

Perceptions of Sindhi Intelligentsia towards English Language learning

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Abstract

This research work aims to explore out the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia related to English language learning. English in Pakistan is given much significance and considered as gateway to success. In the private sector schools, English is used as a medium of instruction from Nursery, KG and onwards. The widespread use of English in Pakistan is considered as linguistic imperialism and exploitation of the regional languages. Sindhi is believed to be one of the oldest languages. The British authorities during their reign in Sindh promoted Sindhi language and culture. In order to ease difficulties in Sindhi writing, the British government established a committee to design an appropriate Sindhi script, because previously, it was written in the different scripts. Above all, Sindhi was also designated as an official language of Sindh province. The data of this study was collected through semi- structured interviews. The findings of this study reveal that Sindhi intelligentsia is well- aware of the utilitarian value of English. They also believe that proficiency over English language can help promote their culture and literature across the globe. This study further, reveals that Sindhi intelligentsia has positive attitude towards English language, but they also want to preserve their own language and cultural identity.

Keywords: Word Linguistic imperialism; Exploitation; Regional languages; Medium of instruction; Cultural identity.

1. Introduction

The purpose of this research is to assess the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia relating to English language learning. It also discusses the issues of linguistic imperialism, use of mother tongue as a medium of education and impacts of globalization on Sindhi language and culture.

Sindhi language is believed to be the oldest language of Pakistan and Sindhi people want to make Sindhi language as a national language of the country. Therefore, Sindhi intelligentsia have been struggling to declare Sindhi language as a national language of the country. Siraj (2009) praising the historic importance of Sindhi language, and claims that the language of Mohen Jo Daro was the archaic form of Sindhi language. He also claims that Sindhi language nursed around half of the languages of the world.

There has been a little research regarding the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia towards English language learning. This study will therefore;

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explore out the perceptions of Sindhi people and will apprise the policy makers, academia and researchers of the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia. This research will further, unravel the issue of linguistic, cultural and ethnic identity in Sindh. Besides, this study will apprise us whether the linguistic, cultural and ethnic identity hinder and prevent the Sindhi learners from gaining proficiency over English language. And also, this study will further bring forth the issues of defective pedagogy or the shortage of resources as the causes of poor academic performance of Sindhi learners.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *English for Socio-economic Development*

English is an international language and widely used for socio-economic development not only in Pakistan, but across the globe. English in Pakistan is given an importance because it is perceived as one of the essentials to help uplift the socio-economic status of learners. Crystal (2012) observes that English language is represented across the world. People belonging to the different walk of life, around the world- depend on English for their socio-economic development. English language is profoundly used in the international domains including communication, business, entertainment, media, education, security and political affairs. The other important domains including: computer software industry are also dependent on English. In this situation, when so many organizations have vested interest in it, the future of English appears to be assured in this perspective.

Norton (1997) keeping in view, the significance of English language across the globe argues that ‘because the mandate of TESOL is the teaching of English, I suggest that if English belongs to the people who speak it, whether native or non-native, whether ESL or EFL, whether standard or non-standard, then the expansion of English in this era of rapid globalization may possibly be for the better rather than for the worse’. The learners are inclined towards TESOL because English is considered as a gateway to knowledge and prestige.

Block (2015), and Hamid & Nguyen (2016) in this context further add that proficiency in English language is a requirement of the modern globalized world, which students must meet in order to pursue better employment possibilities, quality of life, socio-cultural perspectives, and to become successful global citizens.

2.2. *English as a Medium of Education in Pakistan*

Choice of language as a medium of instruction is a complex issue. It involves language needs of learners, attitude of the parents and teachers. The above all, availability of economic resources to train teachers and develop the required material in the targeted language also plays key role (Mansoor, 2003).

In the vernacular medium schools in Pakistan, English is taught from class one or class six, and it is compulsory in higher secondary classes, but students of vernacular schools have poor competency of English language and

cannot read or write. English is taught through grammar translation method. They translate the passages from English to Urdu and vice versa. Relying on rote learning and cramming lessons and essays; they just acquire passing marks in English without any competency in English. In examination, they overall acquire more marks in other subjects than in English (Rahman 2010).

