



RESEARCH PAPER

Perceptions of Students and Teachers about the Practices of English as the Medium of Instruction at Higher Education Level in Pakistan: A Qualitative Case Study of Kohat University of Science and Technology

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions of teachers and students about the use of English as the medium of instruction at the Higher Education Level and practices of English as a medium of instruction at Kohat University of Science and Technology (henceforth, KUST). Problems are associated with English as the medium of instruction, especially in EFL contexts. This was a qualitative case study and data was collected through document analysis and interviews with teachers and students of social, biological and physical sciences of KUST. The results show that English as the medium of instruction is used in the classrooms and all the formal and official matters and decisions of KUST are in English. Results also show that there is no issue for the students and they are happy and satisfied. Overall the findings of the study reveal that KUST is promoting English as the medium of instruction.

KEYWORDS English as a Foreign Language, English as a Second Language, English Medium Instruction, Higher Education Level, KUST

Introduction

Medium has a lot of importance in education. As Nelson Mandela (2006) says, "If you speak to a man in a language he understands, you speak to his head, and if you speak to a man in his own language you speak to his heart".

According to the British Council Report (2010), English medium instruction means, "the use of English language to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English". According to the British Council report, in the Pakistani context, three schools of thought can be seen: (1) supporters of the mother language, (2) supporters of the Urdu language, and (3) English language supporters, as the medium of instruction at HEL (Higher Education Level) classes. In Pakistan, there is an ambiguous situation about the "medium of instruction". On the one hand, while instructions in the English language at Higher Education Level brought problems such as low performances of the students in competitive examinations like Central Superior Service (CSS) examinations and Provincial Management Service (PMS) examinations, on the other hand, English as the medium of instruction at Higher Education Level has also been viewed as having benefits in terms of useful and informative knowledge, in various fields.

Kohat University of Science and Technology is a Public Sector University located in the Kohat District, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. The university was established in year, 2001. Mostly, English is used as the medium of instruction at KUST. English and Urdu along with local languages are used for all purposes: teaching, administrative, official and unofficial, formal and informal at KUST. KUST has introduced all types of degrees from bachelor level to doctorate level in all the areas of studies including social sciences, biological sciences and physical sciences. English is considered as the foreign language in Pakistan. Anbreena (2014) considers the important role and status of English along with Urdu in the Pakistani context as English is used for official purposes in Pakistan. In this study, the main focus was on the policy and practice of English as the medium of instruction and the perceptions of students and teachers about the use of English as the medium of instruction at KUST.

Every country has its specific situation and policy regarding language adaptation in education. Pakistan is a multilingual country with a unique and ambiguous situation regarding, English language as the medium of instruction at the higher education level (HEL). There are many opinions about the use of English in education. Some people favour English as compared with the national language Urdu and local languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Hinko, Saraiki, Balochi etc., but some opinions are completely against English as the medium of instruction. According to Mustafa (2016), parents are usually impressed with the use of English in education. He stated that English is used in Pakistan usually by the elite class. Shah (2017) considers English as the symbol of prestige and economic stability in Pakistan. In this regard, the English language is perceived more less than a symbol of power in Pakistan. there are five major languages in Pakistan, including Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki and Balochi and the national language is Urdu, but in the domains of power like education, bureaucracy, army and other domains of power, mostly English is used (Rahman, 1997).

Books are a reliable source of knowledge and most of them are in English. Panezai (2017) stated that it is difficult for teachers to use books in the English language. There is an ambiguous situation in Pakistan. Some people want to use Urdu as the medium of instruction some people English as the medium of instruction and some people are supporters of the mother tongue (Lotbiniere, 2010). This ambiguity is the barrier to effective education. In Pakistan, eight languages are struggling for supremacy, but English is above all because of its neutrality and universality (Mustafa, 2012). Some portion of the people support the mother tongue as the medium of instruction in Pakistan. Gopang et al. (2016) results also show that the learning process of the students in their mother tongue is more effective.

Literature Review

In Pakistan, there are different perceptions of teachers about the use of English as the medium of instruction. At higher education levels, some teachers prefer English as a medium of instruction and some do not. In this regard, Khan (2013) argues that teachers' perceptions are not in favour of English as the medium of instruction in Pakistani universities. In this study, data were collected from two public-sector Pakistani Universities. The response from the staff of the two universities was not in favor of English as the medium of instruction (p. 181).

