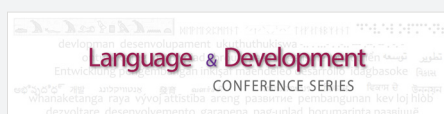


Changing Language- in-Education Policy in Pakistan

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Introduction

Over the past few years the attitude of the policymakers in Pakistan has started changing (Liljegren and Akhunzada, 2017:69). These changes mark a significant move toward recognising all people's linguistic and cultural rights. This paper outlines the policy changes that have taken place at education level in the country recently. The lack of supportive policies were creating barriers to include mother tongue of children from diverse ethno-linguistic groups in pedagogy and learning. It also attempts to determine what factors have contributed to changing the language attitudes and policies in Pakistan. This paper is a literature review, but is also informed by data derived from the author's personal experiences in language research. The main findings of this research form the basis for this paper.

With more than 70 languages, Pakistan is a country with linguistic and cultural diversity. Until recently, however, this diversity has not been fully recognised by central and provincial governments in their language policies. Apart from Urdu, which is the mother tongue of only eight per cent of the national population, the remaining languages have been given very little attention by subsequent governments over the years. Urdu, which is supported by the state, and English, a remnant of British colonial rule, are the two languages of power in the country. Neither of these languages is indigenous. Urdu is the mother tongue of immigrants who moved to Pakistan after partition when colonial rule of the British ceased in India in 1947, when two states, Pakistan and India, came into existence. Pakistan, the newly created state, made Urdu the medium of instruction in government-owned schools all over the country. The justification for giving Urdu the status of the national language was that it was an identity marker between Hindus and Muslims.

In the first educational conference held soon after the creation of Pakistan, it was demanded that Urdu be made the lingua franca of Pakistan and be included in school curriculums as a compulsory subject. State agencies accepted the demand and initiated work to promote Urdu. The new state also inherited a governing system from the British. The official language of the British to run the state affairs in India was English. The state continued the system and, to this day, has not been able to replace English with Urdu or any indigenous language. Many plans have been developed to replace English with Urdu as the official language, but they remain unimplemented.

One of the reasons is that, for many, English is considered the language of the elite class. In addition, government administrations, also a remnant of British rule, do not want to replace English with Urdu or indigenous languages. Many believe that bureaucrats use English as a class marker and for upward social mobility. The elite class wants to preserve its privilege and employment advantage by maintaining English as the official language (Rahman, 2019:366).

English is taught in government and private schools as a compulsory subject from Grade One and it is also a medium of instruction in high fee-charging elite private schools¹. Only Urdu and English have been used to run state affairs and the schooling system. Resources were spent on the promotion of Urdu with the result that other languages were largely ignored by the government. With Urdu as the medium of instruction in government-owned schools, children from all other language communities had to learn it from their first day in school. The policies that focused only on Urdu and English were a primary factor that contributed to the marginalisation of indigenous peoples (Coleman,

¹ There are four categories of schools in the country. High fee-charging elite private schools where the medium of instruction is English, low fee-charging private schools where English as a medium of instruction is claimed but not practised, government-owned schools and Madrasas, both of which use Urdu as the medium of instruction.

2010; Jan, 2016; Jhingran, 2019) because they had to learn these two languages in order to complete an education and to find well-paying jobs (Jan, 2016).

The constitution of the country, established in 1973, gives Urdu the status of the national language of the country and also allows provincial legislative assemblies to promote the teaching of provincial languages in addition to Urdu. However, the provincial governments have not been able to include provincial languages in school curricula due to the centralisation of power, especially central government, dealing with educational issues and policies. Only two indigenous languages, Sindhi and Pashto, were part of the government-owned schools because influential speakers of these two languages did not allow them to be ignored. Pashto was the medium of instruction in Pashto-speaking districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province from

Grade One to Grade Five, and Sindhi was the medium of instruction at the primary level in Sindh province² (Coleman, 2010:15). Federal government policies did not promote or preserve the majority of indigenous languages of the country. Sometimes languages were ignored by categorising them as 'regional languages' or naming them 'small dialects'. Their justification was that they believed these languages were not fulfilling people's needs sufficiently to be made official or to be used as the media of instruction in schools because most of the languages lacked literature and were only used orally. A further justification is the argument that Urdu is widely spoken by most people in the country (Jhingran, 2019:50). While it is true that Urdu has become a widely used literal language, the number of mother-tongue Urdu speakers remains below ten per cent of the population.