2.3. Benefits of Mother Tongues used as a Medium of Instruction

The researchers believe that the use of mother tongue in primary education leaves positive impacts on the learning of the children. Coleman (2010), believes that in the research, there are the evidences that children can benefit well if they are given education through their mother tongues. The research of above half century has indicated frequently that giving education in the mother tongues is the best choice for the children. This way of teaching raises their learning output and enhances confidence, social development and critical thinking abilities. Children can conceive the fundamental thoughts in their first language because there are no obstacles in its comprehension.

Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) endorsing mother tongue as a medium of instruction observes that imparting education to a child in a language other than the mother tongue can also be called an example of linguistic genocide.

Tupas (2015) observes that the significance of mother tongue goes beyond only education, UNESCO has, rather redefined them as an instrument for development in the wider context.

2.4. Linguistic Imperialism and Politics of English Language

English linguistic imperialism is believed to be a sort of linguisticism. Phillipson (1992) argues that 'A working definition of English linguistic imperialism is that the dominance of English is asserted and maintained by the establishment and continuous reconstitution of structural and cultural inequalities between English and other languages (p.47). Here structural refers broadly to material properties (for example, institutions, and financial allocations) and cultural to immaterial or ideological properties (for example, attitudes, and pedagogic principles). English linguistic imperialism is one example of linguisticism, which is defined as 'ideologies, structures, and practices- used to legitimate, effectuate, and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources (both material and immaterial) between groups which are defined on the basis of language.

Pakistan in a way, also undergoes English linguistic imperialism. The proficiency over English is one of the main requirements for getting any lucrative job or qualifying any competitive examination in Pakistan. The national language of the country is Urdu, but English being used as dominant language and it impacts negatively on the local and minority languages. Pennycook (2017) opines that "English remains a massively dominant language of global relations that continues to threaten other languages, cultures and forms of knowledge, to disrupt the educational aspirations of many and to contribute to the reproduction of many global inequalities" (VIII).

Phillipson (1997) observes that dominance on the basis of any language is violation of human rights. Any discrimination on the basis of language, race and gender is morally unjustified.

Kirkpatrick and Liddicoat (2019) believe that indigenous languages are ignored in the educational institutions as a consequence of the promotion of English. Most significantly, it also causes greater disparities between the haves and have nots.

2.5. Ethnic identity and acculturation

Phinney et al. (2001) defining ethnic identity states that ethnic identity refers to the sense of common values and attitudes and feelings of belongingness towards one's own ethnic group and shares the elements such as culture, language, religion, and place of origin.

Describing ethnic identity Berry et al. (2006) give four categories of acculturation-integrations, assimilation, separation and marginalization. An individual having the strong ethnic identity also adjusts with a new society- is considered to have 'bicultural' or 'integrated identity', the one who has strong sense of one's ethnic identity and is reluctant to be absorbed with the new culture keeps a 'separated identity', while one who surrenders one's own ethnic identity and absorbs with the new culture has an 'assimilated identity' when an individual is identified with neither is believed to have a 'marginalized' identity.

One can find such cultural changes especially, in youngsters of Pakistani communities in the wake of globalization. The youngsters prefer to use Western dress, speak English and eat non-native foods in the restaurants.

The literature provides deep insights about the topic under consideration. Based on those insights the following research question is raised which will help guide the inquiry. What are the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia towards learning English language?

3. Objectives of Study

The purpose of this research is to study the beliefs and perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia towards English language learning. This study also explores out the importance of English language in Pakistan in general and Sindh in particular.

4. Significance of Study

The educationists across the world endorse the fact that primary literacy should be given in the mother tongue of the learners and they recommend to learn any foreign language in the succeeding classes.

Whereas, in Pakistan, English is used not only as an official language, but it is used as a medium of instruction from KG, Nursery and onwards in the elitist and non-elitist English medium schools.

The political and social figures of the country also favour the regional languages as a medium of instruction. It is the first of its kind to find out perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia about English language learning.

5. Methodology

The researcher has used a qualitative approach to find out answer to the research question.

