

An examination of newspapers' role in English language learning in Pakistan: Issues and recommendations

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ABSTRACT

Pakistan is a developing nation characterized by its lower income, turbulent economy, elevated commodity prices, and escalated inflation. The government sector's progression has been disappointingly inadequate due to limited resources and a meager budget allocation for education. In light of these prevailing circumstances, this article endeavors to illuminate the newspaper as an economical and invaluable source of diverse information that can be utilized as authentic material for enhancing the teaching and learning of languages, particularly English. The article underscores the significance and affordability of newspapers in primary and secondary educational institutions, specifically public schools, within the context of Pakistan. A comparative analysis of Pakistan's literacy rate vis-à-vis other countries in the region and the substitution of English newspapers for English readers to ameliorate English language acquisition are deliberated upon. Additionally, the article scrutinizes the budgetary allocation for the educational sector in Pakistan from 2017 to the present year, as well as the price range of English readers from this vantage point. Given the significance of the English language and the challenges associated with its instruction and acquisition, this paper proffers several recommendations for the integration of newspapers into primary and secondary levels at public schools.

Keywords: *Authentic material; English reader; English teaching and learning; Educational budget*

1. Introduction

Over the last decade, major changes have taken place in the education system and in English language teaching and learning. This change in the mode of teaching and learning is because of the rapid growing technology and both teachers and students utilize the technology to improve their teaching and learning (Rao, 2019b). There are different online websites for instance skillshare, Coursera, TED Talks, Duolingo and other educational online resources available on Google which may be used to improve the teaching and learning especially English language. The educational online resources are a beneficial part of the technology for students and teachers. However, this technology is not in the access of every student in developing countries such as Pakistan. Unfamiliarity with advanced technology, unaffordability of smart gadgets, and poor quality of the internet may be some of the reasons for not having the desired outcomes of technology in Pakistan. Thus there is a need to ascertain the alternative methods to upgrade the students with the new happenings around the world.

Rao (2019a) asserts that English teachers must use affordable, practical, and easily accessible authentic materials to meet the demands of their students and achieve the required outcomes. To teach English effectively, teachers have been utilizing the teaching resources from the available sources, particularly the authentic material. The use of authentic material helps the students understand the information being taught.

Nunan describes authentic material to any spoken or written materials that are not used for educational objectives. The authentic materials are taken from real life opposite to the artificial language in the textbooks which are specifically created for the language teaching purpose. Anything a native speaker of a language would speak or read can be called as authentic - theatre programs, job applications, brochures, menus, newspapers, magazines (Nunan, 1999). Authentic materials expose students to real language and its use in their local society. Considering the use of authentic materials, Widdowson wrote: "it has been traditionally supposed that the language presented to learners should be simplified in some way for easy access and acquisition. There are recommendations that the language presented should be authentic" (Widdowson, 1990, p.67). Authentic materials may be used in the classroom and may easily be modified for the students. Additionally, these authentic materials can be used in English classes at all levels.

From a range of authentic materials, newspapers are one of the most easily accessible resources. The English newspaper is affordable, easily accessible and gives the reader up-to-date knowledge on a wide range of topics. Moreover, the newspaper serves as a language developer by acting as a simple thesaurus (dictionary) that may improve the vocabulary of the reader (Wijewardene, 2020). Newspapers are a significant information source in the current mass communication media. The print media uses English as a language of communication in order to reach a wide audience with the ideas and intellectual concepts. There is no doubt that newspapers can help to improve education and learning in general. A teacher can cater to the various wants and interests of their students through the newspaper (Radhika & Rajeswari, 2012). The main job of a

newspaper is to spread information and also the added duty of imparting knowledge. A newspaper fulfills this role of education by providing insightful remarks and unique features.

2. Newspaper for teaching purpose

Many teaching and learning aids are used in English learning class by English teachers, however, the newspaper is one of the most versatile and affordable authentic materials of the printed media to train the students to speak and write a language. Radhika and Rajeswari (2012) state that newspapers may help improve the education and learning in general. By using the newspaper in his class a teacher can cater to the various wants and interests of his students. Newspapers are helpful to improve reading skills and enhance thinking skills. They bridge the gap between school-sponsored writing and writing in the real world. They are adaptive to all subject areas and grade levels, flexible, and economical that contains useful vocabulary and brief writing.

