
Bilingual Education in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper investigates second language learning and education in Pakistan. Research studies related to language teaching, effects of age on language attainment are explored to investigate bilingual education in Pakistan. Suggestions to improve the second language education situation in Pakistan are explored while focusing on the root cause for the failure of L2 learning i.e. the teaching methodology.

Keywords:

First Language; Second Language; Critical Period Hypothesis; Bilingual Education; Immersion; GTM; Communicative Language Teaching; Immersion.

1. Introduction:

The pedagogical practices in an English language classroom in Pakistan are a matter of concern for many educators and language learners in the country (British Council, 2006). English being an official language and a lingua franca plays an important role in a Pakistani society. It enjoys a prominent role alongside Urdu and numerous regional languages and dialects. English is considered a convenient medium for science and technology globally, hence, is taught as a second/ foreign language in public and private schools (Rahman 1997). However, the failure of successful second language learning/teaching is evident when students are unable to communicate in the target language effectively even after studying it for years in schools and colleges. Many people while recalling their high school or university language learning experiences, where Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was mainly employed, show dissatisfaction. For them the experience was uninspiring, boring and frustrating especially on their foreign visits because of their inability to use the target language for effective communication. Yet, GTM is still used in numerous countries and in places is relatively popular. Brown (1994) believes, the reasons for its popularity being a few specialized skills

required by the teachers and easy construction and marking of tests as they are mainly based on grammatical rules and translations. Since, many standardized language tests based on GTM, still do not attempt to capture communicative abilities of the test taker, so students only prepare grammar analogies, translations, and rote exercises. Pakistan is one such example where majority of English language teachers prefer a teacher-centered approach i.e. GTM (Sultana, 2008).

The language learners need to have a good competence in all language skills (writing, reading, speaking and listening in order to be efficient users of the language). Ironically, the students realize the need for English (for interviews, better job prospects, higher education) when they have lost most of the opportunities of learning it (formally with the guidance of a teacher). Since, learning an L2 is considered to be a skill, so the focus should be to develop that skill rather than focusing on rote learning (Rubin 2005).

Previous research suggests that the present pedagogical practices in Pakistan regarding English language have not achieved the desired learning objective of learning language, i.e. communicative competence (Pervez & Alam 2003; British Council, 2006). The Pakistani educators, curriculum developers, syllabus designers, L2 acquisition researchers, need to approach L2 pedagogical practices from applied linguistics perspective. To improve the second language education situation in Pakistan we need to consider all the possible drawbacks in the bilingual education system. The main focus of the paper is the root cause for the failure of L2 learning i.e. the teaching methodology. We intend to suggest some plausible attainable substitute methods to improve the English Language teaching conditions in Pakistan.

2. Language Education

2.1 Teaching Methodology:

The obsolete GTM is still quite popular in many Pakistani language classrooms. The world is moving towards more communicative language teaching methodologies after Chomsky's (1957) groundbreaking theory of learning which focuses on the cognition of the learner and that language cannot be learnt through imitation. There are some advantages of using L1 in teaching L2 but the extent of its usage determines its benefits. According to Patten (2000), L1A (first language acquisition) and L2A (second language acquisition) are similar in many ways. So, to assume that as L1A takes place through vast amount of exposure to the language especially auditory input, L2A will also benefit by exposure to authentic sources of the L2 to gain proficiency in the target language. But the

ground realities are far from ideal as the language classrooms in Pakistan are mostly based on oral mechanical drills without much communicative outcome. Students are engaged in translating texts from English to Urdu and vice versa. GTM, is considered to impede the acquisition of syntactic structures of L2 as it focuses on isolated chunks of language without giving due importance to the context which is important for effective communication. Furthermore, GTM focuses more on reading and writing, ignoring listening and speaking skills of the target language. "Having learned a word through translation lists does not mean that such a word is then available with all its nuances; rather only a first connection between a form and a meaning are established. It is only through extensive contact with that word in a variety of contexts that it will gradually develop a full, close to native, set of links" (Bot & Kroll, 2002).

There is ample of L2A research suggesting communicative approach being more effective than the GTM. (Berns, 1984; Nunan, 1991; Brown, 1994).

