



## **Boons of Multilingualism: Socio-cultural Implications of Multilingual Education System at Elementary Level in Pakistan**

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### **Abstract**

Language is at the basis of ideas, thoughts, communication, knowledge, inventions, education, science, technology, and many other countless things. The objective of this study was to explore the positive contributions related to socio-cultural development and socialization of individuals and society at large, due to the prevalence of multilingual education system at elementary level in Pakistan, over which the learners establish their basis for future learning. For this purpose, at random, 50 teaching professionals of elementary level were face-to-face interviewed from district Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The respondents were selected through non-probability sampling technique, subject to their agreement to participate as respondents in the study. The learning of different languages was found to be significant: the learning of native language by the learners was found indispensable for the preservation of one's own identity, history, ethnicity, culture, and for the linking of oneself to one's community, whether small or large, the learning of the national language, Urdu, was found significant for linking oneself to one's national community, and the learning of English was found significant for establishing links with the global community. It is recommended that all individuals of our society must try learning their mother tongue, their regional languages, along with learning their national language, Urdu, for national connectivity, and learning English or any other main international languages for establishing greater global connectivity, in addition to reaping socio-cultural, political, and economic benefits.

**Key Words:** Education, Language, Multilingualism, Social, sociocultural.

### **1. Introduction**

Language is the medium of expression, communication, learning, and transmission of knowledge. When a learner learns in more than one language, he/she grows with broader



sociocultural horizon, and more avenues of academics, research, and social world open to him/her. Multilingualism is the ability of an individual speaker or a community of speakers to communicate effectively in three or more languages. A person who can speak one language is called monolingual, and who can speak multiple languages is known as a polyglot or a multilingual. Due to multilingualism, the individual's thinking and cognitive processes are linked with different spheres, because he/she processes different languages which opens for him/her many more developed vistas of science, technology, developments, inventions, and material related to culture, social science and linguistics; He/she learns from historical, anthropological and archaeological findings in different languages. Language serves us as a tool that helps us in understanding reality and multilingualism opens up possibilities and provides platform for changing the minds of people positively. Chumbow (2009) found enough evidence to claim that globally multilingualism is the norm whereas monolingualism as an exception; therefore, the advantages of multilingualism need to be identified, exploited, and used for individuals' growth and national development.

## **2. Research Design**

With respect to the analysis of the primary data, this is a quantitative research. It has used both the primary and the secondary data. It is exploratory on account of its approach to phenomenal study, and empirical in the context of its scientific validity.

The detailed methodology of the study is described as follows: -

### **2.1 Postulation of the Research**

“The existence of multilingualism in a society, and especially in its education system do positively shape the learning, academics, personalities, and sociocultural development of learners. It helps learners to extend their social circle, sociability, social links, and social interaction. Multilinguals are linked with variant social identities, histories, languages, cultures, arts, literature, social realities, economic opportunities, political advantages, and philosophies around globe”.



## **2.2 Universe of the Study**

The data for this research study was collected from the elementary level teaching professionals either of the government or private sector of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Province of Pakistan. The universe was delimited to the district Peshawar of the province.

## **2.3 Sampling and Sampling Procedure**

Both from government and private schools, 100 teaching professionals, teaching languages to students from grade 1<sup>st</sup> to grade 10<sup>th</sup>, were selected at random, and were interviewed. Being language teachers, they were cognizant of the phenomenon of multilingualism and of its implications in the sociocultural development of learners. Currently in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pashto, Hindko, Seraiki, and Khovar are taught as regional/local languages; Urdu as national language; Arabic as religious and foreign language, and English as official and foreign language.

## **2.4 Process of Data Collection and Its Analysis**

Secondary data including different related books, publications, reports, news, and research papers were analyzed, and the matter chosen from them was properly cited and referenced. Primary data was collected through the structured interview schedule as a tool. To make the interview schedule more objective, purposive, and suitable to the interviewees' level, it was readjusted and modified after its pre-testing. After collecting the required data from the respondents on interview response sheet, it was put on the classification sheets to make the responses easier to analyze. After classification, the data was properly tabulated and then described in textual format.

# **3. Literature**

## **3.1 The Concept of Multilingualism**



According to Crystal (1992) language is known to be the “conventional and systematic use of sounds, signs and written symbols in a human society”. This system of organized symbols and signs, governed by certain rules is employed by humans as a medium for the acquisition of a particular function, mainly for the sake of communication and self-expression. Hence, the usage of more than one language for the said purposes gave birth to the concept of “multilingualism”. The term “multilingualism” is derived from the Latin words, “multi”, meaning many, and “lingua”, meaning language.