Some teachers are in favor of the use of English as a medium of instruction. Din (2015) analyzed the perceptions of teachers about English as the medium of instruction at the Higher Education Level. This study was conducted in Gilgit, Pakistan. The results of the study show that teachers are somehow in favor of the use of the English language as

the medium of instruction. Moreover, this study also stated that the English language is the need for higher education in Pakistan. Teachers were of the opinion that a student's background and efficiency in the English language is the crucial factor (p. 147).

In different contexts, the perceptions regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction are different. Rogier's (2012) study shows the effects of English as the medium of instruction on the language proficiency of students in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). This study shows that English Medium Instruction is helpful in the improvement of English language proficiency of the students. According to this study, improvement is seen in speaking due to EMI classes. Furthermore, students were not facing difficulties regarding EMI in the classroom environment. Students are comfortable with English as the medium of instruction is helpful (p. 130).

Shamim et al. (2016) collected data from the private university of Saudi Arabia regarding English as the medium of instruction. This study found that there were no big issues regarding adopting English as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, the study found that all the participants consider English as the need for a higher education level. Moreover, the students and teachers of the university consider English language as an instrument for higher education.

English is spreading all over the world as the medium of instruction. English as the medium of instruction has some negative points as well. We can say that sometimes EMI is a barrier to the learning process. Williams (2015) reviewed the policy and use of English as the medium of instruction in the South Korean context. His finding indicates problems are associated with EMI. Proficiency is affected due to the EMI of the teachers as well as the students. Sometimes the students favoured L1 as compared with L2. The countries where many languages are used at the same time in education are practising, need a proper policy regarding the medium of instruction. Owu-Ewie et al. (2015) and Gul et al. (2022) studies also highlighted the role of English as the medium of instruction in the learning processes of the students. As:

“Nations whose native languages are not the languages of education have promulgated language policies to solve communication problems in their school systems” (p: 72).

Dearden (2014) collected data from 55 countries all over the world on, "English as the medium of instruction: a global growing phenomenon". He described this English Medium Instruction (EMI) phenomenon in terms of private and public sector institutions. He concluded that private sector institutions all over the world are using EMI more in education as compared to public institutions (p.13). Furthermore, the study also shows that the use of EMI is more in the primary and secondary phases than in the tertiary phase worldwide. It may mean that EMI is popular and practical at the Higher Education Level worldwide (Gul et al., 2023).

English as a medium of instruction has an impact on teaching practices around the world. Cho (2012) in his study described the effect of EMI on the teaching practice at universities in Korea. This study found that EMI is not very effective at Korean universities and there are side effects of EMI:

“The spread of English as a lingua franca has affected business, science, and technology, education, culture, religion, language, and politics since the early 20th century, and its influence has now permeated virtually all fields of society worldwide.

Globalization, internationalization and particularly the advent of the Internet have facilitated the use of English in every segment of life" (p: 136).

Furthermore, this study found that students enrolled in the university were not very happy with EMI (p.157). Moreover, students think that the university has adopted EMI for university ranking or prestige rather than for learning. Darus & Saadiyah (2010) study also identified some problems associated with EMI. This study finding clarifies the difficulties regarding the use of English as the medium of instruction in EFL classrooms are there (p.19).

Material and Methods

A qualitative case study approach for the study was adopted. Qualitative research is an exciting, important and highly awarding task due to the reason that it engages us with the problems that matter, in ways that matter (Manson, 2002, p.1). According to Chenail (1995, p. 7) in a qualitative study, we ask simple questions and get the complex answers. According to Bloomer & Wray (2013), the management of complex answers and simple questions is the key to conducting a successful qualitative study.

Population

The population can be targeted and accessible. Pilot & Hungler (1999, p. 2780) distinguish between target and accessible population. The target population includes all the cases about which the researcher would like to generalize. Therefore, the purposive sampling technique was adopted to determine the accessible population. Three teachers and three students were interviewed. Furthermore, the population of the study comprised all Higher education level students from three different departments of social, biological and physical sciences of KUST.

