

Reforming the National Curriculum: Teaching the National and Provincial Languages of Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan is a linguistically rich nation where seventy two languages are spoken. Language research shows that children should learn as many languages as possible, which increases the grey matter of the brain and makes them more intelligent. However, it is impossible to teach all languages of Pakistan by including them in the National Curriculum. By virtue of the Constitution of Pakistan, Urdu and English are the national languages. Recently, in September 2015, the Supreme Court passed a ruling by which Urdu also became the official language of Pakistan. In this regard, a focus should be placed in making children bilingual in at least these two languages, goal not achieved until now. Besides, so that the provincial language legacy does not get lost, an effort should be made to ensure the teaching of the provincial languages (Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Balochi at least) at primary and secondary schools in all the schools of the country, public or private. This research is a proposal based on a previously empirically tested linguistic model. The main purpose is to achieve bilingual citizens (if not multilingual) who are able to speak the national languages, as well as their provincial languages, at a native level and be proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing, in order to ensure continuity of the rich linguistic legacy of the most important languages of Pakistan.

Keywords: National languages of Pakistan, Provincial languages of Pakistan, Applied Linguistics, Curriculum development, Language Policy, Language Planning, Educational Linguistics.

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Introduction

The linguistic diversity of Pakistan is outstanding. The multilingual and multi-ethnic variety of the area constitutes parts of the culturally rich legacy of the country. Language in Pakistan has often been associated with ethnicity (Maldonado García, 2014 & Rahman, 1996). For this reason, considering the evolution of the English language in Pakistan and that of Urdu language, especially after the partition, and how Bengali language became a sensitive matter, as well as a political issue, the teaching of languages in Pakistan is a matter of elevated political importance.

Furthermore, the language reforms (MaldonadoGarcía, 2014) and linguistic steps the different governments of the country have implemented until now, have been highly unsuccessful in achieving a perfect level of bilingual competency in the national languages and even less in the regional languages. In this manner, we find the following language demographics in Pakistan:

Punjabi 48%, Sindhi 12%, Saraiki (a Punjabi variant) 10%, Pashto (alternate name, Pashtu) 8%, Urdu (official) 8%, Balochi 3%, Hindko 2%, Brahui 1%, English (official; lingua franca of Pakistani elite and most government ministries), Burushaski, and other 8%(CIA World Facts, 2013-14).

The literacy level of the Pakistani population is directly related to the issue of national languages proficiency. The opportunities for Pakistan in this regard are immense, as it has been proven that the more languages a child learns the greater the grey matter of the brain. In other words, a child becomes more intelligent when he or she learns an extra language (MaldonadoGarcía, 2011).

In addition, the issue of the teaching of provincial languages has been historically sensitive (Maldonado García, 2014). Not every province can become independent only on the basis a different language and a different ethnicity, like in the case of Bengal (Maldonado García, 2015). Consequently, the following ethnic groups are present in Pakistan:

Punjabi 44.68%, Pashtun (Pathan) 15.42%, Sindhi 14.1%, Saraiki 8.38%, Muhajirs 7.57%, Balochi 3.57%, other 6.28%(CIA World Facts, 2013-14).

Statement of the problem

The population of Pakistan is highly multilingual and at the same time highly deficient in speaking the national and official languages of the country. An effective language model is necessary which would be implementable and would yield the necessary result.

Objectives of the study

The present study is aimed at determining an appropriate model for implementing the teaching of the most important languages of Pakistan with the purpose of achieving language literacy in Urdu, English and the regional languages.

Methodology

This study applied a sequential mixed methods approach of research to achieve the objectives; mainly descriptive and analytical methods. Multiple examples of effective language models exist all over the world, which many countries have utilized and applied in their own countries. An appropriate and effective language model was identified which was highly effective as it enforced the learning of the national and official language as well as regional languages by virtue of constitutional amendments as well as national curriculum amendments in the different provinces and which if applied in Pakistan would yield positive results. For the implementation of the methodology an analysis of the socio-linguistic factors of Pakistan as well as other countries was considered and the most effective chosen after the analysis of the data.

