TAYYABA TAMIM

LANGUAGE POLICY, LANGUAGES IN EDUCATION, AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY REDUCTION IN PAKISTAN

Abstract

The paper is based on some key findings of a wider 3-year research study funded by Research Consortium on Educational Outcomes and Poverty (RECOUP). This in-depth qualitative study used multiple case study method to capture the processes by which languages used in government and private schools, under the current language policy of Pakistan, differentially affect poverty reduction in terms of equality in the expansion of opportunities and choices, as suggested by Amartya Sen's capability approach. The interview data of 32 participants (final year secondary school graduates and 5-6 year older same- sex siblings) from 8 private and government schools in Punjab and Sindh, along with documentary analysis and participant observation revealed issues of language-based exclusion and marginalization that led to the persistence of the disadvantage of the social and academic government school participants, despite education.

Introduction

Poverty has been traditionally measured in terms of economic deprivation. However, there is a realization now that the rise in National Economic Growth Indicators, often does not offer an accurate picture of poverty, since it is multidimensional by nature (Tabatabai 1995). It is suggested that a 'poverty profile' (Crow 1992) may be constructed with 'high-quality social indicators for education, health, access to services and infrastructure [...] social exclusion, [and] access to social capital' to measure it along with economic indicators (Human Development Report, 2000: 1). Development discourse now also deliberates on how deprivation of opportunities or choices can lie at the core of poverty (Sen 1985) and 'how social exclusion sets limits to people's participation in development, and how barriers to such participation can be removed' (Human Development Report: 2000: 1).

Education has been at the centre of international and national initiatives taken by governments to reduce poverty. For this educational goals are set and measured internationally, in terms of Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) and Net Enrolment Ratio (NER). These are based on an assumption of unproblematic relationship between education and poverty reduction. Such aggregated estimations miss out on the local and contextual features of education, which may lead to differential educational outcomes, limiting the transformative outcomes of education for those who are the most in need. Research has indicated that there is no 'automatic trajectory of

progress' in educational settings (Walker 2006:16) that ensures equal opportunities for all. Education if not equitable can lead to further deepening of social stratification and divisiveness in access and entitlement.

Language can be an important source of discrimination within education (Bourdieu 1991). Language is not only the main medium of accessing and processing knowledge structures offered in education but also a crucial tool for mediating with the social world. Hence, the significance of languages chosen to be used and taught in education cannot be denied because situated within social, cultural and historical contexts, language is 'intimately related to the distribution of social power and hierarchical structures in society' (Gee 1989: 20). Research in Africa has shown that language can be a subtle but potent means of exclusion of gender and ethnic groups from socioeconomic development processes (Robinson 1996). This may also explain why the poorest populations are also linguistically most marginalized (ibid.).

The language policy can reinforce the dominance of privileged groups which is often mediated through educational institutions (Bourdieu 1991). Language policy within education configures power structures within institutions in relation to wider power structures. The language-based decisions and practices in education can forge the privilege of the dominant by devaluing the linguistic capital of the dominated and reinforcing their disadvantage. Hence, educational institutions may reproduce and forge the existing inequality between social classes (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977), rather than offer equal opportunities for achieving valued goals. This marginalization may also result from restricted dissemination of the valued languages to privileged groups only (Bourdieu 1991). Hence, the choice of languages in education, teaching/ learning of languages as situated within a wider language policy, though driven by political, social, economic and pragmatic concerns (Mansoor 2005) can have strong implications for issues of poverty and inequality.

Studies in sociolinguistics suggest a link between languages and marginalization. Tollefson (1991) found evidence of language policy as a 'mechanism' for establishing the privilege of the dominant, with his 'historical structural' approach in a study across seven countries. Studies in critical pedagogy in immigrant contexts have also drawn attention to the sociopolitics of teaching dominant languages like English and issues of power and identity (Norton, 2000; Cummins, 2000). Vavrus (2002) in his longitudinal study found a link between secondary school students' sense of empowerment and their knowledge of English. Other studies like Walker's (2006) on widening participation in higher education in the UK revealed that the rejection of working-class participants' 'linguistic and cultural capital' led to alienation stress and despair among them (p:7). In Pakistan, Rahman's (2006) historical linguistic work highlights the relationship between language and political power; while Mansoor's (2005) study has revealed the importance of English in higher education and the paradoxically inadequate language support. A missing dimension in these studies, however, is the lack of concern in engaging with issues of narrowly defined poverty, as affected by languages in education and language policy, mapped out on the subjective realities of individuals.

The question that this paper addresses is how the configuration of languages in the language policy and within education in private and government schools in Pakistan affects the educational outcomes for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds in terms of poverty reduction? Poverty is conceptualized here as relative and seen as 'capability deprivation' i.e. freedom of opportunities and choices to participate and achieve valued goals in relative terms (Sen 1985). The current paper, following Bourdieu (1991) rejects the linguistic and cultural deficit theories and is based on the assumption that education if equitable can transform the lives of all despite disadvantaged backgrounds. The paper begins with a brief overview of the context, language policy, languages in education and poverty in Pakistan. It then explains the methodology of the study before presenting the findings and their discussion. This is followed by a conclusion.