Bloomfield (1935) defined bilingualism as “the native-like control of two languages”, which underscores the ability to speak the languages perfectly, while Macnamara (1967) stated it to be the minimal competence of a person in a language other than his mother tongue, with respect to any one of the four language skills i.e. either in listening, reading, speaking or writing. For instance, Titone (1972) stated that bilingualism is the individual’s capacity to speak a second language while following the concepts and structures of the language, instead of paraphrasing from a mother tongue. It is established that a multilingual person is able to understand and speak more than one languages with basic proficiency. Multilingualism is acquired through a number of factors, and through methods such as at-home education and national education policies.

The European Commission (2007), for example, defines multilingualism as “the ability of societies, institutions, groups and individuals to engage, on a regular basis, with more than one language in their day-to-day lives.” In similar ways, Li (2008) looks at multilinguals as “anyone who can communicate in more than one language, be it active (through speaking and writing) or passive (through listening and reading).” Li confirms that a multilingual person, group, or setting engenders basic proficiency in the use, speaking, or understanding of more than one language.

### **3.2 Consideration of Multilingualism as Advantageous from that of being Disadvantageous**

Until about 60 years ago, “widespread belief” and “scientific evidence” converged on the conclusion that exposing children to more than one language was a potentially dangerous experience. The expectation was that children would display “mental confusion” (Saer, 1923) and show signs of “mental retardation” (Goodenough, 1926). This view was eventually



challenged by a study by Peal and Lambert (1962) in which the researchers predicted that monolingual and bilingual children would be equivalent on measures of nonverbal intelligence but that bilinguals would obtain lower scores on verbal measures. While, to their surprise, bilingual children outperformed their monolingual peers on essentially all of the tests, including nonverbal intelligence. In contrast to the earlier descriptions, therefore, Peal and Lambert (1962) argued that bilingual children showed enhanced “mental flexibility”, perhaps as a consequence of having to switch between languages. They also demonstrated cognitive advantages for bilingual children. Thus was born the idea of a “bilingual advantage” and an active area of research investigating its qualitative nature, its limiting boundaries, and its possible causes soon followed.

### **3.3 Advantages of Multilingualism**

On social advantages, Cook (2001) expresses that the multilinguals do have a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, and they learn reading more easily. Multilinguals, therefore, are not restricted to a single world-view, but also have a better understanding that other outlooks are possible. The multilingual children are exposed to more diverse social experiences; consequently they become adept at considering other people’s perspectives, making them more effective communicators. Similarly, Kolb (2012) found multilingualism, as a social and cultural benefit, which grants access to connect with people. This is especially evident in social settings where a proficiency in a foreign language is required for effective communication with speakers of other native languages, and the multilingualism is usually linked with fostering a better understanding of other-cultures. And afterwards, Berdan (2014) also expressed that a multilingual not only has an edge in social exchanges, he/she also has better knowledge on the experiences, history and society of foreign lands, thereby, attaining a more comprehensive, multicultural outlook.

On psychological advantages, Landry (1973) found that the multilinguals have proven to be more creative and apt with respect to flexible thinking ability, that the multilinguals have the ability to depart from the traditional approaches to a problem – multilingual competence equip them with possible rich resources for new and different ideas. Similarly, Foster and Reeves



(1989) found multilingualism helpful in cognitive development and enhanced academic performance. In the same way, Mohanty (1992) stated advantages of multilingualism in cognitive, linguistic, and academic performances. He reported that studies have proven that the bilinguals outperform the monolinguals on a number of cognitive, linguistic, and metalinguistic tasks.

Ricciardelli (1993) found that multilingual students excelled on creativity, cognitive development, metalinguistic awareness, and reading achievement. Furthermore, Stephens (1997) pointed out that multilingual children excelled in social problem solving. Moreover, Kormi-Nouri, Moniri and Nilsson (2003) shared that the multilingualism leads to an increase in both episodic memory and semantic memory at all age levels. In a similar study, May, Hill, and Tiakiwai (2004) found that in terms of communicative sensitivity, multilingual children are more likely to experience higher self-confidence, stronger willingness to communicate, and be less worried about making mistakes, and they are also more sensitive to nuances in communication.