5.1 Tools for Data Collection

Data was collected through semi- structured interviews. Semi- structured interview method is used keeping in view its flexibility and open-endedness. Cohen et al. (2007) believe that there is flexibility for the researcher in the semi- structured interviews. The interviewer can modify the wording of already framed interview questions for convenience of the interviewee and can add other questions during interview if situation requires. (Dörnyei, 2007) observes that through semi- structured interview method a researcher can get in-depth data on important areas in a flexible and exploratory way.

The interview protocol for intellectuals contained 17 items. The copy of interview protocol is attached in the appendices A. For this study ten prominent Sindhi intellectuals including poets, writers, linguists and media personnel were interviewed to assess their beliefs regarding the importance of English language and their sentimental attachment with Sindhi language.

The intellectuals considered as respondents of this study have diverse expertise in fields such as education, literature, history journalism and politics. They are popular in society for their services in various fields and are considered of high regard. Some of the respondents were also given many high civil awards by the government in recognition of their services in the respective fields

5.2. Site of the Study

This study was conducted in Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. Hyderabad is the second largest city of Sindh province having population of two million people. Hyderabad is center of educational institutions and is also hub of cultural, academic and literary activities of Sindh.

5.3. Participants

This study contains ten in-depth interviews of the leading Sindhi speaking intellectuals based in Hyderabad. The intellectuals having diverse expertise in fields such as literature, journalism, history, politics and education selected as respondents for this research. The intellectuals included in this study are popular in masses and media (including social media) in the province and they are also recipients of many civil awards in recognition of their services in the respective fields.

5.4. Procedure for Data Collection

The intellectuals were contacted in person and apprised of the objectives and significance of this study. The intelligentsia selected as respondents of this study- belonged to diverse fields. Most of the intelligentsias were approached in literary sessions as organized by the various institutes and literary forums of Hyderabad, where they came to attend or preside the sessions.

The media personnel wanted to be interviewed in their media offices, whereas, academicians and writers preferred to be interviewed at their respective residences. Their appointments were reconfirmed on telephone before visiting them for the interviews. Some of the participants also rescheduled the dates of interview for their other important activities.

The interview of each participant continued from 30 to 60 minutes. The respondents were given choice of the language for interviews therefore; they preferred to be interviewed in Sindhi language and then transcribed.

5.5 Analysis

The data was analyzed through thematic analysis of the interviews. To begin with, interviews of the respondents were audio recorded and then, transcribed. The themes were generated from the transcription of the interviews.

6. Findings and Analysis

This section seeks to answer research question i.e., what are perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia towards English language learning? Through this question; this researcher attempts to know the perceptions of Sindhi people towards English language learning. The intelligentsia are important segment of a society. It has already been mentioned that respondents of this study belong to the different fields having vast expertise in their respective fields, and they have also been in contact with masses. They are, therefore; well-aware of the issues and happenings of the society. The intelligentsia are taken as a representing sample to answer this question. The findings and analysis of the interviews of the respondents revealed the following dominant themes:

- i. Utilitarian value of English
- ii. Impacts of globalization on Sindhi language and culture
- iii. Performance of L1 at primary education perceived by Sindhi intelligentsia
- iv. Cultural identity and impediments to learning English
- v. Influence of Sindhi language and Indus civilization on many languages across the globe

i. Utilitarian value of English

While Sindhi intelligentsia seems very much attached towards their mother tongue for instance, Sindhi because of identity and cultural reasons; they don't deny the importance of English language because of its utilitarian value. The respondents see English language learning as a passport to prosperity, entering into global arena, and availing opportunities across the world and so forth.

Better education and better job prospects are only guaranteed by learning English language. Through this language and the respondents believe that they can change their social class.

In Pakistan, students' proficiency in English is an essential to qualify Central Superior Service, CSS- a high- ranking examination for civil bureaucracy in Pakistan. The students who are unable to pass CSS, their other options include development sector- is locally called NGO sector. In non-governmental organizations particularly international non-governmental organizations i.e., auxiliary bodies of the UNO such as UNICEF, UNESCO offer the jobs for the candidates having skills of English language.

Hence; keeping in view, the significance of English most of the respondents consider English as a ladder to achieve their coveted carrier and bright future in public and private sector jobs.

