
ENGLISH AS MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION AT SCHOOL LEVEL IN PAKISTAN: CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

Muhammad Fareed

Associate Professor,
Department of Humanities, NED University of Engineering & Technology,
Sindh, Pakistan
Email: darfarid@neduet.edu.pk

Muhammad Yasir Khan

Visiting Faculty,
Department of Education, Iqra University, Karachi,
Sindh, Pakistan
Email: mykhanuk@yahoo.com

Ali Sher Ghangro

Associate Professor,
Education and Literacy Department, Government of Sindh,
Sindh, Pakistan
Email: alighanghro@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

English Language plays a vital role in the Pakistani education system. Despite, it is used as a medium of instruction in many Pakistani educational institutions, a number of Pakistani teachers experience difficulties even in Basic English language skills. Hence, a need was felt to explore the problems that Pakistani school teachers encounter while teaching in English. This study was designed with objectives to explore problems faced by Pakistani school teachers related to English as a medium of instruction and the strategies they use to resolve the challenges. For this purpose, an open-ended questionnaire was designed to collect data from fifty-six school teachers of a private chain of schools in Karachi. The instrument was taken through self-validity, expert validity and pilot validity before data collection for this study. Consent was obtained from the school management to carry out the study and from the participants' to participate in this study. The findings revealed that Science, Mathematics, Computer and Social Studies teachers at school level face multiple difficulties in teaching their respective subjects due to the problems connected to their English Language proficiency in basic English language skills (reading, writing, speaking and listening), pronunciation, spellings, grammar and vocabulary. The teachers use a dictionary, synonyms, and example to facilitate students; they also

consult seniors, translate difficult words and subject-related terms in Urdu to help students understand the subjects. This study concludes that school teachers lack English language skills to carry out their teaching, hence, trainings should be arranged to help them develop the English language skill, which will ultimately improve the teaching-learning process in the classroom.

KEYWORDS

English as a medium of instruction, English Language in Pakistan, ESL, EFL, English language skills of Pakistani school teachers

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a multilingual and multiethnic society with 72 languages (Lewis, 2009). Pakistani education system is based on two dominant languages: Urdu and English. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan with only 6% native speakers (Coleman, 2010), whereas English is used as an official language together with Urdu (Fareed, Humayun, & Akhtar, 2014). English Language is also considered a symbol of status in Pakistani society (Ammar, Ali, Fawad & Qasim, 2015; Mansoor, 2005; Tahir, Rizvi, Ghazali, Ahmad & Shafiq, 2017). In schools, especially in private schools, English Language is given the primacy over Urdu language. The course books and resource materials are developed and printed in English and it is also used as the language of instruction in educational institutions (Fareed, Sultan & Shireen, 2021). Mahboob, (2002) pointed out that the English Language brings better job opportunities all over Pakistan. According to Mansoor (2004), most lucrative jobs demand fluency in English Language. English Language competence precedes all other academic excellence and for many schools, it symbolizes as a pre-requisite for entry into the teaching job (Rahman, 2003).

Education system in Pakistan is divided into public and private sector schools. Annual Education Report (2012) states that more than 33% of children study in private primary schools. Private schools are also divided into two further groups which are elite schools and non-elite schools. Non-elite private schools have many subdivisions based on fee structure ranging from Rs. 500 to Rs. 5000. Schools above the fee range of Rs. 5000 are included in elite schools. The government schools or public schools are state-funded, hence they do not charge any fees (Andrabi, Das & Khwaja, 2006).

Students in the public schools are provided primary education in Urdu but more emphasis is laid upon English in the private sector schools. Elite schools of private sector strictly follow English as the medium of instruction even at the primary school level. Similarly, non-elite schools also claim to use English as a medium of instruction. However, non-elite schools have limited funds to afford well-versed English teachers. Therefore, they are unable to apply strict measures in terms of English as a language

of instruction despite being English medium schools. Despite, the salary of public sector school teachers is reported to be approximately four times higher than the salaries of private school teachers (Annual Status of Education, 2014), still the quality of education in most state-funded schools is well below par, and teachers in the public schools face English Language competency challenges due to their schooling in Urdu medium schools (Andrabi et al. 2006).

