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The English-medium fever in Pakistan: analyzing policy, perceptions and practices through additive bi/multilingual education lens

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Abstract

This study analyses the crisis of English teaching in Pakistan. The study examines stakeholders' perceptions and classroom practices to identify theoretical fault lines and institutional/pedagogical challenges in the low-fee schools. We deem such research critical in the backdrop of public's heavy reliance and feverish pursuit of low-fee English-medium schools which have expanded exponentially off late. Deploying mixed methodology that utilized a questionnaire, interviews and observation, the research draws information from students, teachers and school principals. Results suggest that most respondents perceive early-English policy inevitable, and believe that the earlier the English-medium policy, the better. Respondents' majority also views additive multilingual policy unfavorably presuming that more languages will amount to learners' confusion. Teaching mother-tongues is being perceived as waste of time. Actual English teaching practices appear illusory, as direct and contextualized use of English is a rare feature while Urdu stands as the de facto medium of classroom transactions. Grammar-translation methodologies and classrooms activities leave little potential for communicative competence, concept formulation and linguistic internalization. We conclude that although respondents' support for English-medium policy is rational; however, it is fraught with illusions as neither teaching/learning practices replicate English-medium policy nor bi-multilingual education research supports foreign language as medium for early schooling.

Keyword: English-medium fever, Low-fee private schools, Age and Language Learning, additive bi/multilingual education, Pakistan

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Introduction

The number of private schools has increased almost ten-fold in Pakistan over the last two decades, and nearly one out of three school-going children attends private schools (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2008, p. 335). A survey by ASER (2014) suggests that only 58% children of age 3-5 years attend schools out of which 48% are admitted in the private schools (non-state schools). In addition, 59% children of age 6-16 are enrolled in the private schools whereas 35% are enrolled in the government schools. The low-fee or low-cost English-medium schools constitute a substantial portion of the existing private schools. Andrabi et al. (2008) reported that the dramatic expansion of the low-fee private schools reconfigured the educational landscape of the country. There are no official figures available about the number of low-fee schools at the national level; however, these schools can be seen all around in the streets mainly in the urban/sub-urban areas and also in some rural areas. Such schools claim to offer English-medium education from the nursery level and put up attractive names such as Cambridge, Wilderness, Grand folks, Pearl and so on to project their English image. One of the major causes behind the phenomenal expansion of such schools appears to be the public demand for English-medium instruction at a low price. Public considers English as a potent instrument for socioeconomic mobility, and views it as a passport to potential social powers and privileges (Mahboob, 2002, 2009; Mansoor, 2005; Rahman, 1996, 2004a; Rassool & Mansoor, 2007). Generally, different stakeholders think that when kids begin with early-English instruction in school, it will result in better and quicker learning of the language as well as course contents; thus, they take for granted that by the time children matriculate from schools, they will have gained greater exposure, command and proficiency in the English words.

In view of the dramatic proliferation of the low-fee English-medium schools, and the prevailing perceptions and anticipations about straight-for-English policy, we deem it critical to probe some important aspects of this policy to analyze its theoretical underpinning and practice-related dimensions within the sociolinguistic and sociocultural landscape of Pakistan, where English functions as a foreign language to most children attending the low-fee schools. An analysis of the current policy can be critical from overall language-in-education perspective in Pakistan as on the one hand, the low-fee schools proliferate exponentially in the educational market; on the other hand, the society appears to take early English-medium policy for granted without probing the theoretical, implementational and contextual complexities that underlie English-medium policy in the context of Pakistan. This can be the first study that gives insights

to the language policy dynamics of the low-fee schools in Pakistan. Against this background, our study aims to line up following research questions to analyze the straight-for-English policy:

- I. How do different stakeholders (students, teachers & school principals) in the low-fee schools perceive straight-for-English policy?
- II. How do teachers approach their teaching methodologies while teaching English in the low-fee schools?
- III. To what extent are stakeholders' (students, teachers & school principals) perceptions consistent with the theory of bi/multilingual education and previous research in Pakistan-like sociolinguistic contexts?

The English-medium fever

The popularity of English-medium education has been termed as the fever for English. The pursuit for English-medium education is a widespread phenomenon particularly in large part of Africa (García, Skutnabb-Kangas, & Torres-Guzman, 2006), India (Mohanty, 2006), ASEAN countries (Ferguson, 2013), China (Xiaoyang & Yangyang, 2014) and Korea (Park, 2009; Shim & Park, 2008). Stephen Krashen (2003) also discusses the English-fever phenomenon. According to García et al. (2006), whenever available, parents in many parts of the world choose English-medium education for their children. In China, a larger segment of the society supports English education and emphasize that English is important for students to be able to read and understand Western scientific books and research journals, and participate actively in the international economic activities and exchanges (Xiaoyang & Yangyang, 2014). In addition, Korea has also been in the grip of deep English-fever (Park, 2009; Shim & Park, 2008). For instance, explicating the phenomenal popularity of the English language and English-medium schooling, Park (2009) reports that,

These days, a huge amount of money is being spent on 'English education' (*yeongeokeyoyuk*) in South Korea every year. Children as young as five years as well as school-age students are studying English until late at night in tens of thousands of cramming schools (*hagwon*). A great number of children are being sent to foreign countries for the purpose of 'English education' and the number is increasing year by year (p. 50).