3. Recommendations for Improvement in Teaching English (L2)

3.1 Age Factor in Second Language Learning:

From as early as the 1 Century A.D., the optimal age for L2A was discussed e.g. by the Roman rhetorician Quintilian and stressed on leaning the L2 in "tenderest years" (Littlewood, 2004). The modern research also favours Quintilian's belief suggesting that as the brain matures, it becomes less "plastic" and that lost neural plasticity impedes L2 learning (e.g. Patkowski, 1980, 1990; Birdsong, 1999). Hence, proving the existence of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which suggests that the age at onset of Acquisition (AoA) plays a vital role in the ultimate attainment of the L2. The existence of CPH is still a controversial issue among L2 researchers who argue on the onset and closure of critical period. CPH researchers suggest varied times for closure such as: at 5 years old (Krashen, 1979); 6 years old (Pinker, 1994); 12 years old or puberty (Lenneberg, 1967) and 15 years old (Johnson & Newport, 1989). However, there is ample evidence that suggests; "younger is better" (Genesee, 1978; Long, 1990; Birdsong, 1999).

In Pakistani public schools, English is taught as L2 in Yr. 7 when pupils are around 11 years old. Many language education systems keeping the age factor in mind suggest exposing the child to the second language as early as possible for higher proficiency level in L2.

3.2 Bilingual Education:

The desire to become a bilingual has always been found within communities. The historical documents reveal that individuals and societies have been required for centuries to learn other languages for

various reasons. Schools play an important role to equip the society with linguistic competence that is very necessary in the modern world. Various types of bilingual education systems exist around the globe depending upon the way two languages are taught, the syllabus/curriculum objectives, the language education policy of the country and the attitude of the society towards both the languages in general (Močinić, 2011).

A body of research can be found on bilingual education and various education programmes that are prevalent in the multilingual societies (Mackey, 1970; Baker, 2007). Mackey (1970) and Baker (2007) provide extensive classifications of bilingual education. The general aims of the bilingual education can be both *additive* and *subtractive* (*Additive* bilingualism means learning L2 without losing L1 with having positive attitude towards L1 while *subtractive* bilingualism occurs when learning L2 at the cost of L1 with a gradual loss of L1 (Baker, 2001)) bilingualism where the final product is

L2 as an additional language to L1 in the linguistic repertoire in the former while in the latter,

speaker ends up speaking only L2. Baker (1993, 2007) called the educational programmes *strong* which supported additive bilingualism and *weak* who favored subtractive bilingualism. This paper is not going to expand on the typologies of these different programs. Baker (1993) (https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233687931_Bilingualism_Bilingual_Education_and_Sociocultural_Identity_The_Experience_of_Quebec/figures?lo=1) has given a typology of different bilingual education programmes.

To make the second language learning in Pakistan more successful, we propose Immersion with a few innovations to serve the purpose.

3.3 Immersion:

The system that would yield fruitful results in L2 learning in Pakistan is a little modified version of Immersion teaching methods. While propagating the immersion teaching methods, Genesee (1984) believes, that the logic behind integrating language and academic instruction in the first bilingual (immersion) programs was to take advantage of children's natural ability to learn language which occurs during authentic, meaningful and significant communication with others. *Submersion* education system is also used to assimilate the minority groups in the majority speaking language e.g. in North America (Roberts, 1995). Submersion may yield native like proficiency in the target language but often results in the total loss of the native language of the minority group which makes it an undesirable choice (Roberts, 1995). Immersion teaching methodology, on the other hand, has shown marked improvement over earlier language teaching approaches such as GTM, audio-lingual methods etc. The fundamental feature of immersion is without using the student's L1, language is taught in combination with content and culture. Students

initially don't understand L2 but are taught through the use of content clues provided by the teacher. Research shows the differences in the L1 achievement between the immersion students and the mainstream students and the results were found in favour of the immersion pupils (Swain & Lapkin, 1982; 1991a); and that early total immersion pupils generally perform well in other academic domains like mathematics, science, history and geography (Baker, 1993; Genesee, 2004). Immersion bilingual education is generally pluralistic in nature and promotes additive bilingualism which helps in preserving languages (Robert, 1995). Hence, making immersion bilingual education, a favourable option to be adopted in an education setup.

3.4 The History of Immersion Education System:

Immersion methods gained their popularity after the successful results of teaching French to English students in Quebec in the 1960s and are still quite popular (Taylor, 1992). Test scores revealed that immersion students, without losing fluency in L1, can learn the same academic content as students in L1 (Genesee et al., 1985; Genesee, 1987; Johnson & Swain, 1997; de Courcy, 2002). The success of Maori (1982) and Hawaiian mother tongue immersion programs (1983) is noteworthy (Reyhner, 2003).

