



The Impact of Urdu-Medium Schooling on English Proficiency: A Sociolinguistic Perspective

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Abstract

In the present-day modern landscape, proficiency in English Language, has become crucial for succeeding not only in academics but also in all walks of life. English is no longer the Language of the Elite, it is the Lingua Franca, thus proficiency in English has become a crucial requirement for academic success and advancement in any profession, and this requirement transcends all boundaries, what to say about Pakistan alone. However, in Pakistan, still there are social classes (middle and lower-middle) who aspire to get educated but cannot access that elite systems that are known to be English Medium in the true sense. Hence, students educated through the non-English medium of instruction face multiple challenges in developing both proficiency and accuracy in English Language. This research article delves into the linguistic, psychological, educational, and sociocultural issues that the students of these systems encounter. The most important problems identified are due to the differences in the structure of both the languages, including grammar, phonology, and vocabulary. These differences often cause incorrect transfer of expressions from one language to the other and causes errors. Additionally, major factors like language learning anxiety, lack of confidence, and fear of making mistakes further hinders competence. The article also points out some general issues, including traditional teaching methodologies, proficiency of teachers, curriculum, and unequal access to educational resources. Thus, the gap identified in this study is focused on how the sociolinguistic divide and the deficiencies in teaching methodologies barriers in attaining proficiency for the Urdu-medium students. Based on the theories of second language acquisition like Stephen Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis and Pierre Bourdieu's "Forms of Capital" wherein he takes up language as the "Cultural Capital." For the thematic analysis, Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach has been used. This article stresses upon the requirement for communicative, learner-centered teaching approaches, teacher training on interactive teaching methodologies, and enhanced awareness about correct English input. As per the study, the challenges can be overcome through pedagogical measures ensuring use of appropriate teaching methodologies learning environment that enhances English language proficiency and accuracy among Urdu-medium students.

Keywords: Language learning; Urdu-medium students; English Language proficiency; English Language accuracy; Pakistan education system

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Introduction

The importance of English language in Pakistan and across the globe, as a *Lingua Franca* (Crystal, 2003) is an accepted fact. The English language enjoys a status in Pakistan, which perhaps no other language has been able to equal till date. It is widely used in all sectors of education, employment, and entertainment as a common and most widely understood mode of communication in the urban settings. As it is the official language of communication in the Government and Private sectors, all fields of higher education rely on instruction in English, irrespective of the medium and background the learners are coming from. Despite its importance, a large proportion of students receive their early education through the Urdu medium of instruction, which often places them at a disadvantage when learning English as a second or foreign language. It was in 1994 that the Punjab Government decided to make English a compulsory subject from Class one. Later, in 1995, Sindh Government did the same. However, even after three decades, the popping off so called English language Centers, the very local “Angrezi bol Chal Sekhein” invitation boards on roadsides and the rush on registration for IELTS tells a different story – English Language Proficiency and accuracy of the Urdu Medium students still is in a deplorable state!

The proficiency gap between the two languages emanates from their differences syntax, phonology, morphology, and semantic structures. It makes the learning and teaching experience difficult and this intensifies further when the first language provincial i.e. Punjabi, Sindhi, Pushto, Balochi, Gilgiti or any other regional language spoken in Pakistan. This further complicates the structural differences between the languages, as it becomes a transfer from the regional language to Urdu and then English. This is what (Razi, 2013) terms as negative language transfer, marring the learners’ accuracy and fluency. Urdu-medium students are seen struggling with accent, fluency, sentence construction, pronunciation, and correct vocabulary usage, which severely impacts their academic performance and confidence in socio-cultural contexts.

English today has a paradoxical position in Pakistan’s linguistic framework, where it is the language of higher education, governance, and elite mobility (Rehman, 2002). Resultantly, proficiency in English is closely associated with socioeconomic well-being and academic success. However, in the domain of education English and Urdu-medium institutions, have successfully created structural and class disparities among masses.

Those who have studied in the Urdu-medium schools often experience great hardship in adjusting to the higher education setups in English Medium. This transition is often frustrating and demanding, making many quit in the mid-way. It is because of the multifarious challenges they face in the name of English; sometimes their ordeal is at the level of vocabulary only reaching to more complex levels of grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and pragmatics. Research indicates that students from Urdu medium institutions have limited communicative competence despite years of formal instruction (Shamim, 2011).