Analysis of the data

Various language models of different countries were analyzed in respect to the similarities they showed with Pakistan. Some countries had one official languages but no regional languages. Other, had multiple official languages which were major world languages but had no national or regional languages. The country which was found to have a larger similarity with Pakistan was Spain. In Spain, where the literacy rate is as elevated as 97.5% (CIA World Facts, 2013-14), Spanish is the official language which coexists with Catalan, Valencian, Basque and Galician as regional official languages. According to the Spanish Constitution of 1978 in its third article:

1. El castellano es la lengua española oficial del Estado. Todos los españoles tienen el deber de conocerla y el derecho a usarla.
2. Las demás lenguas españolas serán también oficiales en las respectivas Comunidades Autónomas de acuerdo con sus Estatutos.

3. La riqueza de las distintas modalidades lingüísticas de España es un patrimonio cultural que será objeto de especial respeto y protección (The Constitution of Spain).

The country is divided territorially into autonomous communities with their own regional governments which have set in place a linguistic policy for each one of them. In this case, Spanish is the national language set by the Constitution of 1978 and the regional language in those regions which have it, is taught at primary and secondary school levels.

Of course the linguistic panorama of Spain cannot fully be compared to that of Pakistan. Nevertheless, some important similarities are obvious. These include division into autonomous (bodies) communities, multiple ethnicities and culture, as well as efforts for regional separatism in the cases of the Basque Country and Catalonia. These efforts have been fairly aggressive. In the case of the Basque Country they include the formation of a terrorist organization called ETA (ETA stands for 'Euskadi Ta Askatasuna,' expression in Basque language which means "Basque Country and freedom"), however, considerably weakened during the years of democracy, which has left a bloody mark in the pages of history in the name of independence and separatism on the basis of language and culture. The case of Catalonia, although not as aggressive, is still as recent as 2014, as they had brought their case to the European Union for approval of Catalonia as an independent European country bordering with Spain and France. Nevertheless, the European Union refused and stated that if they became independent they would be considered out of the European Union (Strange, 2015). These efforts have not reached to the point of engaging in civil wars, like in the case of Bengal and the Spanish government has always controlled them very effectively, curbing terror in the case of the Basque Country, and administratively in the case of Catalonia.

Another interesting similarity that can be observed in the case of Spain and Pakistan is the large influence of Arabs in both regions. The Arabs arrived in Spain in 711 and in South Asia in 712. They left a large linguistic legacy in both areas of the world. In the case of Spain, more than four thousand terms have been identified, of which the Dictionary of the Royal Academy of Spanish Language in its 22nd edition had included only 1, 664 (MaldonadoGarcía, 2012) since the rest have fallen into disuse. In the case of Pakistan, the number of terms has not been absolutely accounted for, although according to a recent study, the percentage of Arabic in the basic vocabulary of Urdu is of 29.9%, being Arabic language the largest etymological component of the language (MaldonadoGarcía, 2015).

Historically, it is well known that the Muslims and Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492 by the Catholic King and Queen. For this reason the linguistic Arabic influence experimented a continuous recession which lasts until today. Although Arabic influence in Spanish language has now stopped, it can still be observed and it has been measured in the fields of sciences (MaldonadoGarcía, 2012). On the contrary, in the case of Urdu, efforts have been made to rid the language of the Sanskrit and Prakrit influences, associated with Hinduism, with the purpose of maintaining a level of religious influence within the language as well as utilizing a Perso-Arabic script (MaldonadoGarcía, 2014).

The parallelisms are obvious; however, the Spanish language model is quite simplistic as compared to that of Pakistan. First of all, the government of Spain and its citizens only have to deal with one national and official language, Spanish, which historically derived from Latin and is the language of the area since then. However, Pakistan has to deal with two official languages and one of them foreign, which brings with it a high level of linguistic tension and inferiority feelings, if not complex, for those who are not proficient in it, as well as a difference in class for those who are able to speak it as well as those who are not, being looked down upon.

