



Language in Education Policy: The Perception of students about the status of languages in Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro

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Abstract: *Learning English as a Second language in Pakistan has remained an obstacle for most of the students in Higher Education. This study is a researcher's observation as an English Language Teacher in Higher Education where most of the students in Sindh come from Rural areas. The aim of the study is to see the way language(s) are being used for teaching and learning in Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro. Three main languages i.e. Urdu, Sindhi and English, are being used as mediums/media of instruction throughout the educational diaspora in Sindh but English seems to be a long shot in this process as it hardly gets a sizable space in education up to the collegiate level. This thing gets quite complicated when it comes to the higher education because higher education throughout the country is controlled by the Higher Education Commission which categorically excludes local/vernacular languages as mediums of Teaching & learning. Due to this language-in-Education policy in higher Education, most of the students face numerous problems with Limited English Proficiency (LEP). This study analyzes students' perceptions through questionnaires and concludes that the students usually can't manage to handle the problem of medium of instruction at tertiary level due to the lack of atmosphere as well as of competence of the institutions, they face this problem at mega level in universities. The language barrier kills most of their capabilities and pushes them to adopt some shortcut measures i.e. cramming, plagiarism etc.*

Keywords: Language Policy, Language in Education Policy, Higher Education

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Introduction

In most of the developing countries, teaching and learning how to use English language has, for long, remained a huge obstacle. It deviates the essence and purpose of education because language remains a barrier. The weakness remains on both sides i.e. teachers and students. The paper explores the way language(s) are being used in teaching and learning. The findings show which languages are used by teachers to teach and which languages are understood by the students in classroom in Mehran University of Engineering & Technology Jamshoro.

The issue of the medium of instruction is very complex, hence problematic in countries where there is a bilingual or a multilingual society. Generally, the language of "the powers that be" along with the official syllabi becomes the medium and content of instruction. Thus, institutionalizing their cultural dominance, it allows them to engineer a "popular approach" in support of the status quo. A language is what we think in, and of course, what exactly we think. Hence, the problem of "language policy in Education" is very much connected with the power structure of any society.

The language of education must be one that the learners speak. Wherein they can actively participate, involve themselves and become critical and creative. It is only possible through the language that brings to them a complete world. It also involves with the skills, knowledge and understanding of language, that all learners, teachers must have to function effectively in society. These all issues are related to language in education policy and has impact on teaching and learning.

Literature Review

Language Policy in Pakistan

This problem is at its extreme in countries which were the direct preys of the colonial rule. The colonial masters, who ruled the colonies directly, kept on dominating the post-colonial world linguistically and culturally. Pakistan, one of the British colonies up until the first half of the 20th century, faces the same problem. Though the education at primary level has largely been nativized in government institutions, they are mostly dysfunctional, or at least malfunctioned.

Issue of medium of instruction in Higher education in Sindh

Sindhi has remained an official and court language before and during British period and continues as such in Sindhi, to date. Here in Sindh, like all other provinces of Pakistan, the education at primary level in government schools is largely in native language. But as soon as the student starts developing consciously, he gets stumbled due to the problem of medium of instruction. The case of education at tertiary levels (i.e. colleges and universities) is not in the slightest any different from the education at secondary level. As the students, usually can't manage to handle the problem of medium of instruction at secondary level due to the lack of atmosphere as well as of competence of the institutions, they face this problem at mega level in universities. The language barrier kills most of their capabilities and pushes them to adopt some shortcut measures i.e. cramming, plagiarism etc.

