

# Role of Mother Tongue in Primary Schooling of Young Learners in Punjab

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on one of the most fundamental issues in Education i.e. the choice of medium of instruction at primary level. In Pakistan, there is a multilingual system of education, besides mother tongue or regional language, Urdu is national language where as English is taught as compulsory subject up to graduate level. The medium of instruction in most of the early schooling is in regional language according to the demand of young learners. Now, Government of Punjab has made it compulsory that primary education should be given in English. In this paper it has been provided research based data to the policy makers and involved parties to make informed decisions. It has been hypothesized that all the stakeholders including the learners, teachers and parents are not satisfied with this decision and this ‘unsatisfied’ state has some pedagogical grounds. These pedagogical grounds needed to be explored and highlighted. In this context, the researcher has studied various theories related to the medium of instruction as well as the researches on this topic. It is basically a qualitative research; the researcher has applied methods of survey research to achieve the objectives of the research. The researcher has collected data from the young learners, their teachers and parents of the selected schools in under privileged areas like that of district Bukkar and Kasur to check their level of comfort with mother tongue, national language and foreign language (English) as the medium of instruction. The study has also checked their level of comprehension of different subjects in these media of instructions i-e mother tongue, National language and English.

Finally, it has been concluded on the basis of analyzed data that the young learners are dissatisfied with foreign language (English) as a medium of instruction in their classes. They have to exert much while decoding the contents of foreign language, therefore, they prefer to

be taught in their regional language or mother tongue for better comprehension. They are mostly entangled in the web of the language problems. English as medium of instruction has become an extra burden for the young learners. This practice has also lead to dissatisfaction on the part of the learners. This study shows that if decisions are made without doing proper research and needs analysis can prove disastrous.

**Keywords:** Multilingual education, Mother tongue, Better comprehension, Convenience for young learners

## 1. Introduction

Pakistan is a country where many languages are spoken. It has five major indigenous languages punjabi, pushtu, sindhi, sraiki and bluchi while the national language is Urdu. After the establishment of Pakistan, English was supposed to be continued as the official language till such time that the national language replaced it. However, this never happened and English has been firmly entrenched in the domain of power in Pakistan as it was in 1947. (Tariq Rahmen, 1999). The status of English as an international language has also proved to force nations like Pakistan to work for its promotion (Gradol, 2006)

Pakistani government as well as policy makers has always tried their best to achieve the academic objectives according to the demands of the modern era, because “education is the real investment of a nation as the future of a nation depends entirely on the generation that is being prepared for the purpose of leading the nation”. (Afzal, 2005, P:65). And ‘the language plays a central role in the process of learning and the achievement of educational goal (Saddiqui S. 2010). language is clearly the key to communication and understanding in the classroom (Banson C. 2004) . Instruction through a language that learners do not speak has been called “submersion” (Skutnabb-Kangas ,2000) because learners entangle in the whirlpool of linguistic problems while learning in foreign language. Therefore, the language of school must be approachable, comprehensible and understandable for the young learners. Herein Pakistan It has been estimated by the World Bank that half the children out of schools do not have access to the language of school in their home lives, indicating the significance of language barriers in education (World Bank, 2005). Now, in the multilingual education program, the teachers of young learners are forced not to use the mother tongue or the first language to teach basic rules for reading and writing skills relative to their education contents. Instead of the mother tongue or the regional language, the foreign language is taught systematically in order to make the young learner so capable that they may be able to transfer their ideas from familiar language to unfamiliar one.

