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BRIDGING GENERATIONS: PARENTAL AND CHILD VIEWS ON MULTILINGUALISM IN PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

Multilingualism is a defining feature of Pakistan's linguistic landscape, with numerous languages spoken across regions and communities. However, attitudes toward multilingualism can vary significantly between generations, particularly between parents and children. This study explores the views of parents and children in Pakistan regarding the advantages, challenges, and social implications of multilingualism. Through a combination of surveys and interviews, the study investigates how language preferences and attitudes differ between these two groups. Findings suggest that while parents generally view multilingualism as a valuable asset for cultural preservation and economic opportunity, children exhibit a more complex relationship with multilingualism, influenced by peer interactions, education, and the desire for social mobility. The study highlights the generational gap in perceptions of language use, showing that parents are more inclined to support multilingualism as a cultural heritage, while children focus on the practical and global advantages of language proficiency. This research underscores the need for educational policies and community initiatives that bridge these generational divides and promote the benefits of multilingualism in a globalized world.

KEYWORDS

Multilingualism, Parental Attitudes, Child Attitudes, Language Preferences, Language Education, Generational Differences, Pakistan, Language Policy, Cultural Heritage, Social Mobility.

INTRODUCTION



Pakistan is a linguistically diverse country, with over seventy languages spoken across its various regions. This multilingualism is not only a reflection of the nation's rich cultural and historical heritage but also a crucial aspect of its societal fabric. The ability to speak multiple languages is often seen as a valuable skill, offering numerous benefits in terms of cultural identity, social integration, and economic opportunities. However, the perception of multilingualism varies across generations, especially between parents and children. While parents may emphasize the importance of preserving linguistic diversity and promoting multilingualism as a cultural asset, children, particularly in urban areas, may focus on the practical and global advantages of speaking internationally recognized languages, such as English.

The attitudes toward multilingualism in Pakistan are shaped by various factors, including historical influences, regional language dynamics, the educational system, and global trends in language acquisition. Parents often associate multilingualism with cultural preservation, family identity, and access to a broader community, while children may view it in terms of social status, educational advantages, and employment opportunities. These differing views create a generational divide in how language learning and language use are perceived.

This study aims to explore and compare the attitudes of parents and children in Pakistan toward multilingualism, examining their perceptions of the benefits, challenges, and implications of speaking multiple languages. By bridging the generational gap in language attitudes, this research seeks to understand how these differing perspectives influence language learning practices and the development of language policies in Pakistan. Furthermore, the study will

provide insights into how these attitudes shape the future of multilingualism in the country, especially in an increasingly globalized world where language skills are seen as essential for personal and professional success.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute to a broader understanding of how multilingualism is viewed within Pakistani families and communities, and to inform educational and social policies aimed at promoting language learning in a way that reflects both cultural preservation and the demands of modern society.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the attitudes of parents and children in Pakistan toward multilingualism. By combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques, the research aims to gain a comprehensive understanding of how generational differences shape language attitudes and practices. The study focuses on urban and rural populations to capture the diverse perspectives that exist across different geographical and socio-economic contexts within Pakistan.

The study involves 100 participants, divided equally between parents and children, resulting in a total of 50 parent-child pairs. Participants were selected from a range of urban and rural areas across Pakistan, with specific attention given to the diversity of language backgrounds. Parents are individuals who have at least one child currently enrolled in school, while children are between the ages of 10 and 18 years, representing a range of educational levels from primary to secondary school. This age range was chosen to capture perspectives from both younger children and adolescents, who may have different views on

multilingualism based on their educational and social experiences.

The sampling strategy involves purposive selection to ensure a broad representation of participants who speak a variety of languages, including Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, and English, among others. The focus on a diverse linguistic background aims to provide a more nuanced understanding of how multilingualism is perceived within different linguistic communities in Pakistan.