The Research Gap

The current literature identifies the challenges faced by the Urdu-Medium Students, as studied by (Shamim, 2011), or talks about aspects like “Negative Language Transfer” (Razi, 2013). However, there is a gap identified in the requirement to examine how the challenges in the domains of educational, and sociocultural factors influence English language acquisition and the students’ academic progress. Therefore, it suggests pedagogical strategies to address these issues. Specifically, the research addresses:

- Q1. What linguistic barriers hinder Urdu-medium learners’ English development?
- Q2. How do psychological and affective factors influence proficiency?
- Q3. What pedagogical and systemic issues contribute to learning challenges?
- Q4. How do sociocultural and socioeconomic dynamics shape language learners’ outcomes?

Theoretical Framework

To substantiate the point of view that Urdu medium students face difficulties in learning English Language with reference to developing proficiency and competence the following were examined through major theoretical perspectives in second language acquisition (SLA):

Krashen's Input Hypothesis

Krashen's Input Hypothesis theorizes that language acquisition through the formula of "i+1", where 'i' is the current level of the learner and '1' (input) is a bit above the level of the learner. According to Krashen, if the input is meaningful and it makes sense to the learner, then it becomes the primary means of learning for the learner. The key aspects of the Input Hypothesis are first, Comprehensible Input, i.e., what is being offered to be taught must be understood by the learner first as a meaningful message instead of making it grammar intensive or loaded with rules of grammar. Second, it needs to be Subconscious Acquisition, i.e., instead of making the learner rote learn words or rules consciously, it should be made interactive right away making it interesting and meaningful from the beginning. Language is absorbed through meaningful interaction with the language (reading/listening) rather than conscious memorization. Third, is the Natural Order, i.e., the Learners always grasp the structures of grammar in a natural order and if these are taught in an artificial made-up manner, these will make no sense to the learner. Fourth, is the Compelling Input, which must be so natural and interesting that it shifts the focus of the learner from being in a learning not an alien situation.

Relation with other Hypotheses

Krashen's Input Hypothesis has a relation to the Affective Filter Hypothesis according to which a lower anxiety state of the learner allows him to learn more easily and comprehension becomes convenient. Another is the Acquisition-learning hypothesis, which makes a distinction between subconscious and conscious learning, where acquisition is subconscious and learning is conscious. The argument of the hypothesis is that only acquisition results in language learning in a natural manner.

Bourdieu's Language as "Cultural Capital" Theory

Bourdieu theorizes that language functions as a form of cultural capital. It is an alive resource that individuals possess in varying degrees based on their socio-economic background. Within this framework, the "official" or elite language of a society, (in Pakistan's case English) functions as a legitimate currency in the linguistic marketplace (Silver, 2005). It is thus, that students from Urdu-medium backgrounds enter the higher educational system and job market with a deficit of this specific capital. Resultantly, their primary linguistic range of English is not valued culturally in the academic and professional settings. Consequently, the education system, by implicitly demanding a level of English proficiency that it does not justifiably provide, serves to reproduce prevailing class hierarchies rather than facilitate social mobility (Bourdieu, 1986).

Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory

Vygotsky and Cole (1978) came up with as the social nature of learning insisting that a language learner's cognitive development is directly related to the environment of the target language i.e. Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). While the theory has valid relation to learning a second language effectively, the problem is that Urdu medium Students in Pakistan are never exposed to that Zone of Proximal Development in their learning settings.

Cummins' Interdependence Hypothesis

Cummins (1979) gave the interesting hypothesis that suggests an interdependence between the first and the target language. This interdependence between the two languages is that of proficiency i.e. Linguistic L2 proficiency depends on L1 proficiency and development. Yet, the Urdu-medium students stand at a disadvantageous position here as well because their first language is of much use in higher education or there are lesser chances for the both languages to grow side by side. These contexts in a nutshell, provide an overview that

proficiency challenges for the Urdu Medium Students due to inadequate input, affective barriers, limited interaction, and incompetent or incomplete use of bilingual resources.