The children in multilingual system of education need more time to perceive an idea as compared to those who are being taught in monolingual system of education, that is why the young learners of Western or monolingual societies easily qualify their earlier level of education with best cognitive-academic skill (Mohanty A. 1990). In Pakistan, the elite class has an easy access to those institutions with expert linguists who have good command on foreign language. They not only enroll their young ones in these institutions but also engage well qualified tutors for them. They gain proficiency in foreign language and use excessively it in their domestic environment. Children of such families feel no problem while studying the basic concept in foreign language. But in case community from backward areas of Pakistan, the children are at disadvantage when they are taught in foreign language. They are at loss because they have no access to expert foreign language teacher and also they have no exposure to foreign language in their social set up but they have to study their course contents in foreign language. The teachers themselves feel inconvenience in dealing with these course contents. Such atmosphere or set up is quite unsuitable for the development of basic cognitive-academic skill of the young learners whose academic foundation needs to be developed on stronger basis. The good quality mother tongue based multilingual education is

therefore needed at the early schooling of the young learners. The early education should be in children's first language and gradually introduced transferring it if necessary to the second language of instruction after at least six years (Alidou et al, 2006).

This paper is a line with the above mentioned difficulties of young learners of Pakistan. The author has tried to expose the difficulties of the slums of the undervalued areas of Punjab where the government has announced English as a medium of instruction at school level and it has been enforced without keeping in view the linguistic problems of these backward areas.

The study aims at getting the following objectives:

- to investigate the level of satisfaction of primary level learners with English as the medium of instruction.
- to assess the level of comprehension of young learners in English as the medium of instruction.
- to observe whether mother tongue based education can be a better option at the primary level.
- to judge the choices of teachers about the medium of instructions.
- to note down the observations of the parents about the medium of instructions.

In order to achieve the objectives of the study a qualitative method of survey research was used. Office of the Executive District officer education of each of the selected districts was accessed for the smooth and easy survey of the schools. Mostly, the assistant education officers were obliged to accompany for the easy access to the school staff and students. Students were contacted in their colloquial tone for the development of familiarity.

The students have been introduced the 1st topic '*parts of plant*' from the authorized book of science 3rd. Published by the government of Punjab education department in foreign language by adopting direct and communicative method. They remained passive during the lecture even communication was held in a very familiar way, but they remained stunned and failed to response altogether. Later, another topic was discussed in the national language and students began to response positively. At the end, a concept of their syllabus was discussed in Punjabi, the mother tongue in their regional accent with the help of their teacher. They became cheerful and wholly perceived the idea. For better comprehension they have been later, questioned and a very positive response has been sought.

It was concluded after having a detailed data analysis that the medium of instruction in the class-room of a young learner should be quite as approachable and accessible for him as the mother tongue because he can have better comprehension with the least exertion about the perception of the fundamental ideas involve in the study of basic sciences.

## **2. Results & Analysis**

600 young learners were approached in group discussion to find out the results about the medium of instruction in their schooling .The following table shows the percentage of the

level of understanding in three media of instruction:

Table 1. Analysis on the basis of Medium of Understanding

| Sr.No.    | Total No of Students | Level of F.L |     | Level of N.L |    | Level of M.L |     |
|-----------|----------------------|--------------|-----|--------------|----|--------------|-----|
|           |                      | Students     | %   | Students     | %  | Students     | %   |
| Class-2nd | 200                  | 1            | 0.5 | 30           | 15 | 178          | 89  |
| Class-3rd | 200                  | 7            | 3.5 | 40           | 20 | 180          | 90  |
| Class-4th | 200                  | 13           | 6.5 | 60           | 30 | 200          | 100 |