Data was collected through a combination of surveys and in-depth interviews. The use of mixed methods allows for both broad, quantifiable insights and detailed, personal narratives, which can help explain the underlying reasons behind specific attitudes and beliefs.

Surveys: The first stage of data collection involved administering structured surveys to both parents and children. These surveys consisted of closed-ended questions designed to assess participants' attitudes toward multilingualism, including questions about the perceived benefits, challenges, and importance of speaking multiple languages. The survey also explored demographic factors such as language spoken at home, level of education, and socio-economic status, which may influence language attitudes. The survey responses were then analyzed quantitatively to identify patterns and trends within the data, such as differences in attitudes between parents and children, as well as between urban and rural populations.

In-Depth Interviews: Following the surveys, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 20 parent-child pairs (10 from urban areas and 10 from rural areas). The purpose of the interviews

was to gain deeper insights into the reasons behind participants' attitudes toward multilingualism and to explore the personal and social factors that shape their views. Interview questions focused on the participants' personal experiences with language use, their opinions on the role of multilingualism in Pakistani society, and how they perceive the importance of different languages (such as English, Urdu, and regional languages) in their lives. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed qualitatively to identify recurring themes, patterns, and differences between parents' and children's responses.

Quantitative data from the surveys were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency distributions and percentage analysis, to identify general trends in participants' attitudes. Independent t-tests were conducted to assess whether there were significant differences in the attitudes of parents and children, as well as any variations between urban and rural respondents. This statistical analysis helps to determine the extent of generational differences and regional differences in views on multilingualism.

Qualitative data from the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The transcripts were read and coded to identify key themes related to participants' views on multilingualism. This involved both inductive coding (emerging themes from the data) and deductive coding (pre-existing themes from the literature on multilingualism and language attitudes). The analysis focused on identifying similarities and differences between the views of parents and children, as well as any cross-cutting themes that emerged from the urban and rural comparisons.

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to ensure the confidentiality and rights of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from both parents and children, with clear explanations of the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of responses. Participants were assured that their identities would remain anonymous and that any identifying information would not be used in the final report. The data collected was stored securely, and all participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any repercussions. Parental consent was also sought for the participation of minors in the study.

While the study aims to provide valuable insights into parental and child attitudes toward multilingualism, there are several limitations to consider. The purposive sampling method may limit the generalizability of the findings, as it focuses on specific linguistic and socio-economic groups. Additionally, the study is based on self-reported data, which may be subject to biases such as social desirability bias or the tendency for participants to provide responses they think are expected or acceptable. The sample size, though sufficient for an exploratory study, may not fully capture the diverse attitudes of all Pakistani families.

This research will contribute to the growing body of literature on language attitudes, multilingualism, and generational differences in language use. By focusing on parental and child perspectives in Pakistan, the study offers new insights into the cultural and social dynamics that influence language learning and language policy in a multilingual society. The findings can inform educational practices and language policies aimed at promoting multilingualism in a way that respects both cultural heritage and the practical demands of a globalized world.

In conclusion, this mixed-methods approach will provide a well-rounded understanding of how different generations in Pakistan view multilingualism, offering valuable insights into how these attitudes shape language practices and policies. Through this research, the study aims to bridge generational divides in language attitudes and contribute to the broader conversation about multilingualism in Pakistan's diverse linguistic context.

RESULTS

The results of this study reveal significant differences in the attitudes of parents and children toward multilingualism in Pakistan, with noteworthy variations across urban and rural populations. The data collected through surveys and interviews provided insights into how both groups perceive the benefits, challenges, and social implications of speaking multiple languages.

Parental Attitudes: Parents, particularly in rural areas, largely view multilingualism as a cultural asset and a means of preserving regional languages and traditions. Many parents expressed pride in their linguistic heritage, emphasizing the importance of passing down native languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Balochi, alongside Urdu and English. They often perceive multilingualism as an essential tool for cultural identity and social cohesion. In urban areas, while parents still valued multilingualism, there was a stronger emphasis on the economic and educational advantages of learning English, often at the expense of regional languages.