Background to language policies in Pakistan

Pakistan is a multilingual and multiethnic country. The Federal Constitution of 1973 declares Urdu as the national and English as the official language. There exist 77 languages, of which 72 are considered as indigenous while the remaining 5 languages are labeled as immigrant (Ethnologue, 2015). English and Urdu respectively stand first and second in the language hierarchy while the rest of the major and minor indigenous languages stand at the bottom. English is the most powerful language because it is used in the 'domains of power' (Rahman, 1996), such as administration, judiciary, education particularly higher education, civil services, corporate sector, and media. Mostly, quality and expensive English-medium educational institutions are accessible only to a tiny elite class (Mustafa, 2011; Rahman, 2004a, 2007; Rassool & Mansoor, 2007). The National Education Policy (GOP, 2009) theoretically

recommends a multilingual education policy at the school levels—Urdu, English and ‘one regional language’ until primary level. In addition to English, the national language (Urdu), and regional languages, and the learning of Arabic language (GOP, 2009). As the policy reads,

The curriculum from Class I onward shall include English (as a subject), Urdu, one regional language, and mathematics along with an integrated subject. The Provincial and Area Education Departments shall have the choice to select the medium of instruction up to Class V. English shall be employed as the medium of instruction for sciences and mathematics from class IV onwards. For 5 years, Provinces shall have the option to teach mathematics and science in English or Urdu/official regional language, but after five years, the teaching of these subjects shall be in English only (p. 20).

Despite the policy statements, the actual policy with regard to teaching mother tongues or one regional language has not been carried away across the country except Sindhi language in parts of Sindh nor has a uniform policy across provinces and urban and rural areas occurred yet. English and Urdu wield substantial institutional support across important areas; yet, despite the numerical strength, the indigenous languages are generally turned into ‘social ghettos’ (Rahman, 2005a), and those languages are carried within the informal domains such as homes and intra-community usages such as homes and intra-community usage. The attitudes of people are more favorably tilted towards the English language because they perceive it as a vehicle that holds greater cultural and economic capital than the indigenous languages (Mahboob, 2002; Manan & David, 2013; Manan, David, & Dumanig, 2014; Mansoor, 1993, 2005; Rahman, 2004a).

Non-elite/low-fee English-medium schools

Low-fee schools are variously labelled as non-elite, low-cost, or low-fee (Andrabi et al., 2008; Heyneman & Stern, 2013; Rahman, 2004a). Much alike the remainder of the country, low-fee private schools are spread all over in the streets of Quetta city particularly in the urban and suburban areas. According to a survey conducted by the Directorate of Education Balochistan (2013), there were a total of 664 low-fee private schools in the Quetta district while the number of government schools was 471. Based on those figures, the private schools account for 59%, while the government schools make up 41% of the existing schools. Amongst these low-fee schools, there were also a number of Iqra schools, which put up a mixed syllabus teaching Islamic Studies as well as English books. The above survey covers all types of private schools, but it does not spell out the proportion of the English-medium school. Yet, as researchers observe, the prevailing trend suggests that the bulk of such schools bear English-medium names, and advertise as an English - medium.

For the purpose of this study, the schools were recognized as low-fee because they charge relatively modest tuition fees when compared with the expensive, elitist English-medium private schools operating mostly in the major cities of Pakistan that include the Beaconhouse School System, the City schools and some others. In addition, based on definitions as proposed by Heyneman and Stern (2013) who defined low-fee school “as one whose tuition fee was lower

than half the minimum wage”. Thus, based on the minimum wage limit announced by the governments of Pakistan for the fiscal year 2015-16, the minimum wage for an unskilled worker per month is ¹PKR 13,000 ([http://tribune.com.pk/story/898408/budget-2015-16-finance-minister-ishaq-dar-unveils budget/](http://tribune.com.pk/story/898408/budget-2015-16-finance-minister-ishaq-dar-unveils-budget/)).

As the monthly tuition fee for all the schools ranges from PKR 350 minimum to PKR 1,800 maximum per (See range of tuition fee of all schools may be read in the appendix); therefore, all the schools are categorized as low-fee. Previous studies also give nearly similar descriptions of the low-fee schools. According to Rahman (2004a), low-fee private schools are varied to the extent that “they defy classification” (p. 42). Rahman (2004a) also found that these schools charge fees ranging "from Rs 50 Rs 1500 per month, which is far higher than the average state vernacular school but lower than that of the elitist private English school" (p. 64). According to Andrabi et al. (2008), the expansion of the low-fee schools "can be attributed to the fact that they charge low fees. A typical private school in a village of Pakistan charges Rs 1,000 (\$18) per year—less than the average daily wage of an unskilled laborer “(p. 6).

Research methodology

The data has been collected from 11 low-fee English-medium private schools in Quetta, the capital city of one of the provinces of Pakistan. Quetta is located close to the borders of Iran and Afghanistan. Quetta district is highly multilingual and multicultural country that hosts a large number of tribes, ethnic and linguistic groups. The principal ethnic groups in the district are Pashtoon, Baloch, Brahvi, Hazara and Punjabi²(UNICEF, 2011). The participants of this study comprise of students, teachers and school principals. A total of 245 students from high secondary classes (grade 9th and 10th), and another 08 teachers and 11 school principals also took part in the study. The justification for selecting grade, 9th and 10th students were to gather more mature, informed and in-depth feedback on the English-medium issue as those students are the senior most, who have spent from 11 to 12 years in their respective schools. The study mainly relies on qualitative data; however, it also conducts a small-scale questionnaire survey, using a mixed methodology with research tools such as interviews, observations and a questionnaire survey. Mixed method was deemed appropriate as it can afford numerous advantages such as presentation of multiple perspectives, in-depth understanding, enhanced validity, and compensation for limitations of either of the methodologies (Creswell, 2013).