Language Policy, Education and Poverty in Pakistan

Pakistan has no less than 25 languages (Mansoor 2005), in addition to a national language, Urdu and an official language English. Of these, Punjabi is spoken as a mother tongue by 44.15%, Pashto by 15.42%, Sindhi by 4.10%, Siraiki by 10.53%, Urdu by 7.57%, Baluchi by 3.57%, and other languages by 4.66% of the population (Census 2001). In Pakistan, the official language policy demonstrates a strong commitment to Urdu in favour of regional languages but stays ambiguous regarding the relative status of Urdu and English. Despite Urdu being declared a national language, and the lingua franca in the country, historically, it is the use of English that is pervasive in government, bureaucracy, the higher judiciary, higher education and almost all official business (Mansoor, 2005; Rahman, 1996). In this context, the significance of learning the two dominant languages: Urdu and English becomes highly important, with the knowledge of the latter especially related to prestige and power (ibid).

The question of languages in education has been much debated among educationists and politicians and continues to-date in Pakistan. Rahman (1997) states that under the British colonial rule English was reserved for the 'elitist education,' while 'the masses were taught at lower levels in the vernacular - which was taken to be Urdu in all provinces except in Sindh, where Sindhi was used' (p:147). After independence a similar policy continued with also Pashtu being used at a much lower level and to a lesser degree, in some parts as a medium of instruction (ibid.). With regional languages given little importance beyond primary, and apart from the matter of Bengali to be given a status at par with Urdu for a short period, it has been Urdu vs English as the medium of instruction which has comprised the locus of controversy over the medium of instruction in Pakistan (ibid.)

This ongoing debate, though had little impact on the private English-medium schools which continued to function. However, in the late 1970s, the government nationalized private schools to impose Urdu as the medium of instruction in the name of national solidarity Nevertheless, the attempt failed, as even the government's own institutions, such as those run by the Ministry of Defence,

resisted the change. The policy was reversed and denationalization in 1979 led to a surge of English-medium private institutions, especially in urban areas, which charged varying levels of fees. The choice of the medium of education was now left to the provincial governments. In 2002, the Punjab government initiated English-medium instruction for a section within selected government schools from grade VI onwards on experimental basis and further both the governments of Punjab and Sindh planned the conversion of all government schools from Urdu to English-medium instruction from class I onwards until 2012. This however, has not been achieved because of the paucity of human, material and financial resources. This decision made with the enthusiastic verve of equalizing opportunities to learn English, had failed to take into account the problems for learners in government schools, who had little prior exposure to English, and for many of whom even Urdu was a second language. Hence, fraught with pragmatic concerns, political tensions, and little research, the status quo continues.

In higher education the policies and reports of education commissions/committees (1957–1998) declared English as the medium of instruction (Mansoor 1993). However, this has always been meant to be a short-term arrangement until materials in Urdu could be developed (ibid.). The period allocated for switching the medium of instruction from English to Urdu, in these reports ranges from 15 years in 1959 to seven years in 1982 (ibid.). Although the problems of students in higher education stemming from the use of English as the medium of instruction are realized (Mansoor 2005), little attention has been paid to address the issue, and more recent reports hardly mention it. At present, English is the main medium of instruction at higher education level, though there is choice to take up a limited range of subjects in Urdu, this choice narrows down with progression into higher level. All science-based subjects, especially those leading to medical or engineering degrees, are offered only in English at all government and private universities.

Currently, nearly all private schools in urban areas that charge fees use English as a medium of subject study and offer Urdu as a subject, though in low paid English medium schools, although text books are in English, a major chunk of instruction may be in Urdu. The quality of English language teaching/ learning in these schools often coincides with their fee structure. In contrast, at the time, when this research was conducted the free government schools mainly offered instruction in Urdu[1] or, in some cases, regional languages,[2] while English was being taught as a subject. Since then following government instructions, all the government schools have started to officially offer all subjects, except Islamiyat in English. This brings them, to a certain extent, at par with low-paid English medium schools. This enthusiastic move is a classic example of treating English as a commodity and attempting to redistribute it. The policy fails to conceptualize that given the diversity of learners' backgrounds and languages, distribution of the same 'linguistic commodity' would not equalize opportunities. Rather it would further disadvantage those for whom even Urdu is a second language. However, none of the participants had experienced this transition.

Poverty in the Pakistan is pervasive with 49% of its population suffering from multidimensional poverty (Human Development Report, 2011). Participation in higher education is only 5%, and is fraught with gender and regional disparities (Economic Survey 2011). Although the Economic Survey (2011) has estimated the literacy rate at 57.7% and informs of rise in school enrolments, studies such as Andrabi, Das, Khwaja, Vishwanath, & Zajonc (2007) and ASER (2012) report poor learning outcomes, specifically in government schools, revealing that there is a large majority of those 'in' schools but 'silently excluded' from any meaningful learning (Lewis, 2007a in Lewis and Little, 2011).

The Study

This paper is based on some key findings of a 3-year qualitative study which used a multiple-case study design . The methodology of the study served its purpose to explore the outcomes of languages in education, with all its complexity, interwoven into the fabric of the sociocultural context within which the participants were located. The study aimed at in-depth understanding of typical cases rather than extensive generalization. Each case comprised a final-year secondary school student and his/her same sex sibling (at least 5 years older) who had completed secondary education. Sixteen cases (8 male pairs and 8 female pairs) were selected from 7 schools (4 private and 3 government) in urban areas from Karachi (Sindh) and Lahore (Punjab). In Sindh, Sindhi is a mandatory paper in Sindh Secondary board examination, taken at the end of secondary school, while Punjabi has no place in the secondary education in Punjab.

