

TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH LANGUAGE: A DESCRIPTIVE STUDY OF THE ATTITUDES OF MUSLIM RELIGIOUS SCHOLARS

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Abstract

Recent research has found that Pakistani Madrasas' Muslim religious scholars are split over the teaching and learning of English in Islamic educational institutions. In the context of Islamic education, it looks at opinions among religious scholars in Pakistan concerning the status of the English language in the country, Islamic values and westernization, and Islamic values and the role of English in the education system in Madrasas. The questionnaire was employed as a data-gathering tool for academics studying religion. Thirty scholars who attended all of the Madrasas in district Faisalabad were selected at random. To analyze the collected data, Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was employed. The findings determined that religious academics who teach and learn English want students to be comfortable without affecting their religious and cultural identity. The English language courses developed for the targeted Madrasas may be designed and tailored based on the data. These results show that attending to the causes of English instruction in Madrasas is critical. It would be beneficial to incorporate the requirements and expectations recommended by academics of religion for Madrasas.

Keywords: Attitudes, Language Teaching, Religious Scholars

1.0 INTRODUCTION

English is considered to be a worldwide language. It is the language of progress in Pakistan, and it is widely spoken and understood in every aspect of life. Pakistani English is a dialect of the Pakistani language that is commonly spoken in other nations as a result of Pakistani immigrants who have settled in other countries. According to (Ghani and Deshpande 1994), English was spoken by the inhabitants of British colonies and eventually became the national language of a large number of independent states. English was the language of trade and education in British colonies, and it eventually evolved into the language of communication (Hussain & Shahzad, 2016).

Many languages, including Urdu, English, Punjabi, Pashto, Siraiki and Sindhi, are spoken in Pakistan, which is a multilingual country with many dialects. In contrast, all of the literature and scientific research is available in the English language. In Pakistan, English is recognised as an official language as well as a second language. According to (Ghani and Deshpande 1994), all government documents, military communications, street signs, many shops, commercial contracts, and other activities are carried out in English, including all government documents,

military communications, and street signs. All school levels, as well as colleges and universities, use it as a medium of instruction and instruction. However, they are unaware of the importance of English at the elementary level. When they go into the real world, they realise how important it is. Meanwhile, (Mansoor 1993) explains that Pakistani students' needs for learning English language are primarily for instrumental reasons including travel outside the country and reading advanced technical literature; coping with university classes; having access to international books and journals; and getting good jobs; as well as becoming proficient in the working language of their future careers.

Pakistan has been working hard to enhance the status of learning in general and English proficiency in particular in order to generate good graduates who are capable of taking on real-life tough jobs in the sciences, the arts, and the humanities. Education, as the foundation of growth, is unquestionably subject to quality in a variety of areas, including curriculum, faculty, and instructional methods (Shahzad et al., 2019).

The role of the English language in Pakistan has been controversial with its 74-years history and colonial past. Pakistan came into being in 1947 as a free Muslim state on the map of the world after getting freedom from British rulers. Pakistan is a Muslim country that has many ethnic groups and languages, from 1947 to 1971, Pakistan consisted of two parts East Pakistan and West Pakistan, and there were hundreds of ethnic groups and languages were spoken in Pakistan. Unfortunately, in 1971, these two parts separated from each other because of Indian interruption, East Pakistan was named Bangladesh while West Pakistan remained as Pakistan. Most of the population's language in East Pakistan (Bangladesh) was Bengali, and now it is being used as their national language, while Urdu was the national language of West Pakistan (present Pakistan).

Languages in Pakistan

Pakistan has two significant and important languages Urdu as a national language and English as an official language (Amjad, Shahzad & Tahir, 2021). However, six more major languages and 72 other languages are spoken in Pakistan, except English. All provinces Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan, federal administration and tribal areas (Fata) are named according to the linguistic profile by the mother tongue of their population, for example, Punjabi is spoken in Punjab, Sindhis speak Sindhi, Balochi is used in Balochistan, and Pashto is the language of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The status of Urdu is as a national language, and almost 7.57 % of the total population in Pakistan speak the Urdu language. English is also being used in Pakistan and it is a language of the elite class and symbol of power and domination in Pakistani society (Shamim, 2007). Punjab is the biggest province of Pakistan, so the rate of Punjabi speakers in Pakistan is highest, which is almost 44.15 percent of all languages being spoken. Pashto is the second-highest language spoken that is more or less 15.42 percent, after that Sindhi is 14.1 percent and Balochi is 3.57 percent, Saraiki is 10.53 percent and the rest of other languages are 4.66 percent in Pakistan (Shamim, 2007).