A survey questionnaire was distributed amongst 245 students. Probability sampling technique was used for survey questionnaire that involved “selecting a relatively large number of units from a population, or from specific subgroups (strata) of a population, in a random manner where the probability of inclusion for every member of the population is determinable”(Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2010, p. 713). Within the probability sampling, random sampling technique was used it helps achieve representativeness, which is the degree to which

¹ PKR stands for Pakistani currency Rupee

² GOB stands for Government of Balochistan

the sample accurately represents the entire population (Teddle & Yu, 2007). Based on random sampling, respondents were selected from higher secondary classes, which are locally termed as grade 9th and 10th. Out of 245, 110 (45%) were from grade, 9th and other 135 (55%) were from grade 10th. The questionnaire was made up of the next sections: biographical information, favorite language policy in schools, and students' exposure to direct employment of English in school. The study used Likert scales such as *always*, *often*, *sometimes*, *seldom* and *never* to determine the frequency with which students received exposure to the direct use of the English language. To perform face validity of questionnaire items, a pilot study was conducted to “determine that the individuals in the sample are capable of completing the survey and that they can understand the questions” (Creswell, 2008, p. 390) . The pilot study was conducted in 2 schools involving 45 students. Feedback from the student during the pilot study helped identify several minor problems, particularly in the design of the items that carried a Likert scale. For instance, earlier version contained several open-ended questions, which were found time-consuming, and were challenging for statistical analysis.

The qualitative part of the study included one-on-one interviews with a total of 49 respondents from the three pools of respondents that were comprised of students (30), teachers (08) and school principals (11). Interviews were conducted face-to-face within the respective schools. A purposive sampling strategy was adopted for interviews with students and teachers, which were both semi-structured and open-ended. Students were selected from amongst those who responded to the questionnaire. Likewise, a total of 08 English teachers were available for consultations. Additionally, as 11 principals permitted access to their schools; therefore, one in every school was automatically chosen for interviews. The school principals' input can be essential because they are mostly administrators and owners of the same schools. Critically, their job is also to manage and govern school language policies who Spolsky (2009) describes as language managers. Each interview spanned from 15 to 25 minutes. Questions were both semi-structured and open-ended. The following set of questions anchored the interviews:

- i. *If you were to decide about medium of instruction policy, which language would you have preferred?*
- ii. *Given the multilingual and multiethnic setting of Pakistan, how do you view the current English-medium policy in schools?*
- iii. *How would you answer to mother tongue based language policy in schools?*
- iv. *What are your views about the importance of teaching/learning indigenous languages in schools?*

Interviews were audiotaped, and subsequently transcribed. For coding, a six-phased thematic framework was followed that included familiarizing with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Non-participant observation also contributes to the results of the study. Observations aimed to record pedagogical practices with focus on the use of language (s) by both teachers and students. Observation covered 10 classes in 09 different schools, which makes up

about 400 minutes in total. Each class was about 40 minutes long. The data were subsequently analyzed using descriptive analysis (frequency counts and percentages) for questionnaire and a thematic analysis of interviews. Respondents' direct quotations have been assigned codes such as student (STDT), teacher (TCHR), and principal (PRPL).

Data analysis

Respondents' biographical information

The majority of students were males (n=219, 89%) while only (n=26, 11%) were females. Likewise, 06 of the teachers were females while 02 were males. Moreover, 02 school principals were females and the 09 were males. In terms of academic qualification, 02 teachers held MA/MSc degrees, 05 Bachelor and 01 Intermediate degrees. The school principals' majority obtained an MA / MSC degree and only 02 had Bachelor degree. Language background of respondents shows that Pashto speakers form the majority. Other students belong to 10 different ethnic groups who speak languages such as Urdu, Balochi, Burahvi, Punjabi, Kashmiri, Persian and Kohistani. Teachers and school principals also belong to diverse backgrounds (Refer to appendix). Students largely belong to uneducated families. We find that 33.46% of their fathers and 71.84 of their mothers do not hold any formal education at all. Therefore, they may be described as illiterate. The figures also indicate that fathers are more educated than mothers are. Likewise, 38% of their fathers and 5% of mothers have a Master's Degree while only 7.6% of the fathers and 4.9% of the mothers hold a Bachelor's Degree (refer to appendix). Occupational background of parents shows that the vast majority of their mothers is housewives whereas a significant number of students (40%) suggests that their fathers hold private businesses. Business stands out as the most prominent profession of their fathers, which is 40%. Similarly, a number of fathers hold government jobs across various sectors.

Stakeholders' perceptions about English-medium policy

Results suggest that a vast majority of students, teachers and school principals extend the overwhelming subscription to straight-for-English policy, and simultaneously demonstrate their resistance to mother-tongue based policy. We find that none other than two school principals proposes mother tongue based policy; however, a negligible number of students supports a multilingual policy with mother tongues and Urdu being taught as a subject. Figure 1 below illustrates students' favorite medium of instruction policy in education. It suggests that the largest number of them opts for English-only (n=115, 47%) policy while a significant portion of them prefers a bilingual English and Urdu policy in which English could be taught as a medium while Urdu as a subject—(n=85, 35%).

