

Pakistani Rural Higher Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs About English as Medium of Instruction: A Qualitative Inquiry

Hafiz Tahzeeb Ahmed,

MPhil English, GIFT University Gujranwala, Pakistan

tahzeebahmed421@gmail.com

Dr. Saqib Mahmood,

Assistant Professor, English Department, GIFT University Gujranwala, Pakistan

saqib.mahmood@gift.edu.pk

Muhammad Salman,

Lecturer, English Department, University of Sialkot

muhammad.salman@uskt.edu.pk

Abstract

This research is aimed at analysing the teachers' beliefs about English as a medium of instruction (EMI) at Higher secondary school in the rural areas in one of the districts of Punjab, Pakistan. This study aims to explore and analyze how teachers use EMI to teach science and mathematics subjects. Most importantly, the study tends to examine the challenges faced by teachers regarding the use of EMI in classrooms. Interpretive qualitative research paradigm is employed to offer in-depth analysis of teachers' use and implementation of EMI in classrooms. Semi structured interviews were conducted with ten teachers who are specifically teaching in the rural areas of Gujranwala. Observation has also been conducted to cross check the teacher's views regarding EMI. The thematic analysis of interview narratives reveal that most participants did not have ample knowledge and skills required to understand the dynamics of EMI and its implementation in classroom. The findings indicate that teachers face difficulties due to students' insufficient knowledge about English language. Moreover, lack of training programs and workshops for teachers who are not proficient in various subject like science and mathematics subjects is also one of the reasons why they are unable to make good use of EMI.

Keywords: EMI, Thematic Analysis, HSS teachers, L2, EFL

Background

EMI is used as the primary medium of instruction where English is not the first language or the mother tongue of the Pakistani students at secondary or higher secondary level. The English as a medium of instruction is the language used by the teacher during the class. The basic purpose of the English medium instruction is to augment the ratio of the exposure of the learners and to provide them the perfect opportunities to communicate in the English language. Qorro (2006, p. 3) emphasizes that "Quality education requires that learners take an active part in knowledge creation through critical thinking, discussion, dialogue, asking questions and solving problems". She provides the following views regarding EMI that:

Pakistani Rural Higher Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs About English as Medium of Instruction: A Qualitative Inquiry

Only when teachers and students understand the language of instruction are they able to discuss, debate, ask and answer questions, ask for clarification and therefore construct and generate knowledge. These are activities that are a pre-requisite to learning and whose level determines the quality of education. Thus, the language of instruction is an important factor in determining the quality of education (Qorro 2006, p. 3).

Rationale

Pakistan is one of the most famous developing countries in the world with a diverse culture and multiple languages. Its national language is Urdu and it is used as an official language. In most of the provinces of Pakistan Urdu language is used solely for educational purposes. There are so many factors promoting the English language in Pakistan. According to Rahman (2003), Pakistan is a mixed cultural and multilingual nation with six major and over 59 minor languages. Rahman (2003) asserts that notwithstanding the existence of so many languages in Pakistan, English as a language is associated with power, corporate sector, Government jobs, education, and media. Therefore, English language seems to have become the symbol of power, superiority and elite class.

There are so many statements that describe language policies in Pakistan. Most of the statements are part and parcel of the 1973 constitution. According to the constitution, Urdu is national language. English is used as an official language until the suitable arrangements have been made to replace it with the Urdu language. Without any kind of prejudice to the status of the Urdu language as a national language, the provisional government may come up with novel laws to promote, facilitate and teach Urdu in order to promote it as a national language (Ammar *et al.*, 2015).

English in Pakistan has been and may very well remain the primary medium of instruction (MOI) in schools and higher education (HE) institutes for foreseeable future (Mahboob, 2002). While there have been some changes in government policies towards MOI in schools since the creation of Pakistan in 1947 (Rahman 1996; Mahboob 2002), the role of English in HE has remained consistent in comparison with the other languages (Mansoor 2005). This does not, however, by any stretch of the imagination imply that the use of English as a medium of instruction (EMI) in Pakistani schools is not uncontroversial. There are numerous issues in EMI in HE in Pakistan and this study offers deep insights into this phenomenon.

