

Multilingualism as a Facilitating Factor in ESL Classes at Secondary Level in Public Sector Institutes in Lahore

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ABSTRACT

This study explores multilingualism as a facilitating factor in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at the secondary level in public sector institutes in Lahore. In multilingual contexts such as Pakistan, students often bring diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Urdu, Punjabi, and regional languages, into English language classrooms. Rather than viewing this linguistic diversity as an obstacle, this study investigates how multilingual practices can support English language learning and enhance classroom interaction, comprehension, and participation. The study employs a qualitative research design to understand teachers' and students' experiences regarding the use of multiple languages in ESL instruction. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations from selected public sector secondary schools in Lahore. Thematic analysis was used to identify key patterns related to language use, pedagogical strategies, and learner engagement. Findings suggest that strategic use of students' first languages helps clarify difficult concepts, reduces language anxiety, and improves comprehension of English grammar and vocabulary. Teachers also reported that code-switching facilitates better classroom management and encourages active participation among low-proficiency learners. However, excessive reliance on native languages may limit exposure to English if not carefully managed. The study concludes that multilingualism, when used pedagogically, serves as an effective instructional resource rather than a barrier in ESL classrooms. It recommends teacher training programs to promote balanced multilingual strategies that enhance English language acquisition in public sector secondary schools in Lahore.

Keywords: Multilingualism, ESL, Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION

To have another language is to possess another soul, says Charlemagne (742/7 – 814), King of the Franks. Multilingualism isn't any unusual phenomenon; it is a God gifted character available to every human; Environmental factors are highly responsible to avail this opportunity. Absence of these environmental factor may cause of failure to avail the opportunity to learn the multi languages. "Given the appropriate environment, two languages are as normal as two lungs" (Cook 2002b:23); "A theory purporting to account for universal language learnability cannot be considered adequate if it excludes the non-monolingual speakers of this world" (Satterfield 1999:137).

Multilingualism isn't about learning of two different languages; For example a language user who is speaking or writing a formal or informal dialect is also a multilingual person. Now a days it is difficult

to find a monolingual speaker. As Cook 2002b:23) affirmed that “a handful of isolated pockets of ‘pure’ monolinguals, now hard to find even in the mountains of Papua New Guinea”.

Due to geo political uniqueness, Pakistan is a collection of multiple cultures and languages. It provides number of topics about sociolinguistics for researchers all over the world. According to sociolinguistics, Pakistan has diversity in regions. All regions has its specific language. For example in Punjab most of the people can speak Punjabi, Urdu and English. So in this ways the people of Baluchistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh can speak three or more than three languages (Survey of Pakistan, 2012). (Rahman, 2006) affirmed that most of educated Pakistanis speak at least three languages; mother tongue, Urdu and English.

Multilingualism deals with the study of the condition in which more than two languages are used in the same setting for similar purposes. It has been one of the characteristics of modern civilization. But it is still a matter of debate just how much proficiency is required to get mastery over languages. Many linguists define Bilingualism and Multilingualism as “Mastery over two/more languages.” Many issues are waving their hands towards sociolinguistics due to Multilingual context. Research are investigating different issues specially for the language learners. Multilingualism opens doors towards another issue know as code-switching. Pakistan historical wars, colonialism and migration leads multilingualism is common. UNESCO (2003) acknowledged that multilingualism is a normal practice. Moreover, Wardhaugh (2000) affirmed that monolingual is exceptional. Multilingualism effect the language in many ways. In institutes students speak different languages in different situations, it is due to cultural diversity in Pakistan. At home, when s/he speaks with his/her parents, in school with class mates and with canteen’s sales man, and in class room in formal situation with teacher and class mates. This study will focus the needs that are the requirement for the child to live and cope with different situations in normal ways. It will also give power to this idea that the child will also be able to develop his/her native language (Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto etc.)