On the other hand, the government of Spain only has to deal with four regional languages and a few varieties of Spanish language, while Pakistan has to manage 55 local operating languages (in spite of the fact that Ethnologue lists seventy two languages) (Rahman, 2002) and four of them regional.

Interestingly enough in article three, the Constitution of Spain states that the citizens of Spain have the right to know the national language and the duty to use it (1978). However, the Constitution of Pakistan does not state anything remotely close to this and thus, many citizens of Pakistan are only able to speak the regional language, for example Pashto, and are unable to speak Urdu. Further, a great majority of the citizens of Pakistan are unable to speak English which sets them at a disadvantage in terms of social class (Rahman, 2001)

Furthermore, continuing with the example of Spain which is also in place by other European countries, the school model is homogeneous throughout the country. The majority of the schools are public, although teachers are government employees who are hired on the basis of their education, teaching experience and a state exam called “oposiciones,” which allows the Ministry of Education to make a judgment in terms of the quality of the teachers in experience and education. In this sense, there is a system of checks and balance. According to different scales, teachers achieve punctuation which will place them at the top of the list when achieving scores on the exams or may not if they lack the required experience or qualification.

The problem in Pakistan is not only one of individual feelings of regionalism. It is also a constitutional problem and a literacy problem. In fact, we could add that it is in addition, a problem of infrastructure since all are inter-related.

The linguistic map of Europe is a unique one. In a small area hundreds of languages are spoken. Many European countries in their constitutions have stated their official or national languages; this is the case of Spain, Denmark, France, Finland, Switzerland, Turkey, Russia, Romania, etc. However, others have not stated any official language in their constitutions. This may seem backward and strange. Nevertheless, some of these nations are highly developed linguistically and otherwise. Some of them are Germany, Italy, Czech Republic, etc. (Kortlandt, 1990).

Perhaps we should consider the fact that today's multilingual Europe's linguistic panorama includes that the majority of the mother tongues of Europeans are the state languages in their home countries. German in 2006 was the widest spoken language in Europe, although not with a high percentage of speakers (only 18%) followed by English and Italian (13%) (European Commission, 2006). Human development also plays a role since the index measures life expectancy (health), education (literacy rate) and income per capita. Spain, to provide a European example, ranks at 12th position (according to the Spanish Secretary General of Universities, Federico Morán Abad, at a ceremony in UNED, Madrid) in 2015, with a life expectancy average of 82.32 years in 2012 according to the World Health Organization, which gives it a rating of 7th in the world ranking. A literacy rate of 97.5% makes Spain one of the most literate countries in the world.

Under these circumstances implementing educational as well as many other policies should not be a complex task. However, in Pakistan we find a less than ideal situation, a life expectancy average of 67.05 years and an estimated literacy rate of 54.9% in 2009. (CIA World Facts, 2013-14). The Human Development Index in Pakistan is not homogeneous where there are higher rates in cities like Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad and lower in the provinces of Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in 2012. Yet, these are estimated figures since a census has not taken place for years. In any case, the United Nations has come up with an average HDI for Pakistan at 0.515 in 2012. This makes Pakistan 146 in the world close to India (136) and Bangladesh (also 146) (UNDP, 2013). If we compare this to the HDI of Spain which was at 0.869 and 27 position in 2013 we find two very different pictures (UNDP, 2014).

The need for improving the human development index

These are the basic challenges Pakistan faces. For these reasons, the government of Pakistan has an arduous task at hand. Improving the literacy rate in all provinces of the country is a must if Pakistan wants to survive in a highly competitive

world progressing in technology at the speed of light. Although the current government has made great efforts to improve the literacy rate in some areas of the country, with programs such as “No child left behind” and others, further efforts need to be made in order to implement the current laws which state obligatory schooling age for all children. In addition, some of the best brains of the country find opportunities for development outside of Pakistan. Brain drain is a malady that must be curbed through improving employment opportunities in the country and campaigns to ensure parents understand that all kinds of professionals are needed in a society (not only doctors and engineers who are unable to find professional opportunities within the boundaries of the country and are left to migrate in search of them, while the receiving countries benefit). A professional survey should be conducted to reveal which types of professionals are needed in Pakistan. Laws should be put in place to ensure universities produce the right kinds of professionals who can fulfill those voids.