The sampling of schools was purposive, as the aim was to study typical schools in city centres. The main criteria that guided the selection of a school were: a) a population of 300-400 students and b) preparation (of a significant section of its population) for the matriculation provincial board examination. c) location in city centres. This left out schools that were very small or impoverished on the one hand, and schools that were accessible only to the elite on the other. This also meant that all the participants had studied a very similar syllabus for at least two years and taken a similar examination. The government schools in the study did not charge any fee; while the private schools in the study had a fee structure that ranged from Rs 1500-Rs 5000.

The method of 'snowball sampling' (Biernacki & Waldorf 1981) was also used to facilitate access, which was a major issue because of the political upheaval in Pakistan during the period of data collection, especially in government schools. My role as participant observer played out differently in different contexts because of my ethnicity, gender and class. The sampling process was initiated in schools.[3] In a secondary school, the Head teacher was asked to identify a participant in the final year, with an elder sibling, who had completed secondary school education. Interviews with younger sibling were conducted in schools, while those with elder siblings at their homes.

The choice of siblings within a case served to capture time- related processes i.e. comparisons within the time span corresponding to the age difference between the siblings, in relation to four main areas: a) parental schooling choices b) sociocultural and socioeconomic contexts c) language learning experiences in schooling and d) language-based experiences beyond schooling. In addition the older sibling offered a pragmatic window to the wider social life; while the younger sibling provided more recent and vivid representations of schooling processes. The gendering of the cases helped to avoid gender-related distortion of comparisons. However, a comparison of siblings lies beyond the scope of this paper.

The methods for data collection included: a) in-depth interviews; b) participant observation; c) documentary evidence. Single session, ethnographic style interviews lasting 1-2 hours were conducted with each individual participant separately. The dimensions of human development (Alkire 2002) (see appendix A) were used to provide a flexible structure to the interview. The participants were requested to give concrete examples for any abstract idea they expressed (Woods 1996) and it was these events that formed the point of discussion. A new dimension for discussion was only used to check if the participants would like to contribute anything with reference to it. They were given the option to skip any dimension, though none of the participants took that option (see appendix B for the emergent interview frame).

Participant observation was carried out over the course of a year in schools, public places, hospitals, banks, offices, airports and in different social gatherings in both cities to discover the cultural knowledge, which the participants used to 'organize their behaviour and interpret their experience' (Spradley 1980: 31). The observations centred on: a) the type of information made available in different languages and the intended audience; b) its impact on people's participation in social life, who shared proximity of social positions with my participants; c) the context within which the languages were embedded. Brief notes were jotted down during this process to be expanded later in relation to: time, place, events, people involved, language choice, my own interpretations, reflections, feelings and suggestions for further research or observation. Belonging to the same sociocultural context and given the ubiquitousness of language, I was a participant observant and in the field all the time.

Documentary evidence that was collected included: pamphlets, airline tickets, bank account opening forms; advertisements on billboards; instruction manuals, instructions and sign posting at different offices, hospitals. In addition, secondary school course books of English Math and Science, curricular reports, were also studied. Furthermore, TV programmes on different channels, magazines and daily newspapers were also studied at different periods of time in relation to the language represented, the message conveyed, and the inclusivity or exclusivity of audiences. The collection of all documentary evidence was directed by unfolding of issues from the interviews and participant observation.

The data analysis was a cyclical rather than a linear process. Nevertheless, it moved between two broad phases. In the first phase interviews were fully transcribed and

analysed individually and in the second phase data within and across the cases were studied for patterns and themes. The process began with line-by-line coding of the transcribed interviews. This was done first to get impressions and coding comprised mostly of key words used by the participants, while notes or memos[4] were posted side by side as some concepts seemed to develop. These codes were then revisited, leading to the merging of the initial codes into more abstract categories. This rigorous coding of each interview was both an attempt to retain the link between the question asked and the response and to gain an awareness of the positioning of the discourse within its surrounding argument so that the implicit meanings in the articulation of the perceptions and conflicting or confirming statements could be captured. The emerging themes seemed to divide themselves into some broad descriptive domains within which participants' perceptions were embedded for example family, education, work and wider social life, under the overarching multidimensional framework of human development (Alkire 2002).

In the second phase, the data across the cases was analysed within specific domains. This was followed by axial coding,[5] as larger relationships and patterns seemed to emerge. Old categories merged into 'higher order concepts' (Sarantakos 2005: 350). The question asked here was 'what seems to go with what?' (Robson 2002: 477), as detailed data matrices were made. Strategies of a) clustering and counting to check recurrence of the data; b) 'contrasting and comparing; c) 'partitioning [of] variables' ; and d) checking 'plausibility' of interpretations were used (Robson, 2002: 480) along with triangulation of data from memos, field notes and documentary analysis. Finally, I arrived at more selective coding[6] and 'core categories' at a higher degree of abstraction (Strauss and Corbin, 1998) that led to the final coding.