Figure 1: Students' favorite language-in-education policy

Furthermore, interview data show that all three pools of stakeholders advanced a host of theory-laden propositions in support of straight-for-English policy. The following table quantifies their

responses and outlines the major propositions the respondents put forward to advocate for straight-for-English policy:

Table 1: Perceptions about English-medium policy

As the table 1 above illustrates, a significant number of respondents support straight-for-English policy as they believe that children's minds are sharper than that of the adults, and there is relatively greater potential for faster and better learning of the English language when it is introduced at the nursery level. A teacher observes that, "*You cannot teach mother tongue. How will they learn English then, as English is compulsory language? I do not think we have any other choice*" (TCHR6). Another teacher equates language learning with learning of any new subject. She presumes that learning a new language is not different from that of learning new subjects such as sciences or humanities. She contends that,

If we don't teach English from the beginning, children will not properly understand to read, write or speak. When you give something more time, you will learn it well. The same is true for English. The younger they are, the greater the chances for language learning (TCHR8).

A school principal argued that once children are grown up, the language learning possibilities may gradually diminish. As one school principal explicates that, "*The younger the kids, the sharper the minds. At this age, children will be able to learn more and more English*" (PRPL5). Another principal contends that, "*When we expose children to English in schools, they will find it natural and will take it easily. We should not waste time in teaching mother tongues*" (PRPL9).

At this point, we would deem it appropriate to view stakeholders' assumptions about early-English through most relevant research. We find that age and critical period are crucial subjects in the learning of a second or a foreign language. The effect of age on second language acquisition is a debated subject that has drawn much attention in ³SLA/EFL research (Cenoz, 2003, 2009; DeKeyser & Larson-Hall, 2005; Genesee, 2004; Harley & Wang, 1997; Krashen, 2004; Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Contrary to popular opinion of most of supporters of 'the early, the better' policy of English teaching, Krashen (2003) categorically stated that younger acquirers are not faster at language acquisition. Similarly, Cenoz (2009) underlines the need to analyze the context of language learning. Cenoz (2009) explains that the notion of sensitive age or critical period may influence the learning of a second language positively; however, there is a need to distinguish between 'natural and formal contexts of language acquisition'. Cenoz argues that most research that supports sensitive period and stresses the young age, has been conducted in natural settings where "extensive natural exposure to the language is combined with formal learning" (p. 193). While this situation is in sharp contrast to "acquiring a second or foreign language in situations in which exposure to the language is limited to the school context and

³ SLA stands for Second Language Acquisition, and EFL stand for English as a Foreign Language.

usually to a very limited number of hours per week” (p. 193). In a relevant subject, Singleton and Ryan (2004) conclude that, “those who are naturalistically exposed to an L2 and whose exposure to L2 in question begins in childhood eventually surpass those whose exposure begins in adulthood, even though the latter usually show some initial advantage over the former” (p. 227). In the context of Pakistan, no specific research has been conducted on age as factor in the acquisition of English as a second/foreign language. However, Coleman and Capstick (2012), in response to the supporters of early-English policy suggested that there was a “widespread misunderstanding about how children learn languages and about the role of language in education” (p.8). Coleman and Capstick (2012) termed this as invalid simplistic overgeneralization. They further explain that,

Adults have their own language learning strengths which children lack. On the other hand, because children tend to be less inhibited in their use of language than adults, it may well be true that in a supportive environment - such as the family where they are exposed to languages in a natural and unthreatening manner children will acquire oral skills more rapidly than do adults (p. 38).

Another critical assumptions a large number of respondents propose is, their apprehension about a multilingual policy in schools. They think that it is hard for kids to obtain grasp of multiple languages in schools. They stand opposed to a multilingual or trilingual policy, as it would cause potential linguistic confusion amongst learners. They assume that learning two or more languages will overload children; thus instead of subject material and course contents, their energies will largely consume in learning two or three languages. As a school principal argues that,

We cannot teach many languages. Children’s minds cannot absorb burden of many languages. More languages means more challenges. Children already know their mother tongues; they need more English and Urdu” (PRPL1).

In theoretical terms, their perceptions are largely influenced by what Benson described as the ‘monolingual habitus’, a perspective derived from Bourdieu’s theory of a set of unquestioned dispositions towards languages in society. Benson (2013) explains that “educational approaches in low-income multilingual countries are pervaded by a monolingual habitus, or set of assumptions built on the fundamental myth of uniformity of language and culture” (p. 284). The perception that multiple languages can cause confusion is theoretically inconsistent and less informed by research evidence. We find that around several countries, the concept of a multilingual curriculum is a common educational practice such as Basque Country. In contrast to stakeholders’ negative perceptions about bi/multilingual education, Cummins (2000) underlines numerous advantages that, “bilingualism is associated with enhanced linguistic, cognitive and academic development when both languages are encouraged to develop” (p. 4). Similarly, Mohanty (2009) advocates multilingual education as a resourceful bridge,

...a bridge between home and school, between languages and between cultures. A bridge from the home language, the mother tongue, to the regional language and to the national language as well as world languages like English; an empowering bridge that leads to meaningful participation in the wider democratic and global setup without homogenising the beauty of diversity; a bridge that liberates but does not displace (p. 6).

In addition, a number of other perceptions advanced against bi/multilingual policy and mother tongue based policy are inconsistent with research in bi/multilingual education. Most perceptions are characterized by a ‘monolingual habitus’. For instance, some respondents view the teaching of mother tongues as a waste of time and energy while many others consider only English-medium education as most valuable and promising. For instance, a school principal articulates the supremacy of the English-medium education in the following words:

English is very important. It enables children to get access to civil services, higher education, army and bureaucracy. Due to English proficiency, children will add to their market value (PRPL9).

A teacher emphasizes the scope of English-only saying that, *“Of course, the real productive schooling is schooling in the English medium. You cannot equate other Urdu-medium schools with English medium”* (TCHR2).