Changing the language-in-education policy

In recent years, discussion about language issues by a growing number of policymakers have led to attempts to change relevant articles of the nation's constitution and specific policies at the provincial level. A number of factors motivated the policymakers to discuss the issue and the formation of language-in-education policy to recognise the linguistic and cultural right of people. Below is a summary of the steps that the central and provincial governments have taken so far.

In 2009, a new education policy of the country was released by the federal government stating that the teaching curriculum should include Urdu, English and a regional language (Ministry of Education Government of Pakistan, 2009). In the policy, the provinces were given a free hand to select the language(s) of their choice as a medium of instruction for schools operating in their provinces.

In 2014, for the first time, the Standing Committee on Information, Broadcasting and National Heritage of the National Assembly

invited people from the indigenous language communities to discuss issues related to their languages. The committee identified 22 languages to receive the status of national languages and also recommended the establishment of a central-level public organisation to address these and other language issues (National Assembly of Pakistan, 2014). Unfortunately, the bill was rejected by other committee members who suggested that it would undermine national unity.

Another legislative-level attempt was made in February 2017. The Standing Committee on Law, Justice and Human Rights of Senate, the Upper House of Parliament, held a public meeting. Drafts of two bills of a constitutional amendment were discussed at the meeting. Both bills demanded 'national language' status for some provincial languages.

² According to Ghulam Rasool Chandio. ((personal communication) 24 January 2019), Sindhi language is the medium of instruction up to Grade 10. The inclusion of Sindhi in the school curriculum is a continuation of British-era Policy. The British made Sindhi an official language of Sindh in 1854 (Allana, 1969). Sindhi language activists never allowed the government to remove their language from the school curriculum (Rahman, 2019:372). There are some government bodies working to develop the language; they are Sindhi Language Authority, Sindhi Adabi Board and Sindhi Departments in the government universities in the Sindh province.

At the end of 2011, the Provincial Cabinet of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province decided to include five indigenous languages in the school curriculum as compulsory subjects to teach in their respective areas. The government has since developed curriculum guidelines for these five languages. The development of coursebooks accordingly on four languages is in progress. Indus-Kohistani is one language included in this process, but work on it has not yet started because of a conflict between the Indus Kohistani language group and a Shina language group in the Indus Kohistani district. The Shina language group is arguing that their language is also Kohistani, and therefore should be included

in the process, and a group has taken their case to court. Apart from Book Two, which is incomplete and on hold because of a court order, books up to Grade Four for Pashto, Hindko, Saraiki and Khowar have been finalised and printed in addition to Kindergarten books and supplied to schools (Table 1). Books for Grade Five are under review, and Grade Six books are still being drafted. The books also have been distributed in government schools.

The government also passed the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Promotion of Regional Languages Authority Act

Language	Year	Primer	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Hindko	2018	126,900	88,840	On hold	0	
	2019	102,680	71,905	On hold	53,187	
	2020	95,786	78,815	On hold	70,268	65,226
Khowar	2018	18,330	13,880	On hold	0	
	2019	12,031	10,060	On hold	9,012	
	2020	12,510	11,335	On hold	9,750	8,810
Pashto	2018	1,063,000	768,000	On hold	0	
	2019	891,867	780,487	On hold	610,575	
	2020	917,827	758,092	On hold	599,478	552,417
Saraiki	2018	31,250	21,470	On hold	0	
	2019	28,350	16,400	On hold	11,700	
	2020	47,880	24,850	On hold	15,865	10,150

Table 1: Number of books the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Textbook Board developed and supplied to District Education Officers from 2018³-2020 for students of government-run schools

2012 (The Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Promotion of Regional Languages Authority Act 2012, 2012) in the Provincial Assembly to establish a public organisation to safeguard the languages of the province, but it was not given practical shape

owing to the change of government in the province in May 2013 in general elections. Fortunately, the decision of the previous government to include the languages in the curriculum has been kept intact.