The Medium of Instruction in Pakistan

The medium of instruction is the best way of domination and spread of any language. Policies regarding the medium of instruction depending on the access, approach, and opportunities of the social, political and linguistic group with particular reference to the most inflexible group in the wide range of social groups in the society. The same phenomenon is followed among the countries at the international level to resolve social, linguistic, ethnic, and political conflicts (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004). In all government and private schools of Pakistan, Urdu is a medium of instruction in almost but in Pakistan, all private schools (elite and non- elite) are using English as a medium of instruction. No other language than English is being used as a medium of instruction in all

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government, private schools, and colleges. English is taught as a compulsory subject in all schools and colleges. In Pakistan medium of instruction depends on the availability of English language teachers, because of lack of teachers and facilities some of the schools do not even go beyond the English alphabets learning during their primary education (Shamim, 1993).

The existing Urdu + English policy has three prominent characteristics, English is an examination subject and pupils usually use it to pass. Passing exams in English opens the door to higher education and better employment. The English language is considered the main gateway towards getting a white-collar job, and the English language is taken as a tool for social mobility and quality education. Consequently, there is apartheid in education because of language (Malik, 2010). Another characteristic is that many English language teachers do not use English during a teaching in classes. They deliver lessons in Urdu, and most of the time pupils read whole the text loudly (Shamim, 1993). And the third one is that other languages are marginalised. The perception about languages that they are an inconvenience and a great hindrance to getting jobs and doing progressive works (Kazmi, 2010).

Although Urdu is the medium of instruction in all schools and colleges, there is a choice for students to give exams in English or Urdu from Matric to postgraduate. However, English in Pakistan is taught as a compulsory subject from primary to higher education. The Provincial Government of Punjab in 1994 and the Government of Sindh in 1995 have announced introducing English as a compulsory subject for all classes. Investment regarding teachers' training is worthwhile, as numerous students study English as a compulsory subject and the results are so fruitful. These efforts will help the teachers teach the students through modern established teaching methods and get expertise in their fields. (ELT Weekly, 2011).

Language of Development

General Musharraf got power through a military takeover in October 1999. Musharraf was a great supporter of America policies. He took the steps against terrorism, promoted moderation, and spread the country's fundamentalism by following the guidelines of dictator Zia-ul-Haq. The statements of officials showed that the government was in the favor of English language in academics as a medium of communication and instruction as well, as Zubeda Jalal, Education Minister of government in her address to teachers said that they have decided that English will be a compulsory subject from Grade I where the teachers are available because it is the urgent requirement of the society and education (Jalal, 2004; Hassan et al. 2011).

It is notable that unfortunately, since 1989, no government could practically articulate their pro-English stance in a language education policy. But efforts were done to bring these statements in writing so the schools could follow the practice. It was an effort of Musharraf's government to make the teaching and learning of English accessible to the students and masses that show the government's successful pro-English policies in Pakistan (Shamim, 2007; Iqbal, Hassan & Ali, 2015).

The first time in 1989 English was introduced as a subject at the primary level in government schools, the purpose of this move was to shift the education system in the English language from Urdu and other local languages. The other purpose behind this change was to remove the social inequalities. Over time, the English language was promoted and being used for individual and national development. This change leads the English subject as a compulsory subject in all government schools and ensures that the benefits of this policy are available for elites and all the people of the country. Earlier 1989, all the efforts were being made to strengthen the Muslim-identity and nation-building, for this purpose Urdu language was being used as an effective tool

(Aly, 2007).

In the present situation, English has spread all over the world as Lingua Franca as beyond “any lingua franca of the past” (Wright, 2004). The English language has established its rapport as the medium for promoting modernization, development of the economy, technology, and scientific progress; in short, it improves people’s lifestyle (Haque, 1993; Rahman, 2002; Shamim, 2007). In Pakistan, the number of English students is rising every day. English has made its place as a second language in Pakistan.

We can realize the importance of English as the constitution of Pakistan has been codified in the English language (Haque, 1993). Furthermore, it has become the language of economy, law, business, and technology.

