

Topic: English As The Medium of Education In Pakistan.

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Essay

"Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world". This is an infamous quote about the importance of Education by Nelson Mandela. Statements and quotes by such personalities are quite inspiring but seldom do we realize the actual meaning and potential of these powerful words. Context, is really important in such cases where a country is not only required to deliver in this arena but also devise policy which caters to all sections of a society. Such is the case of Education in Pakistan, where English is increasingly becoming popular as a medium of instruction. On one hand this popularity is an encouraging development in the face of rapid globalization but on the other hand it has had long lasting impacts on Pakistani society, culture and economy and it continues to impact the society in a positive as well as a negative manner.

The national course of action in this regard has been chaotic, where some administrations have taken significant measures to address the situations, while others have

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only lingered ^{on} to the past policies without catering to the demands of that era.

As a result of this havoc, there is not a comprehensive course of action with regards to curriculum, medium of instruction and budget allocations. This has led to an unprecedented erosion of culture, problems in identity, privatisation of education, prejudiced job market and ever widening social gap between the rich and the poor. A plethora of arguments suggest that English as a medium of education has helped in prosperity to some extent, but it has also caused a variety of problems which damage the socio-cultural fabric of the country.

To begin with, it is crucial to shed light on events of the past which have paved the way for the present education system in Pakistan. The role of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan in this regard can not be overstated. He was the most important figure in the 19th century history of Muslims of subcontinent who made them realize the importance of education, especia-

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by western mode of education. He had the difficult task to make these sidelined and distant from education Muslims realize that the actual freedom will come only by adapting to Western educational norms. He made them realize that the only way to change a system was to become an integral part of that system in the first place. He introduced English literature in all subjects and translated them into Urdu. Moreover, he set up English medium institutes to better integrate Muslims in the society and to elevate their societal status. The most notable of these institutes was the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental college in Aligarh. This marked the beginning of introduction of western education in Muslim institutes and societies.

During his lifetime, the British East India Company introduced a variety of policies in the subcontinent. The most prominent of them was introduction of English language in institutions from the very basic level. But after the 1857 war of independence Muslims were not really ready to be comfortable with such policies so they kept

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themselves away from Western-mode of education which later proved to be disastrous for them. This is where the role of Sir Syed played in an advised Muslims to keep themselves aloof from politics and focus solely on education. English language at the time had become a precursor to British loyalty and guaranteed jobs in respectable institutes like the civil service and other prestigious government jobs. So, upon Sir Syed's awakening, Muslims started to learn the language, adopted the Western-education system and managed to secure well reputed jobs not only in government institutes but also in politics. This greatly aided Muslims in their political advancements and later the independence struggle.

There is no doubt that all of this struggle and movement, specifically by Sir Syed Ahmed Khan and later other Muslim leaders proved to be beneficial to Muslims at the time, but it significantly impacted the later developments in educational institutions especially in Pakistan. The patterns of struggle and institutes had an enormous impact on policy formulation

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and institutional setup in Pakistan. There is an evident colonial hangover in educational norms in the country across all sections of society. We are politically, economically and administratively not a part of British empire but somewhere along the cultural lines, we have not given up on British values in education. The English language has become an integral part of our education whether as a medium of instruction, in casual conversations or in research at higher levels. There is a clear colonial hangover which does not seem to go away in the foreseeable future.

It was extremely important to shed light on previous events which led to the present-day education system in Pakistan. We did that in a retrospective manner. But it is equally important to have a deeper look at the recent policy designs and major developments of the country in this regard. So, let us have a closer look at present trends and developments of English Medium Education in Pakistan.

First and foremost, it is crucial to understand the important statistics which will help

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to substantiate our arguments later. There is no doubt that English medium education is increasingly becoming the norm in modern-day Pakistan. But it is also important to note that public schools still comprise a major portion of schools in Pakistan, and the medium of instruction in these schools is either Urdu or other regional languages. However the situation in major cosmopolitan cities and developed provinces provide a different reality, where the private educational institutes, especially at school level outnumber the public ones. According to a 2017 census of Punjab schools, there were 50 thousand public whereas 60 thousand private schools. which means that there is an increasing trend towards privatisation of education and English as a medium of instruction in these institutions. Such statistical analysis is crucial to understand the disparities in education system of Pakistan.