The issue of language in education policy is not new. It has been discussed by various intellectuals, language planners, policy makers, educationists at the macro and micro level. At micro level, it involves the decision of various factors like needs of learners, teachers' attitudes, available economic sources, and curriculum and course books in that language for a particular group of learners, institution or any school. At macro level, government or state is involved in decisions of language(s), standardization and modernizing of any language. But the fact is in many developed and developing countries decision or selection of language(s) is governed by state. As Kaplan (1990) in Egginton and Wren (1997), points out that almost all the language policy models he has witnessed, subside the language-in-education policy to the national language policy, and have its roots deep down in the highest levels of government. The education sector, according to Kaplan and Baldauf (1997) must take a number of language policy and planning decisions:

- a) To decide which language(s) should be taught in curriculum.
- b) To define the teacher supply, that is the teacher's language proficiency in given language(s) in curriculum.
- c) To determine the assessment processes supposed to be used to single out and place the students in formative and summative testing.

- d) To outline the economic and physical resources required to support language planning activity. (Mansoor, 2005).

Another important purpose for language planners is to prepare policies that help in promoting multilingualism and to preserve Linguistic Human rights. Therefore, the documentation of language preservation or usage will help in survival of cultural heritage and identity. Many countries have recognized the value of local and indigenous languages. It is found that in most countries of the world, there is no formal education in local or indigenous languages and the fact is many people do not care about their heritage language. They are forced to shift to the national or official language for economic, military, religious or education purpose. The U.N. declaration of Human rights strongly forbids any discrimination against individuals based on language. According to article 4.2:

“States shall take measures to create favorable conditions to enable persons belonging to minorities to express their characteristics and to develop their culture, language, religion, traditions and customs except where specific practices are in violation of national and contrary to international standards. (Article 4.2)

These statements are mostly remained unimplemented in many developed and under developed countries. As Skutnaab-Kangas (2000) point out, we have the paradoxical situation where languages completely ‘foreign’ to the country get more ‘official support’ than many of the country’s indigenous or minority languages. Such as in subcontinent of South Asia and South Africa which once remained under the colonization of British rule, the linguistic situation is complex. Pattanayak (1986) says that the colonial languages in the Third World education used as substitutes for many of the vernacular languages have caused many problems. This has created an unbridgeable gap between the elite and the masses, hampered mental growth and has caused a lack of creativity and innovation in children. It also is one of the main causes of the weakening of indigenous cultures. (Mansoor,) The situation in such territories is of linguistic apartheid or linguistic imperialism, which means subjugation of various languages by dominant groups such as American and British through their language English. Many policy makers and language planners have prepared different frameworks regarding language policies in multilingual situations such as

by Haugen (1983), Haarmann (1990), Cooper (1989) and Hornberger (1991). One approach according to Tollefson in Eggington (2000), is the 'monolingual policy' where one language is used to secure national unity with a single dominant language. Pakistan best suits this approach because despite many regional languages with million speakers, Urdu is declared national language spoken by only 7 % population.

English Language Teaching

According to Abbass (1998) though the government has been investing a huge amount in the programs designed to teach English as a second language, the results on the national level, on the contrary, are alarmingly poor. At the college level, hardly 18-20 percent of the students pass and as English is supposed to be a compulsory subject, failing in English means a complete failure in whole of the university examination. The ratio mentioned above does not vary that much at the secondary level also. Abbas (1998) believes that this failure in English examinations is caused mainly due to a flawed pedagogy and material design. He concludes that teaching English at all the levels might neither be a suitable nor a plausible plan. English is a compulsory language throughout the country from sixth class up to BA whereas in Sindh and Punjab, it has been made a compulsory subject from class 1. This policy is getting firmly settled as the NWFP government has also announced that English will soon be a compulsory subject from class 1. As of now, every passed out graduate studies English for approximately a decade but does not seem to have learned much due to the lack of planning in educational policy.

According to Malik (1996: 12) there is an evident crisis in the inefficient application of ELT programs in Pakistan. There are two major indicators at the higher level i.e. the emerging BA graduates lacking proficiency in English and the failure of a high number of students in the compulsory English language examinations at Intermediate and Graduation levels. Malik (1996) believes that the emerging BA graduates lacking proficiency in English have led an overall fall of standards in performance at the graduate, postgraduate and/or equivalent levels where English is the official medium of instruction and assessment. A graduate today lacks in Language proficiency way beyond the general expectations and it simply leads

towards an overall decline in the teaching and assessment standards at all the levels of education.