At present, in the following section, we demonstrate a snapshot of some of the significant contextual particulars that characterize English teaching methodology and learning exercises in those schools. The data shall demonstrate that despite most stakeholders’ positive perceptions about English-medium policy, the classroom realities appear contradictory to that of expectations and anticipations the stakeholders show. The snapshot is presented with a view to highlight the practical challenges of implementing a genuine English-medium policy, and exposing children to meaningful use of the English language in the classroom so as to enable them to become as proficient as most stakeholders tend to expect. A demonstration of mismatches between the purported English-medium policy, and the actual classroom practice can be critical given the excessive publicity most low-fee English-medium schools invest on English-medium projection to sell English as a demanding brand in the marketplace.

A snapshot of English teaching methodologies and learning practices

Classroom observation and interviews with teachers show that most teachers most of the time use Urdu rather than English in their classroom transactions such as lecture delivery and interaction with students. One of the indicators of the use of Urdu was that only two teachers out of eight agreed to give interviews in English. Both of them were graduates of English Literature. The remaining teachers preferred Urdu rather than English language because they said that they could not communicate in the English language while they could express their views much more comfortably in Urdu. Teaching methodology is marked by Urdu translation of the texts. For instance, a teacher explained that his method *“is usually a translation of the text. We are told to finish the courses. English is not stressed that much in these schools. Students cannot understand*

English” (TCHR1). The same teacher also revealed that the focus of his teaching is on grammar teaching rather than on speaking or listening exercises. His teaching methodology typifies a localized approach towards language teaching:

I first identify name of the tense. And so I make a graph where all tenses are lined up. Then I teach them the formula and use of every tense, their identification in Urdu, forms of the verb used, and all things. We then provide Urdu sentences, and when they identified tense, they can translate it easily from Urdu to English”.

Another teacher explained how she conducted her teaching—*“I often teach in Urdu. I also provide translation wherever needed. Our children are not that strong in English”* (TCHR3). When a teacher was asked about the level of proficiency students achieve at their matriculation stage, he revealed that *“... most of them are not good at speaking. Their reading is limited to textbooks. Mostly they cannot write on topics that are out of their courses. Cramming is common”* (TCHR2). Are students being exposed to reflective or creative writing practices? The majority of teachers replied that such practices were not common. For instance, one of the teachers explained that, *“We have to complete their syllabus within a specific time. Exercise like creative writing is necessary, but frankly, we have no time for this. There is constant pressure on us from the principal to complete the course”* (TCHR2).

School principals also admitted that they advised teachers to use Urdu rather than English during their instruction. A school principal said, *“I often instruct teachers to keep the children’s level in mind while using medium in class because most of them belong to uneducated families. Teachers usually explain concepts in Urdu”* (PRPL9). Another school principal argued that instead of languages, we should focus on easy transfer of concepts and meanings. Teachers’ use of only English can be a barrier to many students. He described that, *“Children are still poor in English. Children have not become ‘Angrez’ (English-speakers) yet. I tell teachers that while teaching English lessons, they must explain meanings in Urdu”* (PRPL11).

Questionnaire data drawn from the students also indicate that they are given rather limited English exposure in their classroom transactions (Refer to Table 2). Figures indicate that the majority of the students never uses English while *‘asking questions and classroom discussion’* (64.1%), *‘social interaction’* (66.9%), and *‘teacher’s use of English’* (45.3%).

Table 2: Direct use and exposure to the English language in schools

Based on those figures, one may infer that Urdu stands as the default medium of classroom transactions, and most teachers instead of English use Urdu. As far as the implications of the use of Urdu are concerned, it may be argued that although a vast majority of students speak indigenous languages except a small number of Urdu speakers, Urdu is still very familiar language to most students who comprehend it easily especially those who belong to the cities. Significantly, at macro sociolinguistic level, the use of Urdu can also symbolize the supremacy of Urdu vis-a-vis the mother tongues of majority students, and it can also epitomize exclusion of local linguistic diversity of the mainstreams schooling landscapes. From a pedagogical viewpoint, we argue that there is no harm in using Urdu for translation purposes; however, we problematize the current practices as to suggest that students also require some meaningful

exposure to the English language to achieve a certain level of proficiency in the language they and their parents aspire passionately. We may argue that the current policy and practices suffer from chaos where students can grow their linguistic and academic repertoire neither in the English language nor Urdu nor in their mother tongues. They end up as semi-multilinguals.

Here follows a vignette from Classroom observations, which also confirms the use of Urdu rather than English as a communication tool. The vignette is based on observation of the 10 classes attended from those schools. It was found that none of the teachers in the classes used English either for formal lecture delivery or informal interaction. Urdu was the de facto medium of classroom communication between teachers and students. The use of English was confined to the textbooks. Besides, teacher-to-student and student-to-student communication often took place in the Urdu language. Students also used their mother tongues in their interpersonal communication. The occasional use of the English language that usually occurred, was in the form of single-sentence expressions or single-word verbal expressions. Teachers and students were observed using occasional English expressions and sentences for command, instruction, or permission; however, the mode of communication was devoid of natural communicative intent and spontaneous delivery of the language. Both students and teachers employed somewhat clichéd, formulaic and seemingly habitual English expressions such as ‘be quiet’, ‘stop it’, ‘come in’, ‘behave yourself’, ‘take out books’, ‘come in’, ‘go to toilet’ and so on. Similarly, students were trained to use such habitual expressions as ‘May I come in teacher’, ‘May I go teacher’, ‘good morning madam’ and so on. Mohanty (2013) also noted such behavioral norms in the low-cost English-medium private schools in India. He describes such practices as superficial Anglicization and conventional behavioral norms, aimed to impress upon parents.

