



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Official Status of English Language and Difficulties in Learning: A Pakistani Perspective**

Ghulam Mujtaba Yasir<sup>1</sup> Zohaib Zahid<sup>2</sup> Naila Ijaz<sup>3</sup>

1. Assistant Professor, Department of English, Government Associate College for Boys D.G Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
2. Assistant Professor, Department of English, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Sub-Campus Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan
3. Lecturer, Department of English, Government Graduate College for Women, D.G Khan, Punjab, Pakistan

**DOI** [http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-II\)1.41](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-II)1.41)

**PAPER INFO**

**Received:**

August 11, 2021

**Accepted:**

December 12, 2021

**Online:**

December 15, 2021

**Keywords:**

English Teachers,  
Government Schools,  
Language Policies,  
Poor Outcomes,  
Status of English  
Language

**\*Corresponding  
Author**

[zohaib.zahid@iub.edu.pk](mailto:zohaib.zahid@iub.edu.pk)

**ABSTRACT**

English has been taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan since 1947 but the problems of teaching and learning the English language are persistent and insoluble. Pakistan is facing a number of problems in teaching and learning the English language. English is being taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan from the very beginning of school and continues till the level of higher education but the students are unable to use English language conveniently. This article first describes the official status of the English language according to the constitution and language policies of Pakistan. It then describes the reasons for poor outcomes in English language skills with the help of an interview taken from English teachers teaching to class I and II in the Government schools of Pakistan, recommending solutions at the end and providing guidelines for further research.

**Introduction**

Pakistan is a multilingual country where many languages are spoken. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan which is the mother tongue of only 7.57% of the entire population but is most widely understood in the country. English is the official language in Pakistan along with Urdu and it is taught as a compulsory subject from primary school level to higher level studies. The graph below shows the major languages and the percentage of their users in Pakistan.

**Multiple Nomenclatures for English as Global Language**

English language has become international language and various terms have been assigned to describe it in multiple settings. Different researchers have used

various terms to describe the global recognition of English: 'General English' was termed by Ahlu (1977), 'World English' was invented by Brutt-Griffler (2002), 'English as an International Language' coined by Jenkins (2000) Widdowson (1997), Modiano (1999), 'English as a Lingua Franca' House (1999) Seidlhofer (2001) & Jenkins (2007), 'English as a global language' coined by David Crystal (1997), and 'World Standard (Spoken) English' said by McArthur (1987).

### Official status of English in Pakistan

#### Pakistani languages

Languages	Percentage of Speakers
Punjabi	44.15%
Pashtu	15.42%
Sindhi	14.20%
Saraiki	10.53%
Urdu	7.57%
Balochi	3.57
Others	4.66%

1973 constitution of Pakistan contains details about the status of English language under article

251. Following are the details mentioned in the constitution of Pakistan: (Rehman, 2003)

\*Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and steps will be taken for its implementation as official language from the day of commencement.

\* Unless Urdu takes place as official language, English will be used for all the official purposes

\* The provincial assemblies are authorized to implement any local language for its promotion in addition to national language Urdu.

#### National Language

Pakistan's national language is Urdu which is the mother tongue of 7.57% of the entire population who migrated from India and settled in Pakistan, called Mohajir (Immigrants).

Urdu has become a symbol of unity and it has assisted to develop a united Pakistan. In this context, Urdu is resisting all the racial and linguistic conflicts in Pakistan. These conflicts may lead to disturb the unity of the state otherwise. Hence, it is serving a political purpose in Pakistan.

Medium of instruction in the schools is Urdu. On the other hand, English is an official and international language so it is taught at higher levels of education (Rehman, 2003). (At Present, English is being taught from class one to Higher level of education in Pakistan in almost all the all the institutes of Pakistan)

### **English language Policy in Pakistan**

It was decided in August 1947 (the creation of Pakistan) that English will remain the official language of Pakistan till the national language replaces it because English was the official language of British India. With the passage of time, English firmly entered in the power domains of Pakistan as it was before 1947. This can be understood by the policy of the elite class in Pakistan as they patronized English because it gave them an edge on the illiterate masses of Pakistan. They patronized it in the name of modernization, globalization and efficiency (Rehamn, 2003).

Stephen .P. Cohen suggests that Civil Services of Pakistan (CSP) was an Anglicized body of the men who continued British tradition in Pakistan. According to him the armed forces and officers' corps was 'British generation'' which had occupied it till 1971. It can be understood that the elite continued its patronage as it made them different from common masses. (Cohen 1994: 162-163).

### **Draft of National Educational Policy of Pakistan 2009**

The National Education Policy of 2009 which was implemented in Pakistan under serial numbers 57, 82, and 110 that describe policy of English language in Pakistan.

(57) People in Pakistan are linked to each other by the use of Urdu language as it is the national language of Pakistan. At the same time, English is an international language and its knowledge is equally important to compete in the global world. Local languages exist in all the areas of Pakistan in addition to the national language Urdu. The students must get adequate knowledge of the languages to compete nationally and internationally.