Literature Review

Mahboob and Jain observe that English was made known to the South-Asia when the British began to exercise power in India under the pretense of the East Indian Company. Similarly, the practice and status of English raised from that point, as the use of Persian, by the Mughal Empire, as the language of arts, science and governance were neutralized and India came under the rule of British Empire, English became intermixed into the educational, legal and other structures of the country. As its very inception, Pakistan has continued to observe three different language policies: Urdu, as the national language of Pakistani population, while, the English language, as the official language, and one regional language for every area (Mahboob & Jain, 2016).

Moreover, the policy of using regional MOI has been adopted by the schools in KPK and Sindh whether they are English medium or Urdu medium. However, English continues to remain the basic source

of instructions in many English medium and government schools. The choice to maintain EMI in Pakistan is largely seen as a political as well as a realistic decision. It was necessary as it became the language of government offices and educational institutions before freedom; the language was already developed in contexts of government offices and education sector, and people were already intimated with it in that context. Mansoor (2004, p. 341) states that "...it was political because in the absence of another local language that served all the functions that English did, selecting another language would potentially suppress other languages and isolate speakers of those languages".

According to the reports of Greenberg index, Pakistan has 0.082 linguistic diversity (O'Dowd & Lewis, 2016). In the view of this report, this can be said that in Pakistan most of the people do not share their mother tongue as first language. Having more than 70 different linguistic groups and less than half of them considered are used in the context of education, in opinion of most of people this is creating challenges for educational development in the region.

In addition, policy actions 4 – 8 state : (Mahmood, 2009). It is suggested that English and Urdu should be included to the specific curriculum or syllabus of the student in Pakistan from Class One to onward and a subject like mathematics along with an unified subject. Furthermore, the Regional and Area Education Sectors should be in the list to select the medium of education up to level five (class v).

The views of students and researchers in a different background about implementing EMI are questionable. As far as the views of students are concerned, Kagwesage (2012) notes that the limited language competence of the students tends to stop them from understanding their language because they know a bit about non-native language. It is pertinent to explain that they had positive views about EMI and they worked hard with determination to handle EMI rules. Van den Hoven (2014) conducted a research in Saudi Arabia, UAE and Kuwait. She found out the fact that students grow an optimistic attitude for EMI for realistic reasons. It is also noted that that they do not intend to tell the use of EMI.

According to the Ministry of Education (Ministry of Education, 2009, p. 71; while dated, these are the latest statistics available), 68.3% of government schools use Urdu as the MOI; 15.5% educational institutions in Sindh use Sindhi as the MOI; 9.5% use other languages (Pashto, Balochi, Arabic etc.), and 10.4% use English as the MOI. While precise statistics for private schools are pretty difficult to gauge, but estimates based on reports from ASER (2012), Coleman and Capstick (2012), Mansoor (2005) and other sources suggest that over 70% of private schools across Pakistan use EMI. Furthermore, as pointed out earlier, most universities in Pakistan use English as the MOI for the majority of the subjects taught (especially in post-graduate and STEM programs). Changing in the dynamics of MOI at the primary and secondary level tend to bear out that students entering HE are more or less bound to possess varying levels of expertise in English. There are hints of misalignment between the government schools' MOI policy and the HE MOI policies mostly due to the limited number of government EMI schools and the extensive use of EMI in higher education. Researchers who worked extensively in this area (Mahboob 2017; Rahman 2010) seem to claim that maintaining English as the MOI in the private and elite schools, while using Urdu (or the provincial language) in the majority of government schools, proves fatal for the students who come from lower socioeconomic status backgrounds and perpetuates current socio-economic class differences.

