



Research Article

Impact of Instructional Medium on University Students' Learning Challenges and Quality of Learning in Pakistan

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Abstract

The quality of learning among university students in Pakistan is deeply influenced by the medium of instruction and the socio-economic context in which students learn. This study investigates how the use of English and Urdu as instructional medium affects students' understanding of lectures, learning motivation, and overall academic performance. A quantitative research design was employed using a structured questionnaire administered to 496 university students selected through convenience sampling. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression analysis. The findings reveal that students face significant comprehension difficulties when lectures are delivered in English, especially those from Urdu-medium or low socio-economic backgrounds. Although the medium of instruction showed limited direct correlation with learning quality, it strongly influenced students' confidence and participation in class. The study concludes that aligning instructional language with students' linguistic competence can enhance learning outcomes and motivation. It recommends teacher training programs, improved English language support, and inclusive pedagogical strategies to bridge the gap between instructional medium and effective learning quality in higher education.

Keywords: Medium of instruction, Learning quality, English language, Higher Education in Pakistan.

Introduction

Education is a tool of development. It broadens minds, helps to distinguish between right and wrong, enables us to discriminate well from bad, and utilizes our environment to the best of our ability for the betterment of an individual as well as the community (Ahmad & Khan, 2012). According to Plato, education means to turn eyes from dark to light (Ahmad & Khan, 2012). Education is an important right of human beings, and it should be considered an end in itself rather than a means to an end. Without education, no other society can be called civilized, and no other community can be called a nation (Sayeda et al., 2016). Education equips people with the instruments to disrupt the barriers of class. It is the base of intellectual development and comprehension of the complex world (Sayeda et al., 2016). Language gives meaning to experiences, thinking, emotions, and the conduct of human beings (Sengupta, 2016). Language is considered the main source of transmission of knowledge because it plays the role of the center of all teaching and learning activities. The language that is used to convey information regarding any subject at all levels of education is called the Medium of instruction (Tahir et al., 2017). The medium of instruction is the language that teachers use in the classroom for teaching (Ahmed & Zarif, 2013). The medium of instruction is a source of imparting knowledge and communication.

Anyone can interact effectively by using language and pitch of voice (Farooqi, 2016).

Battle and Lewis (2003) came to the view that education played an important role in the development of human capital and was concerned with the opportunities for better living and the welfare of the individuals. Moreover, it is considered a first step for every human activity in this era of technological revolution and globalization (Farooq et al., 2011). People are giving priority to higher education because education is considered the only key to keep pace with the world's progress, and through education world is making progress day by day (Azhar et al., 2014). According to Saxton (2021), higher education ensures the attainment of knowledge and skills through which individual can make themselves able to improve their quality of life and increase their productivity. The increase in productivity further leads towards new opportunities for remuneration, which increases the economic growth of the country (Nemaorani, 2014).

The quality of learners' learning has remained the top priority for teachers. The key aspect for the teachers is to teach their students effectively so that they may be able to show quality learning during their academic activities. To achieve this objective, it is important for the teachers to have a comprehensive understanding of the factors that may take part in the success of the students or may hinder their academic progress (Azhar et al., 2014). These factors can be family factors, student factors, peer factors, and school factors (Crosnoe et al., 2004). This study aimed to analyze the effect of only two factors, socio-economic status and medium of instruction, on the learning of the students at the university level. Medium of instruction and socio-economic status of the students are of vital importance in affecting students' learning. They are like the backbone to make the students financially and mentally confident (Azhar et al., 2014).

English in Pakistan has long been regarded as a symbol of social advancement and upward mobility, whereas Urdu represents both national identity and religious association. Historically, Urdu-medium schools were designed to educate clerks and lower-level workers who would serve the needs of the elite and the growing English-educated middle class. This linguistic divide gradually deepened socio-economic inequality, as proficiency in English became the key to securing prestigious and better-paying positions in society (Rahman, 2006). Socio-economic status of a family consists of the education of parents, size of family, standard of house rented or occupied, income of family, and level of stability of family, among other factors (Abdulkadir et al., 2016). Teachers often need to adopt a bilingual approach in classrooms to address students' learning challenges. While instructors aim to conduct discussions in English, they frequently allow students to respond or interact in Urdu. This practice reflects the mismatch between the official policy of English as the medium of instruction and the students' varying educational backgrounds and language competencies.

Secondly, teachers are also facing pedagogical dilemmas due to their own inadequate proficiency in English. These conditions are having a great impact on the learning of the students. Thus, the research aims to identify the impact of socio socio-economic background of the students and the medium of instruction used by the teachers on the quality of learning of the students at the university level.