Analytical Framework

The paper follows thematic analysis by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It categorizes recurring patterns into four dominant domains: Linguistic barriers, Affective and psychological factors, Pedagogical and instructional limitations and Sociocultural and structural constraints. These are discussed in the subsequent paragraphs in the paper.

Linguistic Barriers - Challenges Faced by Urdu-Medium Students

Learning English Language is perhaps not such an ordeal as it has become for the Urdu Medium Students in Pakistan. Language learning is a skill for which both the students and teachers need the correct approach, the right tools (teaching-learning aids and resource materials), the appropriate academic setting and the reasonable time to practice it. (Westwood, 2016) notes that students face problems in learning not because they do not have cognitive issues, but because of the curriculum or methods of teaching.

Differences Between the Structure of Urdu and English

The most significant barrier is the structural difference contrast between Urdu and English. Urdu has a Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) sentence structure, while English is a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) pattern language. This difference results in grammatical errors when the Urdu Medium Students try to frame sentences in English following the grammar translation method but inherent differences in the structure of the languages makes complete equivalence impossible (Khan et al., 2025). Common errors due to structural difference are:

- Verb Misplacement (SOV Transfer):
 - *Urdu* : Ali school jata hai. (Subject-Object-Verb)
 - *Interlanguage Error*: "Ali school go."
- Helping Verb Misplacement:
 - *Urdu* : Ali so raha hai.
 - *Interlanguage Error*: "Ali sleeping is."
- Direct Object Misplacement:
 - *Urdu* : Ami ney khana pakaya.
 - *Interlanguage Error*: "Mother food cooked."

Pronunciation Differences

Phonological differences further obscure spoken English for Urdu-medium learners. English is a stress-timed language, meaning that the stressed syllables recur at relatively equal intervals. However, Urdu is a syllable-timed language, where each syllable commands an equal duration of time. Because public sector Urdu-medium institutions rarely provide explicit instruction in articulatory phonetics, the learners bring in Urdu sounds which they normally pronounce and mix with English sounds. As a result, learners often substitute familiar Urdu sounds, leading to pronunciation inaccuracies (Mahboob et al., 2008).

Consequently, students substitute unfamiliar English phonemes with familiar Urdu sounds. For instance, the production of voiceless plosives /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/ and /g/ are difficult, generally for speakers of languages where aspiration is not common. In case of Urdu-medium students, where pronunciation is not taught, such pronunciation errors have a negative impact on their confidence. This can be understood as Negative Transfer. For example, the /p/ in /pɜ:s/ becomes plainly 'purse' with a /ʊ/ and /r/ sound in it. Also dropping the final /r/ like in 'character' or 'actor' is not practiced which sounds abnormal to native speakers of English.

Additionally, the phonotactic constraints in Urdu make the speakers insert an extra vowel sound to break up an unfamiliar consonant cluster. Some observable common

pronunciation errors are in the "SC" combinations. In such words the Urdu speakers tend to insert an additional vowel sound making them sound like "is-cool," "is-cratch," and "is-creen." These pronunciation divergences mar the accent and fluency and, in the English, speaking social setup become a negative influence on the speaker's competence.

Vocabulary and Grammatical Errors in Writing

This is one of the crucial areas where most of the errors occur, as it requires correct grammatical structure and vocabulary. It happens due to limited exposure to actual language use and dependence on direct or literal translation from first language. Typical grammatical problems are noticed when learners have Urdu sentence structures and meanings in mind and they try to come up with an English sentence in the same sequence and pattern in English. This results in incorrect written expressions.

Another aspect is unwillingness to write on the part of the students because they lack in sufficient vocabulary to express themselves. This deficiency in the Urdu medium students is basically an outcome of the teaching practice of English language. This hampers the process of writing by the students and in gaining proficiency in developing correct grammatical structures with appropriate vocabulary.

It is also noteworthy that when such basic attributes in English language structure are not developed, then creative writing is a far cry. In most of the cases, the only form of writing done in Urdu medium schools is essay writing. Mostly, either the teacher dictates it to the students or give it as a home assignment. In the second case, the students seek the help of the tuition centers, guide books or internet in some cases, depending upon understanding and availability. These practices curb the tendency to learn English language usage in the correct sense and they face immense problems in higher education and at workplace.