Some other methodological aspects of teaching also suggest lack of the use of English for the purpose of genuine communication and naturalistic internalization of the syntax, vocabulary or the meanings. Classroom observations unfold that teachers do teach some grammatical structures such as parts of speech, tenses and voice; however, the pedagogical approach is characterized by a decontextualized form of grammar and vocabulary teaching. Grammatical structures are taught with the help of Urdu translation, and by formula while students were made to memorize the rules and were told how to construct simple, negative or interrogative sentences. None of the teachers applied either activity-based or a task-driven teaching and learning pedagogy to internalize language by acting or doing, a pedagogical approach most advocates of sociocultural theory and constructionists suggest (Vygotsky, 1978). The following table illustrates how one of the teachers taught tenses in her class. As these examples suggest, the teacher gives students a sentence in Urdu and then translates the same into Urdu, instructing students how to identify certain tenses in the Urdu language. The concerned teacher also devised a formula that involved formation of sentences in different tenses. Here is an example of the same:

Urdu	English translation	Formula
امی کھانا پکا تی ہے۔	Mother cooks food.	Subject+ 1 st form of verb +s/es with singular subject + object
وہ سکول جاتا ہے۔	He goes to schools.	Subject+ 1 st form of verb+s/es with singular subject +object
ہم کرکٹ کھیل رہے ہیں۔	We are playing cricket.	Subject+ +1 st form of verb+ing form +object
ہم کراچی گئے تھے	We went to Karachi.	Subject+2 nd form of verb + object

The same decontextualized approach applies to reading practices and vocabulary teaching. Most teachers taught reading lessons with conventional teacher-centered methods where teachers read the text aloud while students followed them in the form of chorus without thinking about the meaning. The following table illustrates how one of the teachers tipped some words out of a lesson as difficult words, and wrote their Urdu meanings on the whiteboard, which the students faithfully copied in their notebooks:

English	Urdu
Observed	مشاہدہ کیا
Struck	لگا
Infection	بیماری لگنا
Spread	پھیلا ہوا
Shapes	اشکال
Pitied	رحم کھایا
Sympathized	ہمدردی دکھایا

Few important themes emanate from the teaching methodologies and learning practices as illustrated in the above vignette. The use of English remains confined within the text books. Urdu stands as the de facto medium of classroom activities, which one may regard as essential for the easy transfer of the meaning and concept of the contents. However, this very fact also underlines the pitfalls of the English-medium policy and typifies its theoretical, pedagogical and institutional limitations within the context of the low-fee schools in Pakistan. Paradoxically, English which most students and parents feverishly aspire, is being supplied in rather little quantity as teachers' use and students' exposure leave English-medium policy as illusory and misleading.

The English-medium fever through bi/multilingual lenses

This discussion views the current English-medium policy through existing scholarship on bi/multilingual education to show its theoretical fault lines and implementational challenges. Drawing on extensive evidence from wide-ranging and diverse contexts featuring the weaknesses of early-English policy, we seek to offer a counterargument to the perceptions which most stakeholders advance in support of straight-for-English policy in schools. Most stakeholders aptly anticipate that English-medium education policy is likely to open up the gates for manifold social and economic opportunities. However, one also needs to analyze some of the assumptions made about the outcomes of straight-for-English from the spectacles of existing theory and empirical research in the identical sociolinguistic contexts such as that of Pakistan.

Most stakeholders believe that teaching mother tongues are a waste of time. They believe so because presumably, on the one hand, the earlier introduction of mother tongue in schools will reduce the amount of time they will require for learning English; on the other hand, they accord little instrumental value to mother tongues in the economic and cultural market. However, Mohanty (2009) argues that the belief that English-medium education offers quality and brighter prospects are premised on myth of English-medium superiority, which also fosters negative perceptions about indigenous languages. Thus, the

...myth of English-medium superiority is propagated to the detriment of the poor and the marginalised. English and other ‘killer languages’ set in motion a hierarchical pecking order of languages that severely disadvantages the other languages, those of the Indigenous peoples and minorities, in particular (p. 5).

In stark contrast to their negative assumptions about early mother tongue teaching, an extensive research on children’s language development emphasizes that academic literacy (reading and writing) in children’s first language can potentially lay a strong foundation for the acquisition of a second or a third language (Baker, 2001; Cummins, 1979, 2009; King & Mackey, 2007; Krashen, 2004; Skutnabb-Kangas & Toukomaa, 1976). The ‘threshold hypothesis’ and ‘interdependence hypothesis’ as put forward by Skutnabb-Kangas and Toukomaa (1976) and (Cummins, 2000) respectively, contradict stakeholders’ most assumptions. The two hypotheses ‘threshold level’ and ‘interdependence’ theorize that when children have reached a threshold of competence in their mother tongues (first language), they can then effectively learn a second or a third language without losing competence in the first language. For instance, Cummins (2001, 2009) proposes that if instruction develops in an additive bilingual education with L1-L2/3 program, it will not only build a sound foundation for reading and writing, but it will also develop,

...deeper conceptual and linguistic proficiency that contributes significantly to the development of literacy in the majority language. This ‘common underlying proficiency’ makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related skills across languages (Cummins, 2009, p. 25).