Ali and Devi (2013) regard newspapers as good resources for language learning. They highlight that newspapers offer a variety of materials, particularly for students, such as sports and education columns, geographical and historical columns and cultural events. Teachers may take advantage of English newspapers with these different sections to teach vocabulary in the classroom. According to Ali and Devi (2013), newspapers use everyday language with all of the idiomatic terms from that culture. We can study newspapers in a variety of ways, as there is a variety of language styles that are not present in textbooks. Real-world experiences engage students' interest and offer knowledge as well as a useful method of facilitating language learning. Obanya asserts that the overuse of textbooks has led to a less productive environment, and there is a notable lack of contact in the teaching and learning processes in the classroom that should involve both verbal and nonverbal components (Obanya, 2002). Due to this, students and learners may lose interest in studying languages and find the process burdensome (Tafida & Dalhat, 2014)

Rao (2019b) considers newspapers useful in enhancing the writing, vocabulary, and grammatical skills, reading comprehension, as well as their ability to read and interpret maps, charts, and diagrams as well as their analytical and critical thinking analysis. Moreover its material may also be useful for pre-activity tasks which may develop the learning skills when the material is given to the students as assignments. Students may learn different ways of writing English through a display of a wide range of written English styles in newspapers.

Teachers may also use written advertisements for the practice of developing the logical connections between different ideas or concepts. Advertisement is an ideal instrument of transferring information. Advertisements cover any type of information (Hambali, 2010). The language of advertisements is not a normal form of written text. The fact is that the language of advertisements is usually in the form of extract and incomplete which can be called 'advertising text'. Advertisements in printed media are written in 'cuts of words' that need to be described or transferred to form a complete and

meaningful sentence. (Hambali, 2010, p.3) Advertisements are mostly in incomplete form of language and carries information in extract form with words, phrases, and derivations and sometimes symbols as well which need to be transferred into non-extract information and complete sentences (Hambali, 2010) which may be a good practice for the students to improve their writing skills if they change these incomplete phrases or sentences and into complete sentences.

Hambali suggests to arrange the advertisement with a variation of categories such as job vacancy, travel agency, study abroad or goods products, etc. so that students may have their own choice based on their interest when they are given tasks or assignments. Selection of advertisements with images may also be beneficial in drawing student's attention. This may get students motivated in describing the advertisements, and sometimes students may get helped more easily to speak with the help of pictures. There are different links from where teachers can download ad relevant pictures (Hambali, 2010).

Using newspapers in class provides real life situations of productively obtaining and using English as a communicative instrument. Education World (2011), a book and periodical publishing mentions some reasons of how newspapers may be effective classroom teaching tools. These reasons are as follows:

- A newspaper deals with what is happening currently, providing motivation for reading and discussion.
- It is an adult medium that students of all ability levels can be proud to be seen reading.
- It makes learning fun.
- It is very flexible and adjustable to all kinds of syllabus fields and class levels.
- It bridges to fill the gap between a classroom and the real world.
- It develops good reading habits for a life-time.
- It can be cut, marked, clipped, pasted, filed and recycled.
- It gives everyone something to read news, sports, weather, etc.
- It is a cost-effective source to educate students.
- It contains practical vocabulary and the best models for clear and concise writing.

Newspaper is the most widely used of the print media as a teaching aid in the developed countries where initiatives have been taken to include newspapers in the classrooms. The purpose of such initiatives is to introduce students with the newspaper as a powerful and economical authentic material.

Taking the example of a developed country - the United States, the importance of newspapers can be considered on a critical level. In the United States initiatives have been made to include newspaper reading into lesson plans. Newspaper in Education or (NIE) (American Press Institute, 2013) is the name of the program that aims to promote the reading habit in students and learners. The program emphasis the responsibilities of citizenship and encourages everyday newspaper reading. The purpose of this program is to introduce students to the use of the newspaper as a powerful and economical instructional instrument.

"Newspaper in Education" (NIE) arranges further workshops for the teachers as 'Newspaper in education week' with the intention of helping students become aware of the world around them, make decisions, new strategies with their class fellows and become producers as well as consumers of the written word. The purpose of the program 'newspaper in education week' is to transform students into news readers, news collectors, and news writers as well. Moreover, NIE promotes to produce a classroom newspaper that would enable the teachers to combine reading and writing activities every day through the workshop of 'newspaper in education week'. Students also have the opportunities to become newspaper publishers from kindergarten to high school. This program is sponsored at the national level by the American Newspaper Publishers Association Foundation and the International Reading Association.