In order to know about teachers' beliefs about EMI, the following research questions are formed as a guide of this research.

- What are HSS teachers' beliefs about EMI in the rural areas of district Gujranwala, Punjab, Pakistan?

Pakistani Rural Higher Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs About English as Medium of Instruction: A Qualitative Inquiry

- What are the difficulties faced by these teachers in incorporating EMI?
- How far these teachers perceive EMI effective for teaching various science and mathematics subjects?

These questions are significant because they tend to cover the gap of previous studies that had been carried out in this field. To fulfill the demand of the research queries, semi-structured interviews and observations were conducted.

Research Methodology

Qualitative Research Paradigm

The aim of the study is to analyze the teachers' beliefs about EMI at higher secondary level. The qualitative research approach has been implemented In order to achieve these specific objectives. Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) explain the dynamics of the qualitative research in the following words:

Qualitative research seeks to provide understanding of human experience, perceptions, intentions, and behaviours based on description and observation and utilizing a naturalistic interpretation approach to a subject and its control setting. Qualitative research is situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible.

Research Setting

Research setting is that area from where the researcher gathers the facts for research. The research setting of this study is higher secondary teachers of District Gujranwala, Pakistan. For data collection, interviews were conducted to know the impact of EMI on students' learning at the secondary level. Four teachers from public sectors while six from private sectors were interviewed.

Research Tools

In order to collect rich data, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews. In the same way, observations were made as the research tool to corroborate the data gathered through interviews. Observation, for qualitative data collecting, is one of the most well-known tools. Observational techniques are strategies by which an individual accumulates firsthand information on projects, processes or practices being examined.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis has been applied to analyze the recorded interviews. Thematic analysis can be defined as a process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data. Braun and Clarke, (2006) define thematic analysis as“ an inadequately outlined and once in a while recognized, yet broadly utilized subjective systematic technique within and beyond psychology. It is a method for distinguishing, breaking down and revealing themes within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Braun and Clarke divide the thematic analysis into five parts.

- I. Familiarization with the data
- II. Generating initial codes
- III. Searching for themes
- IV. Reviewing themes

V. Defining and naming themes

The analysis of data shows that both sectors' teachers have distinctive convictions about English as a medium of instruction. For example, instructors in private sectors are in favor of English as a medium of instruction but on the other side, instructors from open division don't recognize it at higher secondary level such as, instructors are not in favor of English as a medium of instructions at any level because they think that English as a medium of instruction isn't appropriate for all subjects but only English subject. However, private teachers accept that English as a medium of instruction is supportive for higher secondary levels but not at the beginner level.

Findings and Discussion

Implementation of EMI

Most teachers have awareness about EMI and share their different beliefs about it. One of the participants succinctly expresses his views:

English as a medium of instruction", especially in teaching. EMI is necessary for our education system as most of the scientific research is in English. English is an international language and English is playing a vital role in the economy. Students cannot compete with other countries' students without the English language. EMI at the higher secondary level is compulsorily applied. In my opinion, EMI is compulsorily applied in the English language class. (Ali, SS Physics)

Ali has expressed that EMI means "English as a medium of instruction" and especially useful in teaching. According to him, English, an international language, has a plethora of research is in the English language. Therefore, English as a medium of instruction is compulsory in our education system. The English language has been playing a vital role in the economy of every country. Students must focus on the English language to compete with other countries' students. According to him, EMI at the higher secondary level should be applied in the premises of class to develop their habit and make them able to understand English so that they can play their role in any country effectively.

