

Department of Development Studies

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Thematic Focus: Development as Discourse

Exploring the Role of English Language as an Academic Gatekeeper in Pakistani Educational System: Focus Rawalpindi-Islamabad- Maleeha Sattar (2013-2015)

This research study explained the rationale behind the policy of English Language as compulsory subject in Pakistan. It also documented the perceptual experience of the students who are negatively as well as positively affected by this policy. Employing qualitative research strategy, in-depth interviews, and Critical Discourse Analysis, this study confirms that students from lower socio-economic background are suffering or are at the risk of suffering at the hands of English as a compulsory subject.

Key Findings

1. The study identifies the dominant and hegemonic discourses (globalization, English as global language, global knowledge society, global economy, global competitiveness, global citizen, globalized world order, globalized and competitive world etc.) and the subjugated discourses like mother tongue, vernaculars, national language, national cohesion and social exclusion.
2. The study shows that Pakistan's policy with respect to English as medium of instruction is contradictory as well as ambiguous. The study concludes that the policy of English as compulsory subject in education system of Pakistan is, thus, partly a product of dominant discourses of globalization. The dominant discourses of English as language of globalization and globalized world order are the discursive elements of social practice of policy formulation in Pakistan.
3. Depending on the context and the proficiency in English, the identities and social positioning of those who are fluent and those who are not fluent in speaking English can be exclusionary or inclusionary.
4. The gatekeeping role assigned to English as a compulsory subject results in perpetuating the already existing inequalities in society. It negatively affects those from lower socio-economic background. The gatekeeping role excludes those who fail to pass English compulsory by denying them the opportunity to get further education. The repercussions of the dominance results in dropping out of a significant number of students from education system due to their failure to pass the exam or acquire a certain level of proficiency in English language.

Policy Implications

1. Absence of scholarship in Pakistan and elsewhere that could question the sagacity of the policy of English as a compulsory subject in Pakistan makes this study theoretically significant as it claims to be the first research study in Pakistan that intends to problematize this policy.
2. Based on the experiential realities of students affected by the gatekeeping role of English language and its dominance in Pakistan, this study problematizes the unquestioned gatekeeping role of English as a compulsory subject in Pakistan's education system. The results of this study will provide insightful data and findings to the education policy makers which they will use to make the educational system more equitable and to remove the linguistic discrimination. It can also help non-Anglicized students, with little knowledge of English, who have a lot to offer otherwise. This in turn will contribute to the national development of citizenry.