

Education in Multilingual Context: An Attitudinal Survey of Usefulness of Languages Conducted In Religious Seminaries in Pakistan

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Abstract

Madrassas (religious seminaries) in Pakistan has an independent curriculum for imparting religious education. Unlike schools and colleges, they give prime importance to Arabic language that is symbolic of the grandeur of Islam. English language in a majority of these institutions is given less or no value. Further, it is also not mandatory language for graduation in madrassas. However, English dominates the job market and cannot be ignored in the country. Thus, madrassa students are faced with learning Arabic, Urdu, Persian and English besides local languages for professional prosperity. The present study is a qualitative attempt to investigate language attitudes to measure the usefulness of these languages in the linguistic market of the county. The findings are based on 42 in-depth interviews of madrassa students and teachers selected through purposive sampling conducted in 6 madrassas situated in province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study reveals that the languages are perceived useful in different contexts. Arabic is considered important for religious duties, Urdu for nationalism and English for access to good jobs and use of modern technology. The study concludes that madrassa community is well aware of the importance of languages in contemporary scenario and the earlier views that religious community downplay the importance of English have become less relevant.

Key Word: Language; Attitudes; Arabic; English; Urdu; Linguistic Market

Introduction

In this study, we are going to investigate the approach of the students and teachers of madrassas whether they consider other languages useful or not. They give importance to different languages due to their different status. For example they consider Arabic language as language of religion and it is given prime importance and many books of the curriculum are in Arabic. Persian language has been the language of the Muslim rulers in India so it has an importance as Political Islamic status. Urdu as a national language and Pashto is the local language or mother tongue but the last language Pashto is the case in the provinces of Khyber Pakhtun khwa and Balochistan only. The study is based on the notion that we learn language(s) for some practical reasons and thus we accumulate linguistic capital through formal education according to the needs and demands of job market. It means that we live in a linguistic market where we can prefer some languages over other languages. This study

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is very significant because the madrassa education which include eight years Dars-e-Nizami curriculum do not include as a compulsory subject as the prime focus is on the Arabic language. We can easily find that After Arabic language somewhat importance is given to Urdu, Pashto and Persian language. But on the other side we know that the job market is dominated from English language and the main stream of the society demands for a command over English language rather than any other language. Many official tasks are performed in English language and many times these madrssa graduate find themselves unfit in the society. These graduates with Arabic as primary language find difficulties in finding place and professional sphere. Apart from Arabic, Urdu language helps them to accommodate themselves in the society but having nothing in English language, they find many times many difficulties. This study then attempts to know language attitudes to access how the religious community locates itself in the linguistic market. Furthermore we will make an attempt to know the level of satisfaction and the challenges they face commonly with the linguistic capital, they accumulate during their education.

Literature Review

Madrassa is an Arabic word meaning “a learning centre”¹. It literally means, “school” but we can say that in it refers to a learning institution where Islamic courses are taught, but not only the Holy Quran, Ahadiths, Sharia (Nasr, 2010; Blan chard, 2008; Heifner, 2007). We can define madrasa as:

“A school for Muslims or Muslim college or a Muslim university which is normally related mosque² or a school in which Muslims go for learning Islam³.

The word *madrassa*, is used for it English.

Madrssas are institutions of religious education which have their own curriculum while the government institutions have another curriculum given by the government of Pakistan and these government curriculums have some subjects of Islamic studies but they are very low in quantity. The government has produced the Sixth Five Year Plan (1983-1988) for the mosque schools. The majority population of our country is Muslim and about ninty seven percent of it considers that Islam is the backbone of their cultural values and traditions. In their collective as well as in their personal life, they look for guidance to the religion of Islam. And very proudly, they follow the teachings of Quran and Sunnah⁴. This kind of situation provides sympathy and legitimacy to religious educational institutions. Loo ney (2003) says, in Pakistan the prime reasons for madrassa’s popularity has the worse facilities situation of education in private and personal schools. Poor people cannot afford to pay the even the small amount of fee. And some of these private schools have a greater amount of fee for which there is no question to send the children to these schools as there is no question of affordability⁵. While the madrassas in Pakistan offer free education, food and lodging which is the attraction for the poor people of the society⁶.