EMI is helpful in teaching

Most of the participants agreed that EMI is very helpful in content teaching. They understand the basic concept of the idea. One of the participants shares his belief that, "Yes, it helps in understanding the basic concept of the idea. I am positive in this regard as some of the students are enthusiast about EMI and they request the teacher to use English words in the class so that, they can improve their English (Salman, SS English)". According to Salman, EMI is very helpful in content teaching. It helps to understand the basic concept of the idea. According to him, some of the students are enthusiast about EMI and they request to their teachers to use the English word in their lecture. So, most of the time students understand EMI as well as sometimes they are confused due to lack of knowledge of their relevant fields. Therefore, teachers face a lot of difficulties regarding EMI in classroom discussions.

Difficulties Faced by the Teachers regarding EMI

Teachers are facing a lot of difficulties regarding the implementation of EMI in the classroom. Most of the teacher's beliefs that students have many challenges regarding EMI. Concerning students, students have problems in learning vocabulary, listening, writing and speaking. "Most of the students are unable to comprehend if EMI is only used as MI" (Safdar, SS Physics). According to Safdar, when the language of the lecture was not regular or, in other words, when teachers used the English language inconsistently as the medium of instruction, students were unclear. Students are unable to understand the technical term of the English language.

Difficulty listening and speaking

Students cannot show themselves easily if they do not participate in debates made in the EMI course, they often drop their self-confidence. Students feel hesitation and shy they do not try to speak and participate in classroom discussions. They seem to have lost their confidence as well as they are not able to give a proper answer to what they understand about the lecture.

Shahid said that:

While teaching sometimes it's become very difficult to make the students what I am trying to tell them especially in such kind of situation if I am allowed to use another medium of instruction rather than in English medium. It's become almost impossible to tell the student what I meant. But particularly at times, I feel this difficulty that I am going to relate something and my student getting something other. (SS English)

According to Shahid, it's a big problem faced by the teachers because most of the teachers claim that they are trying to make students understand but students do not get the actual idea conveyed by the teachers. Furthermore, He adds more than "I don't think so EMI can help in content teaching. When it became to tell the student what the teacher means when he using English as a medium of instruction how can it help in content teaching" (SS English).

According to him, EMI is a very rare case to fascinating the students. But most of the time, it is very difficult to understand the main phenomenon of the lecture that what the teacher wants to tell the students.

Students are uncomfortable with EMI

According to teachers' beliefs at the higher secondary level, students do not feel comfortable with it. When teachers use EMI in their classrooms they feel, through the reaction or facial expressions, that students do not understand the exact sense of the lecture because of the unacquaintance of the English language.

Salman said that "they seem perplexed but after a couple of days' practice and learning, they feel comfortable with it" (SS English). According to him, in early days, they seem perplexed and confused but after a few days' students feel comfortable with EMI but another participant said that, "Yeah, they always deal to difficult to tackle with language that is alien for them. Students never feel comfortable when they are unable to what is being said to them. How can you feel comfortable with any alien language?" (Arslan, SS English). According to Arslan, students always to deal with EMI and not to tackle easily. EMI is alien for them and it is not possible to comfortable with the alien language.

EMI process is time taking

According to collected data, most of the teachers belong to the public and private sectors at the higher secondary level. They have beliefs that EMI is time taken process. Shahid shares his belief that is:

Yeah, in my opinion, it involves a lot of time and you have spent more time elaborating on the themes you need time to explain the sentences in different ways. For example, you are one construction is unable to understand the students. So, in my opinion, EMI is a time taking process. Teachers used a lot of examples as well to clear one point of view. (Shahid, SS English)

According to Shahid, EMI is a time taking process and it's a waste of time. You need more time to elaborate on their themes and their idea. You have to need to explain one sentence and one technical term with more examples of different ways. Teachers used a lot of examples to clear one point in front of their students.