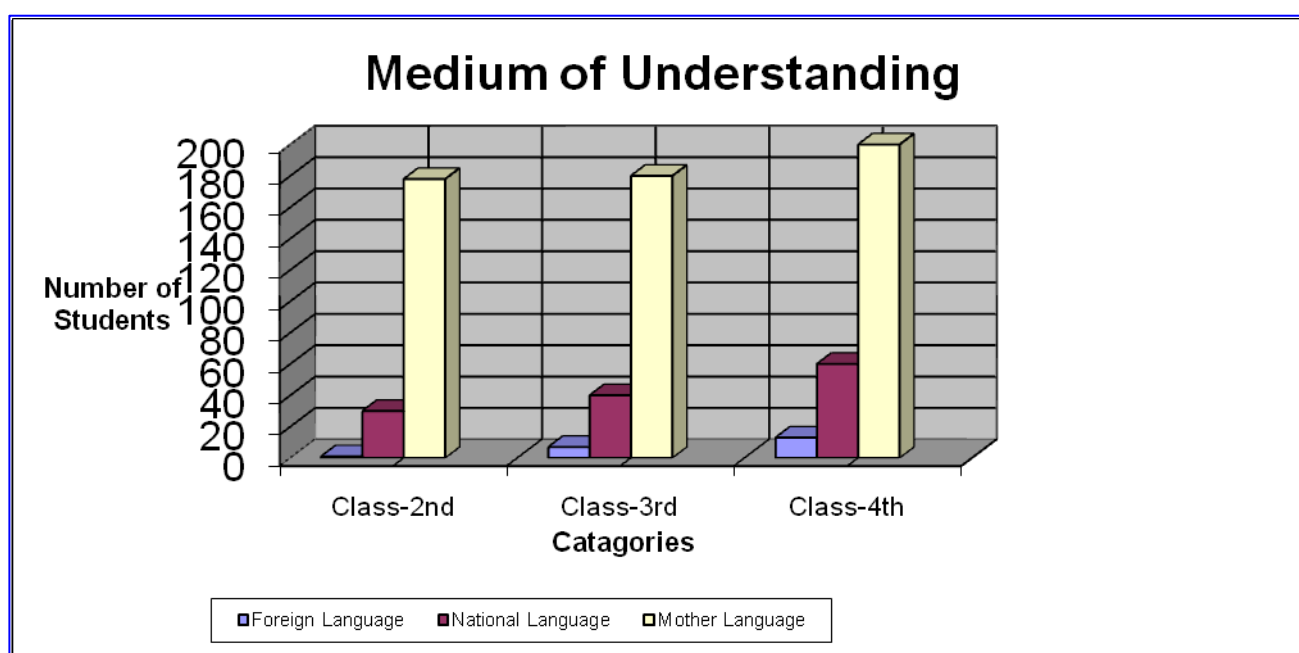


Figure 1.

The learners were approached from the 20 schools of the two districts. 200 each from grade II, III & IV. The above cited graph shows the level of understanding extorted from group discussion. The young learners were taught certain topics of their relative course contents. The young learners were approached in three media of instruction i-e the foreign language, the national language and the mother tongue. The bars of the graph show the level of understanding in these three media of instruction. The bars plotted against the percentage of the level of understanding in mother tongue show that the young learners showed their satisfaction when they were taught in their mother tongue. The low level of the bars of graph plotted against the level of understanding in the foreign language shows that learning process in the foreign language would be quite a burden for the young learners. However, the percentage of the level of understanding in the case of the national language was encouraging as the N.L. was a familiar one for some young learners. There were high percentages of young learners who completely responded in the mother tongue and understood the idea presented before them. The percentage of the young learners was very low in the case of foreign language, used as a medium of instruction. The following themes were generated from the afore said description of the representation of data:

### 3. Reasons

- The environment and socio-cultural background of young learners play an important role in the development of the cognitive ability and linguistic skills. The inertia of these conditions produces hindrance for the perception of the ideas in foreign language.
- The indigenous school atmosphere did not allow the young learners to adopt foreign medium of instruction.
- Incompetency of the teachers in the case of foreign language also plays a very bad role in the development of the foreign language. They, themselves felt confusion in the teaching practice by using the foreign language medium of instruction.
- There was no sign of charts and other materials that could motivate the young learners towards the foreign language, the course contents had been printed in the foreign language.
- The language used in the text of the course contents was quite tough and inaccessible to the learners who were devoid of stronger foundation of the foreign language. They felt inconvenience while listing to the ideas in the foreign language.

### 4. Recommendations

It can be said that the medium of instruction in the class-room of a young learners should be quite as approachable and understandable for them as the mother tongue because they can have better comprehension with the least exertion for the perception of the fundamental ideas involve in the study of basic sciences.

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