³The Textbook Board prints books according to the number demanded by District Education officers. They typically demand ten per cent more books than the number of students enrolled in the government schools to cover damaged books and additional needs in case of increased enrolment. In the case of Pashto, the body also prints some additional books to fulfil the demands of private schools.

In January 2014, the Balochistan provincial cabinet decided to include Balochi, Brahui, Pashto, Persian (also known as Farsi)⁴ and Sindhi in the educational curriculum of the province (Shah, 2014). In the same year, the Balochistan Assembly passed a bill, The Balochistan Introduction of Mother Languages as Compulsory Additional Subject at Primary Level Act 2014 (The Balochistan Introduction of Mother Languages as Compulsory Additional Subject at Primary Level Act, 2014). The bill directed the provincial government to develop

books in the mother tongues for the schools. Syllabi for languages up to Grade Five have been prepared. The development of books in the five languages is in progress. Until now books for Grade Four (Table 2), including primers, in the languages have been developed and provided to schools. Books for Grade Five are at the printing stage. The government also increased the annual funding for the private academies established by Balochi, Brahui, Hazaragi and Pashto language communities for the preservation and promotion of their mother tongues.

Language	Primer	Book 1	Book 2	Book 3	Book 4
Balochi	in stock	40,100	43,800	7,950	24,000
Brahui	in stock	in stock	49,850	in stock	48,000
Pashto	in stock	46,100	15,400	in stock	30,000
Persian	in stock	in stock	in stock	in stock	3,000
Sindhi	in stock	26,770	in stock	in stock	1,800

Table 2: Books the Balochistan Textbook Board ordered to be printed in five languages for the academic year 2020

In Gilgit-Baltistan, five languages, Shina, Khowar, Balti, Burushashki and Wakhi, have been selected to be included in the school curriculum. In the province's educational strategy (Gilgit Baltistan Educational Strategy 2015–30, 2014:ii) it states: 'The medium of instruction for the first three years of the learner's education to be the mother tongue wherever possible; thereafter Urdu or English according to local decision.'. In August 2016, the legislative assembly passed a resolution to ensure that the languages of the province are made part of the government-owned school syllabi (Mir, 2016).

This put pressure on the government to initiate work in the direction toward the implementation of the education strategy. The government allocated budgetary funds to revitalise the languages, organise meetings of local writers to address orthography issues of the languages and sponsor a conference hosted by Karakorum University in the province. Scholars from other provinces were invited to the conference to seek their advice for the revitalisation of the languages. The government has created committees for each language comprising

⁴The bill was intended to benefit the Hazaragi language (ISO 639-3, haz) but it has been called Persian in the bill. Members of the community have stated that their language is different from Persian and should be given its correct name in legislation.

literary people tasked with developing books for the schools (Yaad, 2017). The committees of Shina, Burushaski, and Wakhi languages have finalised primers in their languages to be taught in government schools. The government has also completed paperwork required to establish a new government body called the Gilgit Baltistan Academy for Regional Languages, Art and Culture. The main goal of the academy is to develop a curriculum for schools up to Grade Five.

The change in the attitude of the government towards the languages has been a long-awaited demand of the mother-tongue speakers of indigenous languages. The speakers wanted the government to support their mother tongues in the same way it has supported Urdu.

Factors resulting in changes to language education policies

A number of factors have caused language-in-education policies to change in Pakistan. These are outlined below. Each has played a major role

in bringing about changes in the attitude of government officials and the formulation of new language-in-education policies.