EMI Effective for Teaching in Various Subjects

The researcher finds out teachers' beliefs about English as a medium of instruction and investigates that EMI is effective in different subjects like mathematics, chemistry, and other science subjects. EMI slows down the learning handle due to the concept of science and science being more difficult to get it in the English medium. If teachers are not capable of the language at that point how can we expect them to manage with the double request for delivering substance as well as language? They faced issues effectively covering their subjects. Therefore, teachers are teaching science and mathematics in a mixture of both Urdu and English dialects. One of the members offers his opinion;

In my opinion, it's very difficult to implement EMI in other subjects. Because sometimes we are not proficient in the language then it is not possible to deliver the content with the English language. Suppose that if teachers are not able to understand the main phenomenon of EMI in other then how the students can perceive exact sense in other subjects. In my opinion, EMI is very suitable in the English subject and EMI is not very effective in science and mathematics subjects. (Fatima, SS English)

According to Fatima, EMI is not so effective in other subjects. Where teachers themselves are so much confused then what is the level of students' understanding? Teachers are not so proficient in the language then how can students expect them to cope with double demand for delivering content as well as language? There is a need to be trained to teachers as well. After that teachers will able to deliver a lecture in full content.

Observations

This part of the study describes the observation regarding the reliability of the data. The researcher visited the classrooms after gathering the data and observed the teacher's lectures who participated in the study. This activity strengthens the study more where the lectures of the participated teachers are observed. The researcher has already mentioned in the methodology portion that classroom observation was used in this study to supplement the data obtained from the interviews.

The researchers conducted the observation of the interviewees to validate that what medium of instruction they were using during their lectures. Most of the teachers did not use EMI rather they were using the mother tongue as MI. It was observed that the teachers belonging to private sector schools were using Urdu as MI whereas the teacher in Public Sector school was using Urdu and sometimes Punjabi also. It was also observed that students faced difficulties in understanding while applying EMI. The students were found confused when teachers used EMI, in the sense that the students understood something else for what the teacher had asked them to do.

It was observed when a teacher uses EMI in the classroom, students get confused and they request the teachers to translate these English words into Urdu. In private sectors, teachers used the Urdu language to deliver their lectures for the better understanding of the students. Similarly, in public sectors, teachers used Urdu as well as the Punjabi language for a better understanding of students.

The observation highlight that EMI is not effective in various science subjects. In private sector teachers are proficient but they do not use EMI in the classroom. But in public sector teachers are not skillful in the English language. They have a lack of knowledge about the relevant subject as well. Therefore, they are not able to deliver content language in the classroom.

The observation also reveals that EMI is a time taking process. When the teachers used EMI in the classroom they used more and more phrases to clear one sentence or one phrase. Therefore, mostly teacher in the private and public sectors use the mother tongue rather than EMI. According to them, the

Pakistani Rural Higher Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs About English as Medium of Instruction: A Qualitative Inquiry

mother tongue is easy to understand the main idea and content language. Teachers are not satisfied with government policies because many teachers have different beliefs regarding EMI. In a short time, the government of Punjab (GOP) changed policies regarding EMI. Due to this process, teachers are confused to use English as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

Conclusion

This study has examined HSS teachers' beliefs regarding the implementation of EMI in the classrooms. There is a plethora of problems faced by the teachers while delivering the lecture in classrooms. Partly due to the fact that teachers are not trained, they seem to be confused whether or not EMI is helpful for higher secondary students. . Furthermore, the teachers are forced to deliver their lectures in English language because mostly teachers have presupposed beliefs that English medium is compulsory at higher secondary level. Unfortunately, they are unable to implement EMI in the classroom because they suffer from multiple external as well as internal impediments. Delivering a lecture in English is difficult for them because two reasons namely their inability to speak fluently in English and the inability of the students to understand English. When they are using English language in classroom. Students are confused and do not understand the content. It is sad to know that most of the students have insufficient knowledge about English language. Most of the students are not taught English language till they are in Sixth standard. This is the reason why their basic skills are not developed and eventually they feel at home when they are being taught in their native tongue. Therefore, teachers are forced to prefer mother tongue as medium of instruction rather than EMI. During semi structured interviews the selected teachers shared the fact that they suffer because they teach students one thing and students perceive another thing.