Role of English in Educational Institutions in Pakistan

According to (Rahman, 2002) in all successful constitutions of 1956, 1962, and 1973, it was desired to replace English by Urdu in all dominated fields of life. English is being taught in government, private elite, non-elite and at a higher level as a second language (ESL) in Pakistan (Shamim, 1993). Teachers’ main concern is teaching the lesson and grammar, regardless of the size of the class. Following is the classroom vignette: The very first thing teachers do in the class is to instruct the class to open the books on the page number of today's lesson, then the teacher writes the title of the lesson on the blackboard and asks students to write on the notebooks. After that one of the students is asked to read the passage loudly from your textbook followed by comprehension questions. The next job is to work on grammar exercises. The teacher again reads the passage aloud, translates and dictates the meanings of difficult words from the lesson, and writes the meanings of those words in Urdu on the blackboard. During all the class time, pupils sit passively and listen to the teacher with their heads down (Shamim, 1993).

Shamim and Allen (2000) argue that in Pakistan teachers use bilingual way and other local languages are also used by both teachers and students in classroom discourses. While only in private English medium schools teachers and students use English in classrooms (Rahman, 2004). Constitution of 1973 recommended that English was going to be replaced by Urdu within the time of 15 years. In this time, English got a great prestige and became the language of elites and economic development. In these 15 years, elite private schools flourished and started to enjoy a special status in Pakistan.

In a nutshell, both languages Urdu and English, are equally used as a medium of instruction but English is mainly taught in private schools of Pakistan. People who are more influential in English have more opportunities to get jobs in public service, judiciary, and army; this is why the rate of English learners in Pakistan is increasing rapidly.

English in Religious Institutes

In Pakistan's religious institutions (Madrasas), we have an Islamic-oriented education that is usually free of cost. They also give accommodation, food, and all necessities to their students. This is the reason that most of the students in these Madrasas are from low-income families and backward areas. The students who get education from these institutions are called Talibs, and their age is ranged between 10 to 28. Some of these Madrasas have nursery classes but some have only adult scholars. The number of Talibs in these Madrasas starts from hundreds to thousands. Ideologically these Madrasas are divided into five major groups based on politics and sectism. These groups are Shia, Jamaat-e-Islami, Sunni (Bareili), Sunni (Deobandi), and Ahle Hadith/Salafi (ICG, 2002). According to a religious scholar; there are almost sixteen associations of religious

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institutions and Jamia Naeemia, Wafaq-ul-Madaris Al- Arabia, Rabat-ul-Madaris, and the most important (Thanvi, 2007; Madaris Teachers 2010; Aziz & Hassan, 2018). Federal Madrasas are under the control of the Ministry of Education.

National Education Ministry gave special attention to the Madrasas and demanded that there be strategies for the madrasas regarding teaching and learning the English language. In a focused group discussion, representatives of different Madrasas of KPK and FATA participated, they had the most convincing arguments against the question about the importance of English language learning. But the representatives of Madrasas answered that they want English for four reasons: for the sake of knowledge, to compete for West of its thought about their state in general and Madrasas in particular, for the preaching of Islam and to contribute to the achievement of harmony.

In the whole world, we are blamed as terrorists, so we should learn English to communicate with the outer world and to remove the tag of terrorists. Pakistan is a suitable country for producing many products. Muslims are a peaceful nation and Islam is a religion of peace and harmony yet the world says us as terrorists. We want to learn [English] from the British Council so that we can help the region by changing views of terrorism. The preaching of Islam will be easy and motivating for our people (Saeed et al., 2021). Through English, we can communicate Islam to others, learn about Judaism and Christianity, achieve harmony, and learn (Pinnock, 2009).

Saeed et al., (2021) concluded that the Muslim religious scholars' attitudes toward English language learning in Pakistan is positive though it was divided earlier. A deep insight into the contents provided in the written fatawas discloses that the Muslim religious scholars opposed the teaching and learning of English initially. Later, realizing, the importance of teaching and learning a foreign language, they realise that the language is substantial to use the preaching of the religion Islam. They accepted the internationality of the language and the adverse impact they could face if the language was discarded from their system and education (Nadvi, 2006).

The findings of the present study may prove helpful in reforming the syllabus of Madrasahs. It may help in changing the attitude of Islamic society regarding English language teaching. It may also help in knowing the attitudes of Muslim religious scholars in the present era.