NIE programs are offered by more than 700 newspapers not only in the United States but in Canada, South America, Europe, Africa, and Australia as well. Leading Newspapers across the world have such learning programs as a step towards making awareness of current and worldwide affairs among children while enhancing their language skills and literacy skills. Whereas in Pakistan, there are no such initiatives or any other programs to overcome the lacks in the education sector rather education is one of the most deprived sectors. Pakistan is a developing country with low income and as per the report of World Bank (2022, May), the overheated economy, high commodity prices, and the declining Rupee added to inflation attaining an 11-year high of 12.2 percent on average in 2022 and projected to increase to 23.0 percent in 2023.

In Pakistan education is not the first priority of the public. There is also an unsatisfactory improvement from the government sector due to limited resources and low budget allocation for education. A study by the Research Journal of Commerce, Economics, and Social Sciences discusses the importance of education and compares Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan. This study mentions many differences in resources within these three countries. The data demonstrates the difference of the literacy rate as in Indonesia 90%, Malaysia 89% and Pakistan 54.9%. As per the research study, Pakistan comparatively has the higher ratio of poverty and inequality which makes sense that Pakistan has the lower literacy rate (Propakistani, 2021).

3. Educational budget of Pakistan

The educational budget demonstrates the lowest allocation on education against the percentage of GDP among the other countries of the region. The examination of budget from the year 2017 demonstrates that the budget for Education Affairs and Services in 2017-18 was Rs 90.818 while Rs 97.42 in 2018-19. In the budget of 2017-18, the government allocated Rs 10.798 billion for Secondary Education Affairs & Services which increased to Rs 12.365 billion in 2018-19.

The government allocated Rs. 90.556 billion for Education Affairs and Services in the federal budget for 2022-2023 which is 1.5% less than of the allocation of Rs. 91.970 billion in the current year. As per the structure of the budget, the allocation for pre-

primary and primary education affairs for 2020-21 was Rs. 2.931 billion which had been Rs. 2.83 billion in 2019-20 while Rs. 7.344 billion allocated for Secondary Education Affairs & Services for 2020-21 which was Rs. 6.718 billion in 2019-20. (Yusufzai, 2018-2019; Propakistani.pk, 2022).

According to the Pakistan Alliance for Girls Education (PAGE) organization, the government allocated Rs. 83.3 billion for Education Affairs and Services in the budget of 2020–21. By comparing our budget to international standards, it can be ascertained that “the assigned budget of education is the lowest as of the agreed targets of 15-20% of the total budget and 4% of the GDP”.

4. Public expenditure on education

Total public expenditure on education as a percentage to GDP is estimated at 2.2 percent in 2017 as compared to 2.3 percent of GDP in 2016 in Pakistan, which is the lowest in the region. This public expenditure on education is estimated at 2.3% for 2019-20, which is also lower than other countries in the region. The public expenditure is estimated at 1.7 percentages in 2021-22 which is against 1.9 percentages in the year 2020-2021 again the lowest in the region (Propakistani.pk, 2018-19, 2022).

4.1. Structure of education budget

The government allocated Rs. 2.931 billion for pre-Primary and Primary Education Affairs for 2020-21 which was Rs. 2.83 billion in 2019-20, Rs. 7.344 billion allocated for Secondary Education Affairs & Services for 2020-21 which was Rs. 6.718 billion in 2019-20, Rs. 1.237 billion for administration which was Rs. 1.407 billion in 2019-20 which was later revised to Rs. 727 million. This low budget from both sides results in a gap regarding the level of the schools in Pakistan with international schools. The International Schools Consultancy (ISC) declares a school as an international school if the school has a syllabus, totally or partially in English outside an English speaking country, or in a country with English as its official language, if a school offering English-medium syllabus will be international in its orientation. In the list issued by the ISC Pakistan has been declared as having 439 international levels of schools.

For meeting the requirements of International Schools Consultancy (ISC), evaluation of English medium syllabus is very crucial. To enhance the English learning of students, only an English textbook will not be sufficient. Private English medium schools in Pakistan include a separate English readers set consisting of 5 to 6 story books in their syllabus published by Oxford university press. In the Collin Advanced Learner's Dictionary, the 'reader' is defined as a helping book for children in reading or for people in learning a foreign language. A reader comprises text passages and often exercises for practicing in reading and writing.