Study Rational

English Language competence of the teachers plays a central role in both types of educational institutes. Teachers' position is vital and holds the major responsibility for influencing the education policies, effecting change and innovations in the systems. English Language competency also ensures the quality in teaching. Along with school management, students also prefer proficient English teachers in the classrooms (Mahboob, 2002). Parents also have a preference that their children should be taught in the English Language (Nel & Müller, 2010). However, a teacher with the relevant subject command and good English Language skills is considered a rare commodity at school level in Pakistan (Mahboob, 2006). Although school level teachers possess command in their subjects and disciplines, but their English Language competency is relatively surface, hence they face multiple English Language related challenges in classrooms (Aziz & Gul, 2015; Fareed, Ashraf & Mushtaq, 2019; Saeed, Iqbal & Azam, 2012; Tahir, Rizvi, Ghazali, Ahmad & Shafiq, 2017). Therefore, this study attempts to explore English Language related challenges, that Pakistani school teachers face, while teaching their respective subjects in English, and the strategies they use to overcome language barriers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Medium of instruction means the language used by a teacher in a classroom to teach the subject. There have been multiple options to choose from for the medium of instruction in Pakistan since 1948 (Rahman, 1996; Mahboob, 2002; Mansoor, 2005). The education ministry selected Urdu as the medium of instruction in public sector primary schools. On the other hand, private schools adapted English Language as a medium of instruction. In the 1980s although the government-supported English to be taught from class 4, but on the contrary, the emphasis was laid upon the use of Urdu language in public schools. However, later governments (1988–1990 and 1993–1996) changed the emphasis by declaring English to be taught from class 1 rather than class 4 especially in government-funded schools (Rahman, 1997). Nevertheless, this change could not be implemented until the new government that took over in 2001 (Rahman, 2006), which supported the use of English in education and later aided in the formation of National Education policy 2009. English Language is used as the medium of instruction in almost all elite schools which include armed forces schools, few public and private schools. Most of colleges and universities also use the English Language

as MOI.

According to Mansoor (2003), not only students have low English language proficiency, but many teachers also face the same problems. It is because of the fact that most of the teachers graduate from local universities when they become teachers they take the language deficiencies from their student life. This situation has become cyclic, students with low English Language skills manage to graduate and become teachers and teach another group of students with similar language problems (Mansoor, 2005). This continues language-based academic problems in higher education. On the other hand, there are schools in urban areas where the financial status of the local community does not permit the parents to pay a high fee. According to Shamim (2008), these non-elite private English medium schools are unable to use English as the medium of instruction due to lack of teachers with English speaking fluency. Hence, the quality of English in classrooms teaching in such schools is well below par.

English is “the most widely taught, read, and spoken language that the world has ever known” (Kachru & Nelson, 2001, p.9). It is used besides Urdu in the schools, and learning of English is considered as a demand of society (Mansoor, 2003). Learning English for Pakistani students is also important because the medium of instruction at the university level is mainly English. When teachers are not proficient in the English Language they face problems effectively covering their subject matter. Therefore the teachers may be teaching science and mathematics using Urdu and English together. According to a British Council research (2013) school teachers are not completely prepared to teach in English-medium. Like for any other subject, good language skills are required to teach science as well. This is essential because language plays a very important role in thinking, communication, and also it is a tool for exchanging concepts and ideas between individuals (Aziz, 2003). As Pandian (2002) asserts, what teachers know and can do, affect all the core tasks of teaching. English Language of teachers plays a critical role in the teaching-learning process. English language oral communication skills are essential for teaching (Dar, Zaki, & Kazmi, 2010).

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

1. To identify the obstacles that school level Science, Mathematics, Computer and Social Studies teachers face while teaching the subjects in the English language
2. To explore the strategies, that school level Science, Mathematics, Computer and Social Studies teachers use to overcome the problems in class.

RESEARCH QUESTION

1. What kind of English Language related problems do Pakistani school level Science, Mathematics, Computer and social studies teachers face while teaching these subjects

in the English language?

2. What strategies do Pakistani school level teachers apply to tackle the English Language related problems while teaching Science, Mathematics, Computer and social studies in English language?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample of this study comprised of fifty-six teachers teaching Maths, Science, Computer, Social Studies and Pakistan Studies in English Language from class 3 to class 8 in a private-sector chain of school in Karachi. Sample description: Gender, academic qualification, professional qualification, teaching experience and mother tongue of the participants is given in the table below.

