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**Instructional Challenges: English as Medium of Instruction in Primary Schools of District Lower Dir**

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**Abstract**

English is a source of communication across the globe and serves as a communicative base in education. The current study is aimed at identifying the challenges and issues faced by teachers and students towards English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at the primary school level in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. This quantitative study is carried out with a sample of 308 primary school teachers through simple random sampling by using Krejcie and Morgan (1970) sampling formula. The collection of data is made through a close-ended questionnaire and analyzed through descriptive statistics and Chi-square. Findings revealed that disturbance in classrooms, lack of proper syllabus, lack of alignment with native languages, lack of professional development of teachers in EMI and lack of interest of students are the challenges faced by teachers while teaching with EMI. The findings also revealed that limited exposure of students towards English and lack of opportunities for practicing English. Recommendations include the provision of informal opportunities to students in the form of open competitions and free dialogue along with provision of multimedia and other gadgets to primary schools for practicing English.

**Keywords:** English as Medium of Instruction, EMI, Challenges with EMI, Primary Schools,

**Introduction**

Medium of instruction plays a vital role in student's academic achievement (Wolff, 2006). Defining EMI (English as a Medium of Instruction) is a difficult undertaking. A recent report published jointly by EMI Oxford and British Council, identifies EMI as a rapidly expanding global phenomenon. The report says that English is increasingly being used today as medium of instruction instead of being taught as a foreign language in education (Dearden, 2014). Many countries around the world have adopted English as a medium of instruction. For example, Belgium, Japan, Swaziland, Australia, Ireland, United States of America and Croatia (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2004; Nakamura, 2005). The medium of instruction at the school level has been an issue of considerable debate in Pakistan. A school of thought that exists in Pakistan argue that whatever the child's first language is; English should be the medium of instruction. This view has resulted in the English for All policy, which has resulted in a recent policy shift aiming at all public sector schools to start teaching English from class I. This, however, has not been done after a requisite feasibility of this policy decision (Government of Pakistan, 2009). English medium education is widely assumed synonymous with high quality education. This often leads parents to prefer English medium education for their children. The result has been a proliferation of private so-called English medium schools even in the remote areas of Pakistan. In Pakistan, English language learning is also a popular demand because this language is instrumental in

providing extensive job prospects. The provincial government of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan developed a plan to switch to the policy of making English as medium of instruction at primary level (Bari, 2014). A comprehensive program was started that ranged from writing of the textbooks to teacher training. As part of the initiative induction of 14000 teachers and 360 master trainers to train the 23000 teachers made. The general public, particularly the parents welcomed this decision (Buneri, 2014). The decision to start teaching English from the early school years is often taken by all elected governments as a political gesture rather than as an expression of their political will to provide opportunities for gaining widespread literacy in English (Shamim, 2008).

There are more than 7,000 known living languages and most children grow up in an environment where more than one is spoken (Wisbey, 2017). However, studies show that almost 40 per cent of children do not have access to an education in a language they understand and this is negatively affecting their learning (UNESCO, 2016). Many countries still prioritize national or official languages (second language) as the medium of instruction, which are often not the languages children, speak at home (Kosonen, 2017). The importance of language of instruction for a quality and equitable education is recognized in the Sustainable Development Goals. Thematic indicator 4.5.2 reports on the percentage of students in primary education whose first or home language is the language of instruction (UIS, 2018). Children learn best when the first language of instruction is their mother tongue (Benson, 2004). Results of learning assessments show that when home and school languages differ there is a negative impact on test scores. (UNESCO, 2016).

Therefore, the need for this study was felt to identify the challenges and problems experience by learner and instructor while using English language as source of instructions in primary schools of Dir Lower.

### **Objective of the study**

1. Investigate the problems that teachers face because of English as the medium of instruction in Dir Lower Primary School.
2. Identify the problems that students face as a result of learning English as a medium of instruction in Dir Lower Primary School.
3. To Suggest specific solutions to problems facing teachers and students at Dir Lower Primary School.

### **Research Questions**

RQ-1 what are the challenges faces by teacher when giving instructions in English language at Primary schools?

RQ-2 what are the educational difficulties students face while learning English as medium of instructions?

RQ-3 what appropriate strategies should teachers adopt in order to guide learners effectively and overcome the challenges that learners face while learning in English medium?

### **Research Hypotheses**

Ho-1: There are no problems that teachers face because of English as the medium of instruction in Dir Lower Primary School.

Ho-2: There are no problems that students face as a result of learning English as a medium of instruction in Dir Lower Primary School.

