

# How Urdu Could Be More Effective In The Pakistani education system compared to English.

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## Key Insights/ Abstract

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Since the birth of Pakistan, national language has been a point of tension. Pakistan is an ideological state, and Urdu is a crucial part of this ideology. Pakistanis connect to this language emotionally, culturally, and intellectually. However, due to various factors, Pakistan has not been able to make Urdu its official language. As the time has passed, Pakistanis have settled with this fact, and they try to compromise with the English-dominant system. As a result, there always stays a state of confusion because even though the ones learning in private, first-class schools manage to get good education of English language, those who do not get to get that high quality of education, or those who are

not able to pick-up foreign languages quickly, or those who never get to get any type of education at all, consider themselves not worthy enough to vote, to be a responsible citizen, to play their part in the development process, or even to be called a Pakistani.

This research explains how students are affected due to the linguistic differentiation, and how they see this problem at different stages of their academic life. This research is a broad one, involving participants from diverse age groups. Before anything else, it is essential to know the background and nature of the problem.

## Research Context

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The roots of the language dispute can be traced back to the period of British colonization of India. Even after the decolonization, why could we not get rid of the English language. One study proposes that, the medium of instruction controversy can be seen as a part of the power struggle between different pressure groups, or elites and proto-elites, in Pakistan. (Tariq Rahman, 1997) The ruling elite, actually supported English for use in all official domains so as to ensure its cultural predominance and distinction from the non-elites; to facilitate the entry of its children in positions of power and privilege and open the possibility of entering the international, very highly paid, professional elite. (Tariq Rahman, 1997)

Urdu should continue to remain our national language as it is our identity and widely spoken language of the country, everyone can easily communicate in Urdu than in any other language, Urdu is easy to learn because of its simple and easy structure. (Shazia, Shumaila, & Khushbakhat, 2016) Furrakh and Zafar demand serious changes in language planning which leads to create a balanced development of all languages and positive attitude

towards indigenous languages. (Furrakh & Zafar, 2018)

Urdu has not yet developed to be a language of science, business and technology. There appears to be quite a few misunderstandings and preconceptions regarding the real status of Urdu. (Amanulla, 2016) English enjoys better academic value in comparison with Urdu as it is the language of seminars and conferences nationally as well as internationally. The future of the English language is also bright while the participants expressed doubts that the Urdu language is being replaced slowly by the English language. (Azhar & Faheem, 2018)

Nazeer, Zahid, and Faria confirmed that the postgraduate students at University of Balochistan, Pakistan experience English speaking anxiety in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) classroom which have debilitating effects on their academic achievement. (Nazeer, Zahid, & Faria, 2017) Books in English & other languages should be translated into Urdu language because it is easier to understand concepts from books in Urdu language. (Iftikhar, Muhammad, & Imran, 2018)

Our whole educational system stands only on marks. So, the student has one wish to gain maximum marks and teachers' goal remains only to show the good results although that is at the expense of the language dying. (Rabia, Ayesha, & Sadaf, 2015)

If English continues as the official language of Pakistan, all Pakistanis must be given equal access to good quality English language education and to schools that teach subjects in English. If this is not

possible, and in my opinion, it is not, English should be replaced. (Harris, 2007)

This research inspects the discussed issue from the perspective of students of different age groups, and they are force-taught a foreign language to be able to get the most premium education.

Also, these students suggest the steps taken to eradicate this issue in the most effective way that they can relate to the best.

## Research Design

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There were four steps included in this research to gather the data. Then the results were collected, combined, and evaluated.

In the first step, I gathered a sample of 60 participants, who were students of 4th -6th grade, from 6 different schools. Three schools were in Rawalpindi (an urban area), and two were in Murree (a rural area). The 60 students were divided into two groups; the Urdu group and the English group. Both of the groups were to take a test, after a brief discussion about the content of the assessment beforehand. The Urdu group had to solve an Urdu question paper and the English group had its questions in English. The test was of

18 marks, and we had to compare the performance of both groups. The same groups were required to write a short paragraph in the second step. They had to write about the superpower they wanted the most, and how they would use it to help others. The third step was to interview 10 university students. They were from 4 different universities of Islamabad. They were inquired about the importance of Urdu, and how we can replace English with Urdu within a short period of time. In the final step, an online survey was conducted about the impact of English on Pakistanis' lives. Around 100 responses were recorded through Google forms.

