

Pakistanlı Öğrencilerin İngilizce Öğrenme ve Konuşma Konusundaki Görüşleri^{1*}

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Öz

Pakistan’da İngilizce hem eğitim dili olarak hem de resmi dil olarak kullanıldığından önemli bir yere sahiptir. Pakistan’daki dil, eğitim ve kültür çeşitliliği insanların belirli bir grup veya dil ile özdeşleşmesini zorlaştırmaktadır. Öğrencilerin iç görülerini anlamak için onların dil algı ve tercihlerini incelemek çok önemlidir, çünkü böyle bir inceleme Pakistan’daki eğitim sistemlerine bir değişiklik getirebilir. Bu bağlamda, bu çalışmanın amacı öğrencilerin İngilizceyi öğrenme ve konuşma konusundaki görüşlerini araştırmak ve böylece onların bu konuda olumlu veya olumsuz tutumlarını ortaya çıkarmaktır. Bu araştırma karma yöntemli bir çalışma olarak tasarlanmış ve 2019-2020 akademik yılında Forman Christian College, Lahor / Pakistan’da öğrenim görmekte olan 60 lisans öğrencisi ile yürütülmüştür. Araştırma sorularının cevaplarını bulabilmek için hem nitel ve hem de nicel araştırma teknikleri kullanılmıştır. Çalışmanın nitel verileri öğrenci anketi yoluyla nicel verileri ise izlem görüşmeleriyle toplanmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İngilizce öğrenmek, İngilizce konuşmak, Öğrenci görüşleri.

^{1*} Bu çalışma Dr. Öğretim Üyesi Hülya Yumru danışmanlığında Araştırmacı Naba Dawar’ın “Understanding Pakistani Students’ Perspectives of Learning and Speaking English” adlı yüksek lisans tezinden üretilmiştir.

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Doi num: [10.17932/IAU.EFD.2015.013/efd_v06i1004](https://doi.org/10.17932/IAU.EFD.2015.013/efd_v06i1004)

Pakistani Students' Perspectives on Learning and Speaking English

Abstract

In Pakistan English is used as an official language and has a significant position in the educational system. The intricate lingual, educational, and cultural diversification in Pakistan, might make it difficult for people to identify with a particular group and language. In this sense, it is fundamental to examine the learner's perceptions together with their language preferences in order to understand their insights; this can, in return bring about a change in the educational systems running in Pakistan. Following this line of argument, the purpose of this study was to investigate the students' perspectives towards learning and speaking English and to better understand whether the students account positive or negative attitudes towards learning and speaking English. The study was conducted with 60 undergraduate students studying at Forman Christian College, Lahore/Pakistan. This study was designed as a mixed method study. That is, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to find out the answers to the research questions. The quantitative data was collected through a questionnaire and the qualitative data was collected through interviews.

Keywords: Learning English; Speaking English; Student perceptions.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan is a multilingual country, where English holds equal importance as Urdu (Rahman, 1998). Urdu holding status of being the national language of Pakistan is used for every-day communication, whereas English is the official language of the country. The Pakistani elites speak English frequently in contexts such as education and employment and casually in their daily routine chats. It is a considerable part of the Pakistani society and is known to be an exceedingly popular language amongst the majority. Consequently, English today is being widely used not only in education but in government, law, and technology as well. It is fascinating to note that even with the dominant and prestigious position English holds in Pakistan, it is still considered the second language in the country because of the widespread use of Urdu and other regional languages, which are termed as