Moreover, EMI is not effective in various subject because in public sector teachers are not good at speaking or delivering lecture in English language. They have insufficient knowledge and do not understand the main phenomenon of medium of instruction. During the observation, the researcher explored the fact that mostly teachers were not satisfied with the government policies. There is no Co-ordination between policy maker and teachers. The government should conduct workshop and training programs for better understanding of EMI. There is dire need to train teachers through regressive and incessant workshops. Moreover, the students should be taught in English language from early age. If teachers are well trained in English language their proficiency and fluency improves. Similarly, if students are taught in English language from an early age, their ability to understand English language will improve drastically. This is one of the ways in which the implementation of EMI can bear fruit.

References

1. Ammar, A., Naveen, A. L. I., Fawad, A., & Qasim, K. (2015). Language policy and medium of instruction issue in Pakistan. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*, 5(1), 111-124.
2. Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
3. Coleman, H., & Capstick, A. (2012). *Language in education in Pakistan: Recommendations for policy and practice*. Islamabad: British Council.
4. Kagwesage, A. M. (2013). Coping with English as Language of Instruction in Higher Education in Rwanda. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 2(2), 1-12.

5. Mahboob, A. (2002). No English, no future!. *Language policy in Pakistan*. In S. Obeng & B. Hartford (Eds.), *Political independence with linguistic servitude: The politics about languages in the developing world*, 15-39.
6. Mahboob, A., & Jain, R. (2016). Bilingual education in Pakistan and India. *Bilingual and multilingual education*, 233-246.
7. Mahboob, A. (2017). English medium instruction in higher education in Pakistan: Policies, perceptions, problems, and possibilities. *English medium instruction in higher education in Asia-Pacific*, 71-91.
8. Mahmood, K. (2009). Indicators for a quality textbook evaluation process in Pakistan. *Journal of Research and Reflections in Education*, 3(2), 158-176.
9. Mansoor, S. (2005). *Language planning in higher education: A case study of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
10. Mansoor, S. (2004). The status and role of regional languages in higher education in Pakistan. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 25(4), 333-353.
11. O'Dowd, R., & Lewis, T. (Eds.). (2016). *Online intercultural exchange: Policy, pedagogy, practice*. Routledge.
12. Qorro, M. (2006). Does language of instruction affect quality of education? Retrieved from http://hakielimu.org/files/publications/document101does_lang_instruc_fct_qual_edu_en.pdf (August 10, 2019) Tanzania Institute of Education. (2011). Improved ordinary secondary school curriculum (Draft). Dar es salaam: Author.
13. Rahman, T. (1990). Pakistani english. *Published by National Institute of Pakistan Studies. Islamabad.*
14. Rahman, T. (2003). *Education in Pakistan: A survey*. SPO discussion paper series. Islamabad: Strengthening Participatory Organization.
15. Masaoay, S. M., & Litao, R. (2021). Beliefs and Practices in the Implementation of Performance Tasks (PETAs): Basis for the Development of Enhancement Program. *Middle Eastern Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 57-75. <https://doi.org/10.47631/mejress.v2i3.291>
16. Rahman, T. (2010). *Language Policy, Identity, and Religion: aspects of the civilization of the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Chair on Quaid-i-Azam & Freedom Movement, National Institute of Pakistan Studies, Quaid-i-Azam University.
17. Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (Eds.). (2005). *Handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
18. Saleh, S. J., & Majeed, S. J. (2021). Motivation toward English Language Learning among Iraqi University Students. *Middle Eastern Journal of Research in Education and Social Sciences*, 2(3), 46-56. <https://doi.org/10.47631/mejress.v2i3.294>
19. van den Hoven, M. (2014). The use of English for education in the Arab world: An ethnographic investigation of female Emirati pre-service teachers' conceptions of English as a medium of instruction. In *Teaching and learning English in the Arabic-speaking world* (pp. 81-98)