Affective and Psychological Factors

English Language and Anxiety

In a country, where English has become a status symbol, Urdu medium students face great hardship in competing with their English medium peers. At the face of it, their first defeat is at the spoken front, where they cannot keep the balance between accuracy and fluency.

It is this embarrassment or fear of ridicule (Shamim, 2011) that makes the Urdu-medium students' reluctant to participate in English discussions. The same foreign language anxiety factor is defined by (Horwitz et al., 1986) a distinct form of performance anxiety. When the scenario is set in Pakistan, English becomes the symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991) intensifying fear of negative evaluation. (Cowden, 2009) while discussing the factor of social anxiety explains that learners of English experience the problem of engaging in speaking practice. According to him the anxiety to speak in English is the crucial factor for the teachers to understand as it directly affects their psychological wellbeing in academic achievement.

Inspiration and Motivation

Gardner (1985) talks about integrative and instrumental motivation. In case of Urdu-medium learners' instrumental motivation i.e. getting through exams, securing jobs, etc. is more common yet, there is limited evidence of integrative exposure to English-speaking communities. In addition, English as the identity of elite class creates identity conflicts, particularly in situations where linguistic differences create social divisions (Rahman) (2002).

Pedagogical and Instructional Limitations

Grammar-Translation Method

This approach was historically used in teaching Greek and Latin. Gradually, it was used to teach other languages of the world. In the Urdu Medium Schools, this method is used to teach English, with little or no use of English and all the teaching is done in the Urdu or the regional languages. Vocabulary is taught from isolated word lists, and for grammar, students

are made to learn by heart elaborate rules, with no conceptual clarity of language use in the real-life situation. Moreover, loud reading of text is started early in the course of study, where little attention is paid to the context of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis. Thus, memorization of rules is prioritized in this approach over communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Examination System

Till date, the examination for English is still based on written script alone. Entire assessment is done on the basis of questions asked either from text books or in case of writing comprehension in the shape of unseen passages. Topics for essays are also the same more or less repeated over the years, thus rote learning often rescues the students. There is no concept of skills assessment or an integrated skills assessment for a language. Thus, examination system is a mental block for the students and teachers both. Curbing their motivation and their effort to excel in English language.

Teacher-Training and Teaching Proficiency

The main proponent of success or failure of students in learning a language is the teacher. Ill-trained teachers, add to the plight of the students who belong to the villages, and of the students who reside in the cities but study in the Urdu medium Schools. The reason is the training offered to the teachers is not up to the required standard. Rather the training facilities are quite rare and according to the latest trends and teaching methodologies. It is rightly noted in many studies that most of the teachers in rural and public-sector institutions lack advanced English proficiency or training in communicative pedagogy (Coleman, 2010).

Motivation and Commitment Factors

These are the most important prerequisites for any teacher in general and a language teacher in particular. If the teacher is motivated, commitment automatically comes in. However, both are found missing from the attitude of the Urdu medium teachers often. The reasons are various. The most significant being the uncongenial working environment, lack of teaching facilities, overcrowded classrooms, and low salary package.

Sociocultural and Structural Constraints

Language and Social Stratification

English is the language of the elite class. Those who speak English fluently have an edge over those who cannot in every walk of life. Wealth, power, status and other such privileges are associated with proficiency in English in Pakistan. Rahman (2002) notes that the education system in Pakistan is heavily stratified along socioeconomic lines. This according to him is due to the medium of instruction, which acts as a marker of social class and a tool for accessing power. Bourdieu's (1986) theory of cultural capital, supports the same. According to him, those possessing esteemed forms of linguistic wealth as cultural capital, get an access to authority, legitimacy, and distinction.

Lack of Awareness about the Culture of Target Language

This is a very important factor. The actual feel of a non-native language is otherwise very difficult to develop in the minds of the young students who are totally ignorant of the culture where the language is spoken. A simple example is of the word "Supper". In our culture there is no such concept, which is popular in the British culture as a light meal taken in the evening. The teachers here explain it as "dinner before dinner", which is confusing for the children. This, and many other such concepts validate the fact that cultural awareness is always a part of language learning, which is missing in Urdu medium Schools and a factor that hampers language learning.