Objectives of the Study

- To study the attitudes of the religious community towards English and its teaching
- To explore the importance of English language teaching in Pakistan
- To know about the place of the English language in the syllabus of Madrasas

2.0 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To conduct the research, the researchers collected the data through a questionnaire from Muslim religious scholars in different Madrasas in district Faisalabad. The researchers collected the data from those Madrasas that have been serving for the last ten to fifteen years and at least have ten teachers. The sample of data collection is 30 teachers who were teaching in selected Madrasas, and their minimum age was more than twenty years. They belong to different areas of district Faisalabad. The researchers used a questionnaire filled in by Muslim religious scholars in different Madrasas as a data collection tool. Questions were developed based on four categories: Pakistan and English language, English language and western culture, Islam and English language, and English language and syllabus of Madrasas. Religious scholars were asked to show their responses to the extent of their agreement or disagreement with each item on a five-point

Likert scale questionnaire. The frequencies and percentages of responses were calculated by using (SPSS) Statistical Package for Social Sciences.

3.0 ANALYSIS

Table 1 Status of English in Pakistan

Variable	Response				
	<u>Quite right</u> f (%)	<u>Right</u> f (%)	<u>To some extent right</u> f (%)	<u>Wrong</u> f (%)	<u>Totally wrong</u> f (%)
English speakers are seen as respected people in Pakistan.	6 (20)	8 (26.6)	15 (50)	–	1 (3.3)
English is compulsory for the progress of the Pakistani nation.	7 (23.3)	8 (26.6)	9 (30)	1 (3.3)	5 (16.6)
The trend of English learning is increasing in Pakistan.	5 (16.6)	19 (63.3)	6 (20)	–	–
English has an important role in the education policy of Pakistan.	10 (33.3)	14 (46.6)	5 (16.6)	1 (3.3)	–
English should be taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan.	7 (23.3)	10 (33.3)	10 (33.3)	1 (3.3)	2 (6.6)

In table no.1 we see the responses of the Muslim religious community towards the English language in Pakistan. Most of the religious scholars are in favor of the English language for the progress of Pakistan. According to religious scholars, the English language has a vital role in Pakistani society and different institutions. Still, English language speakers in Pakistan are not as respected as they should have been.

Table 2. English and Westernization

Variable	Response				
	<u>Quite right</u> f (%)	<u>Right</u> f (%)	<u>To some extent right</u> f (%)	<u>Wrong</u> f (%)	<u>Totally wrong</u> f (%)
English syllabus is a cause of westernization.	11 (53.3)	5 (16.6)	7 (23.3)	6(20)	–
English syllabus is causing western culture domination over the Islamic culture.	10 (33.3)	13 (43.3)	3 (10)	3 (10)	1 (3.3)
Students of the English language are losing their religious identity.	10 (33.3)	8 (26.6)	9 (30)	3 (10)	–
English language learning is possible without western culture representing the syllabus.	11 (36.6)	9 (30)	7 (23.3)	3 (10)	–
Western syllabus in the Pakistani education system is a hindrance to learning English for Madrasas students.	6 (20)	10 (33.3)	9 (30)	4 (13.3)	–

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In table no. 2, which is about western culture and English, the majority of respondents are against studying the English language because Muslim scholars believe that the English curriculum is a contributing factor to westernisation. It can have an impact on their religious identity, and the western culture representative syllabus makes it more difficult for Madrasa pupils to learn English. Religious experts, on the other hand, think that learning English is doable even if one does not follow the English western syllabus..

Table 3. *English and Islam*

Variable	Response				
	<u>Quite right</u> f (%)	<u>Right</u> f (%)	<u>To some extent right</u> f (%)	<u>Wrong</u> f (%)	<u>Totally wrong</u> f (%)
Learning English is forbidden in Islam.	–	–	1 (3.3)	9(30)	20 (66.6)
English is playing the role of international language for preaching Islam.	7 (23.3)	15 (50)	7 (23.3)	1 (3.3)	–
The trend of learning English among religious scholars is increasing.	6 (20)	9 (30)	15 (50)	–	–
Religious scholars hate learning English.	–	2 (6.6)	16 (53.3)	8 (26.6)	4 (13.3)

In Table No. 3, which is about Islam and the English language, responses reveal that the Muslim religion is not opposed to the teaching or learning of the English language, and that there is no distinction between people based on their native languages. Islamic law does not ban Muslims from acquiring or teaching the English language. Because the English language can be employed in the teaching of Islam in western countries, responses tend to be more positive when the language is English. Furthermore, religious academics do not despise the English language; rather, they desire to use it to spread the message of Islam throughout the world.