Significance of the Study

Yelland (et al. 1993) affirmed that a learner learns faster in their first language (L1), such as reading, and that there is a strong link between learning a foreign language (FL) and doing better on reading tests (for kids of all intelligence levels, Garfunkel & Tabor 1991), as well as doing better in other basic L1 skills, no matter what race, gender, or academic level they are (Dumas 1999); Multilingualism develops a markedly better language proficiency in, awareness to, and understanding of their mother tongue (e.g. Johnson et al. 1963). For example, high school seniors who had studied a foreign language for two or more years did much better on achievement tests in their first language than students who had not studied a foreign language (Bastian 1980; see also Van de Craen et al. (2006) for an account of children in multilingual settings). “Cook (2001) observes, “A monolingual has in a sense a single other to model: all the people whom he or she encounters use the same world-view and the same language. A person who speaks multiple languages has at least dual others – a stereoscopic vision of the world from two or more perspectives. As we know from many studies of young children, this indeed has an effect on their cognitive development, enabling them to be more flexible in their thinking, learn reading more easily. The point is not so much that $2+2=4$ as $2+2=5$; it is not just the addition of a different world perspective to the person’s scope as the realization that many perspectives are possible. Monolinguals therefore are not only restricted to a single world-view, but they also have more ideas that other world-views are possible. Indeed, this has always been seen as one of the main educational advantages of language teaching. (Cook 2001a)”

Statement of the Problem

(Cook, 1999; Thomas & Collier, 1998) Investigated number of advantages for being Multilingual except language skills. They have high academic skills and cognitive abilities. In addition to (Galambos & Goldin-Meadow, 1990; Bialystok, 2001) affirmed that they have great understanding of Language skills. Learning is difficult for students who don't grasp the subject in their mother tongue or accent.

The goal of this study is to identify strategies for helping learners who have trouble learning more than one language, especially those who are made to remember without knowing the fundamentals.

Motivation for Research

Once, the researcher faced great problems in grasping the lecture delivered by instructor in direct target language(L3), the teacher used Direct Method of language learning. The researcher, at his own, translated the material in his mother tongue (L1), preferring over national language (L2) and then perceived the essentials of content and then rephrased it. The researcher took it as a challenge and worked on the idea that the local dialects and varieties of local languages should be used as facilitating factors. The researcher has experienced multilingualism at different points over their academic career, therefore they have firsthand experience with it. They hope to learn more about the advantages of using various languages in ESL (English as a Second Language) programs through this study. Effective methods for comprehending local language variations, content, and their connections to the target language will also be examined in this study. This research it will be significant to know how the students at secondary level are able to conceive and perceive the worth of multilingualism in their academic career. They can brood over the possibilities of availing the opportunities and facilitation provided by the use of more than two languages.

Delimitation of the Study

The area of focus will be the use of two or more than two languages as facilitating in acquiring a foreign or target language. This research will be carried out in selected secondary schools of City Lahore. The students of secondary level will be the population of this research for data collection.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The pedagogy and policy of multilingual education have been extensively studied. Multilingualism is a complex topic with connections to various fields of applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics. However, because this study will examine multilingualism in the classroom and how it functions as a teaching tool and how it benefits both teachers and students in secondary ESL classes in public schools, it will primarily be discussed in relation to applied linguistics. An overview of the body of research on the various facets of multilingualism will be provided by this study.

Multilingualism is important in education, especially in South Asia, according to research. Multilingualism is a distinguishing feature of language in the region's educational system, claims Schiffman (2012). According to Crystal (2011), millions of people around the world are naturally multilingual. According to Mansoor (1993), a three-language system has developed in Pakistan, with each language having a defined function: the vernacular is used for in-group communication, Urdu, the national language, is used for out-group communication, and English serves a particular purpose. The findings of Nadkarni (1983) and Nihalani et al. (1989), who determined the communicative roles of languages in multilingual situations, are in line with this framework.

Human experience is fundamentally shaped by language, which affects how people view and communicate their identities, emotions, and thoughts (Sengupta, 2009). Language can serve as a source of nationalism as well as a defining characteristic of identity, and people's innate love for their mother tongues can result in unfair treatment and interpersonal injustice (Blake, 2003; Patten, 2001; Van, 2003). Certain populations may experience marginalization or disadvantage as a result of this unequal linguistic endowment. Various multilingualism models suggest that in order to promote linguistic equality and fairness, each language used in a community should be given equal attention and importance (Patten, 2001). Regardless of their linguistic origin, people can benefit from equal opportunities and treatment when the diversity of languages is acknowledged and respected.