Limited Practice Opportunities

Another aspect that adds to social anxiety and developing fluency in English is the lack of opportunity to speak the language outside in the society i.e. at home, among peers or even on the school with peers and teachers. English speaking environment is almost non-existent for

the Urdu medium students. This fact is supported by the input-based theories as well; insufficient exposure slows down acquisition of a language.

Digital Facilities

In today's modern world where learning has become heavily dependent on modern technology and digital resources, the Urdu medium schools are still very resource poor. This specially holds true for the schools in rural areas. All the student in these schools suffer due to the lack of resources and are not able to fully develop their learning potential due this important factor. A proper environment plays a pivotal role in enhancing learning proficiency; however, the absence of resources is viewed as a barrier towards the same. The lack of educational facilities adds to the learners' struggles. In this regard, students of the resource poor Urdu medium schools are at a significant disadvantage as the socio-economic disparity limits their access to quality education (Cummins, 2000).

Research Design

This study is based on an interpretivist research paradigm. It recognizes that language learning is a social phenomenon and needs a genuine context to fully develop the learners' potential as (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) also observed i.e., constructed and influenced by contextual realities. According to the requirements of developing language proficiency, a qualitative meta-synthesis design was adopted. Primary field data was not collected rather the study synthesized existing empirical research conducted in Pakistan and comparable multilingual contexts.

The rationale for adopting a qualitative design was due to the complexity of sociolinguistic and pedagogical variables affecting Urdu-medium learners. It is accepted that Language acquisition is difficult to explain quantitatively, as it requires interpretation of classroom practices, learner experiences, institutional constraints, and sociocultural hierarchies.

Data Collection Procedure

A systematic search strategy was employed using academic databases including resources from:

- Google Scholar
- ERIC (Education Resources Information Center)
- JSTOR
- ResearchGate

Keywords included:

- "Urdu-medium students"
- "English Language proficiency"
- "Teaching Methodology"
- "Social anxiety"
- "English language as a status symbol"
- "Grammar translation method"

Table 1

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Criterion	Inclusion	Exclusion
Type of Study	Peer-reviewed experimental qualitative studies.	Fragmented opinion pieces, general surveys, and editorials.
Timelines	Publications between 1979 and 2023.	Publications prior to 1979.
Contexts	Research conducted in Pakistan or having some comparable linguistic setting.	Research related to monolingual or unmatched contexts.
Subjects	Focused on Urdu-medium students and SLA variables.	Exclusive English-medium/A-Level contexts only.

Analytical Framework

Analytical Procedures: Thematic Synthesis

The combination of the included articles was conducted using the Thematic Synthesis framework (Thomas & Harden, 2008), which contains three analytical stages:

Stage I. Free Line-by-Line Coding

In this stage, for each article consulted, the "Findings" and "Discussion" sections were treated as raw data. Every line was coded to identify any repetitive concepts concerning teaching methodology, students' anxiety, and social status.

Stage II. Development of Descriptive Themes

The Initial codes were equated across the different studies to recognize patterns and any overlapping. These were then gathered into "Descriptive Themes" that summarized the collective evidence.

Stage III. Generation of Analytical Themes

In this final stage, interpretation was involved by "going beyond" the original studies. The descriptive themes identified in stage II, were synthesized to develop an all-embracing conceptual model that clarifies how sociocultural issues and outdated pedagogy (GTM) interconnect to prevent proficiency in English Language for the Urdu Medium Students

Reliability and Validity Considerations

Although qualitative synthesis does not rely on statistical validity, credibility was ensured through:

- Use of peer-reviewed sources
- Triangulation across multiple scholars
- Cross-referencing theoretical frameworks
- Inclusion of both local and international perspectives

The study maintains transparency by clearly identifying theoretical anchors and empirical evidence. The thematic synthesis revealed interconnected challenges across linguistic, affective, pedagogical, and structural dimensions.

Linguistic Barriers

Syntactic Interference

Urdu's Subject–Object–Verb (SOV) structure differs from English's Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) syntax pattern. This structural difference results in errors in word-order mistakes, particularly in written composition. Observations from the study indicate that Urdu medium students make English sentences following Urdu syntax patterns, particularly when writing under examination pressure. These Typological-divergence mistakes signify a systematic, foreseeable structural interference pattern during L2 construction by the Urdu medium students.