Findings

The analysis of the data seemed to cluster the participants into three social 'classes.' My concept of class here aligns with Bourdieu's use of the term i.e. classes in theoretical terms only. This is to emphasize that the participants seem to group not only in terms of their approximate volume and composition of capitals: economic, cultural, symbolic and social but also seemed to share with those approximate to them in the social space certain attitudes, perceptions and a thread of common experience (Crossley 2008).

Apparently, stemming from difference in economic capital the differences between them were reflected in a) family education, occupation and living conditions b) parents' attitude towards education vs. skill learning c) attitude towards female jobs d) schooling choices e) schooling experiences f) and conformity to or challenging of established local culture.[7] A discussion of all these aspects which clearly advantaged the private school graduates is beyond the scope of this paper. Table 4.1 provides an overview of the basic comparison in relation to income, family size and education of the two groups.

Family income, size and educational profile of the two groups

Table 4.1: Family income, size and educational profile of the two groups

	Total Family Income	Number of siblings	Current educational status	Personal income
Private school graduates	Rs 60,000-200,000	3-4	Younger in schools, all elder siblings in universities	-
Government school graduates Lower-middle class	Rs. 40,000-50,000	5-8	Younger in school, all elder siblings in universities	-
Working-class	Rs. 9,000-25,000	6-9	Younger in school, all elder siblings in work	Rs 1000 - 12,000

Four of the eight government school graduates (GSG) cases formed the lowest income group,[8] with both parents uneducated and fathers in skilled/unskilled manual labour and lived in impoverished over crowded slums; I term them as the working class. The other group of GSGs had a higher range of income, with fathers either in small businesses or low paid office jobs. They lived in much better conditions. I term them as lower-middle class. A common strand in the lives of all GSGs was low parental education if any and large families. Apart from this the lower-middle class GSGs shared several values with the middle-class private school graduates (PSGs). The working-class GSGs also informed of disruptive schooling journeys and poor value attached to education by the parents and little attention the selection of schools by them, and discouragement of females to work outside homes, except in teaching profession, adhering to norms common in the given culture.

The parents of the lower-middle class GSGs shared with private school graduates an appreciation and commitment to education and were open towards females pursuing a career, often confronting cultural norms, though schooling choices were made with relevance to distance to school like the working-class GSGs, initially. PSGs suggested much higher incomes. They all reported highly educated parents with both parents holding a Masters or Bachelors degree, except in one case. [9] Fathers either owned a business or held well-paid jobs and in one case the mother was also working. In addition, they belonged to comparatively smaller families see table 4.1. Research has highlighted how these differences advantage the middle class children in terms of cognitive and verbal development. Even if not seen in deterministic terms, it can hardly be denied that this social positioning placed the working class GSGs most disadvantageously. However, following Bourdieu (1991) Hart et al (2004) I argue that education can offer possibility of positive change to all despite the limitations of social background. The paper focuses only on the comparison between private school graduates (PSGs) and government school

graduates (GSGs). However, where intra-group differences are significant I highlight the social class category.

There were no significant differences between the schools in Punjab and Karachi, except that the physical infrastructure of the visited schools in the latter was generally worse and there was a sense of scarcity of financial resources. There were also no discernible differences in the responses of the participants from the two provinces. The findings here are presented as themes arising across cases, but intra-group differences are not glossed over if they are relevant to the paper

Poor Learning of Languages and Devaluation of Local/Regional Languages in Private School Settings

The findings revealed that the participants from the most disadvantaged backgrounds remained the most disadvantaged also in terms of learning of languages in schools. According to self reports, six out of sixteen participants from government schools reported not having learnt any language. Significantly, all of these were from the lowest income backgrounds. Of these some like Khalid could not even 'read or write a line of Urdu,' or Sindhi let alone English (Khalid GSG). These participants invariably reported being grouped in large classrooms, and/ or labelled as low-ability students. Hence the lost opportunity of literacy despite 10 years of attending school, and the demanding regimes of balancing work with study. Other government school graduates (GSGs) felt they knew Urdu, but hardly any English. Hence, these were deprived of access to the language that held high prestige in the country.

The private school graduates (PSGs), on the contrary, invariably reported knowing English to varying extents. Although only seven of the sixteen private school graduates (PSGs) felt highly confident of their English, they all strongly felt that these were still much better than the minimal English of the GSGs. However, all of them declared having learnt only 'poor' Urdu from school. It is significant that 17 out of 32 participants from both groups i.e. 53 % of them termed themselves as in the case of Huma put it 'in the middle of nowhere' and who Cummins (2000) terms as 'semilinguals' deficient in command of any language. Importantly, the participants from both groups considered Urdu much less important than English in terms of negotiating desirable educated identities and accessing valued goals. Hence, the lowest income group of GSGs felt they had benefited the least, while the PSGs, who formed the highest income group of participants in the study, realized that they benefited the most from their schooling in terms of language learning.

However, none of the participants, except one, reported learning Sindhi at school.[10] 'We learnt it as a subject only...you know [not a language] so we never learnt anything,' explained Mehwish (PSG). The one female graduate, who reported learning Sindhi, belonged to a Sindhi speaking family and even her elder sister did not share her perception of knowing Sindhi.