On linguistic and communicative advantages, Dickinson and Chaney (1997) have mentioned the benefits of communicative ability and communicative competence of multilinguals, as it develops their linguistic competence in other languages and broadens their content exposures of different academic/literary materials across linguistic boundaries. The multilingual children exhibit stronger and more effective social communication skills; they are competent to communicate in various social settings more effectively, and their world-views and outlook are also expanded. Edwards and Dewaele (2007) also found that the multilingual competence leads to a “dynamic, ever-evolving system” of knowledge of more than one language in the same mind. In a similar way, Abutalebi et al. (2008) found that the multilinguals have an added advantage in their capacity to switch-on to one language when in use and deactivate the other during a communication act, helping to orientate the portion of the bilinguals’ brains that stimulate linguistic awareness and subsequently improve their communication skills.

On economic and political advantages of multilingualism, Grin, Sfreddo and Vaillancourt (2010) highlighted a larger demand for export, high turnover rates, and more customers in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) that used more market languages. Evidently, multilingualism is



closely linked with profits and productivity, and should be acknowledged as a powerful tool for the economy. Multilingualism is a necessity for political significance, as Simire (2003) found that multilingualism ensures the political outreach in linguistically diverse nations, particularly to populations prone to isolation due to language.

### **3.4 Pakistan's Background on Multilingualism**

Lewis, Simons, and Fennig (2013) found that more than 700 spoken languages are spoken in the region that includes India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Afghanistan with India having 454, Nepal 122, Pakistan 77, Afghanistan 41, and Bangladesh having 44 actively spoken languages. The Greenberg's linguistic diversity index for India was 0.916 (ranking it fourteenth in the world), while for Pakistan it is 0.775 (ranking it at number 40). Rahman (2005) viewed that Pakistan has made greater success in unifying the nation around Urdu. Furthermore, the religion Islam played an important role in unifying the people of Pakistan. Annamalai (2001), and Rahman (2002) have said that in reality, the boundaries between many languages and dialects are not clearly defined, and such diversity distinguishes the multilingual competence of the people and the plurilinguality of the region from many other communities.

Certain languages are important for people's identities and chosen affiliations. In South Asia, local communities do identify with certain mother tongues, though critical linguists consider the label ideological. However, language ideologies are enabling as well as limiting, and an identification with the mother tongue is empowering for certain communities. As argued by Khubchandani (2008), the term mother tongue is categorized by one's allegiance to a particular tradition, and it is societally identifiable. While mixed codes are natural to the speakers in this region, an affiliation with mother tongues is also natural. Therefore, a plurilingual approach that affirms mother tongues—without disregarding plurilingual communicative patterns and yet demystifying monolingual target language proficiency as in English—is consistent with local traditions and practices.

Pakistan, in its National Education Policy - 2009, has made an effort to balance the needs of mother tongues for early foundation, national languages for national identity, and global lingua franca, such as English for economic development. Accordingly, National Education Policy -



2009 stipulates that “The curriculum from Class I onward shall include English (as a subject), Urdu, one regional language, mathematics along with an integrated subject” and “English shall be employed as the medium of instruction for sciences and mathematics from Class IV onwards.” (Khattak, 2014; Mustafa, 2015; Rehman, 2004). Such attitudes create a greater demand for English in both urban and rural communities of the country (Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2011). Rahman (2010) found that the current educational policies aim to facilitate literacy, equity, and develop learners’ competence in local languages and English. Though mother tongues are affirmed and used to provide a foundation in early education, there is also a focus on transitioning to advanced competence in English, in recognition of its place in higher education and employment. Shamim (2011) found that, recently, Pakistan has introduced multilingual education policies recognizing regional languages along with the dominant national *linguae francae*.

The 1973 Constitution of Pakistan states that Urdu will be the national language of Pakistan while English will be used as the official language till the time (estimated 15 years) that arrangements can be made for it to be replaced by Urdu. However, the fact of the matter is that English, being the official language and the language of higher education in Pakistan, is considered the language of personal and professional development (Mahboob, 2002; Shamim, 2011). Often, English plays a gate-keeping role through being a compulsory subject in entrance exams for higher education institutions as well as those leading to the echelons of power such as the civil services of Pakistan.