Table 4. *English and Syllabus of Madrassas*

Variable	Response				
	<u>Quite right</u> f (%)	<u>Right</u> f (%)	<u>To some extent right</u> f (%)	<u>Wron g</u> f (%)	<u>Totally wrong</u> f (%)
There is a similarity in the Syllabus of government institutions and Madrasas.	1 (3.3)	3 (10)	9 (30)	12 (40)	5 (16.6)
Madrasas teachers agree to the syllabus of English.	2 (6.6)	5 (16.6)	11 (36.6)	8 (26.6)	4 (13.3)
The trend of English learning in Madrasas students is increasing.	6 (20)	15 (50)	9 (30)	–	–

English should be taught as a compulsory subject in Madrasas.	7 (23.3)	10 (33.3)	5 (16.6)	6 (20)	2 (6.6)
The English language is supportive of the Madrasas students in scientific progress.	6 (23.3)	11 (36.6)	11 (36.6)	2 (6.6)	–

When it comes to the English language and Madarsas syllabus, Table 4 reveals that most of Muslim religious scholars are not entirely satisfied with the curriculum provided at government educational institutions. There is no difference between the English curriculum of Madarsas and the curriculum of government institutions. Religious experts are becoming more interested in learning English on a daily basis, and they believe that English should be taught as a mandatory course of study at the Madrasas. English is also beneficial for the advancement of scientific and educational research.

4.0 DISCUSSION

Part of the discussion includes four categories of discussion: the status of the English language in Pakistan, English and western culture, opinion of the religious scholars regarding the English language and Islam, and syllabus of Madrassas.

In Pakistan, learning English is increasing day by day; it is being taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan. English is a source of getting knowledge about other modern subjects. The English language has a major role in the progress of Pakistan, whether it is in education, business, or trade. So it is not wrong if it is said that English has become official and the language of instruction. According to respondents, English is a tool of improvement in anybody's personality. Still, the English language can affect one's religious identity as the English syllabus reflects Western culture that can overcome the religious and cultural identity of the learners. They think that if Muslim students learn the English language, they will also learn the western culture, which will take them away from their Muslim culture. So if anybody wants to learn English he should learn English without western representative subjects.

In Islam, it is allowed to learn the English language because in Islam there is no discrimination among the people based on language and there is no restriction of learning the English language in Islam and other religions.

The fourth category is about the English language and the syllabus of Madrasas. English is being taught in Madrasa as an optional subject. Madrasas have their English language syllabus, and there is no relativity between the syllabus of Madrasa and other educational institutions. English is compulsory to get scientific knowledge, so learning English among the students and teachers of Madrasas is increasing day by day. So English is a part of the Madrasas syllabus but they are not following other educational institutions of Pakistan.

The aggregate outcome of all replies leads us to the conclusion that Muslim scholars' reactions are getting more favourable as time progresses and as the situation evolves. The results are growing more and more favourable towards English language instruction and learning as time goes on as compared to the early results. If we look at English language instruction before to partition, we can see that there is a significant difference in favourable reactions. The aggregate reaction of all four groups is in support of the teaching and study of English as a second language.

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5.0 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the collected data was done on the level of attitudes of Muslim religious scholars towards English language learning in Pakistan. In the past, religious scholars were against the teaching and learning of English language but after some time when they realized that English language learning is compulsory for the Muslims to prevent their culture, religion and for making progress in the modern world, they allowed Muslim students to learn English and other modern subjects. In the present scenario, the English language has become one of the dominant languages of Pakistan and it is compulsory for the progress of Pakistan. Religious scholars have a hypocritical attitude to some extent because they think that the English language is compulsory for the improvement and progress, but people who speak the English language are not respected even they are also learning the English language.

All the religious scholars in Pakistan agree on learning and teaching of English but on the other hand, they are of the view that learners should learn English without western culture representative subjects because it affects their religious and cultural identity. English language learners should not adopt western culture as said by a majority of religious scholars. Religious scholars are in favor of English language learning that's why English language teaching and learning is allowed as a subject in the Madrasas of Pakistan and the number of English language learners in Madarsas is increasing day by day. So overall majority of religious scholars have positive attitudes towards English language learning, which is very much changed after the partition era.

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