

- iii A study was conducted by Genesee (1987) to judge the performance of the students in Canada who were solely taught in their first language English as MOI (non-immersion program) and students taught in L2 that is French (immersion program). In accordance with the conclusion of the study, learning performances of the learners under both immersion and non-immersion program were equal. The MOI neither have the positive nor negative impact on the achievements of the students in science subjects. The findings also confirmed that immersion at the early stage results into the negative impact on the performance of the students in content subjects.
- iv Msonthi (1997) has reported the favor of parents for English rather than local languages as MOI. This favor is based on the social and economical valor owned by English language. However, according to Laitin (1992), there are only a few Africans who prefer other than their own languages, despite the fact that, European languages are world-widely recognized for their significance in international communication, business and media. South Africans have seven official languages on their credit, two of which are foreign. One African language is the paramount requirement of every South African. Nevertheless, English is continuously considered as the language of socio-economic opportunities in South Africa as in Pakistan. People do not consider vernaculars as powerful languages for their successful future as compared to a colonial language. According to Tonder (1999) this is the reason they favor English as MOI for the education of their kids. This study reveals the objective oriented (professional security) selection of a language as the MOI.
- v A study was conducted by Klerk (2000), and he informed that after 1990 students of the continent of Africa abundantly adopted English based institutions. This is what we can easily witness in Pakistan. The strength of English medium schools is increasing day by day and people are more interested in English medium schools than any other. He has further informed about the outcomes of a research work carried out amid Xhosa-speaking community. There was an over-whelming majority of the community who sent their children to English-medium institutions. English was preferred, because, it worked as a source of better job opportunities along with educational achievements. This study also reveals the objective oriented (professional security) selection of a language as MOI like the previous one.
- vi Suie, et al (1979) carried out a study to examine the impact of the language of instruction or MOI on students' learning and cognitive growth at the secondary school level. There were almost one thousand respondents who were high school

students in Hong Kong. It was proven through the outcomes of the study that Chinese language was better than English for the academic achievements of the students in Hong Kong. This study reveals that mother tongue, indigenous language or national language is a better option for MOI as compared to foreign language.

- vii Tollefson (1991) has reported that Namibian government chose English as their bureaucratic language. According to the language policy, change of MOI was given a space at the 5th grade in primary education. For the first 4 grades mother tongues were the MOI, whereas English was recommended as MOI from post primary onward. Nonetheless, it is astonishing to note that, even up to class IV students were not taught in their mother tongue due to the preference of English by parents. This study reveals that educationist, teachers and parents must be on the same page in the selection and acceptance of language as the MOI.
- viii Willing (1985) conducted a comparative study to judge the performance of students of bilingual programs and students of the conventional or the monolingual program (non-native English students taught entirely in English as MOI) in America. The findings of the study asserted that students of bilingual programs performed better than the students of monolingual program. This study reveals that bilingual programs are better than monolingual programs for students in terms of their learning performance.
- ix According to Djité (1987) not only former British colonies adopted English as MOI after independence but French was also adopted in the same fashion in Africa. In Côte d'Ivoire French is favored and native languages are neglected. The residents of Côte d'Ivoire even wanted French to be their bureaucratic language. These people raised questions about the change of medium of MOI because the children of government officials were studying in French. So they did not accept the double standard. This study reveals that language of the masters has the long lasting impact on the minds of slaves.
- x Scotton (1993) informed that under a new education system in Mali it was decided that mother tongue would replace French as MOI from class I to III. This decision could not be implemented immediately because of the difference of opinion among different stakeholders (International Development Research Centre, 1997). It was further observed by him that common people are interested in the change of language policy. They favored French, not local or national languages for the education of their children. This study also reveals that language of the masters has long-lasting impact on the minds of slaves like the previous one.
- xi Sabri (2007) carried out a study to examine the effects of education in native and foreign language on students' conceptual understanding of science subjects in

Turkey. The results indicated that students, who were taught in a foreign language (English), had more false impressions than the students, who were educated in their native language (Turkish). This study reveals that teachings in native language give better results as compared to foreign language.