Insufficient Vocabulary and lack of Creative writing Ability

Observations show that vocabulary teaching within the Urdu medium classrooms takes place as an exclusive decontextualized, isolated event to learn and memorize isolated word lists. This academic detachment restricts the semantic processing required for long-term retention, resulting in a poor word reserve. Therefore, students writing exhibits a heavy dependance on rote-memorized method. Since teaching methods treat the language as a fixed set of rules to be memorized rather than an flexible tool, creative writing tendency in students remains underdeveloped.

Pronunciation Errors

Phonetic analysis shows problems among Urdu-medium students in pronouncing English voiceless and voiced bilabial, alveolar, and velar plosives like /p/,/b/,/t/,/d/,/k/ and /g/. Particularly, the typical phonological rule of aspiration used for voiceless plosives in initial stressed syllables is constantly missed out due to L1 phonetic transfer. Since, articulatory

phonetics is not taught, students find the rhotacism of Received Pronunciation (RP), difficult, and specifically fail to suppress the final non-prevocalic. These specific phonological nonconformities arise directly from a lack of clear metaphonetic awareness due to teaching deficiencies in the classroom.

Affective and Psychological Factors

Language Anxiety

The typical issues related to an environment that fosters non-standard English language production develops a deep anxiety among Urdu-medium students. Over years of schooling, this displays as an inferiority complex regarding verbal proficiency. Horwitz et al., (1986) conceptualize foreign language anxiety as situation-specific anxiety arising in language classroom. Application of Krashen's (1985) Affective Filter Hypothesis to these observations suggests that high anxiety inhibits language intake or acts as a cognitive barrier in learning. This barrier is not due to lack of capacity of the learners, but a defensive psychological coping mechanism. (Shamim, 2011) also observed that it is this embarrassment or fear of ridicule that makes the Urdu-medium students' reluctant to participate in English discussions.

Inspiration and Motivation

The data from the study reveals that for the Urdu Medium Students, excelling in Language is not the primary motivation factor. Rather as (Gardner, 1985) talks about integrative and instrumental motivation, for these students, passing the exams, getting jobs, earning social stability etc. is more important. Also Rahman's (2002) observation that English for the elite class and it creates identity conflicts, stands valid through the observations of this study, where it is seen as creating social divisions.

Pedagogical Constraints

Grammar-Translation Method

The study identifies that the grammar-translation method, which is teacher-centered is more common. In Urdu Medium Schools, this method is used till date and hampers language learning. Moreover, there is no concept of focusing on other skills. This systemic dependence on grammar translation Method, aggressively, limits student access to communicative practice. Moreover, it has no capacity to ensure that the interactive language skills may be assessed or developed.

Examination System

In the typical Urdu medium educational setting, the high-stakes examination system is a major structural problem that creates a powerful, negative "washback effect." Because the state apparatus solely tests memory retrieval rather than functional language skills, teaching and learning unsurprisingly hinge toward rote learning. The findings show that teachers intentionally design their daily lessons with this memorization model to guarantee for students to pass the examination. Hence, the examination system restricts communicative proficiency.

Teacher-Training and Teaching Proficiency Challenges

The data highlights an severe crisis in teacher expertise, where many teachers display limited spoken fluency and a heavy dependance on L1 code-switching during lessons. This supports Coleman's (2010) diagnosis of inadequate teacher preparation as a self-perpetuating systemic barrier. When the main source of classroom input is phonologically and syntactically incompetent, the successful transference of productive and creative language skills and usage becomes structurally unachievable.

Motivation and Commitment Factors

Lack of commitment and motivation are crucial factors that are hampering English language learning scenario in Pakistan. Being important prerequisites, these have a direct bearing on the motivation and commitment of students. The lack of resources, low salary packages and crowded classrooms have a direct bearing on causing pedagogical burnout. A few recent protests by teachers in Urdu Medium Public Sector Schoos, explain their plight and

their demotivation level. Dawn (2024) reported, regarding women educators and community schoolteachers in the rural districts of Lower Dir and Bajaur staged multiple protests over non-payment of salaries for months and receiving significantly lesser salaries. Similarly, the Express Tribune (2022), reported about the plight of teachers in Lakki Marwat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, due to unpaid wages.