Similarly, scholars of bi/multilingual research term several other assumptions such as ‘the younger, the better’, and ‘learning many languages at the same time causes confusion’ as myths (King & Mackey, 2007). Older children can make equally greater “strides and reach high levels of success in the second language” as younger children do (King & Mackey, 2007, p. 22). Research evidence also suggests that children who begin schooling with their mother tongue (L1), can catch up, and can even surpass those children who start with second/third language in terms of linguistic development in the target language (Mohanty & Saikia, 2004; Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson, Panda, and Mohanty (2009) claim that “whenever English is not the mother-tongue, its learning should be promoted through linguistically and culturally appropriate education...and the faith that an early start in English means good education and ensures success in life is a pernicious myth” (p. 327). In the similar vein, Ferguson (2013) describes the glamorous pull for early English education as a ‘fever’, which is based on rational demands; however,

The ‘fever’ for English is often ill-informed and misguided for a number of reasons. First, the early introduction of English in primary schools is often ineffective and leads to lowered educational performance (p. 18).

Research evidence from a number of studies from post-colonial contexts such as Africa, South Asia, particularly India and the ASEAN regions advocate mother tongue based instruction. Research simultaneously problematizes the teaching of English, an ex-colonial language as medium of education in schools. In the backdrop of steady pull towards English language teaching across the post-colonial contexts, an array of scholars and researchers problematize its introduction in education particularly in the earlier years in schools. According to Benson (2002), mother tongue based schooling enables students to “learn subject disciplines and develop literacy skills upon which competency in the second or foreign language can be built” (p. 303). Advocating additive approaches, Pinnock (2009) observes, “Switching completely away from teaching in a language understood by a child is likely to distract and confuse students to a great extent. Good practice involves an additive approach, where increasing time is gradually given to one or two second languages, but the first language continues to play an important role in teaching and learning”(p. 14). English teaching as a foreign language worldwide misleads many parents into believing that formal education means education in English, which has a pernicious backwash effect (Benson, 2009; Heugh, 2009). Describing the advantages of additive education, Cummins (2009) proposes that:

Approximately 200 empirical studies carried out during the past 40 or so years have reported a positive association between additive bilingualism and students’ linguistic, cognitive, or academic growth. The most consistent findings are that bilinguals show more developed awareness of the structure and functions of language itself (metalinguistic abilities) and that they have advantages in learning additional languages (p. 26).

In addition, extensive research evidence shows rhetorically as well as empirically that, the earlier instruction in a familiar language at the primary level has numerous advantages, far greater than instruction in a foreign or a second language. Instruction through home or indigenous language improves the quality and quantity of interaction between pupil and teacher (Hardman, Abd-

Kadir, & Smith, 2008); it fosters cognitive development and literacy and eases the transition between home and school, and so on. (Alidou et al., 2006; Benson, 2002) .These arguments are increasingly bolstered by empirical evidence from different countries such as Mozambique (Benson, 2000); Burkina Faso (Alidou & Brock-Utne, 2006); Zambia (Tambulukani & Bus, 2012); Tanzania (Brock-Utne, 2007); Nigeria (Fafunwa, Macauley, & Sokoya, 1989); Botswana (Prophet & Dow, 1994); Zambia (Willaims, 1996).

Similarly, Mohanty (2013 & 2010) also addresses the teaching of English issue in India by conceptualizing it as the ‘myth of English medium superiority’. His findings about low-fee English-medium schools in India show that although all parents believe that English medium schools are better; however, English teaching and learning practices are illusive as when quality of schooling and socioeconomic status are controlled, English does not deliver good results. He calls these as ‘doom’ schools where children are doomed to failure.

In the local context too, scholars have voiced for the implementation of additive bi/multilingual education system. Rahman (2004b) asked for a paradigmatic shift in language-in-education policies proposing for the introduction of indigenous languages in the mainstream education. Subsequently, Coleman (2010) made recommendations in favor of teaching mother tongues at the primary levels. The study found mother tongue based instruction beneficial for the reasons such as easy comprehension of the concepts, parents’ involvement in their children’s educational matters and reinforcement through local media and so on. Crucially, it also emphasized that children are likely to achieve greater proficiency in English if they first study in their home language and then study English as a foreign or second language. Moreover, Mustafa (2011) regards initial schooling in L1 as beneficial to underprivileged children as it would help develop their cognitive development and critical thinking. In addition, it would considerably help curb rote learning and ensure more meaningful class participation. English should be introduced later as a second language. In two recent studies, Manan, David, and Dumanig (2015a) and Manan, David, and Dumanig (2015b) found that English-medium policy was illusive, and there was a disjunction between English language and most children’s sociocultural ecology.

Conclusion

In summary, we may argue that apart from unsolid theoretical grounding and shaky empirical foundation, it is also critical to critique the policy by contextualizing the practical challenges associated with the provision of effective English-medium education in schools across the country. In practical terms, the English-medium policy is constrained by institutional and pedagogical challenges. Drawing on multiple data sources, evidence abounds that English teaching and learning practices appear paradoxical vis-à-vis the assumptions and anticipations most advocates of the ‘straight-for-English’ and English-only policy put forward. Critically, the term English-medium can be termed as an illusion in the present context because the schools advertise themselves as an English-medium; however, the actual practices demonstrate Urdu as the de facto medium of classroom transactions, which provide rather limited space and exposure for the use of the English language.

