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## **IMPORTANCE OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND ITS SCOPE IN PAKISTAN**

### **Abstract**

*The study aims to examine the importance of English language acquisition and its scope in Pakistan. The paper attempts to find the reasons due to which English language has not yet been integrated into the everyday life of a common Pakistani. It also explores various reasons that are associated with the slow pace of progress. A qualitative and theoretical research methodology has been adopted to look into the problem as a whole rather than just one city, area or group of people, making the study multidimensional as compared to previous works in the same field. It concludes by stating the glitches, the Pakistanis are facing and may continue encountering them owing to slow progress of acquiring English language. The investigation also furnishes certain recommendations that aim at speeding up the second language acquisition process in the local setting.*

**Keywords:** Pakistan, English language acquisition, motivation, implications, English medium schools, Urdu.

### **1. Introduction**

One of the most important questions in the history of Muslims in general and Pakistanis in particular is that whether English language acquisition is important or not? Sir Syed Ahmed Khan was the first South Asian Muslim individual, who pointed out the need to acquire English as a second means of communication in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He argued that in the current British colonial era, it is of utmost importance for the people of South Asia to acquire English language in order to keep in pace with the British and their development. In the post partition period, it took some years for the Pakistani administration to understand

the practicality and effectiveness of English language acquisition for the masses and administrators.

China, Germany, France and Austria are often referred to as examples of countries that prospered without the acquisition of English language. However, the dynamics of the South Asian region are out rightly different from that of these countries. They did not attain freedom from the British Raj and therefore their complete infrastructure and administration mechanism was not in English language. On the other hand, countries like Pakistan and India adopted an already established system developed in English language. Therefore, the significance of learning English language for the people at the helm of affairs became much more important.

The paper outlines the research carried out in order to ascertain the need of English as a secondary means of communication in Pakistan. Since language is the systematic method of communication and majority of international dealings are carried out in English, hence acquiring English has become need of the time. English has attained the status of lingua France as well.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to investigate the questions that have been the point of debate in many political and educational circles of Pakistan:

Whether English language acquisition is important or not?

Whether it is suitable to invest into a system that produces English speaking people or not?

Whether the practice of putting English acquisition as a top priority is significant for Pakistan or not?

## **2. Review of Literature**

The views on English language learning and its scope are pretty biased in Pakistan. It is difficult to bisect, if the person analyzing the situation is biased or not, henceforth this research is carried out in order to reach a conclusion. Various publications and material were read and analyzed for the formulation of this paper. The portfolio of numerous writers and multiple research papers were also examined closely to bring about a solid and unbiased conclusion.

### **2.1 English as a Lingua Franca**

English is an instrument that connects people at international

level and it is the source of communication between different people belonging to different countries. Naved (2015) quoted that people from different countries usually communicate in English as a common language to interact with each other; hence it's said to be the 'international common tongue'. This need to communicate with diverse people makes it indispensable for an individual to acquire the basics of the language, if not much. Besides, not only some personal needs but educational preferences are also attainable through the acquisition of English language. As Akhtar (2013) put that education all over the world is being dealt in English language, so one has to advance the expertise to reach the international standards and to walk side by side of the advanced countries like the USA and the UK. He further argued that English is the most crucial and critical need for the progression of Pakistani nation. If Pakistanis wish to deal or trade with the western countries, they first need to master English language because if the language barriers would not be removed, then no progress and advancement can be made. The world has become a global village and no country can survive in isolation. The importance of English language can't be disregarded since it has emerged as a lingua franca. In addition, if an individual fails to represent the country at international level, it not only brings shame to one particular individual but disgrace to the state as well. Likewise, not only in educational sector, English has become the common trade language in the developed world (Firth, 1996). In Pakistan as well, English was declared the official language by the Benazir Bhutto's government in the 90's, although the provision had been provided in the 1973 constitution as well (Akram and Mahmood, 2007).

## ***2.2 Influence of Colonization***

Pakistan has achieved independence many years ago, yet the influence of the colonised period is overriding day to day proceedings of Pakistanis. Valika (2017) argued that one of the significant impressions of colonialism that prevails is on an emotional and psychological state of Pakistanis, which has affected their preferences, one of which is the language. He added that it is a common occurrence that post-colonial societies continue to be influenced by colonial traditions, one of them being the colonised tongue.

One of the national issues faced by Pakistanis is to acquire English language and to communicate it in an accurate manner.

People who speak English as a first choice after acquisition of its basics are often mocked in our society. Therefore, a certain anxiety is present among students to learn English as a second language and then use it in their daily routines (Nawaz et al., 2015). This is one of the major hurdles that come between people and their willingness in the acquisition of English language. The same kind of anxiety is felt in the classrooms as well where English is taught and the learners are treated with contempt when they attempt to talk in English. At times, the teachers are also not well versed with English language and the teaching methodologies, as it is a second language for them as well. This usually puts in the seed for acquiring wrong or bad English, causing more discomfort in the future for the person willing to use English as his standard method of communication. Similarly, this experience of making English as a first choice of language for communication causes social implications (Gardner, 2010). This is relevant for a society where making fun is a daily routine for people in all walks of life. Change is usually a scary thought for people in Pakistan and since English is looked upon as a sign of success, the person struggling to acquire is scorned. Many are hesitant to communicate in English because they are always filled with apprehension that they will be shunned if they'd fail to deliver correctly. Valika (2017) stated in his research that in no way it does reflect upon anyone's competence, if they speak English incorrectly. He further added that English language is the primary mode of instruction in Pakistani institutes and instead of inculcating a sense of self-esteem for the native language, the institutions admonish and demotivate learners from communicating in languages other than English, which is rightly alarming.