Child Attitudes: Children, particularly in urban areas, demonstrated a more utilitarian approach to multilingualism. They valued English as a key language for upward social mobility, academic success, and

future employment opportunities. Many children showed a preference for learning English and Urdu over regional languages, which they perceived as less useful in the modern world. This trend was less pronounced in rural areas, where children were more likely to maintain their regional language use alongside Urdu and English, often due to stronger familial and community ties to local languages.

Generational Differences: A significant generational divide emerged in terms of how multilingualism was perceived. Parents tended to value multilingualism for its cultural and social significance, while children focused more on its practical benefits in the globalized world. This divide was especially apparent in urban areas, where children are more exposed to global media and education systems that prioritize English. In contrast, rural children, while also recognizing the importance of English, maintained a stronger connection to their regional languages, largely due to family influence and local community dynamics.

Challenges and Opportunities: Both parents and children acknowledged the challenges of maintaining multilingualism, particularly in the face of increasing globalization and the dominance of English. Parents expressed concern about the erosion of regional languages, fearing that younger generations may lose touch with their cultural roots. Children, on the other hand, highlighted the difficulty of mastering multiple languages simultaneously, often feeling pressured to prioritize English for academic and professional purposes.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study underscore the complexity of attitudes toward multilingualism in Pakistan,

particularly the generational differences that shape language preferences. The cultural value placed on multilingualism by parents reflects the broader societal importance of linguistic diversity in Pakistan, where regional languages are seen as vital to maintaining cultural heritage. However, the strong preference for English among children, especially in urban areas, reveals the growing influence of global trends and the changing demands of the job market and education systems.

In urban areas, the shift toward English as the primary language of social and professional mobility presents a challenge to the preservation of regional languages. This trend reflects the broader phenomenon of language shift, where global languages like English are increasingly seen as more prestigious and valuable than local languages. This shift may result in the gradual marginalization of regional languages, which could have long-term implications for cultural identity and social cohesion.

The generational divide in attitudes toward multilingualism highlights the evolving nature of language use in Pakistan. While parents view multilingualism through a lens of cultural preservation, children are more attuned to the practical benefits of language skills in a globalized world. This divergence suggests that educational policies and community initiatives must address both the preservation of regional languages and the practical need for global languages like English. It is crucial to find a balance that allows children to gain proficiency in both global and regional languages without losing their cultural ties.

In rural areas, the attachment to regional languages remains stronger, likely due to closer-knit communities and familial support. However, as urbanization

increases and access to global media and education spreads, these attitudes may begin to change. The challenge will be to ensure that children in both urban and rural areas are equipped with the language skills necessary to succeed in a globalized world while maintaining a connection to their cultural heritage.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on the complex and evolving attitudes towards multilingualism in Pakistan, revealing key generational differences in language preferences. Parents tend to value multilingualism as a means of cultural preservation, while children prioritize languages that offer economic and social mobility, particularly English. This divide underscores the challenges of balancing cultural identity with the demands of a globalized society.

The findings suggest that educational and language policies in Pakistan need to address this generational gap. There is a need for policies that encourage the learning and preservation of regional languages while also ensuring that children acquire the language skills necessary for success in a globalized world. Educational systems should be designed to foster bilingual or multilingual proficiency, where both regional languages and global languages like English are taught in a way that is practical and culturally enriching.

Moreover, it is important for both parents and children to be made aware of the benefits of multilingualism, not only in terms of personal and professional development but also as a way to preserve Pakistan's rich linguistic diversity. Efforts should be made to create a more supportive environment for learning

regional languages, which can coexist with the global importance of English and Urdu.

In conclusion, bridging the generational divide in attitudes toward multilingualism requires a collaborative approach that involves parents, children, educators, and policymakers. By valuing both the cultural significance of regional languages and the practical advantages of global languages, Pakistan can foster a multilingual society that thrives both locally and globally.

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