### **Research Methodology**

Quantitative approach was employed for the collection of data in current study. The population of the current study comprised the teachers of government primary school for boys in district Dir Lower. Multi stage cluster sampling technique was applied and then simple random techniques were utilized. Krejcie and Morgan (1970) were used for selection of sample from the selected schools. A total 308 teachers out of 1500 were randomly selected for data collection. Chis-square and percentage was used for the analyses of the collected

data.

### Data Analysis

Table 1 presented data for the problem faced by teachers as EMI and is analyzed in the following manner:

**Table 1 Problem Face by Teachers as EMI**

S. No	Statement	Observe Frequency X2					p-value	
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA		
1	The disturbing environment Of classroom distracts and affects the teaching of English language	9 (2%)	16 (4%)	21 (6%)	140 (37%)	194 (51%)	383.3	0.000
2	The lack of essential resources affects the learning of English language.	8 (2%)	10 (3%)	7 (2%)	140 (37%)	215 (54%)	488.9	0.000
3	It appears very difficult for The teachers to teach in English without essential resources.	6 (2%)	6 (2%)	7 (2%)	130 (34%)	231 (61%)	546	0.000
4	The resources make the class room environment Attractive and efficient for the learner and help them in erudition English language.	7 (2%)	8 (2%)	19 (5%)	137 (36%)	209 (55%)	447.9	0.000
5	Overcrowded classroom Creates difficulties and stress for the teachers while teaching English.	6 (2%)	7 (2%)	6 (2%)	139 (37%)	222 (58%)	524.3	0.000
6	Inappropriate syllabus at Primary level leads to difficulties in teaching in English language.	243 (64%)	114 (30%)	7 (2%)	7 (2%)	9 (2%)	507.3	0.000
7	Teaching of improper Syllabuses by teachers makes negative impressions on students which cause difficulties in learning English language.	7 (2%)	7 (2%)	26 (7%)	117 (31%)	223 (59%)	464.6	0.000
8	The influence of native language is another hurdle for teachers in teaching English language.	243 (64%)	114 (30%)	7 (2%)	7 (2%)	9 (2%)	507.3	0.000

9	The lack of interest of students in learning English language is a problem for teachers.	215 (57%)	146 (30%)	7 (2%)	7 (2%)	5 (1%)	510.3	0.000
10	Different family background of students is problem for teachers.	243 (64%)	114 (30%)	7 (2%)	7 (2%)	9 (2%)	507.3	0.000

The Table 1 reflects the attitude and perception of primary school teachers towards problem experience by teachers utilizing English as a medium of instruction. Maximum of the participants fully agreed statement and the overall results were significant ( $\chi^2=383.3$ ,  $p=0.000$ ). High level respondents disagree with the statement -the disturbing environment of classroom distracts and affects the teaching of English language (D=37%, SD=51%). Furthermore results of statements highlighted that maximum level of respondents strongly disagree (D=37%, SD=57%) with the statement 2 -The lack of essential resources affects the learning of English language. The response of respondents was significant ( $\chi^2=488.9$ ,  $p=0.05$ ). The response of participants towards statement no.3 reflected that maximum respondents strongly disagree (SD=61%) with the declaration that adequate professional development chances are provided to the teaching staff to enhance their learning capabilities in the regards of English as a medium of instruction. The statement no 4, that written guideline stay alive specifying how to teach English as a medium of instruction. The response of the respondents was in strongly disagree (SD=55%) and the answer was significant ( $\chi^2=447.9$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ).

Furthermore the response of participants towards Overcrowded classroom generate difficulties and stress for the teachers while teaching English high number of respondents strongly disagreed (SD=58%) and frequency of responses was significant ( $\chi^2 =524.3$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ). Furthermore -Inappropriate syllabus at primary level leads to difficulties in teaching in English language majority of the respondents strongly agreed (SA=64%) ( $\chi^2 =570.3$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ). The results of statements no.7 -Teaching of improper syllabuses by teachers makes negative impressions on students which cause difficulties in learning English language high level of the respondents strongly disagreed (SD=59%) and participants answer was significant ( $\chi^2 =464.6$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ). Statement no.8 analysis reflects that majority respondents strongly agree (SA=64%) with the statement -The influence of native language is another hurdle for teachers in teaching English language. The participants response towards the declaration were significant ( $\chi^2 =570.3$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ).

The participants response towards assertion no 9 -The lack of interest of students in learning English language is a problem for teachers were in the favor of strongly agree (SA=578%) and their response was significant ( $\chi^2 =510.3$  and  $p< 0.05$ ). In last declaration 10 -Different family background of students is problem for teachers a huge number of respondents strongly agreed (SA=64%) and the answer was found significant ( $\chi^2 =570.3$ ,  $p< 0.05$ ).