Research Question

The present research addresses the following question:

Q.1 What are the views of learners regarding languages used by teachers and learners in pedagogical settings in Mehran University of Engineering & Technology Jamshoro?

Methodology

Participants

The participants are students of Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro. The students are selected from 10 different departments of university. From these departments, quantitative sample representation was selected through probability sampling, and techniques used was stratified sampling. The students selected for this study were final year students. I have selected five random students of final year from each department and total sample size is 50 students. The purpose of selecting final year students is to know their language proficiency. In Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro, students are taught 2 to 3 subjects of English from their first to final year. The purpose of including these subjects in their syllabus is to make them proficient enough to work in any institution.

The Background of the Learners and their Language Needs

The purpose of this study was to collect data related to the educational as well as the language base of the Learners. This study, on the other hand, had a purpose of studying their language needs. It tried to focus the learner's choice of medium while learning and the reason for that specific choice. The motive of this study was to single out the difference between the Language policy and Learners target to assist the authorities in designing such language programs which may match with the needs and preferences of the learners.

Institutional Practice

The study is based in The Mehran University of Engineering and Technology to study the Language/s used for delivering lectures and in providing the necessary material to the learners. One of the aims of this study was also to investigate not only into the general language policy of the university, but to also consider the class-room practice and the medium of instruction used in studying and taking examinations.

Instruments

In this study, questionnaire is used as a tool for data collection. Information was gathered by means of self-completion questionnaires administered by the interviewer. Self-completed questionnaires that the respondents could fill in for themselves were considered very efficient. The questionnaire was well-constructed. Careful wording of the questionnaires was done so that all questions would mean the same to all respondents. The student questionnaire was consisting of 3 variables.

Results and Discussion

According to Fink (1995:53) descriptions, relationships, comparisons and predictions are the main results of a statistical analysis. The above-mentioned analyses are the most common of their kind used for surveys as will be seen in this research study. Some graphs and tables are used to show the results followed by a discussion. The SPSS software is used for data analysis.

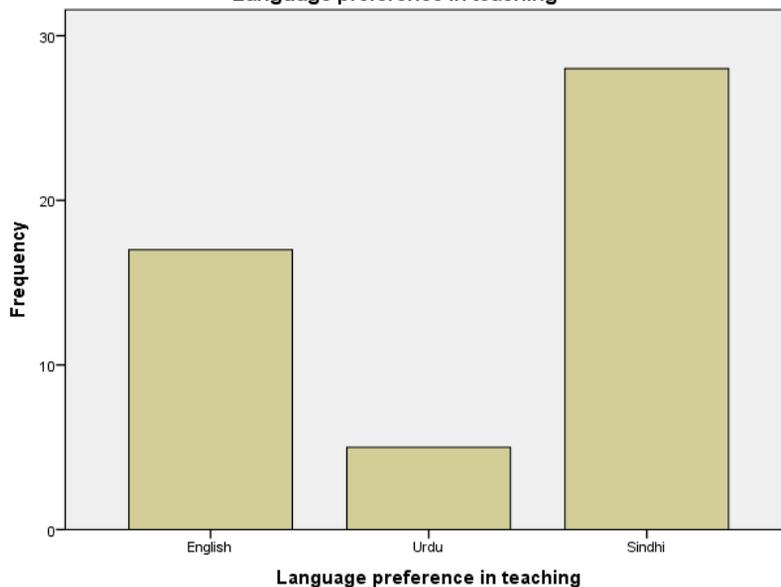
Language preference in teaching

Which language is preferred by the teachers while teaching?