Madrssas on the other hands are the institutions for higher studies from those of mosque schools and maktabas which teach only the Holy Quran⁷. Currently, in comparison with the conventional institutions, they are distinguished because they focus religious-based (Islamic) curriculum especially in Pakistan, India and neighbouring country. In some of the Arab countries (Egypt&Lebanon), may refer to educational institute how ever⁸. So the terminology *madrssas* is used and people understand its meaning.

Generally we can say that these religious madrssas try to focus on the character of the student's in Islamic concepts of morals & spirituality. These madrssas focus on the behavioral side and to make awareness in the students of religious identity⁹. A pupil in religious school learns reading, writing and their prime focus remains on learning the meaning and implementation of the text of the Holy Quran and Sunnah. These religious institutions can be divided into some categories like: maktaab/primary school which has less than a hundred pupils and a *Daar-ul-Uloom* or *Jaamii'aah* or a university where the pupils are taught higher level subjects or religion¹⁰. The madrssas produce two kinds of students; the Huffaz-e-Quran and Qaris. Such madrssas focus only on memorization of the Holy Quran and how to recite it while the second type of students are those who get mastery in Arabic Grammar, text, the meaning of the Holy Qurana, Hadith and Fiqh¹¹.

Methods and Procedure

The study is on the basis of the data taken and on the qualitative style and the interview. As a direct approach to investigate language attitudes, the study is conducted within madrassas. Guided by bottom up approach, the study highlights the attitudes of the pupils and madrssa teachers. Forty two interviews are taken through purposive sampling of 6 religious schools in the three districts of Malakand, Dir Lower and Swat in the province of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Initially, the study was meant to cover the whole province but due to constraints of time, travelling and security, it was confined to the three districts. Generally, madrassa community is viewed as less cooperative and does not facilitate research endeavors and this was another reason of delimiting the area of the study. To ensure proper access to madrassas, a number of meetings with local elders, political leaders and religious activists were held before the field study. Without their support, the study would not have taken place. After identifying madrassas, several visits enabled the researcher to identify the respondents who were willing to cooperate in the research study. The interviews were conducted through the help of interview guide¹². The average time of the interviews was 40 minutes. A total of 7 interviews from each madrassa were conducted to ensure equal representation with 2 teachers and 5 students. Sensing the sectarian outlook of madrassas in the area, the selected madrassas included 2 from Deobandi school of thought, 2 from Bareilvi and 2 were administered by Jamat Islami. Initially, the study was

confined to male students only. However, the researcher succeeded in accessing a female madrassa owned by a local Jamat Islami activist who was approached through local party leaders.

The collected data was audio recorded in the local language and then transcribed in English to prepare it for analysis. The data was thematically coded and pseudonyms were used for the institutions and the interviewees as important part of research ethics. The coding process was an adaptation of Roney (2000) as can be seen in the appendix.

Data Analysis and Discussion

When we examine in madrassas, the language learning situation, the curriculum is quite different from the ordinary educational system. Arabic language is given top priority because the religious literature (Islamic) exists in it and the second language is used Urdu and in support any local language is added (according to the need of the region) for mastering Arabic. Some literature is also present in Persian language at different levels and because it has been the official language of the Muslim rulers in the Indian sub-continent. While looking at this situation, we can easily say that the burden of languages in madrssa system is heavier than the conventional educational system. Addition of English language to madrssa system will be an extra burden.

In this scenario, it is suitable for us to know the reasons that how much the learning of language is useful. It is important for us to know that how madrssa students manage to learn English language and how they can affect the rest of the society. We should know the viewpoint of the stakeholder's i.e, the madrssa students and the teachers. Their views should be checked specially towards learning English language because it can be seen in only during the first two years. Here we analyze the viewpoints of the madrssa students about how Arabic, Urdu and English languages are useful for them. This analysis can show us how these students look at these language as local, national and in international context.

Usefulness of Arabic

For the inquiry about the attitude of the madrssa students, we used the general to particular style. It was easy for sideline the prime languages and we can know the perspective of being useful instead of targeting a specific language. At the same time, without other languages, we cannot analyze clearly the English language. We asked the students how much they found useful the languages which already they know. This provided us a clear picture when the inquiry was started with Arabic language and they considered it as the language of religion and Allah's words (the Holy Quran) exists in it. Many interviewees gave top importance to it but at the same time it was not the only option and many of these students were in favor of Arabic language in the society and job market.