Rehman (2004) shares that the use of Urdu as a *lingua franca* is widespread across the country, however, English serves as the official language. Though the importance of teaching regional languages in addition to English and Urdu is recognized by Pakistan’s National Education Policy - 2009, the regional languages are at the lower end of the language hierarchy in Pakistan and used mainly for informal communication amongst the inner circle of family and friends (Manan & David, 2014).

#### **4. The Primary Data**



The gathered primary data is tabulated and described as follows: -



| <b>4.1 Primary Data Table: Respondents' Views on the Effectiveness of Multilingual Elementary Level Education for Sociocultural Development of Learners</b>                                                                                           |                       |    |    |    |       |     |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|----|----|----|-------|-----|
| Study's Object Related Phenomenal Variables                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Responses of Teachers |    |    |    |       |     |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Yes                   | %  | No | %  | Total | %   |
| Variable-1: Teaching and learning of mother tongue/local/regional language (Pashto, Hindko, Seraiki, Khowar) by learners is effective – as it helps them to connect with their ethnicity, and gives identity to them                                  | 40                    | 80 | 10 | 20 | 50    | 100 |
| Variable-2: Teaching and learning of national language (Urdu) is effective for learners – as it helps them to link with their national identity, ideology, and history.                                                                               | 46                    | 92 | 04 | 08 |       |     |
| Variable-3: Teaching and learning of our religious Islamic language (Arabic) is effective – as it helps learners to learn Islamic teachings and adopt Islamic culture.                                                                                | 40                    | 80 | 10 | 20 |       |     |
| Variable-4: Teaching and learning of Pakistan's official, and international language (English) is effective for learners – as it helps them to survive in official sphere, get employment, and create global chances of economic and social mobility. | 39                    | 78 | 11 | 22 |       |     |
| Variable-5: It is logical to support the multilingual education system in Pakistan.                                                                                                                                                                   | 47                    | 94 | 03 | 06 |       |     |
| Variable-6: Multilingual education system is helpful for learners' academics, sociability, sociocultural development, wider social interaction, and development of new social networks and linkages,                                                  | 40                    | 80 | 10 | 20 |       |     |
| Variable-7: It contributes towards an individual's overall personality development.                                                                                                                                                                   | 43                    | 86 | 07 | 14 |       |     |
| Variable-8: Multilingualism assists in learning about the prevailing human society.                                                                                                                                                                   | 46                    | 92 | 04 | 08 |       |     |
| Variable-9: Multilingualism helps in learning about history, evolution, and the rise-and-fall of human races and nations.                                                                                                                             | 47                    | 94 | 03 | 06 |       |     |
| Variable-10: Multilingualism increases the chances of an individual's survival in the global village.                                                                                                                                                 | 47                    | 94 | 03 | 06 |       |     |
| Variable-11: It helps learners in understanding other human beings, philosophies, and the world at large.                                                                                                                                             | 39                    | 78 | 11 | 22 |       |     |
| Variable-12: It leads to more mental satisfaction, innovation in life, and mental broadness, and perceptive and cognitive development among its users.                                                                                                | 40                    | 80 | 10 | 20 |       |     |
| Variable-13: The economics, employment, investment, trade, business etc. are the                                                                                                                                                                      | 47                    | 94 | 03 | 06 |       |     |



|                                                                                                       |    |    |    |    |  |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----|----|----|--|--|
| unavoidable vital realities of life – the chances of which get increased for a multilingual/polyglot. |    |    |    |    |  |  |
| Variable-14: Multilingualism encounters some challenges that are bound to be dealt with.              | 46 | 92 | 04 | 08 |  |  |

#### 4.2 Description of Primary Data Table

Variable-1 shows that the 80% of the respondents endorsed the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of mother tongue/local/regional languages including Pashto, Hindko, Seraiki, Khowar in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on account of its being helpful in connecting one with one's ethnicity and identity.

Variable-2 shows that 92% respondents agreed that the teaching and learning of national language (Urdu) is effective for learners – as it help them to link with their national identity, ideology, and history. It helps in inculcating national integration inside them and forming national identity in them. It is also believed to be helpful in enabling them to speak with their countrymen from other regions and provinces.

Variable-3 reveals that 80% respondents agreed to the effectiveness of the teaching and learning of our religious Islamic language (Arabic) for being helpful to them in learning Islamic teachings and adopt Islamic culture. Arabic is the language in which Allah Almighty revealed his last Holy Book, the Holy Quran; it is the language spoken by the Holy Prophet Muhammad (Peace Be Upon Him), and it is the medium of his traditions and almost all Islamic literature and learning.

