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**EDUCATION THROUGH MOTHER TONGUE IN PAKISTAN: A CASE
STUDY OF PAHARI LANGUAGE**

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Abstract

The importance of education is vital for all whether it is imparted in schools, universities or other institutions. However, it is still being debated which language should be used as medium of education at all levels: Should it be the official/national language or the mother tongue of the learners? In Pakistan English and Urdu are the two languages which are extensively used for teaching/learning purposes mainly because of their widespread acceptance. According to

UNESCO's declaration, mother tongue should be used as medium in early childhood and primary education (UNESCO, 1953). The present paper also focuses on the need to impart knowledge and education through the indigenous language. The sample for this research was taken from Murree's Pahari community which employs Pahari language for its day to day conversation. The sample for this study consists of five parents and five teachers. Through interviews, it was found out why people favored the use of mother tongue in education and how some of them opposed this idea. It was found out that most of the participants opposed the idea of Pahari being the medium of instruction because of its low social, economic and political value.

Introduction.

The value and significance of education for the young and old alike is fully acknowledged all over the world. However, the medium of education is still under debate. Some people are in favor of the native language of the learners and others believe that education should be imparted in the national or any international language. In other words, these people favor the use of English as a medium of education. They argue that international language like English helps the learners to communicate very easily with every other community of the world as it is a language of wider communication. If the language of instruction is not understandable to the learners and they are put in an environment where they do not find any other language except the target language is termed as submersion (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000) which is equal to keeping the learners under water without informing them about the art of swimming. The mother tongue supporters have another point of view. They believe that the child can understand and comprehend his/her mother tongue quite easily because of the environment, geography and communications going on around. For the students who face problems in learning due to weak language ability, instruction in mother tongue is suitable especially in the early stage of education and it is like a relief for them (Matentjie, n.a).

Therefore, the education, if given in foreign language does not suit the cognitive structure of the learners' brain, especially when it comes to the learning of abstract concepts. The cognitive-academic language proficiency (CALP) which is required in school and also in the life after school, progresses gradually. The learners have to absorb and understand these abstract things on the basis of their previous knowledge. It is not possible for a child to develop abstract critical thinking without prior knowledge of his mother tongue. If CALP is not started at school level, he/she may not develop abstract ideas.

On the other hand, if a child is not imparted education in Mother Tongue, the child hardly understands anything in the beginning. He might feel depressed in the classroom. So the student does not evolve his/ her mental thinking faculties. There is also an issue of drop out of children from schools due to this problem. However, when a child finds his mother tongue as a language in which he is taught, he can not only understand the subject matter but also becomes a thinking person.

The benefit of teaching mother tongue is that the child develops his concepts in his first language before he plunges into the realm of second language or third language. According to Cummins (2001) bilingual teaching has many advantages over monolingual teaching. Ball (2010) in his

research report declares that being proficient in one's native language is very important and effective for cognitive development and also educational development. In Mali, the students who were given an opportunity to have their own language as medium of instruction, showed more or less five times less chances of repeating the year and they lessened the chances of dropout by three times (Bender et al., 2005).

In Pakistan, Urdu is not generally the first language. It is mostly the second language. In three provinces the basic education is given in the medium of their local tongue such as Balochi, Sindhi and Pashto. Urdu is taught as a subject. But at the higher classes Urdu becomes the medium and then still in higher classes English replaces Urdu. In Punjab and some other parts of the country, local language teaching is completely nonexistent. Urdu is the medium of education and English works as a subject. Ethiopia which is among the poorest countries of the world has also recommended eight years of mother tongue education. (Gebre, 2013). This experiment in Ethiopia was a success. However, the results were not good for those who did not complete eight years.

In the English medium schools in Pakistan, the children sometimes show better in English as compared to those who have mother tongue as medium. But in this way, gradually, the students employing mother tongue medium develop their abilities in a fast manner; whereas the speed of those who have English as medium slows down. Their knowledge of culture also lags behind. In this way, it looks that the mother tongue as a medium of instruction gave better results. Cummins (1991) gave two theories—Interdependence theory and common underlying proficiency which mean that the first language efficiency supports the second language learning because of the existing concepts which are interpreted in the second language.

Research Questions

- What are the opinions of the parents and teachers towards the suggested usage of language for the children?
- Why are they ambitious to have Urdu and English as instructional languages?
- What are the real reasons which consciously or unconsciously motivated the parents and teachers to prefer Urdu and English?
- A general question which seeks to find out the role of income and area in determining the choice of language.

Research Methodology

The study that we conducted was mainly ethnographic in nature where we acted as participant observers and interviewed the people informally. The population of our research was Pahari speaking community mainly living in Murree and its villages. We selected ten people for detailed interviews. Five people from our Pahari community and five teachers from Government and private schools were selected and then interviewed. It was not a formal kind of interview rather a discussion which was focused on eliciting the general tendency latent in the minds of the people about the use of mother tongue or second language in the schools. We also took notes while we were moving in the area and having chat with people in order to write down the important

excerpts of the people.