The participants could not avoid the exaggeration to express that Arabic language was very much useful for religious education. They tried to search the uses and benefits of Arabic language in their profession and life. It was because of virtual non-existence of Arabic language in the country. The official affairs are conducted in English language and Urdu is a supporting language along with a local language. The Arabic language is considered as religious language and Islamic teachings. In inquiry from a student to know the job market of Arabic language, he pointed out some positions owned by madrasa graduated like Arabic teachers, Qari and Lecturer positions in different schools and colleges and research institutions owned by the government. He also indicated its importance for those who want to travel and serve in Arab countries and at the same time indicated the limitations of options in jobs. But he, at the same time indicated to its psychological benefits and satisfaction in religious sense¹³.

Another confused student admitted that he has no knowledge about how much the Arabic language is useful. He only pointed out the teaching jobs and mosque duties that were served only by madrasa graduates and people with Arabic knowledge¹⁴.

In the same way a large number of the students indicated towards the limited options which existed in the job market for the madrasa students. Some of these students had no idea about this topic and they had in their minds to serve madrasas only or offer their services to mosques or benefit the religious education related services.

Usefulness of Urdu

Urdu being a national language of Pakistan is widely used in media (print and electronic). Quid-e-Azam, the father of the nation declared it the only national language. This language (Urdu) can be traced back in the Mughal Period in 16th century in India. Currently, it is a symbol of the national unity and it surpasses all local languages which are more than a few dozen in number and evidently it can be called *lingua franca*. In the Pakistani society, it is used very widely side by side with English language. The political leader class fined Urdu language as a source of communication with the masses. It is used in the parliament and the supreme court of Pakistan has recently ordered the government to convert all its orders, matters and communications to Urdu language as it is the national language. In the government educational system (in schools and colleges) the medium of instructions is Urdu and it is taught as a compulsory subject from class one to twelve¹⁵. Urdu language is a the prime means of communication and communication and the large number of the population watch Urdu news papers and see Urdu TV channels and programs. In the history of Indo-Pak, it played a vital role especially during independence movements and as a result the Muslims got Pakistan (an independent state) and

Sir Sayed Ahmand khan played a leading and vital role when Urdu Hindi conflict arose¹⁶.

As conclusion we can say that learning Urdu language is very much important to know the history of Pakistan and to know the culture of Pakistan. Many famous religious writers in Urdu language and their writings is still read and understood even now and for this reason madrssa students still use Urdu language. In Khyber Pukhtun khwa, Urdu language is compulsorily taaught laanguage for the students at institutions. For day to day life and interaction, it is taught in madrssas as well as in schools. We can easily assume that due to its vital role in the society, Urdu language is taught about all kind of schooling whether it is government sector, private sectors or madrssas.

During this research about the usefulness of languages (Arabic and then Urdu), it was noted that these madrssa students were very much aware of the importance of these languages and they considered Urdu language as a symbol of the unity of the country. It was a symbol of pride for them and some students also expressed their worries about the popularity and use of English language and opposed it and they were dissatisfied with the situation. They said that giving so much importance to the English language puts the national language (Urdu) to a background. A student did not express the inability of his father who could read nor write Urdu and that is why he could not get any job. He said that his father spent all his life in a mosque of his village although he was a religious scholar but he could not find a good job due to the lack of Urdu knowledge but at the same time many of his father's friends got jobs because of their Urdu knowledge¹⁷.

Many other participants had inclination towards Urdu language as it is a very good option to deal with others in most of the regions in Pakistan. They pleaded for its promotion and called it the need of the day for all Pakistani citizens.

Usefulness of English

During this research the students were asked about the usefulness of English language after asking about Arabic and Urdu languages and they were asked to express themselves about their priorities about English. This provided us a comparative study of the languages too. After a debate and discusstion, it revealed that many students were in favor of English language than any other language option. Many of them responded in a positive way. The dissatisfactory situation of availing jobs with madrssa graduation, brought many students toward conventional educational jobs and they urged for learning English language.