The following table 2 presented data regarding problems faced by students in EMI and is analyzed in the following manner:

**Table 4.2 Problem Face by Students EMI**

SN	Statements	Observations					X <sup>2</sup>	P-Value
		SA	A	N	DA	SDA		
1	It is very easy for students to speak in their native language or other languages which they can speak easily instead of English language.	162 (42%)	146 (38%)	21 (6%)	9 (2%)	42 (11%)	539.9	0.000
2	It's very difficult for the students to learn and speak English language fluently because English language is not the native language of most of the students.	128 (3%)	230 (6%)	6 (2%)	10 (3%)	6 (2%)	533.9	0.000
3	It is difficult for students to learn English because of the limited learning environment available to them e.g. the students can't always listen to people speaking proper English around them.	148 (3%)	207 (55%)	9 (2%)	9 (2%)	7 (2%)	474.8	0.000
4	Those students who are learning English language mostly belong to the rural areas where mostly they speak their native languages.	6 (2%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	131 (35%)	233 (61%)	561.3	0.000
5	Strong Students Dominate the Class and majority of the students who are weak in the study have no or less opportunity to learn English.	154 (40%)	208 (55%)	7 (2%)	6 (2%)	5 (1%)	502.8	0.000
6	Learning of English grammar rules is a difficult task for students at primary level.	7 (2%)	5 (1%)	5 (1%)	128 (13%)	235 (62%)	563.5	0.000
7	The unqualified teacher who teaches the English language is the biggest problem that students face in learning the English language	148 (39%)	209 (55%)	7 (2%)	9 (2%)	7 (2%)	485.3	0.000
8	Parents don't support or encourage their children to learn English language	5 (1%)	16 (4%)	6 (2%)	135 (36%)	218 (57%)	489.3	0.000

9	The lack of English speaking environment at homes is a problem in learning English language.	215 (57%)	135 (36%)	7 (2%)	16 (4%)	7 (2%)	472.7	0.000
10	There are no opportunities for children to practice newly-learned skills beyond the few periods in their classrooms.	226 (60%)	137 (36%)	6 (2%)	6 (2%)	5 (1%)	540.3	0.000

The aforementioned Table 4.2 highlighted the perception of teachers towards difficulties experienced by learner utilizing English as a medium of instruction at primary schools in dir lower. In this regards the perception of respondents towards statement no .1 were significant ( $\chi^2 = 539.2$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). Greater part of respondents strongly agreed (SA=%59). With the statement –For the students, it’s very easy to speak their native language or other languages which they can speak easily instead of English language.

Another declaration No. 2 confirm that greater part of the respondents strongly agreed(A=61%, SA=34%) with second statement|| it is challenging for the leaner to speak fluently in English language due to less opportunity for the students to speak in English and the respondents answer towards the statement was considerable ( $\chi^2 = 533.9$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). From declaration No.3 it has been concluded that huge number of the participants agreed with declaration|| It is difficult for students to learn English because of the limited learning environment available to them e.g. the students can’t always listen to people speaking proper English around them. The response of the participants were in Agree (55 %,), Strongly Agree (39%). The overall results was found Significant ( $\chi^2=474.8$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

Furthermore another declaration4, results shown maximum respondents strappingly disagreed(SD=61%) with the declaration that those entire learner who learning English language mostly belong to the rural areas where mostly they speak their native languages|| and thisreply of respondents was noteworthy ( $\chi^2 = 561.3$  and  $p < 0.05$ ).

Additional more statements No.5 highlighted majority of respondents are strongly agreed with the statement –Strong Students Dominate the Class and majority of the students who are weak in the study have no or less opportunity to learn English|| (SA=55%) and the reply of the participant were considerable ( $\chi^2 = 502.8$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The results of statement No.6 reflects that maximum number respondents fully disagree with this sentence i.e. –Learning of English grammar rules is a difficult task for students at primary level|| Disagree (34%, Strongly Disagree (62%) and over results of reply was found Significant ( $\chi^2=563.5$ ,  $p=0.000$ ).

The question no.7 result disclosed that maximum of respondents strongly agreed with the statement –The unqualified teacher who teaches the English language is the biggest problem that students face in learning the English language|| (SA=55%,) and reply of the participants were outstanding ( $\chi^2 = 485.3$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ).