Variable-4 shows that 78% respondents agreed to the teaching and learning of English which is Pakistan's official and international language and testified to its effectiveness as being helpful in its learners' survival in the Pakistan's official sphere, in their get employment, and in their cashing in the global chances of economic and social mobility. As Pakistan remained a British colony, so majority of its legislations and other official procedures were inherently adopted from the English system of government, which was run primarily in



English language. This language has a significant historic and current significance for the people of Pakistan. Presently, it is the language of many developed and leading nations. Therefore, the learning of English language provides access to political, social, and economic opportunities.

Variable-5 exhibits that 94% respondents support the multilingual education system in Pakistan because of its greater functionality and scope.

Variable-6 reveals that the 80% respondents agree that the multilingual education system is helpful in improving the learners' academics, sociability, sociocultural development; in ensuring wider social interaction for them, and in their developing new social networks and linkages with local society, and more specifically with the society around the globe.

Variable-7 shows that 86% respondents agreed that multilingualism contributes to the development of individual's overall personality. Language being an essential part of human personality helps them in expressing in different and effective ways, in interacting with more people and in learning from more people. It helps in shaping internal as well external persona.

Variable-8 shows that 92% respondents expressed agreement over the advantageousness of multilingualism in learning about prevailing human society.

Variable-9 also shows that 94% respondents think multilingualism as advantageous in learning about history, evolution, and rise-and-fall of human races and nations. The data and information that is related to other parts of world is usually preserved in the language of the region concerned – therefore the particular language is a necessity to be learnt in order to study and analyze the current state and historical facts about other parts of world.

Variable-10 shows that the 94% respondents believe that multilingualism increases the effectiveness of survival in global village, because in world



different languages are spoken and different world identities are attached to them.

Variable-11 shows that 78% respondents agreed that multilingualism help learners in understanding other human beings, philosophies, and world at large.

Variable-12 tells that 80% respondents agree that multilingualism gives more mental satisfaction, innovation in life, mental broadness, and perceptive and cognitive development to the multilingual.

The variable-13 shows that 94% respondents consider that the economics, employment, investment, trade, business, which are the unavoidable vital realities of life get promoted through multilingualism and the chances of their promotion increase for a multilingual. The multilingualism makes the individuals socioeconomically functional in those regions of the world whose the language and culture are known to them.

The variable-14 shows that the 92% respondents believe that multilingualism also faces challenges that need to be dealt with on priority basis. These challenges include difficulty in learning different languages at same time, creation of multiple-identity issues, quality of language learning and its learning material, lack of interest on the part of teachers and instructors that teach languages, the unclear scope of a language if it is learnt, in-effective guidance regarding the significance of the language to learners, spread of misinformation about a particular language, etc. yet they cannot minimize the significance of multilingualism.

## **5. Conclusion**

Findings of the study inform that the teaching and learning of mother tongue/local/regional language is connected to one's ethnicity and identity; other languages like Urdu, Arabic, and English are also considered to hold significant values for the learners. Multilingual education system is considered



to hold functionality and scope. Multilingual education system gets approval for being helpful in promoting the learners' sociability, sociocultural development, wider social interaction, and the development of new social ties around the globe. Multilingualism assists in the development of individuals' overall personality and helps in learning about the prevailing human society, its history, its evolution, and the rise-and-fall of human races and nations. It increases the effectiveness of survival in the global village, and helps learners in understanding other human beings, philosophies, and the world at large. Multilingualism leads to more mental satisfaction, innovation, mental broadness, and perceptive and cognitive development of the individual. The chances of economics, employment, investment, trade, business get increased for multilinguals. It was also noted that multilingualism too is encountered with some serious challenges like difficulty in learning different languages at the same time, the ensuing multiple-identity issues, quality of language learning, and the lack of interest on the part of teachers and instructors etc., which can be overcome through proper planning and judicious measures.

Therefore, the postulate of the research i.e. "The existence of multilingualism in a society, and especially in its education system, does positively shape the learning, academics, personalities, and sociocultural development of the learners. It helps learners to extend their social circle, sociability, social links, and social interaction. Multi-linguals are linked with variant social identities, histories, languages, cultures, arts, literature, social realities, economic opportunities, political advantages, and philosophies around the globe", has been proven.

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