the “mother-tongue” of the people. The majority’s communication utilizes the mother tongue as much as English. However, the medium of instruction in most institutions is English and is the medium of communication used by the majority of youth for their communication (Rahman, 1998); because of this, the importance English Language holds is undeniable. In this period, where Education is growing and being internationalized, the country has initiated actions to improve and develop the standards of higher education, aligned with the global demands. Be that as it may, it does not appear to take the historical background into account associated with colonialism and linguistic domination. The language diversity in Pakistan and the linguistic and ethnic rights movements that have marked the history of the country have been ignored. Canagarajah (1999) points out that second language learning and building an identity around it are major research areas. Norton (2000) further adds that language is not only used by learners for their conversations but side by side; they negotiate their identity and their relationship with the world around them with its help. According to Kramsch (1998), learners may relate themselves with a language as a sign of belongingness or to associate with a particular batch. She further proposed that a common man may derive strength, pride, and social esteem by sharing a common language with the group they are from. Taking into consideration the importance of these factors, it becomes compulsory to investigate the language learner attitudes, together with their language choices, to achieve a comprehensive viewpoint of students’ willingness to learn and speak English and, therefore, to develop an appropriate agenda. Hence, this research aimed to investigate the present perceptions of the students in terms of learning and speaking English using the following research questions as a basis:

1. What are the students’ reasons for learning and speaking English?
2. What decisions would the students make for learning and speaking English, if given a choice?
3. Do the students recognize any threats to their culture, religion and mother tongue when they learn and speak English?
4. What are the students’ perceptions about the effects of learning and speaking English on their identity?

5. Do the students experience language anxiety in learning and speaking English? If so, under what circumstances?

METHODOLOGY

This study adapted mixed methods approach. That is, both quantitative and qualitative research methods were used to find out the answers to the research questions. The present study was conducted with randomly chosen 60 undergraduate students studying at Forman Christian College, Lahore, Pakistan in 2019-2020 academic year. Following mixed methods approach to research design, a questionnaire that was developed by Soomro (2016) was used to collect the quantitative data from the participants. The questionnaire is based on a 4 -point Likert-type rating scale ranging from 1 “Strongly Agree” to 4 “Strongly Disagree”. There are 80 items in the questionnaire and it involves two parts. Part A consisted of nine items to elicit background information about the participants of the study. The questionnaire items in Part B are grouped under five categories that are labelled as *students’ reasons for learning and speaking English* (Items 11, 17, 18, 24, 27, 31, 32, 36, 39, 41, 42, 43, 62, 67 and 76), *students’ choice for learning and speaking English* (Items 10, 14, 15, 19, 25, 26, 30, 40, 46, 49, 51, 53, 54, 60, 63, 66, 69, 71 and 72), *students’ perceived threats to their culture, religion and mother tongue when they learn and speak English* (Items 22, 34, 44, 55, 56, 57, 61, 64, 65, 70, 74, 77 and 79), *students’ perceptions about the effects of learning and speaking English on their identity* (Items 20, 21, 23, 28, 35, 38, 45, 47, 48, 52, 58, 75 and 78), *language anxiety the students experience in learning and speaking English* (Items 12, 13, 16, 29, 33, 37, 50, 59, 68, 73 and 80). The qualitative data was gathered through follow-up semi-structured interviews with randomly chosen 10 participants. The purpose of using semi-structured interviews was to get an in-depth understanding of both, the differences and connections in the socio-psychological perceptions of the learners by getting to know them, their problems and perceptions about the current topic in detail. The quantitative data gathered from the questionnaire was subjected to the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) software version 26.0. The data elicited through the interviews were subjected to descriptive analysis.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

The first research question was about finding out the students' reasons for learning and speaking English. The findings showed that the majority of the students learn and speak English not only for academic purposes but for personal and professional gains as well. The findings also indicated that most of the students think speaking English leads to better speaking skills and so, by speaking it more often, they increase their chances of having a better life in Pakistan and abroad. This finding is in line with Thirumulai's (2002) argument that draws attention to the fact that English is preferred to be learned everywhere because people have realized that knowledge of English is a gateway for a better career option, increased salaries, broader knowledge and also, global communication. In conclusion, all these factors are the main reasons that drive the individuals to learn and speak English. The aim of the second research question was to find out what decision the students would make for learning and speaking English, if given a choice. The findings revealed that learning English is a personal choice for most of the students and it is not an implication. English is not only preferred for educational purposes but is also important for practical life. The findings imply that the participants know that learning and speaking English is rewarding for them, hence they pursue learning it. However, regional languages hold importance as well when it comes to education. The results also indicated that there is no pressure from the family when it comes to the choice of speaking in English however; mother tongues are preferred with family while English is preferred in other interactions. The reason for preferring mother tongue in family interactions is mainly because the majority understands it and also that it is close to the participants' hearts in terms of affection. This discussion supports the view that even though Pakistani students don't always choose to speak in English, they have positive feelings for it overall. There are no negative attitudes towards learning and speaking it as it is the students who determine which language to use depending on the context they are in and the people around them.