Sociocultural and Structural Constraints

Language and Social Stratification

In Pakistan, English has become associated with the elite class. Those who can speak English are preferred in every job and educational sector, Thus, excelling becomes easier for them and difficult for the striving Urdu medium students. In this context, Rahman, (2002) has opined that the education system in Pakistan is heavily stratified along socioeconomic lines. The study also gets its validation from the Bourdieusian perspective that in Pakistan English directly serves to enhance the class divide. It validates institutional prejudice, in terms of job opportunities or admissions in higher education sector.

Unawareness About Language Culture

The data shows that in the Urdu-Medium schools, there are almost non-existent opportunities to access an insight into the target language culture either through the resource materials or the experiences of the teachers. In the absence of such guidance for the Urdu-medium students, they find great hardship in visualizing and understanding the cultural setting of the English language and many words and phrases are lost upon them.

Limited Practice Opportunities

The study reveals that there are no opportunities to speak English in the classroom, similarly, the situation is worse outside the classroom. The English-speaking atmosphere or environment does not exist for the Urdu Medium students anywhere in their close surroundings to train their language learning instincts. Thus, the facts based on input theories are also challenged making language acquisition more difficult. In this regard, Krashen's Input Hypothesis explains that limited exposure reduces acquisition. Moreover, Vygotsky's social constructivism theory suggests that the students are deprived of comprehensible input for adequate learning.

Less practice opportunities can significantly impact the proficiency in English for Urdu medium students. Due to the limited exposure to English language practice in their daily lives, Urdu medium students may struggle to grasp the nuances of English grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The study finds that this lack of practice hinders their ability to communicate effectively in English-speaking environments, both academically and professionally.

Furthermore, the impact of fewer practice opportunities in English can also be observed in academic performance. Urdu medium students face difficulties in understanding English-language textbooks, lectures, and exams, leading to lower grades and academic achievements. This creates a cycle of underperformance and lack of confidence in English language abilities, further exacerbating the proficiency gap. In fact, the correlation between English proficiency and academic success, emphasizes the need for consistent practice and exposure to the language.

Digital Facilities

As per the observations of this study, the absence of sophisticated digital resources for an easy access to resources of language are creating a negative impact on the overall educational scenario of the Urdu-medium students. Their total reliance on the textbooks and ill-trained teachers is not taking them to the farther ends of knowledge as the other students can reach conveniently with digital access.

Policy Implications

Following reforms at policy level in the country would be useful if implemented in true letter and spirit:

Uniformity of Medium-of-Instruction

Gradual transition to bilingual models would reduce the cognitive overload for the Urdu medium students when shifting to English-dominant higher education can be reduced.

Curriculum Review

Incorporation of interactive communicative language teaching and task-based learning activities as per international standards of language teaching and learning will help in English Language acquisition.

Professional Training of Language Teachers

In-service training programs and elaborate courses in the teacher training programs on language teaching training would help. Teaching from language teaching needs to be segregated. Skills development of teachers needs special focus in teacher training courses.

Examination System Reform

Need to introduce skill-based assessments for English language as per international standards, instead of depending on rote learning and testing writing only.

Digital Access Opportunities

Concerned departments, and Government authorities need to invest in providing access to digital resources to the resource poor Urdu medium schools to create some parity with English medium schools and other elite educational setups.

Bridging the Gap at Higher Education Level

For the Urdu medium students, before they start higher education program at graduate level, some English language crash program may be offered to enhance their understanding and skills development for making further education easy.

Conclusion

This study establishes that Urdu-medium students face great linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and structural problems in becoming proficient and fluent in English language. It is concluded that reform is required at the level of teacher training, assessment system, classroom environment, educational and digital resources provision, and an overall shift from the status complex that is engulfing the opportunities for the Urdu medium students to excel in life. With adequate measures to dress these issues through wholesome reforms, there can be substantial improvement in curriculum review, teacher training, and provision of adequate resources. It is imperative at this point of time that gaining and fluency English proficiency is no longer a privilege of the higher class only, rather should become accessible to all alike. In future empirical research may include longitudinal studies measuring intervention outcomes. In this connection, large-scale surveys capturing learner experiences across provinces can be looked into.

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