Drawing on statistical data, the policymakers lay out the frameworks and drafts in any administration. The education policy is no different, there have been numerous attempts throughout Pakistan's history where there were active efforts

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to devise a comprehensive policy framework for the country. This included budgetary provisions like those in Pervez Musharraf era where education spending was 15% of government spending but it was not until 2009, when government of Pakistan was finally able to devise an education policy. Within this policy, an important decision was made with regards to English as a medium of instruction in educational institutions especially the higher education. But unfortunately there were no provisions of sustainable educational priorities or a focus on balancing the public-private institutional ratio, which has exacerbated in the present times and is leaving long-lasting imprints on society.

Additionally, there have been some noteworthy advancements in educational policy formulation throughout the years. After the 2009 policy framework a draft of National Education Policy by the ministry of federal education was proposed in 2016 but it could not be translated into a comprehensive policy. Concentrated efforts were made during the tenure of PM Imran Khan where there were notable efforts to frame a new

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policy in 2018 but it failed due to political unrest in the country before its final drafting in 2021. At present, Pakistan has not been able to formulate a new policy framework which inculcates global standards, modern practices in education and which caters to national needs. This depicts a grim picture of educational institutions and policy making bodies in the country.

The Musharraf era educational policies were mostly influenced by our important role in US war on terror. English was promoted to "modernize" Pakistan's image in front of the world after the deteriorating image projection of Muslims and Pakistan in the international media. The alliance of US pressure at the time and Pakistan's own insecurities led to the so called modernization of the education system.

A retrospective analysis on educational fiasco of the subcontinent and the subsequent effects on present day Pakistan tell us that english medium education was a combination of different movements, policy frameworks and alliance pressures which shaped the country's

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education system to a large extent. Now, it is important to shed light on the effects of this english medium education on Pakistan economy and culture at large.

Firstly, this english mode of education has left remarkable impacts on Pakistani culture. There is an increasing trend of english language as a medium of instruction especially in the private schools. People are becoming increasingly comfortable with english language, especially parents who want their kids to be fluent in the language from the very beginning.

According to Gallup Pakistan, 58% Pakistanis opine that the medium of instruction for higher education in Pakistan should be english. This is equally true to primary and secondary schooling in private institutions. This has lasting impacts on regional languages which are increasingly becoming sidelined. There are more than seventy regional languages spoken throughout Pakistan but due to overwhelming english demand in private schools children are more prone to not be fluent in their mother tongue and other regional languages. This has

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led to an erosion of cultural heritage. If this trend persists in the present pace, it is very likely that in the coming decades, these regional languages will be completely sidelined. Hence English as a medium of instructions has become an indirect threat to regional languages in Pakistan.

This trend does not only remain with educational institutions, rather it has a tendency to create social hierarchies especially in developing countries like Pakistan. According to numerous studies and surveys, private schools include mostly, people from upper-middle and elite classes while public schools include people from lower-middle and poor classes. The underlying cause is the economic means but English language also plays an important role here. Children from private schools like the Beaconhouse Franchise are considered smart and confident primarily due to their fluency in English language. While on the other hand, children from government schools are known to be underconfident and are judged based on their inability in fluency of a foreign language. This exacerbates the already wide class

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gap in Pakistani society. These arguments are a fool proof that English as a medium of education in Pakistan is increasingly becoming a metric of social status.

Furthermore, private institutions are in high demand in Pakistan, as they are considered a metric of elevated social status and provide ample growth opportunities to students in their formative years. This has led to a sudden rise in private institutions in Pakistan. The trend is not just limited to relatively progressive provinces like Punjab but is also on the rise in less progressive provinces like Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. According to BISE Abbottabad there are approximately 2000 private institutions in Abbottabad alone which has a small population of 1.3 million people. Reportedly, ^{have more} parents of these children confidence in educational policies and curriculum of private institutes. On one hand where it ensures healthy competition between private sector it increasingly marginalises the govt and public schools and ultimately the Urdu medium of instruction in these areas. Hence, a sudden rise in private institutions has led to market driven schooling in Pakistan.