Further, an accurate census will reveal the real picture which will allow for making additional and needed improvements. In any case, in terms of literacy the most recent information available is from 2005 (Choudhry, 2006).

Table 1
Literacy rates in Pakistan

Year	All Areas			Urban			Rural		
	Both Genders	Male	Female	Both Sexes	Male	Female	Both Genders	Male	Female
2004	54	66.25	41.75	72.37	79.9	64	43.84	58.4	30

In terms of health, the budget should be increased so that public hospitals can operate in a decent and humane manner and provide adequate care to the patients through preventive medicine. At the moment the doctors are not well paid, appropriate medical supplies are not available and medical facilities are distant from population nucleus in some areas of the country. Basically, public hospitals are not enough and fail to be equipped with the necessary tools to be effective.

The economy needs to be boosted. The resources of the country need to be exploited for the benefit of its citizens. This will without any doubt create employment opportunities for those who are qualified professionals as well as the lower level work force. Employment laws should be strengthened so that employment is fully regulated and employees and employers are protected. This is probably the most difficult task at hand considering that the unskilled work force has never enjoyed these rights, many are illiterate and are unable to stand up for themselves.

Improvement in reading has been shown in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa as this table shows (ASER, 2012):

Table 2

Reading improvement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa schools: Urdu

Urdu: Percentages of Children who can read (2012)						
Class	Nothing	Letters	Words	Sentences	Story	Total
1	22.3	35	33.6	4.8	4.3	100
2	11.3	20.5	45.7	13.6	8.8	100
3	6.5	10.7	38.2	23.9	20.7	100
4	4.6	6.2	30.0	27.8	31.4	100
5	4.9	4.4	22.2	25.2	43.3	100
6	4.2	3.0	13.5	21.8	57.5	100
7	5.7	1.8	7.8	18.3	66.4	100
8	0.0	0.0	2.2	13.3	84.5	100
9	0.0	0.0	0.9	8.4	90.7	100
10	0.0	0.0	1.4	7.6	91.0	100

This is an improvement from the same report which had been conducted in 2011 and showed that 32% of the students of class 5 were able to read a story as compared to 43% in 2012 (ASER, 2012).

Table 3

Reading improvement in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa schools: English

English: Percentages of Children who can read (2012)						
Class	Nothing	Letters	Words	Sentences	Total	
1	24.5	24.7	33.0	13.9	3.9	100
2	13.1	15.0	34.1	29.2	8.7	100
3	7.1	8.6	24.8	37.7	21.9	100
4	6.3	5.5	18.1	35.4	34.8	100
5	6.1	3.3	14.2	29.4	47.1	100
6	4.6	1.6	9.1	22.4	62.4	100
7	5.8	1.3	6.2	14.9	71.8	100
8	0.0	0.0	0.4	11.8	87.8	100
9	0.0	0.0	0.3	8.2	91.5	100
10	0.0	0.0	0.3	5.8	93.8	100

ASER 2011 showed that 36% of class 5 students were able to read sentences as compared to 47% in 2012.

Proposing the Model and Solving the Problems

The above tables show that remarkable improvements are being made in Urdu and English languages in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In this regard, language policy improvements are viable at a national level if we apply a few simple changes. In both languages an improvement of 11% was made from 2011 to 2012. Further improvements can be made, such as these:

In regards to making changes towards achieving a workable and above all, fair linguistic proficiency in terms of the national languages, the following changes are viable;

Constitutional changes:

An amendment to article 251 can be made. At the moment the article reads thus:

National language.-

- (1) The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.
- (2) Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.ⁱ
- (3) Without prejudice to the status of the National Language, a Provincial Assembly may by law prescribe measure for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language (Constitution of Pakistan, article 251).