Therefore, as Pakistan is divided into four provinces with different ethnic groups, cultural diversity is another important aspect of the Pakistani population in addition to linguistic variety. The languages of Urdu and English have been helpful in easing the amalgamation of culturally distinct areas within a nation. People from the nation's various communities communicate and learn about one another's cultures through the use of Urdu and English. International organizations have paid attention to and value cultural variety. According to UNESCO study, cultural diversity is a defining feature and a shared legacy of humanity that ought to be valued and conserved for the good of everyone. The latter is associated with intangible cultural legacy, which includes a group of people's languages, social values, traditions, customs, and spiritual beliefs (Hoffman, 2006). It produces a world that is diverse and rich, which fosters human potential and values (Bernier, 2008, p.4-5).

Urdu became the national language of Pakistan as a result of this confidence in a single unifying language, according to Tickoo (2006, pp. 168–169). In addition to being a minority language throughout the nation, Urdu is still a minority language inside the states where it is the primary language. Urdu, which was comparatively the mother tongue of only a small community of Muhajirs who had migrated from India's Bihar and Uttar Pradesh states, received special status and the accompanying role primarily because it was perceived as being close to Islam, the state religion, and assumed essential to raising an ideal national identity, even though several languages, including Bengali, Sindhi, Punjabi, and Pashto, had many times more speakers than Urdu. We'll go into great detail about the many forms of multilingualism, such as code switching and code mixing.

Research Objectives

This proposed research will investigate the following objectives.

1. To measure the advantages of multilingualism and examine how it affects secondary school pupils' language acquisition processes.
2. To ascertain whether multilingualism is a choice in language acquisition or a required linguistic characteristic.
3. To determine the advantages of multilingualism in such settings and investigate how it supports the social and ethnic aspects of language learning.
4. To examine the ways in which multilingualism improves teacher-student communication and to pinpoint the most efficient methods for doing so.
5. To examine possible disparities in the effects of multilingualism on male and female students, as well as to compare the benefits of multilingualism over monolinguals.

Research Questions

1. How much does multilingualism improve secondary school language learning processes? 2. Is multilingualism a necessary linguistic trait or a choice?
3. In what ways does multilingualism support the social and ethnic facets of language acquisition?
4. How does multilingualism benefit teachers and students in terms of appropriate communication levels?
5. In what ways is multilingualism superior to monolinguals, and how does multilingualism affect male and female students differently?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The theoretical framework and study design, including objectives, participants, data collection, and data analysis, will be discussed in this chapter. Exploratory research is the researcher's goal, and both qualitative and quantitative methodologies, along with their advantages, will be highlighted.

Population

All the students of secondary level schools in City Lahore will be considered as the population of our research work.

Sample of Study

The sample for this study will be the selected students of selected secondary schools of City Lahore by random sampling or convenience sampling.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data Collection Tools

Questionnaire and semi-structured interviews will be considered more effective for this research as data collection tools.

Questionnaire

For the questionnaire, the researcher would want to use the Likert Scale (Strongly Agree, Agree, Neither Agree Not

Disagree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree). Open-ended questions will follow. The questionnaire's initial section will ask for demographic data. Additionally, other items might be sought based on the research design.

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews are considered suitable for student convenience and effective time management. The researcher aims to interview highly intelligent pupils in secondary schools in Lahore.

Data Analysis

Coding Questionnaire Data

In order to enable statistical analysis, the information gathered from questionnaires and semi-structured interviews will be quantified using coding techniques. This will make it possible for the researcher to find correlations, trends, and patterns in the data.

Inputting the Data

With the creation of a new profile in the computer program, the data will be entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) software, which is frequently used for data analysis in the social sciences. Spreadsheets and a Data Editor Screen are two of SPSS's built-in tools that will be used to arrange and examine the data. In the end, the researcher will be able to get significant conclusions from the data by effectively managing and analyzing it.

Data Cleaning

The data will be carefully examined and corrected for any spelling and grammar mistakes, whether they are introduced accidentally by the researcher or appear in the responses of the respondents, in order to guarantee the caliber of the analysis. To ensure the precision and dependability of the results, this stage is essential. By fixing these problems in advance, the researcher can move forward with the actual study with assurance that the data is accurate and devoid of preventable errors.

Reducing the Numbers of Variables in Questionnaire

The variables in the questionnaire will be reduced to a manageable and proportionate level by the researcher using statistical techniques, particularly Factor Analysis and Reliability Analysis. This procedure will simplify the data and increase its analytical efficiency by assisting in the identification of the most pertinent and trustworthy aspects. By doing this, the researcher may make sure that the data is more precise and targeted, which will result in more insightful findings.