(82) There are some ground realities which need to be addressed in order to take sufficient steps to solve the problem. There is a marginal difference between the education provided by the elite schools (Providing Cambridge based Education System) and the government schools. Curriculum, medium of teaching, salaries of the teachers etc. are entirely different in Cambridge based Examination System Schools as compared to the public schools. The rich children get education in the costly schools offering Cambridge based education and the public schools are filled with poor as they cannot afford to pay hefty fees. The English language competence of the students studying in private schools is far superior to the students of public sector schools.

There are many reasons for students to join elite schools for better education.

The resources provided in the schools, quality of teaching and management are the main reasons for the parents to join elite schools. The syllabus of O/A level classes offered by Cambridge education system is different from the syllabus offered in public schools. The students pass out from elite schools get better opportunities of good jobs. Public sector schools lack the required teaching staff and the resources to equip the students with the knowledge of the English language turning it difficult for the students to get good jobs.

### **Actions of Policy**

The Ministry of Education planned an action policy in the National Education Policy of 2009 in which the sections about English language action are mentioned below. Serial number 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8 of the draft under the heading of 'Action of Policy' are mentioned below.

(3) All the proper measures will be taken by the ministry of education in assistance of the relevant provincial departments to implement a comprehensive plan in order to achieve the target of English language proficiency in areas which are ignored and left behind.

(4) English would be taught as compulsory subject from class 'I' with Urdu, mathematics, regional

language and one more subject.

(6) The medium of teaching from class IV onward shall be English.

(7) The provinces may opt to teach mathematics and science in Urdu but after five years these subjects shall be taught only in English only.

(8) Steps shall be taken to promote the children to learn English language of low socio economic status.

Pakistan is a developing country and more than 90% of the children take admissions in government schools because they do not have money to pay fees in these schools. Scholarships for needy students, free uniforms and books are provided to the students in government schools. Therefore, the middle and lower middle class parents prefer to send their children to the government schools.

Therefore, the researcher approached English teachers of public sector schools to make a comprehensive approach towards the failure in English language performance.

### **Motivation for the research**

The researcher have been teaching English in college and university for

almost 10 years. The students are found reluctant to use English language at a higher level of education even though the students are exposed to it from class I in their early school going years. This difficulty of the students in using English language motivated us to conduct a research to know the root cause of the problem faced by the students and the teachers. It astonishes one that English is being taught to the students from class I and it enjoys the status of official language but the students have been found very weak in the basic four skills of language.

There is a marginal difference between teaching English as a subject and as a language. When we teach it as a subject, as we teach in Pakistan, it hardly improves the practical use of English language as it focuses only on passing the exam which is conducted from a prescribed text book of English at every level of education in all the educational institutes of Pakistan. On the other hand, when English is taught as a language, it focuses on improving the basic four skills of language.

Teaching English as a subject has been confused with teaching it as a language. Therefore, this topic has been taken to describe the status of the English language in Pakistan and to know the root cause at the initial level of education in Pakistan. This research will open new horizons for the researchers as a little research has been conducted with special reference to Pakistan.

### **Research Design**

The researcher approached two teachers teaching English language to class I and II in a government school. The teachers have been teaching the same classes for twenty five years. The two teachers were selected because of their experience and wish to address the problems they are facing.

There were a total five questions for the interview and the researcher had a wish to ask these questions in English but the teachers regretted responding in English as they were unable to understand and respond to the questions in English. To address this issue, the questions were translated into Urdu (National Language of Pakistan) for their better understanding.

### **Response and analysis of the Interview**

Here is the response of the two teachers who participated in the interview.

Q. 1. Is learning the English language essential for the children at the initial level?

T1. Yes, as the students move towards higher classes, they will have to study all the subjects in the English language. Therefore, it will prove helpful for the children to start learning the English Language at initial stages.

T2. It is essential for the children to learn the English language at the initial

stage as it will prove helpful for them in their future educational and professional success.

Q.2. What kind of initial lessons should be included in the syllabus of English in class I and II?

T1. It must be very easy and understandable for the teachers and the learners in the initial classes. The lessons must focus on the use of the English language instead of focusing on passing the exams and getting good grades.

T2. There should be focus on the use of short sentences in daily life so that the students should understand the practical use of English language.

Q.3. What objectives do you have in mind when teaching English to the children?

T1. I am doing a job and it is my duty to prepare the children to pass the tests taken every 15 days by the monitoring team. A written question paper is given to us by the monitoring team to solve it. So, my objective is not to teach them the use of language but to memorize the lessons in order to pass the exams.

T2. I teach them to pass the tests taken by the monitoring team. My students have never been examined by the officials about how much practical use of the English language has been learned by the children.

Q.4. Are you well trained to teach English to your class?