Language is the medium of instruction that is used to provide instructions in any subject at any level. The medium of instruction remains a controversial issue at all levels of education in societies where various systems of education are followed (Ahmed, 2011). According to Rahman (1997), controversy regarding the medium of instruction continues in Pakistan, and it can be viewed as a power struggle between various pressure groups (elites and the pro-elites). Eamon (2005) stated that the socio-economic condition of a family had a great impact on the academic achievement of the students at all levels. Aikens and Barbarin (2008) came to the view that learners from low socio-economic status acquired language more slowly because they take much time to identify letters and related phonics and have face-to-face reading difficulties comparatively. Students from higher socio-economic backgrounds have more opportunities to perform better at the university level and get better jobs than lower socio-economic backgrounds because students who belong to high socio-economic backgrounds have better proficiency in English than students from low socio-economic backgrounds. The university teachers have to face pedagogical issues because they are confused to deal with students having diverse educational, social, economic, and linguistic backgrounds. Moreover, teachers were not proficient in speaking English, so they feel uncomfortable while teaching postgraduate students through the English

medium of instruction in universities (Irfan, 2017). English medium of instruction is compulsory in the universities of Pakistan for postgraduate study because of the availability of reading material in English, but it is not practiced completely (Khan, 2013).

There were many factors inside and outside of the educational institutions that had a great impact on the academic achievement of the students. This study focused on merely two factors. One factor, medium of instruction, was from inside, and the other factor, socio-economic status, was from outside of the educational institutions that affect the academic achievement of the student at the university level. Objective of the Study is to identify the impact of the medium of instruction on university students' face problems in understanding lectures, towards enhancing quality learning in Pakistan. Research Questions of the study is what is the impact of the medium of instruction on university students' face problems in understanding lectures towards enhancing quality learning in Pakistan? Hypothesis of the study is that there is no significant relationship between the medium of instruction and the quality of learning in Pakistan.

This study focused on the students of morning classes of the Department of Education of four selected public universities in Central Punjab, Pakistan. Another limitation was that the researcher could not collect data from any Ph.D. student of the Department of Education of the targeted universities.

Medium of Instruction and Learning

Medium of instruction has always been a glaring controversy in many multilingual countries of the world, including Pakistan. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, which serves as a lingua franca among provinces, but other than Urdu, there are also many other languages that are used at provincial or regional levels. In addition, English is used as the official language everywhere in the country. That is why the position of English in the country can never be denied. So, consequently English medium of instruction has been an unresolved issue because of the overwhelming number of local languages (Shahzad et al., 2013).

Medium of Instruction in Pakistan at the University Level

Each province is responsible for the education system in the concerned province in Pakistan (Mahmood, 2016). Moreover, Pakistani higher education at the federal level is managed by the Higher Education Commission.

According to the ordinance of the Higher Education Commission, it is responsible for the following tasks:

1. To formulate strategies and policies of the higher education sector,
2. To evaluate the institutions,
3. To provide accreditation of institutions,
4. To give the power to federal and provincial governments regarding degree awarding,
5. To regulate and advise existing institutions on financial matters.

According to HEC (2016), there are 104 public and 75 private universities in Pakistan. During 2001-2002, 276,274 students were enrolled, and during 2014-2015, 1,298,600 students were enrolled in the higher education sector in Pakistan.

Medium of Instruction in Pakistan

Pakistani people use at least four languages in their day-to-day life, including Arabic, English, Urdu, and their Provincial language (Gopang et al., 2016). Urdu is used as the national language, Arabic is practiced in Madrassas, and English is in practice as an official language (Gopang et al., 2016). The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, so it also serves as a source of link among different regions, which is why it is called Lingua Franca (Gopang et al., 2016). According to Rahman (1997), a variety of languages or dialects spoken by small amount of populations among people are Balochi and Makrani in Baluchistan; Hindko and Pushto with local dialects of Chitral, Hunza, and Gilgit in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa; Urdu, Saraiki, and Sindhi in Sindh; Kashmiri and Gujri in Kashmir; Punjabi, Saraiki, and Potwari in Punjab (Gopang et al., 2016).

Methodology

This study included a quantitative method approach to have sufficient data. The quantitative research involved the use and analysis of numerical data using statistical techniques. Quantitative research method has been developed for statistically reliable data that tells us how many people do or think about producing something. Quantitative data are typically in numeric form as averages, ratios, or ranges, etc. Self-developed questionnaire was used to collect data on the problem under investigation.