## Key Findings and Discussion

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In the first survey, the pre-assessment discussion was crucial to make the participants aware of what they should expect in the test. The lecture was about three topics; animals, food, and Islamic studies. It included interesting facts and figures so that the session could be an interactive and engaging one. Ideally, the Urdu group was to be explained in Urdu language, and the English group in English. However, with the English

group, whenever I began to talk in English, the atmosphere changed. The participants could not quite understand what I said in English, and even if they did, they were not interacting much. So, I had to switch to Urdu back and forth. When, the English group got their question papers, they would often raise their hands and ask me to translate the question into Urdu for them so that they could solve them easily. Out of 18 points (1

for each question), the Urdu group got 16.7 and the English group secured 16 marks in average. One thing that was worth-noticing was that the English participants from Murree were having more trouble compared to the Rawalpindi English group. This shows how the talent of rural areas of Pakistan is not being able to express itself just because of the domination of a foreign language. In the beginning of the session, they could answer only one question that I asked them which was "What is your name?". Later, when I asked how old are you, they became blank so I have to switch to "Ap kitnay saal kay ho?", responding to which, they only said the figure in English, like "ten" or "twelve".

When they finished the assessment, we moved to the next step which was the paragraph writing. They were given their topic, and some wanted to switch languages. In the urban area, some Urdu participants even wanted to write in English. But, comparing the results, the Urdu participants were slightly more creative and expressive. They wrote about their favorite superpowers by mentioning their favorite shows. Among the powers they mentioned were flying, super car, super bicycle, muscle power, super speed, or the power of knowledge. Some stated that their future goal (like becoming a doctor) was their super strength. As far as the English paragraphs were concerned, most of the them started with "My name is...". The children of Murree wrote irrelevant material for the most part. Only a couple of sentences were related to the actual topic. A student from Rawalpindi wrote: "I put fly, I went fly. I superpower is doctor. I went to need help old people. I like is superman." One English participant wrote the lines in Urdu using Latin Alphabet. These kids may improve as they go ahead with their studies, but what happens when they actually reach university level? This was demonstrated in the next step.

Ten participants of university level were interviewed about their point of view on the discussed issue. A student stated: "The students who had been learning English since the beginning are not going to face any problem in their higher

studies, but for those who have been learning in Urdu, there could be issues." Another student emphasized how an Urdu speaker would feel less confident in his academic journey: "He will not be able to engage in the lesson, he will keep quiet and would be ignored by others. At the end, he will feel left out." An interviewee mentioned: "Without English, they cannot present in class as the presentations are in English". Another student pointed towards the tragedy that the CSS exam of Pakistan, which is criteria to choose able candidates for the significant governmental positions, is 80% in English, due to which thousands of talented candidates cannot make it because of their weak English. A student stressed on how countries like Japan and Korea made so much progress while learning in their own language. They did not need English for development. A participant pointed out to the fact that even if we have a firm grip on English language, and even if then we are taught in English, there is always something that is lacking somewhere. We do understand the concepts, but not to the fullest. Another interviewee suggests that the government should immediately amend the constitution to make Urdu the official language of Pakistan. A student suggests that media could be a powerful tool to eradicate English and promote Urdu. She suggests that there should be academies to teach Urdu language and literature. Another participant recommends developing Urdu websites. She stated: "The Urdu books are too simple, dull, and boring. The covers should be colorful and unique so that the readers, especially children get attracted to them." An interviewee thinks that collective effort is essential for the implementation of Urdu. The results of the online survey were in the favor of Urdu. **58.8%** respondents were the best in Urdu/Islamiyat as a subject and **25.5%** were good at Math. **32%** were not confident about their English skills. **89.2%** would use Urdu if they participated in an essay writing/speech competition, **83.2%** were in the favor of Urdu entertainment, **77%** admired Urdu books like Peer-e-Kamil or Jannat Kay Pattay.

The most essential findings of this process were the policy recommendations the interviewees suggested, and the difference of English proficiency in rural and urban schools. When teaching in an English medium system, not only the teachers are explaining the concepts, but also they are simultaneously translating the English

texts into Urdu. If we aim to creating better professionals in every field, it is essential that they have their concepts clear. English is effective in communicating with the international world, but the significance of Urdu at national level cannot be denied.

## Policy Recommendations

- HEC (Higher Education Commission) and the government of Pakistan is requested to change the academic language into Urdu, if not fully then at least 70%. Important quotations or definitions or points could be in English, but the explanation must be in Urdu so that every student can understand and ponder on it.
- There is a desperate need of making Urdu the official language of Pakistan. If not, a common man would never be able to understand how his own country works because the constitution, law, and all of the official documents are in a foreign language.
- The Ministry of Culture and Heritage and National Language Authority should dedicate a month to Urdu language to carry out activities like festivals, concerts, Mushairas, book fairs, plays, and qawwali nights that promote Urdu language.
- The importance of Urdu language cannot be denied either. So, proper arrangements must be made to teach English effectively as a subject, but it does not need to be included in important subjects like sciences and sociology.
- There is a desperate need to introduce Urdu societies and clubs that keep promoting Urdu throughout the year by arranging competitions like creative writing, theater, or singing in Urdu.
- Pakistanis need to learn other foreign languages as well, so that they could break-free of the mindset that English is the only criteria for measuring one's intelligence.

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