Table 1: Sample of the study

| Participants | | Education | | Age | | Professional Qualification | | Experience | | Mother tongue | |
|--------------|---|-----------|---|-------|---|----------------------------|---|------------|---|---------------|---|
| Gender | N | Years | N | Range | N | Degree/Dip | N | Years | N | Language | N |
| Female | 3 | 12yr | 3 | 0-30 | 2 | B. Ed | 2 | 1-7 | 2 | Urdu | 4 |
| | 2 | s | 2 | 31- | 4 | M. Ed | 0 | 8-15 | 6 | Punjabi | 5 |
| Male | 2 | 14yr | 2 | 40 | 2 | CMA | 2 | 16-25 | 1 | Pashto | 2 |
| | 4 | s | 3 | 41 & | 0 | DIT | 1 | | 7 | Hindko | 2 |
| | | 16 | 1 | abov | 1 | PTCC | 2 | | 1 | Memoni | 2 |
| | | yrs | | e | 2 | None | 5 | | 3 | | 5 |
| | | | | | | | 2 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | 6 | | | | |
| | 5 | | 5 | | 5 | | 5 | | 5 | | 5 |
| | 6 | | 6 | | 6 | | 6 | | 6 | | 6 |

Research Instrument

Data for this study were collected with the help of semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and tested for self-validity, expert-validity and pilot-validity before the data collection. The tool was also translated in Urdu Language to facilitate the participants. Tools translation was also validated by two experts.

Ethical Consideration

Formal permission was taken from the management of the school to conduct the study. Privacy and anonymity of the respondents and institution was assured. Consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study. Participants were given complete

freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage.

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Both female and male teacher participants were assigned separate codes. Female participants were coded from FT 01 to FT32 and male participants were coded from MT 01 to MT24. Findings of this study have been categorized based on emerging themes: issues related to pronunciation of difficult words, grammar and structures, comprehension, lack of vocabulary in productive skills, lack of fluency in productive skills, punctuation, spellings and prepositions issues in writing and Teachers practices to overcome these issues along with the issues related to students' English competency level.

Finding 1: Teachers faced pronunciation issues especially in difficult words MT4, "(I face difficulty in) pronouncing difficult words (while reading aloud)" FT24, "(I find some) specific terms difficult to pronounce" FT25, "(I find difficulties) mostly (in) pronunciation (while teaching)". MT14, "I feel trouble in pronunciation".

Finding 2: Some teachers identified that they faced issues with grammatical structure MT20, "(I face) tenses problem". FT5, FT6, FT18 "(I have issues with the use of) Grammar" FT17, "I face grammar-related issues while teaching" FT3, "(I face structural issues in) writing Lesson plans" FT29, "(I have issues with the use of correct) structures". Few teachers stated their concerns related to the correct use of correct spellings, prepositions and punctuations FT6, "(I face challenges in using correct) spellings" MT15, "(I have issues with using correct) prepositions and punctuations".

Finding 3: Many teachers shared that they had issues with their ability to comprehend the text as they require time to read and understand the concepts FT17, "I don't understand (in the) first attempt, I have to re-read (to understand)" FT29, "I need to concentrate while reading (the text)" MT9, "My reading (comprehension) is weak" MT10, MT23, "I face problems while reading textbooks" MT13, "(I have issues while) reading (the text)" MT14, FT10, FT29, FT30, "(I want to improve) my reading" MT17, "Reading textbooks (are difficult for me) and I (have to) use a dictionary (to retrieve the meaning)" MT22, FT4, FT21, "I want to improve my reading (skills)". FT22, "Sometimes (I face difficulties) in reading poems (and) books (of poetry)"