Language preference in teaching

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
English	17		34.0	34.0
Urdu	5	10.0	10.0	44.0
Sindhi	28	56.0	56.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Language preference in teaching



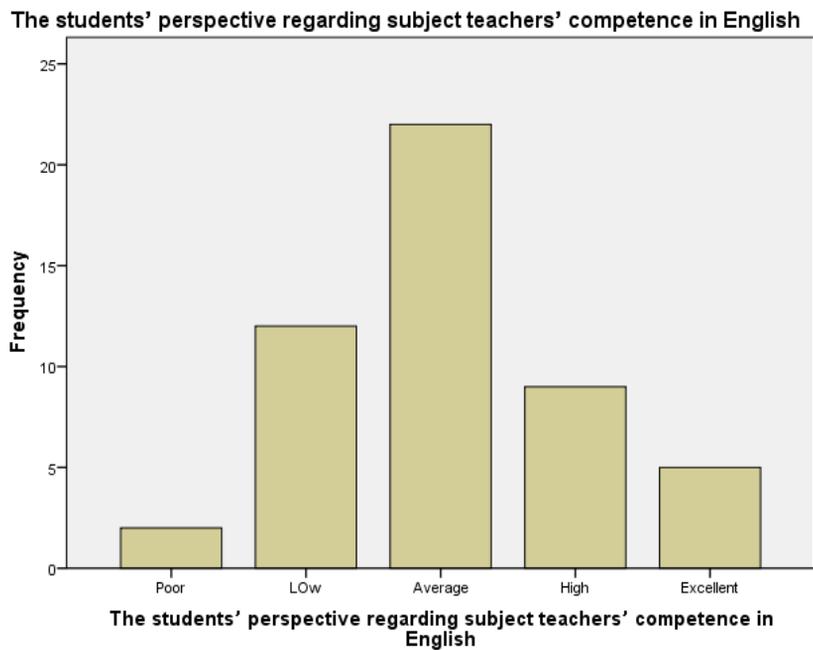
According to the data analyses, the bar chart shows that the language which is mostly used by the subject teachers in their respective classes is mainly Sindhi. It is the language that somehow creates a comfort zone for both the teachers as well as the students because, though the official language policy of the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology puts English as the main language of teaching and communication, if not the only one, it

somehow is the language that most of them (i.e. teachers and students) are lacking in. Furthermore, majority of the students of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology come from the rural areas of Sindh where most of the population uses Sindhi as a Lingua Franca. This seems to be the major reason for Sindhi being opted as the main language of communication by the teachers while teaching in classrooms. The second most used language appears to be English while the slot of the third most used language goes to Urdu. This shows, that whatsoever the Language policy of the university is, the language preferred to be opted depends on the overall linguistic atmosphere.

The students' perspective regarding subject teachers' competence in English

The students' perspective regarding subject teachers' competence in English

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Poor	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Low	12	24.0	24.0	28.0
Average	22	44.0	44.0	72.0
High	9	18.0	18.0	90.0
Excellent	5	10.0	10.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	



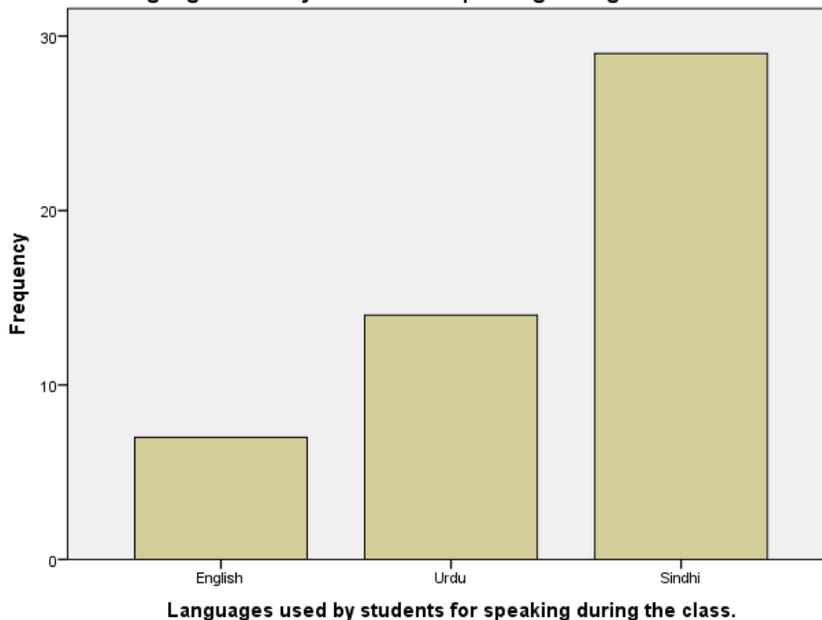
The survey also presents another really very important aspect of the problem. Majority of the students surveyed and believed that a large number of the teachers are just average while using English. The bar chart given above shows that while following the official language policy of the university and using English in classrooms, most of the teachers hardly make it to the point as almost 70 percent of them are either average or even below average. Only 3 out of ten teachers possess the needed efficiency while delivering lectures. This 30 percent seems to be the teachers who have come back after having a PhD degree from abroad as English is the only way to get through it.