Design of Research

The nature of this study was descriptive, and a survey design was carried out to collect the data from the students of the Department of Education, morning classes, of Pakistan to investigate the impact of medium of instruction on multi-socioeconomic students' quality learning in the selected universities of Central Punjab, Pakistan. In this research, a descriptive research strategy was used to investigate the impact of the medium of instruction on multi-socio-economic students' quality learning in the selected universities of Central Punjab, Pakistan. This study is quantitative research and descriptive in nature.

Population

Students of the Department of Education of four public universities of Pakistan were the population of this study. These universities were the University of Sargodha, the University of the Punjab, the University of Gujrat, and G.C. University Faisalabad. The distribution of programs is given in Table 1.

Table 1. Programs were reported in these universities in morning classes.

University	Programs
University of Sargodha	BS, B.Ed. (Hons.) Elementary, MA Education.
University of Punjab	B.Ed. (1.5 years), B.Ed. (Hons.) Elementary, MA Education Elementary, MA Education Secondary, M.Ed. Secondary, MA Education Early Childhood, MA Educational Research and Assessment, M.Phil., Ph.D.
University of Gujrat	M.Phil., MA Education, B.ED (H)
G.C. University, Faisalabad	B.ED (1.5 years), B.ED (H) Elementary, MA, M.Phil.

Sample

A convenient sampling technique was used in this research. As shown in table 2, 496 students of the Department of Education, morning classes, from four public universities of Pakistan participated. Details are as below:

1. Department of Education of University of Sargodha (Morning Classes)
2. Department of Education of University of Gujrat (Morning Classes)
3. Department of Education of University of the Punjab (Morning Classes)
4. Department of Education of G.C. University, Faisalabad (Morning Classes)

Table 2. Sample selection.

University	Population	Received questionnaires	Male	Female
University of Sargodha	338	104	23	81
University of The Punjab	778	233	101	132
University of Gujrat	283	85	31	54
G.C. University Faisalabad	243	74	29	45

Total	1642	496	184	312
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104 students, including 81 females and 23 males, participated from the Department of Education, University of Sargodha (Morning Classes). 233 students, including 132 females and 101 males, participated from the Department of Education, University of the Punjab (Morning Classes). 85 students, including 54 females and 31 males, participated from the Department of Education, University of Gujrat (Morning Classes). 74 students, including 45 females and 29 males, participated from the Department of Education, G.C. University, Faisalabad (Morning Classes).

Research Instrument

The research was intended to see the impact of the medium of instruction on multi-socioeconomic students' quality of learning in the selected public universities of Pakistan. For this purpose, a questionnaire was developed as a research instrument because it was found that the questionnaire is the best way to get the correct information.

Reliability of Research Instrument

The reliability of the instrument was checked to confirm the internal consistency between the items of the questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha was used to estimate the reliability of the instrument, which came up to 0.795.

Data Collection

Data were collected through a questionnaire. The researcher collected all the data by personally visiting the targeted/stated universities. To make necessary clarifications, the researcher was available to provide assistance to the respondents. Direct contacts were used when the researcher was personally available and explained the questionnaire as requested. 821 questionnaires were distributed, but only 532 questionnaires were returned. Out of these 532 questionnaires, 36 questionnaires were incomplete. Only 496 questionnaires were completely filled out and usable.

Procedure of the study

The researcher administered 821 questionnaires in order to collect the required data, but only 532 questionnaires were returned. Out of these 532 questionnaires, 36 questionnaires were incomplete. Only 496 questionnaires were completely filled out and usable. After the collection of data, the data were analyzed through SPSS-22 software. And at the end, findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusions were drawn by the researcher.

Results and discussion

This chapter contains a brief description of the study, findings, implications, discussion, conclusions, recommendations, and summary. The topic of the research was "Impact of medium of instruction on multi-socioeconomic students' quality learning in the selected public universities of Pakistan". The research was descriptive in nature, which was conducted with the help of a self-developed five-point Likert questionnaire.

The objective of the research was as, to identify the impact of the medium of instruction on university students' face problems in understanding lectures towards enhancing quality learning in Pakistan.

The Table 3 indicated the perception of the students about facing difficulties in understanding lectures through the English medium of instruction.