Characteristics of the Teachers and Students of KUST

This was the case study of KUST. All three teachers are from KUST and all three are multilingual. They all have degrees of Ph.D. The teachers selected for this study were male from the three different disciplines at KUST. All three teachers have 7, 11, and 12 years of teaching experience at the Higher education level in KUST. Their ages were between 35-40 years.

Same as the case with students, all three students were selected from the three different disciplines of KUST. Two students were enrolled in the BS (Bachelor of Science) programme and one student was enrolled in the MS (Master of Science) programme at KUST.

Data Collection

In this research study, data is collected by using semi-structured interviews and document analysis. Interviews were used to capture data relevant to the study objectives and research questions; the same is the case for document analysis. Interviews were conducted with only those teachers and students, who were aware of the problem and who had satisfactory knowledge about the phenomenon. For ethical concerns, the researcher gave the selected participants of this study an information sheet as well as the consent form requesting them to read and sign the form.

Interviews with both the teachers and students were taken in English language. It was assumed that all the teachers and students have a satisfactory efficiency in English

language as the teachers and students of higher education level at KUST. Interviews are transcribed, coded and analyzed. The qualitative content analysis (QCA) method was adopted for the analysis of data. QCA is a flexible process as Hsieh & Shannon (2005) define this process as "a research method for the subjective interpretation of the content of text data through the systematic classification process of coding and identifying themes or patterns" (p.1279).

For document analysis, all the documents of KUST such as KUST Statutes (2016), KUST Annual Report (2016-2017), KUST Prospectus (2018-2019), KUST Curriculum (2018) and the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (updated till 2012) have been selected for data collection.

Results and Discussion

In this section, codes from the interview transcripts along with the actual words (using pseudonyms of the participants) and analysis of the documents are presented in a detailed manner.

The policy of KUST regarding English as the medium of instruction is unclear

According to the documents (mentioned earlier), there was nothing specific about the medium of instruction. The teacher Imam is of the view that there should be clear instructions from the administration about the medium of instruction.

"Yes there should be a proper policy. The first thing is there should be uniform curriculum; there should be a uniform medium of instruction. There should be no different policies for different institutions, like in government institutions, I believe that they are following Urdu as a medium of instruction till some time and suddenly they suddenly changed it to English in colleges. And I have seen students who struggle even with the terminologies at college level. So in my opinion there should be a uniform system, there should be a uniform policy and uniform medium of instruction and uniform curriculum." (T2, Imam)

There is no official reference with the departments at KUST about medium

No official document with the department heads and teachers regarding the medium of instruction. The three teachers are unable to answer the question regarding the official document.

"I think the documents, it should not be in the form of letter." (T2, Imam)

English language is used for official purposes at KUST

Teachers and students are mostly using English language for official purposes. For example, the teachers, when they are giving lectures or writing applications or other official things etc., are mostly using English language.

"All notifications, all are in English. These are all evidence, notification, mandating, syllabuses, teachers, teaching lectures, teaching methodologies, materiel, and the slides, all are in English. These are all evidences." (T1, Saleem)

Documents of KUST are in English

All the important documents of KUST such as KUST statutes, KUST annual report, and all the contents and syllabuses are in English language. There is nothing in local languages at KUST. Teacher Imam was of the view that there is nothing that can be found in Urdu or other local languages at KUST.

"It is very clear that throughout the world we are following English. Our board of studies, our course contents, and everything are in English." (T2, Imam)

The role of local languages

Local languages are used to make the students' concepts clear about the topic. The teacher Imam was of the view that it is necessary to use the local languages to make the students' concepts clear. Teachers used other local languages, for example, Urdu, Pashto or Hindko. The teacher Imam was saying that we cannot use English all the time in the class.

"If you give lectures in English there are students, who are not from very privileged background. It is hard for them to understand the concepts. So some time, we switch to Urdu and even to our native language Pashto." (T2, Imam)

English, a medium of higher education

All the participants were considering English as the medium of higher education. Moreover, English as the medium of instruction at KUST in higher education is the compulsion of the teachers and students. According to the teacher Imam, there are no such books on higher education in Pakistan in national or local languages.