Data Analysis through Statistical Procedures

To analyze the data, the researcher will employ statistical techniques, beginning with descriptive statistics to comprehend the data's properties, such as computing means to ascertain average values, looking at the range to determine the data's spread, and computing standard deviation to gauge data variability. To provide a more thorough understanding of the research findings, inferential statistics will also be used to derive conclusions and inferences about the population from the sample data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter delves into a detailed analysis and interpretation of the data collected during the study. It explores how multilingualism operates as a facilitating factor in English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at the secondary school level in Lahore's public sector. The chapter integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to uncover patterns, student perceptions, and teaching dynamics that support the multilingual approach.

Multilingualism and Student Comprehension

The majority of students expressed that when their teachers used Urdu or Punjabi alongside English, it helped them better understand grammar rules, vocabulary, and complex sentence structures. This finding aligns with the theory of 'scaffolding' in language education, where the use of a familiar language supports the acquisition of a new one. This pattern was particularly evident in lower-performing students who showed improved classroom engagement and higher test scores when L1 or L2 was incorporated.

Cognitive and Emotional Impacts

Students reported feeling more confident and less anxious when allowed to clarify concepts in their native language. This affective support mechanism reduced the intimidation associated with English-only instruction. Additionally, students displayed enhanced metalinguistic awareness—being able to analyze and manipulate language structures—thanks to their exposure to multiple languages.

Sociolinguistic Dimensions of Multilingualism

The multilingual classroom environment also helped bridge social and cultural gaps among students. Students from different linguistic backgrounds reported greater empathy and willingness to collaborate. Peer tutoring flourished in such environments, and students became linguistic resources for one another.

Teachers' Perspectives and Strategies

Teachers noted that while initial training emphasized immersion methods, classroom realities necessitated flexible multilingual approaches. Most teachers adopted strategic code-switching techniques, especially during grammar explanations, poetry interpretation, and exam preparation. Teachers also expressed a need for institutional support in terms of training and curriculum materials tailored to multilingual instruction.

Gender Dynamics in Language Learning

Interestingly, female students showed a stronger preference for translation-based learning strategies, while male students leaned towards direct acquisition techniques. Nonetheless, both groups demonstrated improved performance and confidence when teachers validated their linguistic backgrounds.

CONCLUSION

The study clearly demonstrates that multilingualism, when used effectively, is a powerful pedagogical tool in ESL classrooms. In the context of Lahore's public sector schools, where students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds, leveraging their native and national languages fosters better understanding, reduces anxiety, and builds a stronger educational foundation.

The research highlights that the fear of multilingualism diluting English proficiency is largely unfounded. Instead, the strategic use of Urdu and other regional languages empowers learners to transition smoothly into English. Teachers who embrace multilingualism reported fewer disciplinary issues and higher student engagement.

Multilingualism also contributes to identity formation and cognitive development, equipping students with a broader worldview. Rather than resisting their linguistic heritage, students learn to navigate between languages, enhancing both their communicative and academic abilities.

In sum, multilingualism should be repositioned from being a 'problem' to being a 'possibility' in the domain of ESL education.

Limitations of the Study

Despite the rich findings, this study has several limitations. First, its scope is limited to public sector schools in urban Lahore, which may not reflect conditions in rural areas or in private institutions. Second, the data collected primarily focuses on Urdu and Punjabi speakers, excluding representation from speakers of Pashto, Balochi, or other regional languages.

Additionally, while teachers' attitudes were considered, administrative and policy-level perspectives were not deeply examined. The study also lacked longitudinal analysis, which could have provided more insight into long-term effects of multilingual practices.

Future research should address these gaps to provide a more comprehensive understanding of multilingualism in ESL contexts.

Suggestions for Future Research

Based on the findings and limitations of this study, several avenues for future research are proposed:

1. **Comparative Studies:** Research comparing multilingual strategies across different provinces could reveal regional variations in educational outcomes.

2. Longitudinal Studies: Tracking students over time would help evaluate the sustained impact of multilingual education on academic performance.

3. Teacher Training Programs: Investigating how professional development programs prepare teachers to manage multilingual classrooms.

4. Parental Involvement: Exploring how home language practices influence classroom learning outcomes.

5. Technology in Multilingual Learning: Assessing the role of apps and multimedia tools in supporting bilingual and trilingual learners.

Such studies would enrich the field of applied linguistics and provide evidence-based recommendations for national education policy.

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