Paragraph n. 1 should be amended to read “The national and official language of Pakistan is Urdu and all Pakistani citizens have the right and obligation to know it and use it.” The reason for this is that the citizens of Pakistan should be able to use it for any purpose they chose, official or otherwise. In addition, all citizens of Pakistan should be able to understand it, speak it and utilize it whenever they see fit so that they are able to communicate with their fellow citizens. As the official language they should be proud to be able to use it. The Supreme Court order of September 2015 ensured Urdu is now an official language of Pakistan which is a huge improvement from the previous language panorama.

With regards to paragraph n. 2, it has now become clear that the English language has achieved the status of language of science, education and technology. This means that all school children should learn it and be fluent in it so that they can be able to function and compete at national and international levels in whichever spheres of knowledge, trade, investment, technology, education, etc. they chose and cannot be isolated from the rest of the world due to their language skills or lack of them. This amendment will eradicate the elitist system the English language naturally confers to those who are able to speak it (Rahman, 2002). The Constitutional amendment should then be as follows:

“The English language should be taught in all primary and secondary schools for the purpose of education, technology, trade, and other spheres where it may be needed, so that Pakistani citizens can compete and excel in international environments as well as for official and unofficial purposes.”

Concerning paragraph n. 3 it has become obvious that various areas of the country, like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, are not really teaching Urdu to their citizens, and English even less. For this reason, achieving language proficiency in these languages should be a priority in these areas. In this regard, curriculum changes and reforms need to be made so that the constitutional changes can be implemented. Changes of this type have been sensitive in the past. Perhaps this amendment to the Constitution can be made at a national referendum, after running the necessary campaigns so that everyone who is able to vote can understand that the education system needs to be unified. The purpose of this national referendum is to avoid backlash.

Curriculum changes following the proposed constitutional changes

An article as recent as December 2014 states that:

“PTI leaders have asserted that they want a “uniform education system” in the country wherein every child will have the equal right to quality education. According to them the only solution to eliminate this disparity in education is to make English as a medium of instruction as early as in class one (5+) at the public schools. The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa government says it has prepared new textbooks and plans to train 350 teachers, who will in turn train 23,000 teachers” (Torwali, 2014).

This government has again made Urdu the language of instruction. The article continues:

For a multilingual country like Pakistan the educationists suggest a trilingual plan: child’s mother language at the early stages; at a later stage a second (national language) is to be introduced; and afterwards a third language (English) must be incorporated (Torwali, 2014).

If this approach is put in practice, it would have terrible effects on the children. From grade 1 onwards the policies need to be consistent and not change languages at once, since children learn through reinforcement. For this reason, Urdu as a medium of instruction could be a temporary policy. However, the country needs

language trained teachers who are able to produce students that can speak and write Urdu well. In this regard, trained language teachers are a must if national languages proficiency is to be improved.

Furthermore, in Pakistan multiple education systems are working simultaneously. Some of these systems can be divided into three main groups; 1. Public schools, 2. Private schools and 3. Madrasas.

The government of Pakistan at the initial stages should try to unify the national syllabus so that public as well as private schools have a unified system of education. Other countries of the world have utilized this method effectively and have achieved high levels of literacy, for example Spain.

At this point in time, public schools use mainly Urdu as a medium of instruction. Although many schools teach in Urdu in rural areas, they use a translation-interpretation system into the regional language, in order to explain to students the meaning of the lesson. It has been proven that the students enrolled in this system are unable to achieve a high proficiency in Urdu. Furthermore, they are at a disadvantage when compared to those students who are enrolled in English medium schools which are in fact, private schools, following British or American systems of education.