### ***2.3 English - Symbol of Prestige and Success***

In the wake of the Pakistani society, English has been adopted as a tool of communication for all departments of the state. It is also considered a symbol of success and status in Pakistan (Nawaz et al., 2015). People, who speak English, are believed to be from the elevated status in Pakistan. These facts have established English as a more chosen option than Urdu, which is the national language of Pakistan. Many fear that this is the first step of diminishing the identity of any country's citizen and therefore must be stopped. However, it is an established fact that once the ball starts rolling, it gets hard to stop the momentum.

### **3. Research Methodology**

A lot of research that has already been carried out on this topic has a basic glitch that they were quantitative in nature. This means that a certain amount of feedback was collected as raw data before it was analyzed and formed into information that is used to assess the research. The trickiness in this method is that the survey is usually carried out in a specific sample space like in one school, one college or locality. Therefore, such an investigation does not show a true picture of the whole country. Many areas of the country are usually not covered in one study and therefore the data has to be collected block by block. The block wise data is often neglected making these studies biased and unidimensional. Consequently, the method of the research carried out for this study was qualitative and theoretical. The quantitative and theoretical analyses of different researches, however, had been helpful in order to make an outsize sphere around the current research.

#### **3.1 Zero Point**

Since there was no analytical data that could have been used to gauge the importance of English language acquisition in Pakistan, some starting point had to be established. Therefore, a starting point was decided from where the research should begin. The initial point in case of English language in Pakistan cannot be anything else than the advent of the British in the sub-continent. They brought wholesome and grand changes to the method of governance in the region. This was combined with the fact that they changed all official correspondence to their language namely, English. This marks the first period of English language in the subcontinent. India was the jewel in the crown of the British Empire, and English can be called the ornament that they left behind (Nair, 2012). This was the time that most resistance met with the spread of the English language, as this was the language of the foreigners, which was not welcomed by the common masses. However, since the complete infrastructure was transformed into English, it was requisite to adopt the revolutionary movement. Moreover, after partition since the infrastructure given to Pakistan by the British, when they left, was in English; therefore, the need to acquire linguistic skills by the law makers and common workers arose. Keeping the alliance of the future in mind, English was kept as a strong option in all official means of correspondence. As the time passed on, the need

for English swelled. This was also mainly due to the fact that Pakistan's trade and transfer of technology were mainly with countries that communicated internationally in English. The paper highlights these reasons in the coming section.

#### **4. Discussion and Analysis**

Various factors have to be taken into account when English is studied as a second language, considering its impact more than the first language. Some factors associated with the L2 learners include attitude, awareness, motivation and their future prediction. The other factors are dependent upon the role of English in our schools, universities, job centers and society as a whole. In the light of qualitative research carried out to check the importance of English language acquisition and scope in Pakistan, the following findings and analysis are presented:

##### ***4.1 Implications of English Language***

The involvement of English language can be accessed from the fact that all technical, legal and other manuals are only available in English in Pakistan. Urdu versions have either diminished over the years or now all together disregarded in the system. Urdu translations may be available for better understanding but the motions, decisions and amendments are made in English now. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary for all higher echelon players in the government to have at least basic knowledge of English.

Social support plays a major role along with personal attitude and self-motivation for a person to pick for an optional English language course (Osborne, 2003). Attitude has a definite say in learning and using a second language like English in a country where the language of choice is either Urdu or the local language of the city/region/province. These things are developed at a very early level of learning. Moreover, the government of Pakistan ensures that English is taught as a compulsory subject at matriculation level and this continues till graduation. Though, children coming from Urdu medium schools suffer because of this policy. It is a national policy and hence being implemented at the grass root level.

##### ***4.2 English Medium Schooling***

There exists a huge dichotomy when it comes to the schooling systems in Pakistan. Some parents do not have the

option of sending their children to school with an English teaching setup. Sometimes the structure is so weak that the kind of English taught has no use in the real world. Parents are inclined to enroll their kids in the private English medium schools. Since it is compulsory for the private school staff and teachers to communicate in English, it gets easier for the students to adopt and acquire the language (Shah, 2008).

It has also been found that children coming from English medium schools score higher at college level (Rahman, 2003). This result then translates into University level and later for jobs in all sectors whether government or private. Even multinational companies have an inclination to select candidates which are well versed in English, so they can communicate with their international clients and employees. All these reasons ensure that rich parents enroll their children in English medium schools. Such is the implication of learning English in our society.