Growing body of research and documentation

The research and documentation on the languages of the region started during the British rule with the Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson, 1903). More efforts began in the 1980s, led by foreign and local researchers jointly. According to Liljegren (2018:429): 'From the 1980s and onward, a conscious effort was made to record undocumented languages.' He adds that the foreign scholars who carried out the research engaged local speakers of these languages. In the 1980s and 1990s, SIL International, in collaboration with the National Institute of Pakistan Studies and Quaid-i-Azam University, surveyed the languages of the northern mountainous regions of the country. The survey provided detailed information about 30 distinct languages of the area, further highlighting the linguistic and cultural heritage of the country.

Then, in 2002, the Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI) started work on documentation of the languages of the region. As a result of FLI's support in the form of training, motivation and publication, people from these language communities developed the ability to document their own mother tongues. They created and published numerous resources in and about their languages and cultures including the curriculum used in newly established Mother-Tongue Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE) schools (Liljegren, 2018:432–3; Rehman and Sagar, 2015). They successfully challenged the impression that the languages of the region are not developed, and that they do not have literature to be able to be taught in schools.

In 2010, the British Council released a report carried out by Hywel Coleman, a research fellow at the University of Leeds. The report suggested

a 'dream language policy', which included a proposal to teach children in their mother tongue. The report asked the government to establish schools in the seven major languages of the country (Coleman, 2010:44). This was debated during a series of meetings by

academics and policymakers (Coleman and Capstick, 2012:7). Unfortunately, it did not lead directly to any overt change in government policy, but it was an important conversation and prompted many in the media and public to begin discussing the issue.

Increasing language activism

Language activism at both the national and international levels also impacted policy formulation in Pakistan. Language activists struggled for the preservation and promotion of their mother tongues by establishing formal and informal community-based organisations. Activists celebrate International Mother Languages Day each year, compile books in their mother tongue, sponsor poetry sessions, conferences and seminars. Many have established mother-tongue-based multilingual education schools, some have advocated for policy change on behalf of their own and other language communities. As a result, many awareness-raising campaigns have been organised in local communities. These groups write articles for newspapers, participate in television talk shows, hold walks, and develop websites and social media pages in and concerning their respective languages. They invite policymakers, civil servants, scholars of

majority language speakers to their events and encourage those in attendance to draft and pass resolutions. They submit formal requests to government offices for the rights of their mother tongue. They have successfully conveyed their demands to the government and removed many of the misconceptions of the people from these communities that education in their mother tongue is stepping backward. They have, in fact, demonstrated that using the mother tongue as a medium of instruction is one of the keys to improving student learning in the classroom.

Similarly, international language activism for language rights, language use and mother-tongue-based multilingual education has also impacted policy formulation. Pakistan, for example, is a signatory of the Dakar Framework of Action 2000, which emphasises the use of the mother tongue for early childhood education.

The role of the media

The media is another factor that has influenced policy formulation. Both print and electronic media have highlighted the issues of the languages and have covered events related to language activism. They have conveyed messages from these communities, especially of language activists, to policymakers and to the general public. It has been a longstanding demand of these people that the State recognises their mother tongues as well as recognising and supporting their work.

Numerous articles have appeared in all of the major newspapers regarding the importance of mother tongue in education (Mustafa, 2012; Torwali, 2016). A resolution in Gilgit-Baltistan assembly, for instance, was tabled when the media gave coverage to the event organised by the Forum for Language Initiatives (FLI) for the journalists of the Province. The media has also highlighted events over the last decade that FLI and its networks have organised in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province.