Languages used by students' during the class

Languages used by students for speaking during the class.

Language	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
English	7	14.0	14.0	14.0
Urdu	14	28.0	28.0	42.0
Sindhi	29	58.0	58.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

Languages used by students for speaking during the class.



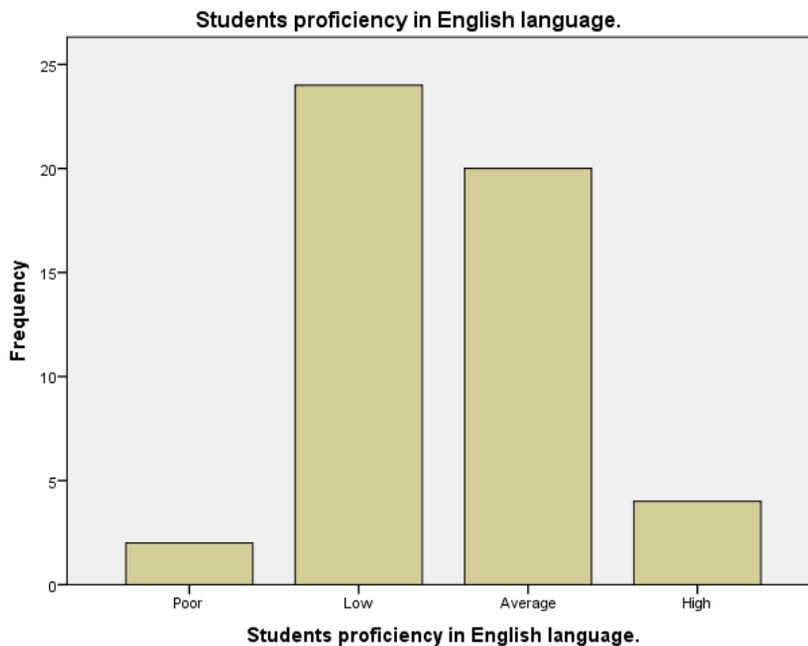
As far as the matter of the choice of the students regarding the language to be used in classroom communication is concerned, most of the students fall back to the same comfort zone which is discussed in its due details under chart I. As has been said earlier, majority of the students studying in Mehran University of Engineering and Technology have come from the rural areas

of Sindh, they feel most comfortable in communication with the Language they are acquainted with the most. Regardless of the choice of Language by the teachers to deliver their lectures, students prefer to communicate with teachers or within themselves in Sindhi. Approximately 60 percent of the students surveyed go for Sindhi whereas three out of ten students feel comfortable enough to use Urdu, the second most opted language, as a medium of communication during classes. Only ten percent, means 1 out of ten students seems to be comfortable with English also and prefers to speak in it.