If we ignore the teaching of English language, the citizens of Pakistan would be deprived of the ability to expand their horizons internationally and obtain lucrative jobs. Shall we ignore the teaching of Urdu, we would deprive the citizens of Pakistan of their national cultural, linguistic and literary legacy which is their birth right. If we ignore the regional languages, we would lose, in this regard, a fantastic linguistic legacy. For this reason and after the approved constitutional changes we shall amend the National Curriculum so that it can be in conformity with the constitutional changes as follows:

Para n. 1: Urdu should be included in the curriculum of all public schools of the country without prejudice to the regional language of the area with the purpose of achieving a high language proficiency. Further,

Para n. 2: In the same manner, English should be taught with the purpose of achieving a high language proficiency, so that all citizens can understand it and use it.

At this particular point in time, the levels of proficiency of all citizens are different. Some cannot understand it nor speak it, others can understand but not speak it, some can write but not speak, while those who had the opportunity to attend private school are fluent in the four skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening, etc. To achieve this purpose, appropriate measures should be taken at university levels so that all trained primary and secondary school teachers should be fluent in English language, such as intensive English language courses and take and IELTS test at the end of their degree in which they should achieve a minimum score of 7.5, subject to which the teaching degree shall be conferred to them. Our Pakistani universities pride themselves in being English medium institutions. Even though the books may be in the English language, it has been found and observed that teachers are using Urdu, Punjabi and other regional languages in their lectures.

If this linguistic chaos is not channeled in the right direction, the country will continue to suffer from the language disparities of the past and the present. Besides, this measure will ensure the same educational and professional opportunities for all citizens of Pakistan, who will be able to open their horizons to the international arena.

Interestingly enough, the Madrassas are teaching in Urdu and achieving higher levels of proficiency in this language than the public schools. At a second stage or reform, policies could be introduced so that students obtaining their education from these schools are able to learn English as well, without disturbing their religious lessons, the teaching of Arabic language and their regular curriculum.

These reforms should be aimed at producing a higher level of literacy, as well as a unified education system that would favor linguistic as well as curriculum homogeneity.

In relation to paragraph n. 3: the regional languages of each province should be included in the national curriculum as separate subjects in primary as well as secondary schools. At the moment, the teaching of regional languages is not homogeneous. Furthermore, some schools may be teaching Sindhi, some Pashto, some universities as well as the civil service also teach the regional languages as separate subjects. However, this limited knowledge is not enough to ensure proficiency, proper continuation and progress of the languages and it is also not homogeneous. Thus, it is neither taught in all schools, nor throughout the country.

In addition, in order to preserve the linguistic richness of the country, specialists should be engaged in the study of the rest of the languages such as Siraiki. In this regard, the Ministry of Education should create regional language Academies, such as the Iqbal Academy which will ensure the continuation of the rest of the languages by engaging language specialists in research about these languages.

Conclusion

It is clear that Pakistan has a multi-ethnic and multilingual population as well as low levels of literacy. It is imperative to implement homogeneous education and language reforms that would produce individuals who would receive similar education and hence have access to similar opportunities. These reforms should lead to a lift in the literacy rate. In this paper constitutional changes have been proposed and discussed which would lead to very much needed educational and language reforms, directed towards the implementation of homogeneous policies for ensuring that all citizens are bilingual (at a minimum) and able to use the national languages in whichever spheres they chose to. This will ensure that they have access and language mobility within the country as well as in the international arena and are able to access foreign educational institutions as well as be able to understand and compete with others in the fields of technology, exports, education, etc.

If the language situation in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has shown significant improvement during the years 2011-2012, it indicates that the literacy level can be radically improved in other provinces as well. It will be interesting to measure the effects of the Educational Reforms that the Government of the Punjab has undertaken. Efforts of this sort, in addition to the proposed ones can be put in practice to achieve higher levels of literacy in the country.

It is important that attention be paid towards the linguistic richness of Pakistan. Furthermore, this goal should be achieved in a progressive manner without causing backlash and disturbance while educating the citizens to understand that these policies are directed towards achieving not only multilingual proficiency but also, the ability to interact and compete without disadvantage in a multilingual ever-changing world.

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