Recent constitutional amendments

Pakistan is a federal state comprised of four provinces named Sindh, Punjab, Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (formerly North-West Frontier Province), autonomous and

self-governing Gilgit Baltistan region (formerly called Northern Areas) and the self-governing state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Map of Pakistan

Until recently, the provinces and other administrative units were not fully autonomous, and it was a longstanding demand of the provinces to enhance their powers. In April 2010, the federal government added the 18th Amendment, written to enhance provincial autonomy, to the country's constitution. This amendment shifted 18 ministries from the Federal Government to the provinces including the Ministry of Education, which means the

provinces were given power to legislate for these ministries (Rizwan, Arshad and Waqar, 2014). The provincial governments took this new opportunity to start developing educational policies of their own and include more languages in the domain of education. The governments of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan have taken concrete steps to include more languages from their constituencies in the policies.

Language and identity factors

Language and identity factors have increasingly influenced nationalist politics, which, in turn, has led to more language-inclusive policies. Many political parties in Pakistan are ethno-nationalist and want to empower the ethnic groups they represent. The Awami National Party (ANP), for example, is struggling for language, identity and cultural rights of the Pashtuns. The party's manifesto is based on the philosophy of Khan Abdul Ghafar Khan (1890–1987), who was a famous nationalist leader of the Pashtuns. He used their language, Pashto, as an identity marker (Rahman, 1996:137). When provinces were given autonomy, this party was in power in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It took the opportunity to promote Pashto. In a cabinet

meeting, they decided to include Pashto in the school curriculum for the entire province. The plan of the government was criticised by the language activists of other languages because Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is home to more than 25 languages with varying populations. Some scholars of the Pashto language did approve of the plan while members of the provincial assembly from other language groups in the cabinet did not accept the plan. As a result, the party revised its plan and included four other major languages of the province to be taught in the schools. Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province was the first province to benefit from this outcome because of its manifesto to support the Pashto language and identity.

Provincial status as a factor

Situated in the Northeast of the country, Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) is another culturally and linguistically diverse administrative unit of the country. The unit is home to five major languages: Shina, Khowar, Balti, Wakhi and Burushashki⁵. Gilgit-Baltistan has been given the status of a separate administrative unit, which means that it has had a province-like status of the country with its own legislative assembly since September 2009. Prior to this, it was an 'agency' (Parekh, 2018) and was administrated

directly by the Federal Government. The status change empowered the unit to develop its own education strategy. In August 2016, a resolution was tabled in the GB Assembly to ensure the inclusion of all languages in school syllabi (Mir, 2016). In addition, owing to language activism and awareness, the government of GB felt the need to develop the cultural heritage of the area and include it in the school curriculum as well.

⁵ Gilgit-Baltistan is home to six indigenous languages: Shina, Khowar, Balti, Burushashki, Domaaki and Wakhi. The number of Domaaki speakers are very low – in hundreds – and scattered. There are also some very recent immigrant Pashto, Kohistani, Uigur and Gojri speakers (Kreutzmann, 2005).

Remaining challenges

All these initiatives have come from the smaller provinces of the country. We are still hoping that the bigger provinces, namely Punjab and Sindh, will take similar steps. Punjabi is among the top 20 most-spoken languages of the world with more than 100 million speakers living in India and Pakistan (Eberhard, Gary and Charles, 2020). In Pakistan, it is also the most widely spoken language with speakers making up 44 per cent of the national population (census, 2001; cited by Rahman, 2019:365). In addition, it is also a language rich in literature.

In India, Punjabi is a language of power, where it is used as the official language of the Punjab Province, but in Pakistan it is not used in any domain of power. Tariq Rahman (2019:365) argues that the Punjabi elite are thinking that they gave up their own mother tongue for Urdu in order to unify the federal units of the country. It has been observed that Pakistani Punjabi speakers feel inferior in associating themselves with Punjabi. As a result, they prefer to use Urdu over their own mother tongue. The majority of Punjabi speakers live in the Punjab province, and so the Provincial Government of Punjab is the least interested of all provincial governments in considering these language issues. When the education portfolio was shifted to the provinces, the government of Punjab issued an executive order making English the medium of instruction in some government-owned schools (Rahman, 2019:368), but, not surprisingly, it was withdrawn later owing to poor results in schools. Even though there is a lot of literature available in Pakistani Punjabi, there is none written for school-aged children or used in children's schools. Even Punjabi is not allowed to be spoken in elite English-medium private schools in the province (Rahman, 2010:27).