We argue that teaching English solely in the Urdu language, ultimately leaves little potential for communicative competence and meaningful learning of the English language as well as contents. The reading and writing exercises are characterized by superficial imitative practices and lack of sensitivity to concept formulation and linguistic internalization. Evidently,

students are seldom exposed to reading or writing exercises that would engage them to analyze, interpret, create, communicate, critique or reflect on the text. The teaching/learning practices within classrooms and within the schools also allude English language learning as students are rarely exposed to rich and meaningful opportunities to internalize the linguistic nuances through reading, writing, speaking or listening. Teachers and school principals justified the use of Urdu rather than English for classroom transactions because there were a large number of students from less educated family backgrounds who did not understand English at all. It can be argued that this very justification is a self-proclamation of the paradoxes and the pitfalls that underlie English-medium education policy as most children are not yet prepared to negotiate with the challenges they confront in their understanding of a foreign language and course content. Most schools can be described as underprepared and under-resourced academically and in terms of quality English teacher to provide quality English-medium education. Mustafa (2013, personal communication) aptly describes such schools as '*pseudo English-medium schools*'. Rahman (2004a) and a number of critics of the English-only policy aptly observe that those schools sell dreams and exploit public's love for the English language—a phenomenon Ferguson (2013) termed as English 'fever'. Mostly, children exercise translated bookish English with virtually little communicative potential. Students' learning of content is generally imitative rather than interpretive. Moreover, the use of English is predominantly symbolic and pretentious—typical of the 'myths' scholars of bi/multilingual education expound in a number of post-colonial countries. Crucially, the so-called English-medium policy suffers from chaos and confusion as it becomes difficult to figure out whether English stands as a subject or as a second language or as a foreign language.

In the end, we sum up that the rampant expansion of English-medium private schools, and the popularity of early-English policy on the one hand marks the English fever; on the other hand, the overall policy, the unfolding perceptions and teaching practices expose its profound theoretical, institutional and pedagogical fault lines. We suggest that the chaotic nature of policy and implementation in the low-fee schools can also be attributed to the sociopolitical dynamics of educational apartheid and existing class divide as the government and social/political elites benignly neglect the low-fee schools which cater largely to children from lower-economic and working classes. Governments' policy of privatization and liberalization can also be the reasons behind declining quality standards. At the language policy level, we propose for structural changes and a paradigmatic shift. There is a need to review the current policy, reformulate it according to theory and academic research, and synchronize it with the sociocultural realities and infrastructural dynamics of the schools. We recommend that children should begin schooling with their mother tongues till the primary stages while English may be taught as a language rather than as a medium. The quality of English teaching may be improved, and its provision may be universalized and equitably distributed across all classes of society so that the scale of disadvantage may be minimized, which millions of unprivileged children face due to the elitist monopoly of the English language. In addition, serious experts in language and education rather than bureaucrats and politicians should spearhead the policymaking process and implementation mechanism.

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Table 1: Perceptions about English-medium policy

Perceptions/presumptions	Frequency	Total respondent	%
The younger the children, the faster the English learning	25	49	51
Teaching multiple languages may cause linguistic confusion	17	49	34.68
The earlier the English teaching, the maximum the proficiency levels	29	49	59.16
The earlier the English language in schools, the greater the prospects for social mobility	17	49	34.68
Quality education is synonymous with English-medium policy in schools.	19	49	38.76
Language diversity is a problem rather than an asset	27	49	55.08
Late transition to English-medium can minimize opportunities for English learning	25	49	51
Language is a non-issue in education	9	49	18.36

Table 2: Direct use and exposure to the English language in schools

Situation	teachers' use of English	for questions & discussion	for social interaction
Never	n=111(45.3%)	n=157(64.1%)	n=164(66.9%)
Seldom	n=63 (25.7%)	n=36 (14.7%)	n=36(14.7%)
Sometimes	n=19 (7.8%)	n=17 (6.9%)	n=15(6.1%)
Often	n=35 (14.3)	n=16 (6.5%)	n=18(7.3%)
Always	n=17 (6.9%)	n=19 (7.8%)	n=12(4.9%)
	245 (100)	245 (100)	245 (100)

Appendix

A. Gender and educational background of participants

Category of respondents	Gender		Academic level				Total
	Males	Females	MA/MSc.	BA/BSc. /B.Ed	FA/FSc.	High Secondary	
Students (questionnaire)	219	26	--	--	--	245	245
Students (interview)	22	8	--	--	--	--	30
Teachers	2	6	2	5	1	--	8
Principals	7	4	9	2	--	--	11

B. Language background of the participants

Students			Teachers			School principals		
Language	Number	%	Language	Number	%	Language	Number	%
Pashto	168	68.54	Pashto	3	37.5	Pashto	5	45.46
Kohistani	2	0.82	Urdu	1	12.5	Urdu	2	18.18
Hindko	5	2.04	Persian	1	12.5	Balochi	1	9.09
Persian	7	2.86	Balochi	1	12.5	Punjabi	3	27.27
Urdu	15	6.14	Punjabi	2	25	--	--	--
Siraiki	8	3.28	--	--	--	--	--	--
Punjabi	11	4.48	--	--	--	--	--	--
Kashmiri	5	2.04	--	--	--	--	--	--
Balochi	11	4.48	--	--	--	--	--	--
Sindhi	5	2.04	--	--	--	--	--	--
Burahvi	8	3.28	--	--	--	--	--	--
Total	245	100		08	100		11	100

C. Range of tuition fee

Schools no	Serial no	Range of monthly tuition fee (in Pakistani Rupee)	
		Lowest (nursery classes)	Highest (higher secondary classes)
	1	500	1000
	2	400	1200
	3	1400	1800
	4	350	950
	5	850	1700
	6	700	900
	7	400	900
	8	450	1100
	9	500	700
	10	600	1200
	11	450	1050