Students' proficiency in English language

Students' proficiency in English language.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Poor	2	4.0	4.0	4.0
Low	24	48.0	48.0	52.0
Valid Average	20	40.0	40.0	92.0
High	4	8.0	8.0	100.0
Total	50	100.0	100.0	



The chart given above describes students' proficiency in English. The results show that an overwhelming majority of the students surveyed believe themselves to be either average or below average in this respect. Almost 90 percent of the students are not good enough to completely express themselves in English. This case gets severe when we realize the fact that the cases surveyed in this data analysis belong to the classes of final year. They are the students supposed to pass from the university within a year and majority of them does not have acquired the needed skills of English Language communication by far. Though the standard syllabus of Mehran University of Engineering and Technology offers at least two to three subjects of English i.e. Functional English, Communication Skills and Technical Writing and Presentation Skills from first year to final year, and though all of these offered subjects are somehow targeted to develop students' communication in English, even then this isn't supposed to be helping that much in this regard as most of the students hardly get a benefit sufficient enough to help them to be fluent enough while using English.

Most suitable language to study in

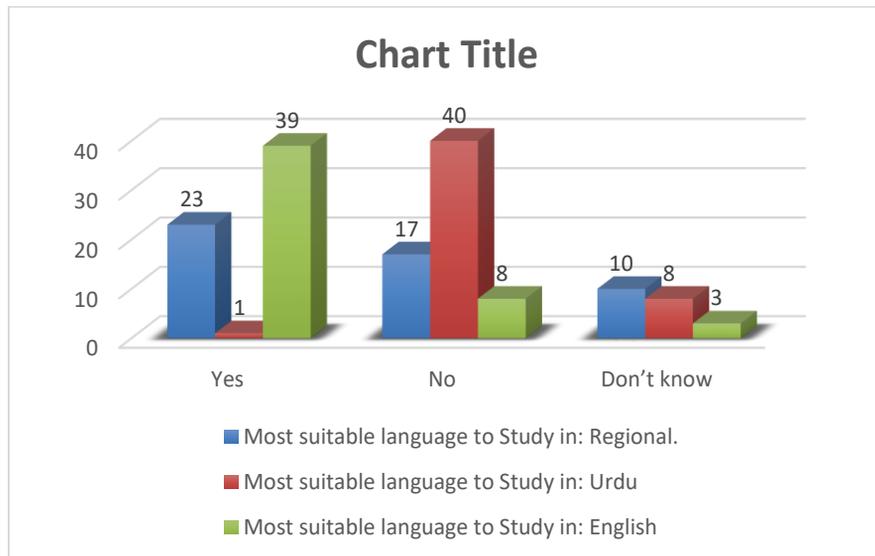


Table2. Students’ perceptions regarding studying in different languages.

Though most of the students do not feel themselves good enough while communicating in English-as has been shown in the concerned chart above, even then majority of them seems to favor English as a language of communication during the classes. The table given above shows a comparative analysis of the choice of regional, Urdu or English languages as a medium of communication which shows that when they were asked about choosing their regional Language as a medium of communication, 46 percent of them said yes, 34 percent said no, whereas 20 percent remained indecisive. In case of Urdu, the decisive majority, approximately 80 percent, clearly said no, almost 15 percent stood indifferent whereas just 5 percent did show consent. But, when they were asked to choose English as the medium of instruction, the case stood almost opposite to Urdu as 80 percent of them said yes, approximately 15 percent said no whereas only 5 percent remained indifferent. This shows that though majority of the students are lacking in English communication, even then majority of them stands firm to develop it.

Conclusion

The findings of this study show:

Though official Language Policy of the Mehran University of Engineering and Technology is primarily designed to help students develop their Language skills along with their professional skills, it does not seem to be yielding much in this regard. The reasons for this anomaly might be various but two major reasons pop up quite loud and clear i.e. the lack of focus on students' needs while executing the aforementioned policy and the stagnant, limited and passive attitude towards execution instead of vibrant, multi-sided and active engagement.

The universities or the Higher Education in Pakistan must also consider expanding its Language policy by adding regional Languages along with English. Regional Languages must be treated as opportunities rather than handicaps. The Universities must design their syllabus and institutional practice accordingly.

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