Table 3. Students face difficulties in understanding lectures through the English medium

Students face difficulties	Frequency	Percent
Strongly Disagree	40	8.1
Disagree	81	16.3

Neutral	77	15.5
Agree	171	34.5
Strongly Agree	127	25.6
Total	496	100.0

Table 3 indicated that out of 496 participants of the selected universities of Central Punjab, 127 (25.6%) strongly agreed, 171 (34.5%) agreed, 77 (15.5%) were neutral, and 81 (16.3%) disagreed. Moreover, 40 (8.1%) strongly disagreed. So $40+81=121$ (24.4%) participants were against, and $171+127=298$ (60.1%) were in favor that who faced difficulties understanding lectures through the English medium of instruction. Thus, more than half of the participants shared a similar approach that they faced difficulties in understanding lectures through the English medium of instruction.

The majority of the participants (60%) had the same opinion that students faced difficulties in understanding lectures through the English medium of instruction.

The majority of the respondents (57.7%) in the selected universities of Central Punjab were in favor that they found it difficult to attempt the paper in English.

Mostly, students thought that it was very difficult for them to understand lectures through the English medium of instruction. This finding is supported by Khan (2013). According to her, when teachers deliver lectures in English in the classroom, students ask them to repeat it. So they have to repeat the lecture in Urdu when they see the blank faces of their students, because their major objective is to satisfy their students.

This study examined that there was no significant correlation between the medium of instruction and the quality of learning of the students. Mostly, participants were in favor that students' abilities flourished through the English medium of instruction as compared to the Urdu medium because English medium were more confident and had better English language proficiency comparatively. But on the other hand, some students were of the view that they faced difficulties in understanding lectures through the English medium of instruction. They also found it difficult to give an oral response to the English lectures as compared to the Urdu lectures. Moreover, the English medium of instruction made them confused. They had to face difficulties while attempting to write in English as well as understand something in English. Such students prefer a familiar medium of instruction for the sake of their better understanding. In this way, they could understand the concepts in a better way and learn faster because their native language is understandable to them, as compared to the English language.

This study attempted to identify the impact of the medium of instruction on the quality of learning of the students in the selected public universities of Pakistan. The medium of instruction in the public universities of Central Punjab is English, but most of the time, teachers teach in Urdu. The objective of this study was, to identify the impact of the medium of instruction on university students' face problems in understanding lectures, towards enhancing quality learning in Pakistan. This study was quantitative and descriptive in nature. Non-probability convenience sampling technique was used in this research. 496 participants, including 312 females and 184 males, participated from four public universities of Pakistan. Data were collected through a point Likert scale questionnaire. After data collection, the data were analyzed through SPSS-22. Descriptive statistics were used for frequency distribution and percentage. A bivariate Pearson correlation test was applied to find the correlation of quality learning with medium of instruction, socioeconomic status, and motivation level on the basis of medium of instruction. A linear regression model was used to indicate how much of the total variation in the dependent variable, quality of learning, can be explained by independent variables, socioeconomic status, and medium of instruction. At the end, findings, implications, recommendations, and conclusions were drawn by the researcher. The results showed that there was a significant correlation between the socioeconomic status of the students and their quality of learning at the university level. Moreover,

students' quality of learning and medium of instruction at the university level are insignificantly correlated. There is a significant correlation between the medium of instruction and the motivation of the students towards learning.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It was concluded that students with the Urdu medium of instruction found it difficult to attempt the paper in English. Some students claimed that English medium graduates were more confident, and the English medium of instruction improved their English language proficiency. Moreover, the medium of instruction significantly affected the motivation level of the students towards quality learning. Teacher education can play a vital role in improving language proficiency among university instructors by introducing specialized language training courses for postgraduate students. New teachers should receive structured training programs emphasizing the practical application of language in classroom settings. In-service training for existing teachers must focus on developing communicative and student-centered teaching approaches. Universities are encouraged to offer short-term English proficiency courses for newly enrolled students to strengthen their linguistic foundation. Furthermore, institutions should raise expectations and standards for language attainment across all academic levels. The curriculum needs to be more practice-oriented, providing students with opportunities to engage in real-life communication situations. Students should be encouraged to use social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and WhatsApp to enhance their English communication skills. Universities can also organize regular seminars and workshops on language proficiency, while teachers should be provided with social and professional forums to practice and improve their spoken English collaboratively.

Future research should explore how the medium of instruction influences activity-based teaching and learning practices, particularly in enhancing student engagement and understanding. Further studies can also examine its impact on group discussions and collaborative learning environments. In addition, researchers should investigate how the choice of instructional language can be made more effective through the integration of information and communication technology (ICT). Finally, future work may focus on the role of social media platforms in supporting language learning and improving the overall effectiveness of the medium of instruction in higher education contexts.

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