Besides, learning English can bring learners into contact with cultures of the different nations. Likewise, the respondents can also spread their culture to other nations of the world.

The intelligentsia seems convinced that learning languages in general and English in particular is an essential for the growth of individuals. It brings enlightenment, moderation, tolerance and equality. The respondents seem the flexible in opening themselves up to different languages and cultures.

According to respondents, Germany and France have remained bitter rivals; however, they have, by now, realized the importance of English language therefore; one can find English newspapers, news channels, and English movies in these countries. One of the respondents who frequently visits European countries including Germany and France delivering lectures as a federation expert in the universities said:

In 1999, I went to Germany, there was not a single book house having English books, one could not find any English newspaper in the markets, there was no access to any English TV channel, I still remember... Now world has changed in 18 years and everything is available in English. (P-10)

The quote further strengthens the idea that English language has become a necessary aid for all of us. Its importance cannot be denied.

Keeping in view the significance of English language, the Pakistani writers also started writing in English. Most of their contributions include fiction and political analysis. The famous Pakistani English writers include Mohsin Hamid , Kamla Shamsie, Tehmina Durrani, Bina Shah, Muhammad Hanif, Tariq Ali and so on. Having discussed theme one, the next section presents theme two.

ii. Impact of globalization on Sindhi language and culture

Regarding impacts of globalization over Sindhi language and culture the majority of the respondents said that globalization will have the positive impact on Sindhi society, as the whole. Under the influence of globalization,

Sindhi people will be more liberal, more rational, far sighted and tolerant in their approach.

The influence of globalization will help improve quality of the all fields of Sindhi society. For example, in literature it will give them exposure to the master pieces of world literature. Prior to globalization, they were familiar with the few anecdotes of Watayo Fageer, now they can access international masterpieces.

Globalization has minimized the distances and opened new arenas for knowledge, information and commerce. Endorsing the positive effects of globalization. One of the respondents said;

You can easily convey your voice in international forum. You can get in touch with international market. You can have international links, furthermore, you can access towards international community. (P-7)

Globalization has also left the positive impact on the music of Sindh. The respondents said that in music they are now using Western musical instruments, such instruments are impressive, and attract the audience. They said that they are now singing Sindhi songs using these instruments.

The respondents also believed that this is a false apprehension that Sindhi people may have less importance of their culture as a result of globalization. Wearing jeans and shorts should, in no way, be considered as a threat to our culture.

The respondents believed that Globalization has overall left the positive impact on Sindhi language and culture. Before globalization Sindhi language was in a confined circle now, it has spread across the globe through websites of Sindhi newspapers and Sindhi TV channels. Now, Sindhi books are also available in soft copy. Globalization gives an open space to all societies.

Globalization has immense potentials to promote local, domestic cultures across the globe. The question is how much capable we are to reclaim the space. (P-10).

As discussed earlier, Sindhi writers could not get global reputation due to linguistic barriers, but despite this, Sindhi writers in recognition of their literary services are acknowledged in many corners of the world. Ali Baba, a noted Sindhi writer, in recognition of his drama Dungi Manjh Draya "River in a small boat" was given award by a literary society of Munich, Germany. Having presented the theme two, now I move on to discuss theme number three.

iii. Preference to LI at primary education

Through this study, it was also revealed that Sindhi intelligentsia want their children to be proficient in English, but so far as the medium of education at the primary level is concerned they preferred their children to be given

education in their mother tongue. This will help a learner to get the knowledge of desired subjects without any linguistic barrier. The Sindhi intelligentsia argues that preservation of any language is directly related to its usage. Hence, the world bodies have passed resolutions that children should get primary education in their mother tongue. The Sindhi society is also aware of it. They deem the primary education in L1 as fundamental right of learners.

It is an established paradigm and established principle of social psychology and educational psychology, even UNESCO has also given its verdict that mother tongues should be medium of instruction. Generally, it is accepted all over the world that medium of instruction at the primary level should always be in mother tongue and there is mother tongues day also in the month of November, so there is no controversy on it, as far as the medium of instruction at the primary level is concerned.(P-1)

The respondents said that poor quality of the teaching material and bad administration of public sector schools led to the emergence of the private schools. The contents of the prescribed books of Sindh textbook board are of inferior quality therefore; people prefer the books being published by Cambridge and Oxford university press. Besides, teachers of the private schools are trained, and pay proper attention towards their students. The management of the schools is also well- trained, and caters to the needs of the learners, whereas, all such facilities are missing in the public sector primary schools.