The price list issued by Oxford University effective from 12 April 2021 shows the price range of English literature readers starts from Rs 275 to 345, reading treasures including different stories start from Rs 245 to 300, and reading story packs of six books

each starts from Rs 925 to 1315. While the price range in the year of 2022, issued by Oxford university effective from 15 June shows English literature readers start from Rs 330 to 420, reading treasures including different stories start from Rs 305 to 370 and reading story books (pack of six books each) start from Rs 1195 to 1695. In addition, English medium schools also include simplified versions of novels as readers for students starting from PKR 925 each, for instance, Gulliver's Travels published by the Oxford Progressive English Readers.

Being a developing country, neither the Pakistani government can afford these expensive English readers to distribute in public schools nor do the middle class parents have the affordability of purchasing educational materials other than the text books. In the prevailing scenario, newspapers may help as the cheapest alternate. Unlike English readers and novels, newspapers are more practical and commonly used authentic materials in meeting the demands of students. It mainly develops reading and writing skills and also the other skills like speaking and listening skills which may be grasped at the same time as all the language skills are integrated to each other.

With the rapid growing technology, Pakistani students are in the immense need to be equipped with new and current information and happenings not only of their surroundings but also of international level. Pakistani students have different capabilities and much potential. The students have their own liking and disliking. They may like the newspaper as it has the ability to capture the attention of students and learners. It is essential for teachers to be equipped with this different approach to learning and make their students able to work with a limited range of resources to reach their goals.

A newspaper may be a useful mode of teaching and learning which not only reports current concerns of the readers but also may serve as inspiration for the students of reading and critical thinking. There are plenty of ways of developing different activities that improve reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Newspapers may also develop reading habits by reading it regularly. The updated content in the newspapers allows teachers to come up with creative ways to teach English through activities. The major benefit of the newspaper is helping the students read English outside of the classroom and avoiding the artificial language of the classroom.

5. Conclusion

Based on the above analysis it can be inferred that using newspapers as an authentic material may be helpful for dynamic learning. Using newspapers as an authentic material may considerably be appropriate for bringing the real world into the classroom and creating a more positive and favorable attitude toward English learning. Newspaper is low cost, practical, and easily accessible authentic material that gives the students up-to-date knowledge on a wide range of topics. Newspapers may help in improving education and learning in general. A teacher may develop interests of his students through using newspapers in a variety of ways as it uses a variety of language styles that are not present in textbooks.

With the rapid growing technology, students in Pakistan must be equipped with new and current information and happenings – national and international level. The students have much potential with different capabilities. It is essential for teachers to make their students able to work with a limited range of resources to reach their goals. Undoubtedly in Pakistan education is one of the most deprived sectors. The public expenditure on education is the lowest in the region that shows education not as something of public first priority. Moreover, there is an unsatisfactory improvement from the government sector due to limited resources and low budget allocation for education.

A study on the importance of education by the Research Journal of Commerce, Economics, and Social Sciences in its comparison among Indonesia, Malaysia and Pakistan mentions many differences in resources within these three countries. As per the research study, Pakistan comparatively has the higher ratio of poverty and inequality which makes sense that Pakistan has the lower literacy rate due to this. The analysis of the educational budget demonstrates that allocation on education is the lowest among the other countries of the region. Comparison of our budget with international standards ascertains that the assigned budget of education is the lowest as of the agreed targets. This low budget results in a gap regarding the level of the Pakistani public schools with international schools.

To enhance the English competence of Pakistani students, only an English textbook will not be sufficient. The private English medium schools include English readers in their syllabus to improve the reading and writing skills of students. Our government cannot afford such expensive English story readers to distribute in government schools. Neither do the middle class parents have the affordability of purchasing educational materials other than the text books. There is a need to fill this educational gap on international and national level with the affordable alternative teaching aids so that students of public school may also avail maximum opportunities to enhance their English language learning especially in reading and writing skills.

Unlike English readers, newspapers are affordable, practical, and easily accessible that may help improve education and learning in general. In the recent scenario of Pakistan, newspapers in English language learning skills are good to be implemented for primary and secondary public schools to enhance the English learning skills especially reading and writing skills.

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