In government schools in the study, though the regional languages did have the same status as Urdu, their use was not discouraged. In strong contrast, in private schools, despite the fact that local languages like Sindhi and Urdu were taught as a part of the curriculum, the policy was to minimize their use among the learners. All the private school participants (PSGs) reported intolerance of school administration towards the use of regional languages or Urdu. PSGs recalled fines and punishments being meted out for using Urdu in classrooms and being constantly reminded to speak only in English. Faisal (PSG) narrated the incidence of his friend who was sent back from the principal's office, without being allowed to speak because he could not express himself in English:

Now Sir was asking him to clarify his point only in English. He is telling sir that I sir I can't (don't know how to) speak in English, I only know how to speak Urdu […] Then he felt very bad. Then he got his speech translated and then after understanding it fully went to sir that sir this is my point…even if I was (in his place) I would have felt very bad. My point is perfectly alright but I am not being able to explain to sir. Sir is insisting that you have... to do it in English... then you don't feel bad […] the whole class then says that sir did not even hear him out.(Interview PSG Site: Lahore, April, 3, 2008).

Here the school had made 'the right to speak' and 'be heard,' (Bourdieu 1991) conditional to knowing English. This institutional devaluation of local languages in private schools seemed to socialize students into dismissing not only local languages and cultures but also the people who used them. What is striking also is the poor learning of dominant languages by the GSGs and the poor learning of Urdu by the PSGs in addition to hardly any learning of Sindhi.

Impact on Participation in Higher Education

In higher education, where the main medium of instruction was English, except in a few selected subjects, the private school graduates reported feeling at ease, already used to the English medium education. On the contrary, all the government school graduates (GSGs) reported problems in accessing, understanding and engaging with information in English text books and lectures. Even the younger participants not yet in colleges, anticipated these issues 'what will we do?' wondered Faiza (GSG). Abid (GSG) explained the plight of those who enter higher education from government schools:

It [English] becomes his limitation... he will not ask any question. It happens in our class. Those who are very weak in English... if sir is explaining and someone asks, he would explain in Urdu but that boy or girl feels guilty in oneself that they all know English and I don't. (Source Interview: GSG Lahore, April, 4, 2008).

Nabila (GSG) reported, 'to tell you the truth I did not know the difference between 'English medium and Urdu medium until I attended my first year English class [in college].' She described her experience of attending lectures exclusively in English:

‘we would sit in our class as if bound and gagged [...] we could not understand anything so how could we ask any questions.’ Sameen (GSG) reported ‘We pleaded the teacher to explain a little in Urdu but she said you have to live with it’. Sameen explained that this excluded 60 % of the first year English class in her college, which comprised of students from government school from any meaningful learning.

This also meant a shift in the positioning of GSGs as the academic language they had acquired i.e. was systematically devalued in higher education and replaced with English, with which they were only minimally acquainted. Nabila (GSG) described how she had to change her focus from understanding the text to mere rote learning in college, because she ‘could understand nothing.’ Ali and Zeeshan (GSGs) both excellent students in their secondary schools were forced to take up back benches:

A: I had good marks in Matric but less in FSc

Q why?

A One thing was English was suddenly there…in the beginning…I could not understand at all. Not at all, look up each word’s meaning then learn it (Interview GSG, Lahore, April 2008).

GSGs instead of feeling empowered by their higher education experience, described feeling threatened and obliged to resign to their lower status in relation to private school graduates. ‘We would just look at them as they did the summary in minutes,’ commented Saleh (GSG), as she related her endless struggle to cope with English text. In addition GSGs also described problems in relating to concepts that they had learnt at school because of the change in terminology from Urdu to English. [11] Consequently, all GSGs either limited themselves to subjects only offered in Urdu or reported a drop in their grades in FSc examination like Ali. This inevitably restricted their freedom to choose the career they valued.

For the working-class GSGs, this seemed to culminate in dropping out of college, since they could neither access subjects of choice nor afford tuitions to support their academic efforts at college. Yasmeen, Anwar and Nabila GSGs, from the lowest-income group, related this as the main reason for leaving college without a degree. It does not then, seem incidental, that of all the 16 GSG participants who were or had been in higher education, only one belonging to the lower middle income group was able to pursue professional education that she valued.

In strong contrast, not only did a majority of PSGs mention active participation in classroom discourse and discussions presenting and asserting their point of view, they also reported involvement in multiple activities.[12] Hira (PSG) reported the freedom to be in dramatics, debates and several other social events, and commented ‘now the one who does not have English language skills cannot even think of participating in a play or standing in an election’. Faizan (PSG) basked in his success in winning a national intercollegiate debating competition at college, and mentioned attending several conferences and seminars, opportunities he attributed to his good English language

skills. The significance of English language was also evident by the fact that none of those who were not confident in their English reported any such participation.

Impact on Career Choices

Data from participant observation and documentary analysis revealed an unmitigated importance of English in the job market. Hence, the advantage of the PSGs. This advantage of PSGs was well perceived by both groups. PSGs strongly felt that they held high value because of their English and their poor Urdu was hardly an impediment in their prospective careers. Mehnaz (PSG), in final year BA Architecture at NCA reported 'I have not written a word of Urdu in the last five years.' Umer (PSG) working after his BBA degree, explained that he worked well at his job with an NGO, by writing Urdu in English alphabet, but it was his English that was important in securing his place in the market. Mehnaz (PSG) explained that even in the placements for internships, English skills were considered: 'Only those with good English are allowed to deal with the clients,' while others are placed at the 'back office.' Significantly, the trust PSGs placed in acquisition of good jobs, corresponded to their belief in their own competency in English. Although a majority of PSGs perceived issues with their English skills, they were keenly aware that they were still in a stronger position in the job market as compared to GSGs, who barely knew English.