While talking about the future, one of these students was very critical and urged that madrssa students must have knowledge of English language. He appreciated one of his madrssa teacher who was a regular government servant. He pointed out some of the students who could get through the different exams

of schools, colleges and universities and it is very clear that these exams had English either medium of instructions or contained English portion. He pointed out continuously his teacher who could qualify all his exams because of the knowledge of English language. He also criticized the madrssa system as their graduates could not go through different conventional exams and could not get job positions. And because of this situation, he expressed his sorrow that religious institutions are not respected in the society. While looking at this situation we came across many fresh madrssa graduates who joined the local mosques as a source of livelihood. They lead the five times prayers and teach the Holy Quran to the children of the local community. They were paid by the community. In early times people would give them annually a stipulated share of the crops but many of them now get their salaried in cash. In each and every case it could be concluded that the amount paid to them was very low which could hardly fulfill their daily life needs. In the same way the madrssa teacher who was madrssa graduates also relied on the local community for their foods and other needs but this case may be different in urban madrssas where special arrangements are made for them¹⁸. In the rural areas, the young students of madrssa would get their food from the nearby houses¹⁹.

Many participants agreed with the usefulness of English language. We noted that many students had sufficient information about the languages and its many aspects but they did not express them directly which has many reasons. One reason in my point of view was the dominancy of religious education. So we felt to make these students out of that mindset through discussion and make them express the reality.

When we interviewed the teachers, one of them talked very expressively and told much about the need of English language. We asked him why he was telling so. He said: I missed an opportunity at a university of a teaching job and it was because of the lack of English knowledge (see also ICG, 2014). He told us how he resolved his problem and worked for learning English language to avail a future opportunity²⁰.

Likewise another told his story that he was serving as Mufti and he was asked a crucial question about Takaful (a cooperative system for the reimbursement of the loss). For resolving this issue he visited a band but could not understand anything as the whole material was in English²¹ So he decided to learn English.

Many of the students responded in positive about the learning of English Language in one way or the other. Most of them had opportunities to face exams specially the bachelor degrees. (it is note able that all the bachelor degree programs has English as a compulsory subject). When these students were asked about their English papers, most of them confessed that they had used unfair means during the exams which is dilemma of the education system.

Many other participants indicated towards many reasons for learning English language. Some of them indicated towards some special details. One student said that In Pakistan, it is very difficult to find a good job if one has no knowledge of English language²². Another student expressed his views that the current scientific and technological advancement cannot be benefited if there is no knowledge of English language²³.

As an overall judgment we can say that, majority of the participants urged on the important role of the language in socioeconomic wellbeing and professional prosperity. According to them English is necessary for getting an access to the job market²⁴. Some of these participants complained of the linguistic situation in Pakistan and said that a specific class is holding the society and power who try to impose westernized ruling and they try to promote the English language. Many of the students considered themselves as “helpless” in this situation while some participants expressed to compromise with the majority and therefore intended to learn the English language as it is the cry of the day.

Usefulness :Analyzing Languages Comparatively

After the details students in a large number compared using and the status of the Arabic language, Urdu language and English language in the present world. An attractive study came forward through which we can know the overall attitudes. In this research we tried to clarify the attitude of the participant toward language and it was encouraging that many of these students want to learn English language due to its importance in the society. The ground reality shows that there is a demand for learning English language. We try to sum up the field data. One of the teacher, very keenly said that due to the global needs, our students must be equipped with the English language as they are going to play their international and global role. And it can be possible only when they know the language and can communicate the world but simultaneously he did not refute the significance of Arabic language as it is the language of religion²⁵.

Some students were not very much different when they were comparing their viewpoint concerning the worth of the language. One of these students see Arabic language as a source the Islamic knowledge and English language is an entrance to the worldly knowledge²⁶.

Summary and conclusion

The madrassa community was interviewed and their animosity towards English language was collected through data and it was revealed that the madrassa students and teachers were opposing English language for some reasons but many of them liked it (for some reasons). They had love for Arabic for religious reasons. They has a space in their minds for Persian language as it was a part of their history and they had love for Urdu language as it was their

national language. Some of the students had strongly opposed English language as the ruling class had always deprived them (people of madrassas) and had created hurdles for their participation in the mainstream.

This data reveals that many although some madrassas kept them isolated themselves from English but some of their students remained active in one way or the other. They had not kept themselves as isolated from the advancement in the vast fields of sciences and skill, education and media. This had caused a huge change in the behavior of them generally about English community particularly English language. Most of the student's don't consider English an alien language. They consider it as compulsorily required for their professional success and a sign of learned people. The madrassas are encouraging their students to learn English, come to the mainstream and participate in the current situation as it is the demand of the day²⁷.

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