The third aim of the study was to find out if the students perceive any threats to their culture, religion and mother tongue when they learn and speak English. The findings revealed that the participants think learning English establishes a feeling of tolerance and respect for other cultures.

Moreover, most of the students think that learning English and being proud of Pakistani culture are not connected. Furthermore, the majority of the participants stated knowing English does bring diversity in terms of open-mindedness and learning more than our national language has to offer. Interestingly, it was pointed out that English isn't the only factor that affects the culture; but factors such as the media and the changing mindsets of people. These findings are in line with Canagarajah's (1999) arguments on this issue. Moving onto the religious affiliations with English, the findings showed the participants think religion and English have no connection as the participants believe Islam doesn't forbid them from learning languages. They further stated that they believe English language will provide them the opportunity to explain their religion better to anyone else outside the realms of their mother tongue. Learning another language was not perceived as a risk that would lessen the value of their mother-tongue, rather it is viewed as an "additional language". For this reason, the students believe that being able to communicate in another language is to their advantage especially, in dealing with the tasks that the modern-world puts forth. The fourth research question of the study aimed at finding the students' perceptions about the effects of learning and speaking English on their identity. The findings revealed that the assumption of English being more modern than Urdu or any other regional languages of Pakistan does not exist; however, it is still crucial to gain prestige in some areas of life such as professional and academic spheres. The feelings towards English affecting their identity are all positive, exactly as pointed out by Dörnyei's (2005) theory of the L2 motivational self, which suggests that learners feel positive about using English. The interviews, however, made it clear how speaking English leads others to think that people speaking in English are privileged and elite automatically. The first reason for this is the education and the division between public and private schools, since private schools pay more attention to quality English language education they are more expensive. If someone speaks excellent English, the others automatically assume him/her as better than them. Thus, English and Urdu medium schools indicate not only a difference in proficiency level but also determine the participants' perceptions of both their self-worth and worth as perceived by others in different spheres of life (Norton, 2000). Secondly, the influence of media in Pakistan has played a considerable role. It has led

people to believe how English is an “elite language” by depicting the owner of the house speaking in English while the maid conversing in Urdu such as in Pakistani TV dramas and movies – and thirdly because better academic and professional opportunities await the ones who are fluent in writing and speaking. Hence, these reasons do not change people’s identity, but they do bring a shift in their perceived identities by the listeners. Therefore, it can be concluded that learning and speaking English does not change the identity but helps in the depiction of a well-formed image of the speakers. The last research question focused on the identification of whether or not the students experience anxiety in learning and speaking English. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), in their theory of foreign language learning anxiety, argue that anxiety may be a reason in refraining from learning a language for many students; however, it can also result in hard work in order to gain success. The latter is what the participants of this study seem to use English for. The reasons for little or no anxiety can be how English is incorporated into curriculum from the start, and the majority of children in Pakistan can understand and speak basic English. The data proves that English is not a difficult language for them to learn, and feelings of nervousness and uneasiness do not surround English language learning. When it comes to speaking, there are two feelings – inferiority and superiority. In conclusion, English learning and speaking does not cast any anxiety onto the participants of the study. However, other factors, like fear of being judged or stage fright, may contribute to the anxiety they sometimes suffer.

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