Saraiki is another widely spoken language in the province. It was officially recognised in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, but in Punjab, where the majority of speakers live, the attitude of the provincial government toward it is the same as Punjabi. The other main language of the province is Pahari-Potwari. These also have been given little attention by the government. In Sindh, only Sindhi is taught in schools, but other languages are also spoken in the Province. The Provincial

Government of Sindh has not taken any steps for the promotion and preservation of the languages. Parkari, Kachi and Balochi language communities living in Sindh also have established their own MTB-MLE schools, but they have not been recognised by the provincial government (Rahman, 2018:376).

Although the Khyber Pakhtunkwa government has made more progress than the Punjab and the Sindh, its policies have not incorporated all the languages within its jurisdiction. Only five major languages have been made part of the curriculum while the province has around 25 languages, many of which fulfil the criteria to be officially recognised and included in the school curriculum. The number of speakers of these languages is considerable, and many of them also have writing systems and their own publications. Some, like Palula, Gawri and Torwali languages communities, are managing their own MTB-MLE schools (Liljegren and Akhunzada, 2017:37; Liljegren, 2018:432–3; Rahman, 2019:376; Rehman and Sagar, 2015:116–21). Gojri and Kalasha languages are also taught in their communities' schools as a subject. Kohistani Shina, Dameli, Gawarbat, Ushojo, and Yidgha also have writing systems and publications, which could be made part of the schools' educational materials.

The new policies of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan include some languages in their provinces as subjects to be taught in government-run schools. However, a better approach is for the medium of instruction to be in the children's mother tongue, at least at the primary grade level, in order to provide a more learner-friendly environment to students. This will not only provide a better learning environment for the children but will also help to preserve and promote the linguistic and cultural heritage of the country. A three-year study of The Citizen Foundation (2020) carried out in Sindh province has been released recently and has found the current education system ineffective. The study recommended the MTB-MLE approach and systematic transition to national and international languages. Zubeida Mustafa (2021), a renowned journalist and supporter of MTB-MLE, admired the study.

Conclusion and future research

This study has revealed that discussions at the central government level to address the issues of indigenous language communities of Pakistan, while slow to begin, have led to some positive changes in language policies. At the provincial level, three governments have included some of the languages of their provinces in their respective school curricula and have started work on implementing their new policies. Resources in these provincial-level languages are being produced in two provinces and teachers have begun using the new resources in the classroom. All of these steps are a move towards recognising the importance of indigenous languages at the institutional level and are evidence of some change in the attitudes of those in authority.

As described above, many factors have contributed to change these policies in the country. Provincial autonomy, for instance, empowered the provinces to develop their own education policies and to include the languages of their constituencies in the school curriculum. As long as the provinces remain autonomous and have the authority to develop and implement education policy, more indigenous languages will be included in the official curriculum. However, there are many more indigenous languages within Pakistan that remain excluded from the curriculum, and until that changes children from those languages will

continue to be disadvantaged and feel marginalised.

There are other challenges to successfully and fully implement the policies described in this paper. For instance, most government schools lack trained teachers to teach the languages. Future research should explore the factors which hinder the implementation of effective language-in-education policies, and present some helpful recommendations to the relevant government officials and policymakers.

Currently central government has drafted a new bill dealing with the school curriculum to be implemented both in private and public schools all over the country from next academic year, due to start in April 2021. The bill does not reveal anything regarding medium of instruction or mother tongues of children, but the Education Minister in a television interview said that provinces will be free to choose Urdu or mother tongue as a medium of instruction. The policy will provide further freedom to the federating units to use mother tongue as medium of instruction and will support the progress that has so far has been made. Such changes in policy are necessary to recognise the language and cultural diversity of the country at institutional level. This is a new factor that needs to be observed and potentially addressed more fully in a future paper.

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