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In addition to this, accelerated private school growth and related english medium education system has led to commercialization of education. Education institutes all over Pakistan have become a brand. This is relatively a novel phenomenon in the country, but is growing at an unprecedented pace. This trend of branding is not only limited to schools but has also engulfed higher educational institutes. Private universities like LUMS, IBA, BNU are not just institutes but brands which guarantee a stable job. They are branded such because of their Western mode of education with english as the primary medium of instruction. The major chunk of population in these institutes belong to the top 20 percent richest strata of Pakistan, which reiterates the argument that Western and english medium institutes are 'branded' as elite and more progressive.

Coupled with this trend is another trend which is the prejudiced job market. As stated above these Western-mode branded institutions charge so high because they guarantee job security. Recruiters from industries of all

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kind and other multi-national corporations demand degrees from such institutions. Sometimes a mere degree, without any relevant experience is sufficient to hire such individuals. Whereas people from public universities with far better degrees and diplomas in addition to relevant experience remain unemployed. Majority of these people, if they find a job, are persuaded to do underpaid work. In short they are over-qualified and underpaid whereas as people from branded institutes are underqualified and overpaid. The underlying reason for this branding is English medium standards which is directly responsible for a prejudiced job market.

All of these arguments substantiate the claim that English as a medium of instruction in Pakistan has created widespread class difference in almost all aspects of life. But it is also important to reflect on whether this guarantees progress or prosperity for a country like Pakistan or not.

There is no doubt about the fact that English language is increasingly becoming global and is vital to navigate an increasingly globalised and intertwined world.

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It is equally encouraging the countries like Pakistan are navigating this change in world with emphasis to learn this language at all segments of society. On the contrary, it is also important to give due importance to regional and national language Urdu. Pakistan has to grow out of the ideology that English medium education directly ensures progress and prosperity. More emphasis on English medium education means more progressive and civil population. The reality is far from it. It tells a whole another tale. If this ideology were true, then so many children in Pakistan would not be out of school. There would not be rising extremism all over the country given the number of private schools and there would definitely be easy and better access to education for all.

The argument deepens with taking into account some case studies of progressive countries where there is more emphasis on quality of education rather than mode of instruction. Developed countries in Nordic region, like Finland, have a widespread policy of providing elementary education

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strictly in their national language, Finnish. There is widespread understanding of this language in general population. The introduction of other languages is not outrightly avoided but rather introduced at secondary levels as a foreign language. This allows for a healthy space for both languages to grow and offer education based in strong ethnic roots.

Similarly in China, the medium of instruction across China is Standard Mandarin Chinese. All state schools and most private schools teach in Chinese based on the Beijing dialect. Both of these countries have a highly progressive education systems and one of the best in the world. On the contrary there is no such policy for integrating regional and national languages into curriculum. Rather these languages are associated with backwardness and low social status. According to a survey of Gallup Pakistan, 1 in 5 Pakistanis opine that society does not give enough respect to government school teachers. These statistics provide a grim picture for Pakistan's public education sector. Pakistan

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can learn from examples of China and Finland and build a framework parallel to their while keeping their unique societal, economical and cultural practices in check. Such comprehensive policies can help reduce the societal gap and provide better access to quality education for all segments of society.

Succinctly put, it can be said on a variety of different arguments that English as a medium of instruction may aid Pakistan to prosper in a more globalised world but in the bigger picture it is equally important to take regional languages and Urdu into consideration, as English as a primary and most widespread medium of instruction in educational institutions has led to a variety of socio-cultural problems. Most notable of these problems are sidelining of regional languages, erosion of national culture; increasing trend of private education leading to a widening societal gap between the rich and the poor. Moreover, it has led to branding of institutions where public institutes are

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considered to be low quality. Parents are also more likely to tilt towards these branded institutions furthering the social gap.

Increased trend of private, western mode institutes also leads to a more prejudiced job market. Pakistan needs to develop a comprehensive

policy framework to inculcate Urdu and other regional languages into the system and devise methods to detach the shame associated

with Urdu-medium institutions. As this shame not only exacerbates class divisions but also

has negative implications on cultural identity and nationalism. There is an urgent need for

a robust policy which will ^{catapult} ~~take~~ Pakistan from list of underdeveloped into developing countries.