Analysis of Data

Through the participant observation, we visited different families, but primarily we interviewed five people from the parents and grandparents whereas, five teachers from both government and private sector. We discussed the results in the following lines:

When we asked the parents about the preferred medium of education in the schools, all five recommended the use of Urdu as a medium of instruction. Even the parent with low income was in favor of Urdu. The irony was that he himself was unable to speak Urdu properly, yet he wished his sons and daughters to use this language.

The parent, who had highest income as compared to the others, also used to speak with his children in Urdu with English code-mixing. He was strong supporter of Urdu and even English for the children. According to him, these two languages should be taught from the beginning eliminating the element of Pahari at every stage. He said that Pahari as a mother tongue could not give any benefit to his children. He felt shame when the children happened to speak Pahari “ I recorded their conversation:

Father: Baita, kia kar rahay ho? (Son! What are you doing?)

Son: Kuch nai, computer pe game khail raha hu. (Nothing, playing game on computer)

Father: Homework kar lia hay na (Have you completed your homework?)

Son: Adha kar lia hay, adha baad ma karu ga. (I have done half; I will do the half later)

In this way we can observe that a craving for Urdu is felt among the rich and the middle class. Even the poor sometimes try to reach their level. In case of grandfathers, Pahari seemed to be the most favored language. They liked it and wanted their children to be taught in this language. One grandfather said:

Pahari wich samjao ta samaj sahih ashni, Urdu wich nikkay ka samjanay hosan, issay ghala fail we hoi gashnay. (If we teach them in Pahari, they will understand but what will they learn in Urdu? which is why they fail).

Upon my question to a participant lady who is matriculated, says that though she has herself received education in the Pahari medium during her primary phase of education, she still believes that Urdu should be the language of instruction because it gives confidence to the students and they can understand the difficult concepts easily. She believes that when the students are exposed to Urdu at a later stage, they find it difficult to digest. However, one participant twenty years of age and belonging to a salaried class/family is completely in favor of Urdu as a medium. He rather thinks that English should be the medium of education. But he laments that teachers of that caliber are not available. He believes that Pahari has very limited scope and the concepts understood in Pahari need to be interpreted in Urdu and then English at a later stage. So why not start with these target languages without wasting time.

From the participation and discussion with these participants, I can conclude that they have their reservations regarding the use of Pahari as a medium of instruction. They think that it is a limited language which cannot give them a greater scope and they will not be prepared for further

education which is in Urdu or English. They also seem to believe that once they develop concepts in one language, they have to reshape them in the cognitive structure of their mind. There is another important thing to say is that Pahari has limited terminology and terms to explain the difficult concepts as these people have suggested.

My interviews and discussion with the school teachers have also been more or less the same. The teachers do not seem to let Pahari be a language of communication. It is rather taken as a stigma (Abbasi & Asif: 2010). The children are not even allowed to speak Pahari in their recess time. It is the strict order of the principal of a private school to use Urdu all the time and if someone is caught speaking Pahari, h/she will be punished. One teacher from the private school says that it may have been possible a few years ago when there were some families which used Pahari in their households. However, according to her, it is not possible at present as people have started using Urdu with their children. Now, the mother tongue is Urdu instead of Pahari. So it is better to use Urdu instead of Pahari.

A female teacher from a private school is, though against Pahari use as instruction, supports to use it for a few students who fail to understand the concepts in Urdu or English. She believes that she has personally observed that the experience was a success. These students showed better understanding and performance once they were taught concepts in the mother tongue.

An old teacher who is going to retire has a little different point of view. He believes that the local language whatever it is should be used as a medium. He gives examples of his own time when so many people got education in Pahari medium and prospered. He even pointed out towards me and said that I perhaps got my education in Pahari medium and even then I made progress. I said yes to his question because my education was also in the Pahari medium which is also my mother tongue. He mentioned the dropout rate of that time with the present and said that today the students leave school due to these language barriers along with other problems.

The difference between the government schools and private schools also becomes evident. The private schools have no space for Pahari because they want to retain Urdu as their medium of instruction. They also claim to be English medium. On the other hand, government schools also favor Urdu but they are not much critical of Pahari language. It is because of the fact that they still have students from far off and poor areas where Urdu is still not used in the households. It is also to be mentioned here that when we talk of household language, it is the language which is spoken with children. For example in Murree, we see almost everyone speaking Pahari with each other in the rural areas. But when it comes to children, the same people switch over to Urdu. So they have two languages in their households, one for children and one for elders.

Conclusion

The overall impact of this discussion is that local language medium though recommended by UNESCO has not been able to attract the people of the minority community of Pahari. The people in general and teachers of the school opine that it is not in the interest of the students to use Pahari as a medium of instruction. They consider it an extra burden on the weak shoulders of the students because they have to shift the languages after each five years. First they will be taught in Pahari, then they will be taught in Urdu and finally if they go for higher education, they

will have to choose English as a medium. So these shifts will weaken their abilities to learn other important things. Teachers of the private and government schools are also critical of Pahari as a medium. So despite the suggestions of the world renowned linguists about the utility of the mother tongue, the trend of its use and application is decreasing in Murree and its suburban areas.

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