Finding 4: The teachers also told that lack of vocabulary had been one of the major reasons, which disturbed them in both speaking and writing skills. MT6, FT9, "(I face) vocabulary problem while speaking and writing" FT14, "(I have problems in) making general conversation due to lack of vocabulary". FT5, "Political terms are difficult to compare (and translate) in simple English (because of lack of vocabulary)" FT6, "(I have problems in finding) appropriate words (while speaking)" FT10, "(I have issues

with the use of) new words of vocabulary (while speaking and writing)” FT15, “Sometimes I don’t find appropriate words to give examples” FT14, MT11, “(I usually face issues in writing due to) lack of vocabulary” FT24, “(It is challenging for me to deal with) hard or difficult vocabulary” MT2, “(I face difficulties with) the words which are not frequently used” FT13, “(I have) less vocabulary” MT9, MT10, “(I have) weak vocabulary (which troubles me while speaking)” FT3, “(I find problems while explaining) some specific term related to Maths when suitable words don’t come in my mind” FT6, “(I have to face problems) in explaining scientific concepts when I come to un-familiar words”. FT29, “(I face challenges in difficult) vocabulary”. FT8, “I have to study (and find out the meaning of) the vocabulary related to the subject (from the dictionary) which is time consuming” MT16, “(I find difficulties) during reading textbooks, due to unfamiliar words and terminologies” MT11, “(I have issues with reading and) understanding (difficult) vocabulary”

Finding 5: Teachers face problems while delivering lectures in English due to the lack of fluency while for some teachers it is time-consuming to convert their ideas into words MT1 “It takes time to convert my views and ideas into words (in English Language) and write them on paper”. Making general conversation and giving general classroom instruction is a troublesome experience FT9, “(I find) giving explanations and writing detailed answers (troublesome) MT1, MT10, “(I find difficulties in) writing detailed answers (due to lack of fluency)” FT3, “(I face fluency issue) in delivering a lecture in English” FT4, FT5, MT16, MT20, MT21, FT23, FT24, FT30, FT31, “(I find difficulties in) making general conversation (due to lack of fluency)” MT14, “(I do not possess speaking) fluency while delivering lectures” FT29, “(I face difficulties of possessing fluency) while writing essays, (writing) detailed answers and during conversations”.

Finding 6: Teachers have claimed to have adopted several remedial measures to resolve all the above issues in their capacity. These solutions are based on their practices in the classrooms. Teachers translate typical subject related terminologies in Urdu MT5, “(I take help) by translating the text (in Urdu)” FT1, “Typical (subject related) terminology is translated in Urdu” FT8, “I use Urdu words for below average students (to clear the concepts)” MT10, “I convert difficult words in simple English (while delivering lectures)” FT23, “(I try to) provide simplest form of (difficult) terms and I teach in English first then I translate in Urdu”, MT24, “(I try to use) extra vocabulary by giving examples and using different words” FT4, “I use simple words to explain the lesson” FT7, “(I use) few words of Urdu (during lectures)” FT11, “Difficult meanings are converted into simple meanings through dictionary” FT15, “(I take help) by repeating sentences” MT1, “(I teach in Urdu” MT3, “Often I (use) some synonym book or (I consult to my) HOD (head of department) if I face such issues” MT15, “I teach them in their mother tongue (Urdu), I draw diagrams (on white board

while explaining) and (I also involve students in) practical activities)” MT24, “I try to be bilingual (while teaching)” MT7, “(I take help from) using proper teaching aids (to explain and teach better)” MT12, “(I read more) to increase my vocabulary (and I improve my speaking) by more speaking practice”.

DISCUSSION

The study was conducted to answer two research questions that deal with the English Language related problems faced by the teachers at school level and the strategies used by them to tackle these problems. The findings show that they have weak English Language communication skills as they struggle to deliver lectures of their subjects in English Language (Fareed, Ashraf & Mushtaq, 2019; Saeed et al., 2012; Tahir et al.2017). Teachers face challenges in pronunciation. Secondly, they face grammatical and structural issues while writing or composing drafts in English. Thirdly, teachers find difficulty in reading the texts in English. Fourthly, they have pointed out that due to lack of vocabulary their fluency is affected.

Addressing to the research question related to the strategies used by the teachers to resolve the above issues teachers shared that they switch codes while teaching to clarify the concepts and specific subject related terminologies between Urdu and English. Teacher also claimed to use simple sentences and synonyms during explanation. Some teachers preferred improving their language skills by spending more time in reading English.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In most of the private sector schools, the language of instruction is English. It emerged in this study that most school teachers face challenges while delivering the content knowledge due to lack of adequate communication cum language skills. The sample showed that the school teachers need to be given English Language input for the effective transformation of their content knowledge. The teacher training sessions of school teachers should include English Language and communication part besides pedagogical trainings.