In the given situation, where English had assumed an unmatched symbolic power, even the lower-middle class GSGs, who were able to survive in higher education felt threatened. Ali explained how he did not pursue a marketing career because it would require presenting in English. Zeeshan (GSG) like others also presupposed issues in upward mobility in job, even if he got one. 'It is all in your mind...but the presentation has to be in English.' He reiterated 'the boss would never take with him someone who does not know how to speak.' Farooq (GSG) who had recently completed his BA degree, felt so pressurized in the job interview with the use of English, even though it was occasional, that he accepted the job offer without even attempting to know his salary. Now a month into his job, he did not know what he would be paid. For others who could only complete two years of college education, the sense of vulnerability persisted. Nabeel (GSG) from the working-class explained, 'One cannot even get a waiter's job at Pizza Hut if you don't know English.'

The findings indicated that the juxtaposition of the devaluation of local languages in the given social context, the value of English and the magnitude of its use, in contrast to the poor English skills of the GSGs, relegated the working-class participants to manual labour or low paid jobs, which they had expected to escape and forced them to accept their low positioning in the social structure. Waled (GSG), in final year of secondary school spoke passionately of working in a bank. However, he emphasized that he would never 'enter a bank' unless he learnt English. 'Why should we go there if we do not have the language/ we have to keep our respect?' Salem (GSG), another student, working as a car mechanic after school, would have liked to work at a computerized workshop, where work was

easier and everyone was so 'clean' but did not consider it a viable option for himself because of his lack of English.

The worst impact of not knowing English was faced by the working –class female GSGs. Restricted by their families in most cases, to teaching jobs, where English language skills were important, they were forced to accept extremely low salaries (Rs 1000-1500) in local private English medium schools. Despite having completed first two years at college, they could only claim a pay lower than that of an average uneducated domestic servant in the city. Hence the education of working class females failed to provide them with the financial stability and independence they strongly valued and needed.

Impact on Control over Life: Wider Access and Participation

The data from participant observation and documentary analysis revealed that English language permeated almost all service departments and official business. For example all the airline tickets, and four of the five banks approached had their account opening forms in English. While all the other detailed information for the clients, like the use of credit cards etc was in English. Even where Urdu appeared in some sections where loans were being offered, the information in Urdu was only selective and minimal. A bilingual telephone line was offered i.e. Urdu and English, by the banks and other institutions but no regional language was used. The same was the case with firms offering life insurance. In addition, in several cases, Urdu translation did not always form a part of medical literature, accompanying medicines or over the counter products, or other pamphlets and sign boards. Even when it did, the information provided in English and Urdu was different. Hence those who could not read English could still only access partial information. The interview data projected the sense of vulnerability and lack of control by the GSGs in this context, as they felt that the information base of the choices they made was limited. 'Even a syringe has English information on it' (Khalid, GSG) commented. This also meant a strong sense of vulnerability especially for working-class GSGs, depending on others for information, if they missed a flight, open an account or choose a product, while the information was there the time, but in English, which they could not read. This also kept them from fully comprehending the repercussions of their choices: even if these were as insignificant as the choice of the right skin care product or an over the counter drug. In the face of this wide use of English in all domains of power and privilege, the GSGs described a sense of vulnerability and marginalization, not even mentioned by the PSGs.

In addition, certain languages always seemed to appear in certain contexts and these contexts in themselves seemed to constitute text by adding symbolic meaning to the language used. For example, it was noticeable that different locations in both cities were also demarcated by language on hoardings, shop names, instructions etc. Exclusive use of Urdu almost always seemed to appear in impoverished surroundings, while exclusive use of English was in elite areas, an intermix of both in middle-class localities. Only by looking at the language on hoardings, sign boards

on shops, instructions in buildings or in hospitals. One could tell if the area was more frequented by poor communities, middle class, or the elite. Hence, different contexts seemed to subtly exclude or include different classes. However, while the PSGs had an unlimited access because of their familiarity with Urdu, the access of GSGs, the working-class especially, was limited as they might find it difficult navigate their way where English was being used exclusively.

The Deepening of Social Stratification

The hegemony of English perpetuated by the current policy was evident in this context, where English was mutually regarded as superior and its speakers as knowledgeable and educated by both groups. This in contrast to the restricted opportunities for learning English, only added a language-based stratification, a state of culturalism' (Holliday 2003) to the class divided society, evident as both groups only referred to each other as 'Urdu medium' and 'English medium,' a dichotomy that they emphasized in 'us'/ 'they' referrals. Hira (PSG) explained:

These Urdu medium children remain uneducated even after being educated,,, they don't know anything… they are villagers… and their parents also… they must have that kind environment at home that they did not study in English medium. If they have studied in Urdu medium then their choice of clothing will also be bad. They would also wear clothes like that…/ A whole picture emerges in the mind.(Interview PSG, Lahore , April 12, 2008)

Unais (PSG) described:

