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

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Introduction

• There is an important difference between language as a *medium* and *subject* of instruction
• English has retained its colonial position as a language of status and power
• Language and identity are complex issues in Pakistan
• The move towards English as a medium of instruction (EMI) is relatively recent
Postcolonial theory

- Problematises the European Enlightenment
- The unequal relationship between the colonisers and colonised is maintained
- Local identities and epistemologies are disparaged and suppressed
- Postcolonialism insidiously reinforces itself
- The colonised cannot ‘represent’ themselves (Spivak, 2006)
Postcolonial theory

Postcolonialism seeks to expand awareness of our own and alternative knowledge systems:

...through the ethical imperative to work with the other, upholding the principles of mutuality, reciprocity, and equality (which means keeping one’s own learned epistemic arrogance in check...) (Andreotti, 2011: 6)
Applying postcolonial theory

• “Linguistic…” and “educational apartheid” (Shamim and Rahman in Coleman and Capstick, 2012: 16)
• Stakeholders reproduce the perceived importance of an English education
• Public school teachers and students struggle to represent themselves in English
• But postcolonialism alone may not explain all the challenges…
• ...and is predominantly a critical theory
Human rights theory

• Concerns the expression, recognition and protection of basic human needs
• Rights are rights in themselves, plural, universal, of high priority, inalienable, indivisible and interdependent
• There are rights to, in and through education
• Tomasevski’s (2001: 13) “4-A scheme” requires education to be “available, accessible, acceptable and adaptable”
Human rights theory

Rights-based approaches ‘operationalize’ the concept of human rights by integrating...

... the norms, standards and principles of international human rights into the entire process of development programming ... (UNICEF/UNESCO, 2007: 10)
Applying human rights theory

- Some perceive English as an economic right and a means of reducing social inequality
- Others claim EMI compromises children’s rights to, in and through education
- But the invocation of human rights to support opposing positions may be confusing...
- ...and their definitive principles have been criticised
Conclusion

• Punjab’s EMI policy challenges children’s rights and identities
• There are competing political agendas and a lack of concern with indigenous languages
• More research needs to be conducted on the role of languages in education
• The education system needs to engage more sensitively with mother tongues and introduce second languages more supportively
Reflection and updates

- A much developed appreciation of the challenges facing children in multilingual, low-income countries with colonial legacies
- These concerns also affect children in low cost private schools
- Recent research conducted by the Government of Punjab recommends reviewing the English medium policy further
References

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