The respondents also suggest to incorporate English as a subject at the primary level and introduce bilingual system of education. Citing the examples of India, Srilanka and Bangladesh; they opined that these countries are using bilingual system of education, therefore; children of these countries are good at English and parents are also satisfied with the teaching system.

The books of higher education can also be translated into Sindhi. But, we should continue to use English till such arrangements are made.

Some of the respondents said that those parents who speak English all the times with their children are in inferiority complex because they think that speaking in L1 will label them as rustic and rural folk, therefore; they speak in English so that in society they can be considered as educated and thereby elevating their social status. The respondents believed that such class conscious society is oblivious of the importance of L1 for the cognitive and creative development of children.

Most of the respondents believe that one should use L1 in one's natural life, English may also be used if circumstances require, and otherwise one should love one's indigenous languages. The following section presents theme number four of this study.

iv. Cultural identity and impediments to learning English

The majority of the respondents believed that cultural identity has never been an impediment towards learning English language. On the contrary, English language can help promote our culture, tradition and civilization across the world. Through exposure of our language to the world, we will be able to see impact of globalization on our L1 and will see how Sindhi language and culture benefit other societies.

Talking about the status of Sindhi language, the intelligentsia said they in no way consider English as a threat to Sindhi language.

While in the preceding sections, the majority of the respondents expressed the positive attitude towards learning English language, some respondents have opined differently.

Regarding the originality of Sindhi language and culture; the respondents said that change is an inevitable in life, those unwilling to accept the change will face challenges for survival of their language and culture.

One of the respondents said:

You cannot put your both feet in same flowing water of a river. If you put your one feet and then the other feet after some seconds, it will not be the same water (P-7).

Some respondents from intelligentsia believe that L1 should be at all levels of education including higher ones. This can be achieved by translating syllabi into L1. They have cited the examples of countries in EU where 48 out of 51 use their own language at all levels of education, only three countries use English as a medium of instruction.

Some members of intelligentsia don't see English language as a parameter for reaching highest ladder of success. The reason being, throughout the world 106 countries use English as official language, however; they are under developed. The countries also include Bangladesh, Pakistan, and India.

They also cite the examples of Indus civilization 5000 years ago. The example in point is Mohen Jo Daro where one can find civility, civic amenities and the knowledge of Mathematics, Geometry and well-planned housing. These findings show that English is not the only parameter of success. People in Indus civilization didn't study English, but despite this they were well off. Hence, these respondents believe that hegemony of English is purpose built and cannot be avoided.

The respondents believe that our children should learn English only as a subject rather than allowing the language to usurp our societies.

While, one of the respondents talking about the medium of instruction in Sindh lamented that some intelligentsia often demand to use L1 at all levels of education. He cites the examples of developed nations such as China and Japan forgetting the bitter facts that these all countries are sovereign from all aspects, their decision-making is in their own hands. He further, said that how can they compare Sindhi society with Japan, which is leading the world in automobiles and how can they compare our society with Chinese which is

leading the consumerism business of the world and China has given the loan of trillions of dollars to US.

Sindhi society in its infrastructure is hundred year back to the nations such as China and Japan....America got loans worth trillion dollars from China. China is holding control over the consumer business of the world. The comparison of Sindhi society with such developed nations is quite imprudent (P-9).

The respondent further expressed that we don't have the institutes which may produce the capable professionals. He asked the intelligentsia to let him know if there are globally reputed professionals such as economist and sociologist based in Sindh. He said that we can develop our society by focusing on English language, because it is language of technology and language of the global market. Having discussed the theme number four now I will move to theme number five of this study.

v. Influence of Sindhi language and Indus civilization on many languages across the globe

One of the respondents said that they were proud of their language, culture and civilization because of its historic significance. He claimed that many civilizations of the world descend from Indus civilization. He added that indigenous Americans migrated from Sindh and created four civilizations there. i.e., Incas, Toltec, Aztec and Maya. He added that Darwin in his book "The Descent of Man" has also revealed that Americans are basically Amri Indians and they migrated from Amri, an old archeological site of Sindh and settled in America in 1700 or 1800 BC. The respondent further said that Richard Dawkin in his book "The Ancestor's Tale" also narrated the same history. John Collier (1947) in his book "Indians of the Americas" also tells the same story that indigenous Americans - red Indians are basically Amri Indians.