"It is very clear that throughout the world we are following English. We do not have textbooks in our languages. So specially, if I speak about my field of study, how you can justify any other language apart from English. There are no text books available in Urdu, Pashto, even your reference books and everything is in English. And even the students who are going to abroad after BS the medium of instruction will be ultimately English. So I strongly agree that it should be implemented." (T2, Imam)

English is not the problem in learning

All the teachers and students were of the view that English language is not a problem in learning. Moreover, they were also of the view that all languages are difficult not only English language. The teacher Imam also has the same thought.

"If I am frank Urdu is also, we struggle with Urdu also. If we took the example of KPK, we struggled with Urdu. We cannot polish our Urdu till so many insights. So it is not about the language. The basic thing is that if you teach English as a medium of instruction since primary schools, and carry on to the higher and colleges and then to the universities then I think, there should be no problem for the students to learn the basics concepts. If you want to switch the university level system then you have to switch the whole system." (T2, Imam)

English language is helpful

The participants including students and teachers were considering English language helpful in learning. According to the teacher Yaseen, English language is more helpful in the process of learning as compared with other languages.

“The terms we use for example in physics, all the terms have to be in English. If you want to translate them in Urdu or in Pashto it won't be possible.” (T3, Yaseen)

Findings and Discussion

The discussion will start from the views of teachers regarding EMI policy and practice of English as the medium of instruction at KUST, perceptions of students on EMI and the consequences of English as the medium of instruction on the learning process of the students. Themes are presented under the research questions and linked to the reviewed literature of the study.

The English language is important in Pakistan

English is the most important language along with Urdu in Pakistan. All the institutions and job providers preferred English language. English is preferable during job interviews in Pakistan. English is the priority for success in the practical and academic career in Pakistan. These results support the results of (Khan, 2013, Gul et al. 2022). Their findings clarified that English language is the most important language in Pakistan.

Books are in English than Urdu or other local languages

Large ranges of books are published more in English than in Urdu or local languages in Pakistan. The reading materials required at higher education level are available in English language. Teachers of the study such as Saleem and Imam were skeptical about the translation of books. Darus & Saadiyah's (2010), Ali et al., 2022 and Afaq et al., 2023 studies also support the view that English as the medium of instruction needs competent English teachers. There should be an appropriate approach teaching to multilingual students. This case study of KUST also consists of multilingual participants. Documents had no proper and clear stance about it.

The role of the local languages

Local languages are used for informal purposes at KUST. According to some teachers, there should be a mixed umbrella of the languages at KUST for all the purposes. The participants' comments indicate that local languages carry the traditional elements of our culture which is why local languages should not be neglected. Teachers and students were of the view that we have not done justice to our local languages. Teachers also support the view that the feelings in the mother tongue are spontaneous. Williams's (2015) case study in the South Korean context was also having the same results. William's (2015) study shows that sometimes, students favouring their mother tongue or local language instead of English.

Local languages are used, because of the less privileged background of the students

Data show that local languages are used at KUST because of the less privileged background of the students. Teachers use local languages because of the inefficiency of the students in English language. Teachers of KUST use local languages whenever it is needed. Teachers use local languages to balance the different educational backgrounds of the students. The background of the teachers is also a crucial factor. Teachers with a less privileged English background mostly prefer local languages. Cho's (2012) study results also show that comprehension in L1 or local languages is more than comprehension in English. Moreover, Darus & Saadiyah (2010) study also identified some problems associated with EMI.

Students prefer English language as the medium of instruction

There is no difficulty for the students regarding English as the medium of instruction at KUST. Students are happy and feel themselves progressive with the use of EMI. Students found English helpful rather than problematic. In Hamid (2016) and Gul et al., (2022) studies, it is found that English as a medium of instruction is not a big issue.

EMI, a global spreading phenomenon

The English language has all the qualities to serve the purpose of higher education. All the participants were of the view that there is a need for English adaptation completely at KUST. All the data shows that the English language is the universal language. All the participants clarified that English has the qualities of universality. These results support the findings of the Dearden (2013) results. Dearden's (2013) and Gul et al., (2023) studies show that the use of English as the medium of instruction is popular in the tertiary phase of education in the world.