> *For example he is Urdu medium he has bad language,,, meaning he verbally abuses ... this is the way his language is ... but the class environment is different ...these things are strictly disallowed and so are bad languages. (Interview PSG, Karachi, June. 22, 2008)*

In this 'othering' the PSGs clearly manifested a colonial dichotomy, where they perceived themselves as inherently privileged and superior, while the 'others' i.e the 'Urdu mediums' as 'uncivilized', uneducated and 'inferior' (Pennycook 1998). This language-based social stratification and unequal power relations between the two groups were manifest as Rehana (PSG) emphasized '*English becomes a barrier between those who speak English and those who don't.*' She explained that some of her class fellows did not speak English, because '*they don't come from a good family*.' This denouncing of those who could not speak English was evident in social networking outside families discussed by participants. Nazia (GSG) commented *'we want to sit with them [English medium],' that way she explained they could also learn English and 'speak to them on equal terms' but lamented that no one liked to be associated with 'us.'* This meant that those from disadvantaged backgrounds had minimal chance of building upon more powerful social networks that could lead to their empowerment.

The devaluation of local language under the current language policy and within education reflected in the dismissive attitude of almost all the participants towards local regional languages highlighted a deepening of social cleavage and a

disintegration of collective agency. Huma (PSG) a final year medical student highlighted the major issue of dealing with poor patients from rural areas who did not speak Urdu. *'Everyone is hunting for someone who knows the language [regional] to communicate with the patient.' Hina (PSG) pointing to the common practice of frequent borrowings from English in Urdu during speech argued: 'we don't even know Urdu. We think we know Urdu but we don't and it becomes such a problem. Every English word you speak is lost on them [patients].'* Without access to the language of people, diagnosis of the illness and health management of the most vulnerable is reduced to speculation and conjecture As participants indicated a shift away from regional languages, it meant an inevitable breakdown of communication between the educated and those most in need trapped in the poverty cycle.

Window of Opportunity in Regional Languages

In strong contrast to the devaluation *o*f local languages, a small but significant section of data revealed the importance of learning regional languages, along with dominant ones. Faiza, a working-class GSG explained that she had recently, left her low-paid teaching job to run a home business, which involved getting order for embroidered laces and preparing them accordingly by the community women. Faiza, now earning much more, strongly attributed the empowerment from her now flourishing business, to the regional languages she had learnt in her neighbourhood, and the Urdu she had learnt at school. Her diverse local linguistic capital allowed her to interact with the home-bound uneducated but skilled women on the one hand and mediate with local shopkeepers on the other and bring financial relief to all, an evidence of agency achievement. She was now able to support the education of her brother, while also hoarding some savings for her marriage. In a different instance of capitalizing on local linguistic capital, Faraz (GSG) running a large family textile business explained that the deliberate use of Urdu in textile industry was intentional and unique to it. He disclosed that the acceptance of local languages allowed them to access and capitalize on the culturally embedded knowledge of skilled local people and accrue vast economic and social benefits for all. 'Had English been made the criteria of selection, so many highly skilled people could never have been able to enter the business,' he explained, while they themselves would have failed to benefit from their valued skills. It might be significant then that the textile industry is one of the most flourishing industries in Pakistan.

Discussion

The results of the study corroborate the poor learning in government schools revealed by other studies (Andarbi et al. 2007; ASER 2012). It also supports the findings of Mansoor (2005) regarding the need for English in higher education, in contrast to the poor skills of students, and the marginalization of the disadvantaged at this level (Walker 2006). The study with micro level data also supports the argument of the marginalization perpetuated by the language policy as suggested by Tollefson (2009). However, the current study goes beyond earlier research and

engages in-depth with issues of poverty and deprivation, in terms of restriction of freedom of choices and opportunities to achieve valued goals (Sen 1985).

The data strongly suggests that the local cultures and languages, when dismissed in educational settings and treated pathologically, as if to be corrected and configured in accordance with the dominant Western culture, led to disempowerment, and limited participation. This inevitably affects the transformative outcomes of education for the dominated. The results of the study match the immigration studies in Canada and USA (Cummins 2000) that suggest language-based marginalization but here apply to vast majority of local population.

Cummins (2000) also argues that provision of the same text books does not ensure equality of opportunity if all the participants have not been equipped equally to make use of them. This was obvious in the case of higher education, in Pakistan, where the facade of equal opportunity falls apart when it is realized that a majority of GSGs remain marginalized both within and after their higher education. Bourdieu's (1991) argument that educational institutions are not neutral but play a mediating role in affecting and reinforcing existing power structures, appears to be relevant to the study. The twin processes of devaluation of local languages and poor teaching of dominant language, against the importance given to English in the language policy, can be seen to increase the social cleavage, disrupt social networking and increasing the vulnerability of the poorest despite their education. The educated can be seen 'dislocated' (ibid.)by their education, as they attempt to disassociate and fail to connect with their cultural knowledge, local languages and a large poverty stricken rural population, intensifying the isolation of the poor rather than contributing to their wellbeing and initializing collective agency for wider prosperity.

If poverty reduction is to be a step towards 'self actualization', what is needed then is to ensure a 'two-way communication' and participation rather than a 'top-down intervention' (Dubbeldam 1984 in Robinson 1996: 45). This necessitates acceptance of local cultures and languages. However, despite the significance of the issue, the question of languages in education and language education within the context of language policy of multilingual countries remains largely unexplored from development perspective. The current study aims to highlight the important and multidimensional implications that language based decisions and practices have for participants from disadvantaged backgrounds.