The respondent further claimed that Celtic civilization also descended from Sindh, while being in Europe the alphabet and numerical numbers were given to Romans.

The respondent said that Sindhi language has influence over many languages of the world including Urdu, Hindi, English and Roman.

6.1 Responding to the Research Question

Responding to the research question: What are perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia towards English language learning?. The respondents said that they are well- aware of the significance of English language. They want their children to be proficient in English. The majority of the respondents showed the positive attitude towards learning English language. They wanted to introduce their mother tongue as medium of education at the primary level and use English as the second option as a medium of education.

7. Discussion

The study investigated the perceptions of Sindhi intelligentsia relating to learning English. To achieve this aim data was collected through semi-structured interviews.

Data of this study revealed that people of Sindh are cognizant of the fact that English language cannot be discarded because of its global importance. They do not want their children to be ignorant about the world knowledge-can be accessed through English language. The literature, trade, business etc., is written and practiced in English. Hence, they want their children to cash on this window of opportunity.

The Sindhi intelligentsia, as discussed earlier, is apparently more inclined towards their language and culture. The literature review and interviews with intelligentsia also strengthened the same point. Under such situation, it was pertinent to explore out whether this linguistic and cultural attachment prevents them from learning English. Most of the intelligentsia argued that they are cognizant of the global socio economic scenario and are also well aware of the significance of English not only in Asia but around the globe. They believe that English is a passport to the prosperity and it is the language of science and technology.

The researchers such as Block (2015), Hamid & Nguyen(2016) and Norton (1997) as mentioned in the literature review section of this paper , also highlighted the significance of English language.

This study also suggests that the primary education at L1 is right of every child around the globe. The countries like Sri Lanka and Bangladesh are bilingual since early education of children. But here, in Pakistan, the medium of education since the primary level is English only.

The preference of L1 seems to have many fold reasons. The first and foremost reason is every child has right to develop concepts in his/her mother tongue. This will help him throughout his life. This practice is in vogue throughout the world including China, Russia, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Sri Lanka etc. Tupas (2015) as discussed in the literature review observes that the significance of mother tongues is beyond just education and UNESCO has described them as an instrument for development in the wider context.

Besides, Sindhi people as compared to other nationalities of Pakistan are sentimentally attached towards their language. In the regional print and electronic media Sindhi people are very vocal and seem to be the sensitive towards the issues related to their language and culture. They believed that their language i.e., Sindhi is one of the ancient languages of the world and it has also nursed many languages of the world (Siraj, 2009). Hence, they always prefer L1 especially for kids. According to UNESCO reports, the primary education of children should be carried out in their mother tongue.

This study also revealed that apparently Sindhi intelligentsia is attached to its language, but most of them send their children to the private English medium schools for education because such the schools relatively impart quality education. The teachers of private English medium schools are

well- trained and pay an individual attention to the learners. The syllabus of the schools is published by Oxford and Cambridge press. The content of the books is scientific, farsighted and liberal in approach. On the other, public schools teach the books of the Sindh Text Book Board which are inferior in quality.

8. Conclusion

This study suggests that the Sindhi intelligentsia is neither against English language nor they want to quit their L1 at the primary stage of the education of their children. Whereas they want to continue learning English in order to be globally acceptable; they want to retain their L1 too. They also want to preserve their own culture and identity. The attitude of Sindhi intelligentsia seems the positive towards the colonizers mainly because of the development carried out by them. The colonizers during their stay in Sindh patronized Sindhi language and culture. They also appreciate colonizers' contribution towards the development of Sindhi language. While they want L1 on the priority, English language is needed to them as L2. English language is apparently accepted by Sindhi intelligentsia because of its utilitarian values and socio economic significance.

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