3.5 Immersion Programs: Early or Late

There is further branching off in the program. Early and late immersion differs in the time of its introduction in the curriculum. Genesee (2004) argues on the basis of evidence that early immersion program (i.e. kindergarten or grade 1) produces more proficient L2 users than late immersion program (i.e. middle elementary grades or beginning of secondary school). He explains the difference between the proficiency levels depends on the factors like: the students' innate or natural language learning ability, the opportunity for extended exposure due to starting at an early age; learning styles of young learners and effective L2 pedagogy (see Figure 1 of Genesee (2004) for the difference of level of L2 proficiency between the programs). (<https://www.psych.mcgill.ca/perpg/fac/genesee/HDBK%20BILINGUAL%20EDUCATION.pdf>)

Baker (1993) proposes that early total immersion produces the most positive results in terms of personal and social behavior thus promoting cultural diversity and cultural pluralism. The above studies favor the early exposure to L2 for achieving higher level of proficiency.

3.6 Some Innovations in the Immersion System:

To tailor the immersion educational program to fit to the Pakistani pupils, we propose some innovations on the basis of a few studies:

Since language cannot be acquired or learnt in isolation through memorizing set phrases and sentences as a general trend in GTM, a more effective method promoting meaningful communicative competence is

needed using more real-life like situations. Therefore, immersion focuses on giving children a linguistically rich environment to make them able to use their L2 as a tool for communication within and outside the school environment. “Immersion program supports a ‘natural approach’ to language teaching in which there is no error correction or explicit focus on form” (Littlewood, 2004).

Lapkin, Swain & Shapson (1990) revealed the shortcomings of Canadian immersion program stating that in the early total immersion program where the students had native like performance in the receptive skills (listening and reading) but not very proficient in the productive skills (speaking and writing), it was probably because some of the grammatical aspects of French which the students failed to master were not required in the classroom setting and therefore not practiced by the students (Williams, 2004).

This gave the idea of school only phenomenon to immersion but amendments in the system can produce healthy results. Later the studies found that if there is equal emphasis on the meaning and the form; the linguistic competence and linguistic knowledge, has a positive effect on the students’ competence with linguistic forms. The studies from Norris & Ortega (2000), Day & Shapson (1991), Harley (1989), Lyster (1994) all suggest that the explicit teaching of formal aspects of language is beneficial to students’ communicative needs and produce lasting improvement in performance. Therefore, a need for balance between both the explicit and implicit teaching is of great importance for successful learning.

We agree with Jim Cummins and Stephen Krashen, the prominent supporters of bilingual education and strongly encourage teaching children their heritage languages (Rehyner, 2003). There should be a place for the indigenous languages in the school curriculum. In addition to English as a medium of instruction, the heritage languages should be taught at schools for positive self-concept and pride in one’s background, better self-esteem. Such pupils are thought to maintain and enrich their native language and culture. The possibility of cognitive enhancement can also occur (Danesi, 1991)

3.7 Teacher Training:

To make the immersion system successful, trained teachers are required who are proficient in the second language themselves. Inducting workshops country wide would be a step forward to training teachers; to ensure that they are well equipped to understand the complex process of L2A and for effective English language teaching. They will have to abandon the GTM and incorporate Content-based Instruction in language

teaching. They need to be aware of new trends in language teaching and this all could be possible through rigorous teacher training programs.

Although, Pakistan lacks a developed English Teaching System as existing in other parts of the world, it is fast catching up. With the increasing demand of effective communication skills in English throughout the world, both in the classrooms and in society, enormous responsibility lies with the instructors to adapt their teaching styles and methodology to equip their students with effective communicative skills.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can significantly contribute towards improving teaching methodology for SLA, with other languages and cultures (Macaro, 2003) specifically in Pakistan. Pakistani language learners would certainly benefit from the introduction of specific CLT activities in the classroom. A shift from a teacher-centered (employing GTM) classroom towards a more student-centered (employing CLT) is the need of the hour (Sultana, 2008). More research is needed on *students' / teachers'* perceptions on the usefulness of aspects of CLT, identification of which aspects of CLT, Pakistani teachers and students find most appealing and how teaching styles should interact with culture-specific preferences.

4. Conclusion:

The early total immersion education is reported to be successful for the children whose LI is a majority language (Baker 1993) and in Pakistan English is not spoken as L1, the adaptation of early total immersion would prove to be beneficial for the whole community. Baker (1993) suggests not to view the Canadian immersion system in purely educational term as the idea behind it is political, social and cultural ideology. It is to promote and produce elite groups giving them more opportunities in the job market over the monolinguals. Pakistan already has a chain of private schools with immersion system but only the rich have access to it. These schools are producing bilingual pupils who have all the doors open to them e.g. better jobs, education etc. but the ordinary public cannot get into them and thus are deprived of acquiring proficient L2 skills (Rehman, 1997). To remove this disparity between the private and public sector we need an education system which is accessible to everyone.

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