What are the rights implications of postcolonial Punjab’s English-medium policy for learners in government schools in Pakistan?

By Nicholas Shaw

This paper explores the rights implications of English-medium instruction for learners in Punjab’s government schools in Pakistan, drawing on the experience of the author and the theories of rights in development and postcolonialism. It addresses the objectives of this conference closely, through discussion of a recent MLE policy intervention in an Asia-Pacific country, its challenges, and the lessons learnt.

The introduction summarizes the position of English in colonial and postcolonial Pakistan and the current “rights talk” around the English-medium policy in Punjab. Next, the analysis defines the term “medium of instruction”, briefly narrates the history of medium of instruction policy in Pakistan, and then describes its introduction in Punjab with reference to its rationale, implementation, and challenges. Afterwards, the paper applies each of the theories – postcolonialism and rights in development – to Punjab’s medium of instruction policy, first defining the theory, then exploring its relevance to the issue and context, before discussing its limitations. In the conclusion, the author offers his response to the research question and reflects on the implications for him as a practitioner working in education development.

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