#### **4.3 Motivating Factors**

After scrutinizing the already investigated material, one thing is certain, that everyone wants to speak and communicate in English. The high esteem attached with future prepositions is the basic motivating factor for an individual to acquire the basics of English language. A learner envisages it as a ladder to success whether it be examinations or a jobs. Motivation is more important than aptitude when it comes to learning English or any second language (Lambert, 1981). The motivation, however, has to be on both ends; individual's and the teacher's.

The anxiety surrounding English acquisition can only be stubbed out once the motivating factor is there. There are a number of factors that can lead towards success in language acquisition. English language is the language of the international business community (Firth, 1996) which can be a huge motivating factor for anyone who wants to get ahead of his peers. Another motivating factor may be the elevation of status and prestige that is usually associated with an English speaking person. Many students claim that their family and teachers are a huge influence on them working hard for acquisition of the English language and subsequently using it to their advantage (Nawaz et al., 2015).

#### **4.4 Cultural Shift**

The cultural bond that Pakistanis share among themselves is far more resilient than the westerners. These bonds are present

between families, teacher, peers, friends and even neighbors (Hofstede, 2001). To bring about a change in the views about English language acquisition, a major cultural shift has to be induced. The present culture promotes anxiety among people, who speak and communicate in English especially when they don't come from a city or family where English is almost the primary language. The cultural change will only come when there is a shift in mentality.

A change in mentality takes decades to happen. People who acquire English as a second language to flourish in the corporate/civil world, come to know the value of acquiring this tool at the formative years of life. Schools and teachers also need to play their role in emphasizing on the role of English language and its significance for the prosperity of the country and its individuals. Only then, there will be a paradigm shift in the thinking of general masses in this context.

#### **4.5 Future of Pakistan**

There are some areas, where Pakistan is lacking from rest of the countries in the region, let alone the world. Few important among these fields include space technology, military development and information technology. India has crossed Pakistan in the mentioned fields by imparting English as a mandatory subject in all schools.

There is almost no doubt about the fact that English language will have a huge impact in the region's future in the upcoming twenty or thirty years (Nair, 2012). This particular trend is rising because of the researches being carried out in English and better English language teachers are hired at graduate and post graduate level. The future holds a lot of potential, if the same kind of expertise is brought down to the grass root level in primary and elementary government schools which may act as the foundation for English language development in Pakistan.

### **5. Conclusion**

The research shows that the majority of people are not self-motivated to learn this language and even when they learn it, there is certain fear of unknown while using it in their daily lives. The paper brings us to the following prong conclusions, which has been derived from the comprehensive research carried out:

### **5.1 Faulty Teaching Methods**

When the foundation is not properly laid, the building will never be a steady structure. English language acquisition, in general, starts at a very late age when the individual realizes that it is of utmost importance to acquire the craft for surviving in the market. Even if English language is being imparted to elementary and primary school children, the standard and facilities are way below than what is required in a competitive world. The product is half done by the time an individual graduates college (if he does), and then he has to work extra hard in his graduate and post graduate years.

### **5.2 Anxiety Ruins Language Acquisition**

A person not well versed with the second language already finds it hard to learn the skill of communication in English. His task is made even more difficult when the social circle around him makes fun out of him. This leads to anxiety which makes it very difficult for the individual to understand what he is learning. Learning a second or foreign language is an extremely challenging task. The negative attitude, approach and mindset of the masses make the job even tougher for an individual.

### **5.3 Pakistani Prospect and English Language**

The government should miraculously translate at least all technology related material from English to Urdu. The next war may be of information and technology, and sadly, it may be fought in English due to the global influence of English language. The fact about English as a lingua franca has to be admitted in any case by the Pakistani government and its residents. Therefore, if Pakistan wants to develop, progress and excel in the region and worldwide, English language acquisition may be declared obligatory not only at university level but at all educational levels equally in the whole country.

## **6. Recommendations**

Few recommendations are presented here in the light of conclusion presented in the section above. The overall agenda is for the betterment of Pakistan and its population to acquire the skills of communicating in English. This overall goal can be achieved by taking the following steps:

### **6.1 General Awareness Campaign**

The general masses are of the view that English is a foreign

language used by the enemy and therefore should not be acquired. A campaign similar to the awareness of polio eradication may be launched in order to change the mindset of the masses through media and other means. This will enlighten the majority population that English is not merely a status symbol but a requirement in order to move forward in technology and other fields.

### **6.2 The Need for Inter-disciplinary Professional Development**

Teachers are not trained to deal with the students in a professional manner. Therefore, a countrywide robust teacher training program is required to be initiated that may ensure that only a certified professional is teaching the requisite subject and not a person who is untrained and just wants to make easy money out. The methods deployed by the teachers are outdated, obsolete and not according to international standards. The students face more confusion when they are taught things that do not fit in their general understanding. Thus, it is essential that the teacher training programs include modern methods of teaching and assessments. Moreover, the parents of young children and adolescents also need to be made aware of the advantages of acquiring English language and the future of their child related to it, in global as well as local context. Parents are the main driving force behind an individual, particularly in Pakistani society, and hence they can facilitate their off springs to acquire English language skills from the very right time.

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