- xii** Eagle (1999) has reported that Nepal was one of those countries, where English was adopted due to its international prestige. English was not a colonial language in Nepal. The elite class of Nepal welcomed English-medium schools in the 1840s for their children. Rich and well-to-do people from India and England adopted English based institutions for their offspring. Common people from all walks of life tried to bear the expenses of English-medium institutions to secure the future of their children in terms of socio-economic benefits. Where job opportunities were provided with respect to the level of caste in teaching, university, journalism, civil service, and politics there, English-based education provided job security for the poor and downtrodden. The national and official language of Nepal was Nepali. Being the MOI in higher education, English was very much important. Jha (1989) observed that the situation was quite interesting and critical in Nepal. Those, who supported Nepali language and culture-based nationalism, adopted the best English-medium schools for their children. At the end, author was compelled to draw the conclusion that Nepali was supported by the personnel who were internally biased and did not want others below their status and class to join them for social, academic and economic benefits. According to (Laitin, 1992) the situation in India was no different. People of India strongly recommended Hindi in educational and official domains whereas elite class adopted English-medium schools for their children. This study reveals that double standards of policymakers and people at authoritative positions cause damage for the future generation in the field of education or otherwise.
- xiii** Marjan (2005) conducted a study at Gomal Medical College in Pakistan. He was intended to study the impact of MOI during school education on the learning achievements of medical students. In accordance with the outcomes of the study, MOI adopted at the early stage of education did not affect the learning achievements of the students considerably in the university examinations of MBBS. He further claims that MOI should not be disturbed at the primary and secondary school level for the sake of enhanced performance at higher education level and the quality of education in professional institutions depends upon the talent of the students not the MOI in the curriculum. This study reveals that MOI or COMOI does not have the significant impact on learning performance of talented students.
- xiv** A study was conducted by Morrison and Lui (2000) to investigate the suitability of English or Chinese language as MOI in the education system of Hong Kong. The outcomes of the study were strongly disagreed in 1986. The commission

recommended Chinese MOI for the better academic understanding of the children while parents viewed English as a reliable source of success, offering more job opportunities in life. This was quite astonishing because, in a survey report, it has been found that if Chinese was adopted as MOI, the learning performance of almost more than 90% students would improve. This study reveals that educationist, teachers and parents must be on the same page in the selection and acceptance of language as the MOI.

- xv In a study conducted by (Parveen, Gopang & Shaikh , 2007), it was concluded that in case of English as MOI there was a big difference in the achievements of 10th class students of private and public sector schools. While this difference diminished in case of Urdu or Sindhi as MOI. This study was conducted in the public and private sector secondary schools of Sindh excluding Karachi. This study has further revealed that if the instructor or the learner or both of them are not familiar with the language of instruction, then learning and teaching activities will be disturbed to a large extent. This study reveals that teachers must be trained enough or proficient enough in the language of instruction for better transfer of knowledge to the students.
- xvi Biggs (1990) has conducted a research to investigate the impact of MOI on the learning method and performance of the learners. He has discussed three prototypical approaches to learning. The approaches are discussed in the following lines in brief to understand the findings of this study:
- I. Surface Approach: It is extrinsic and students learn just to pass the exam. They do not work hard and carry on the selective study just to reproduce adequately.
 - II. Deep Approach: It is inherent and satisfies the curiosity of the learners about their topic. It enhances the comprehension of the learner and inspires to read, discuss and reflect widely.
 - III. Achieving Approach: It is competitive and touches high grades for the learner. The learners compete for the distinctive performance and manage their time efficiently to achieve goals.

It was concluded that learning has a very close link with MOI, and learning performance increases if the language of instruction is proficiently known by the learner. MOI assists the learner to adopt deep or achieving approach for better understanding and comprehensive knowledge.

Use of a language as MOI differs in the nations/countries of the world. There is an overwhelming majority of the countries in the world where national language or mother tongue is preferred to the foreign language. According to UNESCO, (2007) following countries of Asia and Pacific use their national language as MOI: Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, People's Republic of China, Mongolia, Japan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh,

Pakistan, Kazakhsatan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Papua New Guina, whereas Indonesia, Lao PDR, Maynmar, Philippines use their official language as MOI. It can be concluded from the abovementioned report that national and official languages are being preferred as MOI in Asian and Pacific countries.

Conclusion

The above mentioned examples elaborate the case, and it can be explicitly concluded that general population opposes the use of vernaculars as MOI. It is because common people do not have trust in the elite class who publicly favor indigenous languages while adopting those schools for their children, where English or European languages are used as MOI. A common man believes that use of vernaculars as MOI enhances the gulf of discrimination between the rich and the poor, and it makes it difficult for him to approach appropriate socio-economic benefits, because elite class and well to do people prefer foreign language like English to flourish in domestic and international society, and they do not like their children to be taught in indigenous languages. This may be one of the reasons for practically adopting indigenous languages for academic purposes. Studies concerning the impact of the change of MOI on student's achievement are unconvincing and sometimes contradictory. Taking into consideration all the pros and cons of above quoted research works, a few general guidelines may be decided for the policy makers in respect of MOI in Pakistan. The researchers were agreed that if any of the foreign languages was adopted as MOI it would have negative impact on the learning ability or performance of weak students, therefore arrangement should be made to enhance the proficiency of students in foreign language or they should be assisted through bilingual or multilingual education by creating space for their mother tongue or indigenous languages.

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