The results of the study have limited generalizability because of its design but it contributes to the understanding of how language filters control and access to resources and demarcates the horizons of what is knowable and achievable. Hence, it inevitably affects freedom of choice and participation, which are pivotal to the processes of poverty reduction, from a capability-based perspective. Unless languages distributed by schools are valued and accepted in the dominant structures, educational outcomes in terms of participation and empowerment are bound to be limited. This makes equitable distribution of dominant languages crucially important. Conversely, if local languages, a symbol of people's identity and culture,

are devalued by the dominant structures, people are unable to draw 'on traditional philosophies, local resources and skills to confront and ameliorate problems' (Melkote 1991: 204). This adversely affects the agency of the people and their capacity to draw on culturally embedded literacies, which are pivotal in any interpretation of and construction of new knowledge (Ferdman 1991). These issues gain urgency in multilingual contexts like Pakistan.

Conclusion

This paper argues for the interlink between language policy, languages in education and poverty in terms of deprivation of opportunities to achieve valued goals, as suggested by Amartya Sen's capability approach to human development. The results of the qualitative study reported in this paper suggest that the concurrent processes of: a) increasing importance of English in Pakistan; b) devaluation of local languages both within education and outside; c) and discriminatory distribution of valued linguistic capital in educational institutions diminish the transformative impact of education for the disadvantaged. This study reveals the importance of the teaching both dominant and local languages in education and developing a more inclusive national language policy that lifts the status of local languages to empower the poor. The generalizability of the study is limited by its design but it underscores an important area for further research.

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Appendix A

Dimensions of Human Development

Knowledge: Capability to use languages, access knowledge in formal and informal settings, and life- long learning. This includes accessing, participating and pursuing in valued educational activities including use of technology.

Life (*Health, Economic and Psychological Security*): Capability to survive and being healthy, employability and capability to financially support self and family and being able to live with dignity and respect, feeling secure and free of threat or humiliation.

Relationships: Capability to build relationships based on mutual respect, affiliation and collaboration, social networking.

Excellence in work: Being able to participate, enjoy and experience creativity; compete for promotions and recognition in work.

Control over Environment: Capability to control day to day issues, gain understanding and independence in matters confronted.

Participation: Capability of being aware of political circumstances and making informed decisions; having a voice and being heard.

Religion/Spirituality: Capability to access multiple sources of religious information and practicing religion.

Inner peace: Being satisfied and contented (Many participants affiliated it with religion and psychological security).

Adapted from Alkire (2002)

Appendix B

Interview Protocol Final

Part I

a) Personal and Community Profile
   Family, siblings, children, age, education, occupation, economic position, journey
b) Linguistic and Ethnic Profile
   Languages use, languages preferred why?
   Stories, examples, gender related expectations, other cultural expectations

Part II: Language in Education Experiences

Languages introduced in school, medium of education, process of language teaching and use as a medium what, when, how? Why?
Stories, examples, feelings

Part III: Evaluation

a) Process of language education and the role of medium of instruction,
b) Current status in terms of languages learnt and subject knowledge with reference to the role played by language
c) The impact of languages in education in relevance to dimensions of human value: achievements/failures (functioning) and expansion or contraction of capabilities to achieve valued goals
d) range of career choices available
   Stories of struggles and successes and failures: feelings

Part IV: Reflection

The choices made, reasons and their effect
Expected role of languages in education
Comparison of life with parents
Choice for own children
Negative impacts
Impact on gender expectations
Suggestions
Feelings

Notes

[1] In some well funded government schools had started to offer English medium education to one section (class 6 onwards). No participant from this section was included in the study firstly because it was a new phenomenon and secondly it was almost out of reach for the majority of working class because they could hardly pass the English admission test unless they had been to a private English medium school. Hence the section mainly catered to middle or lower middle class students.

[2] None of these were part of the sample for the current study.

[3] However at times a teacher or someone else identified the participants first and then the school was visited if it fitted the above mentioned criteria.

[4] Memos are defined as ' the researcher's record of analysis, thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 110)

[5] 'The process of relating categories to their subcategories' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998: 123)

[6] The process of integrating and refining the theory

[7] All these aspects are not given equal space in discussion in this chapter and I focus mainly on what directly relates to the participants educational experiences.

[8] No such differences were perceptible in the PSGs

[9] In this case father had only completed secondary school but was in a highly paid textile industry job. This is the only industry that uses mainly Urdu rather than English in its organizational documentation.

[10] This was despite the fact that all the graduated participants had taken and passed the Sindhi paper and all the current graduates were to take a Sindhi exam a few months from then.

[11] A general analysis of the science and math text books in Urdu used in government schools revealed that although English terminology was used along with Urdu terms in some cases. The use was not consistent through the books and was not there in the 'exercises' at the end of chapters. In addition only one GSG reported that teachers in their school asked the students to pay attention to these words as preparation for change in medium in higher education.

[12] Once PSGs realized the edge they had over the GSGs who hardly had any English skills and least of all spoken skills they gained shared gaining confidence from it as suggested by Hina. Even those with lower English skills reported much more participation in class than GSGs.

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