English language is the need for higher education

English is the need for higher education. All the participants were of the opinion that if we want to improve our skills for higher studies then, there should be English language. The analysis of the data reveals that, if we go abroad, the language of instruction will be English in higher education. All the terminologies, materials and books of higher education are in English language. Din's (2015) results are also the same as the results of this study. Din's (2015) findings support the view that English language is needed for higher education because of the presence of all the terminologies and books in English.

The English language is helpful in the learning process

Students' comments show that English language is helpful in the learning process rather than a barrier. Some teachers are also of the view that the terminologies won't be possible in the local languages. Moreover, English is the most helpful language in terms of scientific and social terminologies. Rogier (2012) & Gul et al., 2022 studies in various contexts also show that English as the medium of instruction helps improve the proficiency of the students and teachers in English language.

English is the medium of instruction at KUST

The policy of KUST is supposed to use English as the medium of instruction. Teachers also use local languages for the sake of explanations of the topics. The policy regarding the medium of instruction is a debatable issue. English as the medium of instruction is official at KUST. The documents say nothing about the medium of instruction clearly. Teachers use English as the medium of instruction partially at KUST. William's (2015) study bears the same results. His study was on "A Systematic Review of English Medium Instruction (EMI) and Implications for the South Korean Higher Education Context." His findings show that there are some problems emerged because of the inefficiency of the students in the English language. His findings also stated that most of the students and teachers prefer the local language or mother tongue.

Classroom discussions of students and teachers are in local languages

Classroom discussions among the students and teachers at KUST are mostly in local languages and the use of English is very rare. All the students prefer their local languages for discussions and group studies etc. Owu-Ewie et al. (2015) results are same as the results

of this study. Owu-Ewie et al. (2015) conducted their case study on, "The Use of English as a Medium of Instruction at the Upper Basic Level", in the context of Ghana. This study shows that the less proficiency of the students and teachers leads the teachers and students to use the local languages in the classroom.

English, the language of administration at KUST

English is the language of administration at KUST. All the syllabuses and curriculum are in English language. All the mandates and letters, we can say that all the written work of the administration is in English language. All the documents such as KUST Statues (2016), KUST Annual Report (2016-2017), KUST Prospectus (2018-2019), syllabuses, and curriculum are in English language. Cantoni's (2007) case study in Namibia also showed the same results. According to this study, English language is the second language in Namibia. The results show that English language is the language of administration, and is used for other official purposes.

Conclusion

Findings from the qualitative data of document analysis and interviews clarify that English as the medium of instruction is used in KUST. Due to the less privileged background of the students and teachers other local languages are also used to make the students' concepts clear at KUST. Data also indicate that local languages are also helpful for informal purposes like, interaction, and communication in and outside of the classrooms. There are no proper, stated, and clear instructions from the educational authorities and the administration of KUST regarding the medium of instruction. All the teachers and students related to different disciplines prefer English as the medium of instruction at higher education level. Analysis of the data also indicates that all the teachers of different departments including; biological, physical and social science, prefer English as the medium of instruction at KUST. Participants of the study both the teachers and students were of the view that all the reading material required at the higher education level is in the English language. Moreover, teachers were also of the view that the translation of these rereading materials into the national language Urdu, or other local languages may be a difficult and time-consuming task. All the teachers consider that English is necessary for higher education and English is a globally acknowledged language. From the data we also found that all the students from the different departments of KUST are happy and satisfied with English as the medium of instruction in KUST. Students consider English is helpful in the education and also a universal language. Students face problems in understanding the lectures etc, because of their inefficiency in English language. Despite the inefficiency of students in English language, students still prefer English as the medium of instruction.

Recommendations

The study strongly recommended that there should be proper rules regarding the medium of instruction at the higher education level. Moreover, the whole curriculum of KUST should be revised and analyzed. This study also suggests that there should be proper courses for students and teachers regarding English proficiency and English language at KUST. The administration of KUST should motivate the students to use the English language in informal contexts and day-to-day conversations. Furthermore, there should be seminars regarding the importance of English in Pakistan. There should be materials on local culture in English to support and encourage the use of English in the classrooms at KUST. Students should not be discouraged based on the incorrect use of the English language in the classrooms. There should be proper and

specific instructions for students and teachers on the departmental level regarding English as the medium of instruction at KUST.

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