REFERENCES

- Ammar, A., Ali. N., Fawad, A., Qasim, K. (2015). Language Policy and Medium of Instruction Issue in Pakistan. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*, 5(1), 111-124.
<https://doi.org/10.4312/ala.5.1.111-124>
- Andarabi, T., das, J., Khawaja, A. I. 2006. A Dime a Day: The Possibilities and Limits of Private Schooling in Pakistan. *Comparative Education Review* 52(3), 329-355.
- Annual Status of Education Report. (2014). ASER-Pakistan 2013. Retrieved from

http://aserpakistan.org/document/aser/2013/reports/national/ASER_National_Report_2013.pdf

- Aziz, S., Gul, S., (2015). Teachers' Level of Proficiency in English Speaking as Medium of Instruction and Causes for English Speaking Deficiency. *Bulletin of Education and Research*, 37(1), 97-105. British Council, (2013). Can English medium education work in Pakistan? Lessons from Punjab. <https://www.britishcouncil.org/>
- Coleman, H. (2010). *Teaching and learning in Pakistan: The role of language in education*. Islamabad: British Council.
- Dar, M.F., Akhtar, H., Khalid, H. (2014). Code-switching in Pakistani English Language Classrooms: Perceptions of English Language Teachers. *Journal of Social Sciences and Interdisciplinary Research (JSSIR)*, 3(2) 107-120.
- Dar, M. F., Zaki, S., & Kazmi, H. H. (2010). Students' reactions regarding the use of process strategy for oral presentation in ESP. *English Language and Literary Forum*, 12(1), 2-12.
- Fareed, M., Sultan, S.R., Shireen, K. (2021). Pakistani English stories for children: linguistic and technical analysis. *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 8(1), 95-108. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v8i1.42>
- Fareed, M., Ashraf, A., Mushtaq, S. (2019). Medium of Instruction in Education: Perceptions of Teachers and Students from Pakistani School, College and University. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*, 13(3), 134-143
- Kachru, B.B., Nelson, C. L., (2001). In analysing English in a global context: A reader. In Burns, A., Coffin, C. (Eds.). *World Englishes* (pp.9-25). London: Routledge.
- Lewis, M.P. (Ed.). 2009. *Ethnologue: Languages of the world*. 16th edition. Dallas: SIL International. Available online at <http://www.ethnologue.com/>.
- Mahboob, A. (2002). "No English, no future!" Language policy in Pakistan. In Gyasi, S. O., Beverly, H. (Eds.), *Political Independence with Linguistic Servitude: The politics about languages in the developing world* (pp. 15-39). New York: NOVA Science.
- Mansoor, S. (2005). *Language planning in higher education a case study of Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Mansoor, S. (2004). The Status and Role of Regional Languages in Higher Education in Pakistan, *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25(4), doi: [10.1080/01434630408666536](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434630408666536)
- Mansoor, S., (2003). *Language Planning in Higher Education Issues of Access and Equity*. *Lahore Journal of Economics* 8(2), 17-44.
- Nel, N. & Müller, H. (2010). The impact of teachers' limited english proficiency on english second language learners in South African schools. *South African Journal of Education*, 30(4), 635-650.
- Pandian, A. (2002). English Language Teaching in Malaysia Today. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education* 22(2), 35-52, doi: [10.1080/0218879020220205](https://doi.org/10.1080/0218879020220205)
- Rahman, T. (2003). Language policy, multilingualism and language vitality in Pakistan. Retrieved March 22, 2020, from <https://www.sil.org/resources/publications/entry/65424>
- Rahman, T. (1997). The Medium of Instruction Controversy in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 18(2), 145-154, doi: [10.1080/01434639708666310](https://doi.org/10.1080/01434639708666310)
-

-
- Rahman, T. (1996). *Language and Politics in Pakistan*. Pakistan: Oxford.
- Saeed, A., Iqbal, T. & Azam, R. (2012). Perceptions of teachers regarding English-medium instructions at secondary education in Punjab province of Pakistan. *Secondary Education Journal*, 1(2), 41-53.
- Shamim, F. (2008). Trends, issues and challenges in English language education in Pakistan. *Asia Specific Journal of Education*, 28(3). 235 – 249.
- Tahir, A.G., Rizvi, A.A., Ghazali, G.A., Ahmad, S., & Shafiq, M. (2017). Impact of English medium instruction on the dropout rate of students at government high schools in Lahore. *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. 2(3), 194-202.