T1. Well, I passed my matriculation (ten years of education) almost twenty years ago. The syllabus that I studied in my school time was altogether different from the current syllabus. There are various different terms like phonetics, phonemes, morphology etc. that are difficult for me to teach as I have never been trained to teach these terms. I have attended many teacher training workshops offered by the school education department. I believe these teacher training sessions are offered after yearly intervals and last for five to ten day not providing enough knowledge to teach according to the syllabus.

T2. At initial stages I was unable to teach English according to the syllabus but I kept on learning the new topics which I had never studied. At present, I believe I have got command on various topics of English language included in the syllabus of English text book. Teaching training has helped me a lot in this regard. Although I have command on various topics, there are topics which are difficult for me to teach.

Q.5 What is your suggestion to improve teaching of the English language?

T1. The syllabus of English for the initial school going classes must be revised. It should be teacher friendly. The focus of the syllabus designers must be on the

practical usage of English language. Teachers must be asked to attend teacher training bimonthly. It will help the teachers to produce better results.

T2. Teachers' training and amendments in syllabus can prove useful for the learners and the teachers. I believe that easy syllabus will facilitate the teachers as well as the students to learn all the four skills of language learning.

## **Discussion**

The interview depicts that the teachers accept the status granted to the English language in Pakistan. The teachers firmly believe that learning English is essential for the students in order to conveniently pass their studies levels. It helps the students to secure a good job. It is a language of the elite and political class in Pakistan.

The English language has secured a status of official language in Pakistan because it has been studied and understood in this area for more than 300 years. It was the East India Company who came to the subcontinent (Now Pakistan, Bangladesh and India) five centuries ago. They brought their language and culture with them. As it was a trading company, it had to communicate with the elite and political class of that time that included traders, businessmen, and high political elite because they had to take permission of trade from the then political elite. It was the first encounter of the people of the subcontinent with the English language. With the passage of time, the company strengthened itself and the English language strengthened too. Later on, the English occupied the subcontinent and started ruling it directly. They introduced English language as a compulsory subject in all the educational institutes as they wanted to teach their literature to the people of the subcontinent. As the rulers were English, the language of political and business class became English. In August 1947, Pakistan was created on the map of the world. The newly established state of Pakistan adopted the same educational policy and declared English as the official language.

The English language keeps on getting higher value as it becomes an international language. The historical facts reveal that English has got immense importance in Pakistan and it enjoys the status of official language.

The interview conducted from the teachers tells that the society of Pakistan has endorsed the official status of English language in Pakistan in true letter and spirit. This interview was conducted to support the argument that English has been taught as a subject not as a language in Pakistan. Reading, writing, listening and speaking skills are taught to the second language learners in all the language classes of the world but the situation in Pakistan is contrary to the facts forcing students to cram the lessons and get good grades.

The two teachers selected for the interview only stressed to make the syllabus easy and training of the teachers so that they can focus on the language improvement of the learners. This interview brings us to conclude that the teachers and the rest of

the society in Pakistan has no objection against English being the official language of Pakistan but there is a need to improve the way of English language teaching.

### **Conclusion**

Nothing has been achieved by teaching English as a subject although people have been in contact with the English language for decades. The entire world has changed its attitude and efforts are being made to bring improvement in learning the basic four skills of language except Pakistan. It is a fact that the English language is the official language of Pakistan but only making it official will not solve the problem. The education policy makers will have to take certain steps to make changes in the syllabus and methods according to the criteria of enhancing language competence in order to achieve the required results.



## References

- Ahulu, S. (1997). General English: A consideration of the nature of English as an international medium. *English Today*. 13(1): 17-23.
- Brutt-Griffler, J. (2002). *World English: A study of its development*. Clevedon and Buffalo: Multilingual Matters.
- Census. 2001. 1998 Census Report of Pakistan Islamabad: Population Census Organization Statistics Division. Govt of Pakistan.
- Cohen, Stephen P. (1994). *The Pakistan Army*. Edition used. Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1998
- Crystal, D. (1997). *English as a Global Language*.(1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Education, M. o. (2009). *National Education Policy of Pakistan*. Ministry of Education Pakistan.
- House, J. (1999). Misunderstanding in intercultural communication: Interactions in English as a *lingua franca* and the myth of mutual intelligibility. In Claus Gnutzmann (Ed).73-89.
- Jenkins, J. (2000). *The phonology of English as an International Language*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jenkins, J. (2007). *English as a Lingua Franca: Attitude and identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- McArthur, T. (1987). The English Languages? *English Today*. 11: 9-11.
- Modiano, M. (1999). International English in the global village. *English Today*.20 (3).3-15.
- Seidlhofer, B. (2001). Closing a conceptual gap: The case for a description of English as a Lingua Franca.*International Journal of Applied Linguistics*. 11 (2): 133-158.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1997). The forum: EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests. *World Englishes*. 16(1): 135-146