Furthermore, the examination results of declaration No.8 strongly disagreed (SD=57%) with question –parents don’t support or encourage their children to learn English language and the participants reply found noteworthy ( $\chi^2=489.3$ , $p=0.000$ ). The result declaration No.9 highlighted that a large number respondents strongly agreed (SA=57%) that the lack of English speaking environment at homes is a problem in learning English language \_and the reply of the participants were remarkable ( $\chi^2=472.7$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The last question No.10 results disclose maximum of the respondents strongly agreed (SA=60%) with statement –There are no opportunities for children to practice newly-learned skills beyond the few periods in their classrooms and found the response of the participants remarkable ( $\chi^2 = 540.3$ , $p < 0.05$ ).

## Findings

The results indicate that teachers face multiple systemic and instructional challenges while implementing

EMI. A large proportion of respondents strongly agreed that an inappropriate syllabus at the primary level creates serious difficulties in teaching through English. Similarly, the influence of students' native language and diverse family backgrounds were identified as major hurdles for teachers. Teachers also strongly agreed that students' lack of interest in learning English adversely affects classroom instruction. Furthermore, overcrowded classrooms were perceived as a significant source of stress and difficulty for teachers. On the other hand, a majority of respondents strongly disagreed with statements suggesting that classroom environment and lack of resources do not affect English teaching, implying that teachers view these factors as critical challenges. Overall, the findings demonstrate that curriculum mismatch, linguistic barriers, classroom conditions, and learner diversity substantially hinder effective EMI implementation.

The findings related to students' difficulties further reinforce teachers' concerns about EMI. Most respondents strongly agreed that students find it easier to communicate in their native language rather than English, highlighting the dominance of the mother tongue. Teachers also agreed that students struggle to learn and speak English fluently due to limited exposure and lack of an English-speaking environment both in schools and at home. The absence of opportunities to practice English beyond classroom periods was identified as a major obstacle to language development. Additionally, the dominance of strong students in classrooms was perceived to limit learning opportunities for weaker students. Teachers strongly agreed that unqualified English teachers constitute a major problem for students' learning. However, many respondents strongly disagreed with the notion that parents do not support their children, suggesting that lack of support is less of a concern compared to environmental and instructional factors.

## **Discussion**

The findings of the study reveal that the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at the primary level poses significant challenges for both teachers and students, which is consistent with earlier research in similar contexts. The strong agreement of teachers regarding the negative impact of an inappropriate syllabus, overcrowded classrooms, and the dominance of students' native language suggests a clear mismatch between policy intentions and classroom realities, a concern also highlighted by UNESCO (2016), which emphasizes the importance of mother-tongue-based instruction in early grades. The results further align with Cummins' (2000) theory of linguistic interdependence, which argues that insufficient proficiency in the first language can hinder second-language acquisition. Teachers' perceptions that students lack interest, exposure, and opportunities to practice English outside the classroom corroborate previous studies conducted in Pakistan, which report that limited English-speaking environments at home and school significantly restrict language development (Rahman, 2014). Moreover, the identification of untrained or unqualified English teachers as a major barrier supports the findings of Coleman (2010), who stresses that successful EMI implementation depends heavily on teacher preparedness and pedagogical competence. Overall, the discussion suggests that EMI at the primary level, when introduced without adequate resources, teacher training, and contextualized curriculum support, may impede rather than enhance students' learning outcomes, reinforcing the need for a gradual, bilingual, and context-sensitive approach to language-in-education policy.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that the implementation of English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) at the primary school level in District Lower Dir presents substantial challenges for both teachers and students. The findings clearly indicate that factors such as an inappropriate and linguistically demanding syllabus, the strong influence of students' mother tongue, overcrowded classrooms, limited instructional resources, and inadequate opportunities for English language practice significantly hinder effective teaching and learning. Teachers also perceive students' low interest, diverse family backgrounds, and lack of qualified English

teachers as major obstacles to successful EMI. Collectively, these issues suggest that the current EMI policy is not well aligned with the cognitive, linguistic, and contextual realities of primary-level learners. Therefore, the study emphasizes that without adequate teacher training, curriculum reform, and supportive learning environments, the effectiveness of EMI at the primary level remains questionable. A more gradual, bilingual, and context-sensitive approach is essential to ensure meaningful learning and improved educational outcomes.

### Recommendations

1. The primary-level English syllabus may be reviewed and redesigned to match students' cognitive and linguistic levels, ensuring gradual progression from basic to advanced language skills.
2. A structured bilingual approach may be adopted at the primary level, allowing the use of the mother tongue alongside English to support comprehension and conceptual understanding.
3. Regular in-service training programs may be organized to equip teachers with effective EMI pedagogical strategies and improve their English language proficiency.

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