

Position of English in the Education System of Jammu and Kashmir

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Abstract: The state of Jammu and Kashmir, like many other states of India, is geographically varied and linguistically very rich. Geographically the state is divided into three regions: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. All the three regions are linguistically rich adding to the overall linguistic richness of the state. The main languages of the state are Kashmiri--dominant in Kashmir region, Dogri--dominant in the Jammu region, and Ladakhi- dominant in the Ladakh region. Besides these dominant languages there are many other minority languages in the state which include Gojri, Pahari, Kohistani, Pashtu, Hindko, Burushaski, Siram, Pogli etc. making the state of Jammu and Kashmir a multilingual state in true sense. In addition to these indigenous languages there are some foreign languages like Persian, English and Arabic that add up to the multilingual structure of the state. In the academic institutions of the state, it is the non indigenous languages that have secured better position than the indigenous languages of the state. The current paper is an attempt to localize the English language in the overall education system of Jammu and Kashmir. The paper will highlight how English has overtaken all the domains of life like media, administration and legal domain with special focus on the position of English in the education system of the state.

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Introduction

The relationship between language and education is very intimate and no educational process can be thought of without language. The planning of languages in multilingual societies is not an easy task because of being of interest to different stakeholders like administrators, academicians, and above all, to the people. Jammu and Kashmir, like many other states of India, is a multilingual society. Therefore language planning, particularly in the field of education, has always been a complicated matter in the state because of its multilingual structure. The education system of the state follows the national system of education spanning across three levels: Primary Education, Secondary Education, and Higher Education. Because of its multilingual structure the issues like 'medium of instruction' and 'subjects of study' with respect to languages have always been there. The present paper is an attempt to locate the teaching/learning of the English language at different levels of the education system in the state of Jammu and Kashmir.

About the English language

Since the State of Jammu and Kashmir became a part of India in 1947, the educational system in the State adopted essentially the same pattern as that in the Country as a whole. Immediately after India achieved its independence in 1947, the Country faced a major problem, viz., whether English should be retained as a subject in schools and colleges, and whether it should continue as the medium of instruction. This

controversy, however, did not affect the State of Jammu and Kashmir since Urdu had been retained as the official language of the State right from 1947. Several commissions were set up from time to time to bring reforms in the educational system of the State. The first commission of its kind was the Education Reorganization Committee of 1950, also known as Kazemi Committee. The committee recommended that:

- a) Mother-tongue should be the medium of instruction at the primary stage.
- b) Regional language should be the medium of instruction at the secondary stage.
- c) English should be the medium of instruction at the university stage, with the federal language as one of the compulsory subjects.

Several other committees were appointed from time to time to review the language scenario in the education system of the state. Barring a few, the reports of most of the committee speak nothing about retaining or curtailing of English as a subject or as a medium of instruction at any level of education in our valley. Over the years, English has established itself as the most prestigious language in the state of Jammu and Kashmir playing the most significant role in almost all the domains of life.

About the Education System of Jammu and Kashmir

The education system of the valley follows the national system of education which consists of the

primary, secondary and the higher education levels. The primary and the secondary education is imparted in the schools and Higher Secondary Schools of the valley. The evaluation is done internally by the local and zonal administrations except the VIII, X, and XII standards for which the JKBOSE (the regional board) examines and evaluates the students. The other institutions where education is imparted up to the secondary level include the institutions affiliated to the CBSE. Most of the schools recognized by the JKBOSE are private schools where the English language is well placed. The three language formula which places the regional language in good position at the primary level is seen unimplemented in these private schools. Similarly, English language is almost absolute in the institutions affiliated to CBSE. As such the English language has overtaken the whole of the primary and secondary education system and is hence well placed in it. The University of Kashmir and its affiliated colleges, along with all the universities of the valley constitute the higher education system of the valley. The colleges are mostly public funded with a small percentage of professional colleges being private.

Locating English in the education system of Jammu and Kashmir

Language and education are intimately related; the first relationship between language and education can be established by considering the role of language in education. The relationship between education and language is bilateral; Education is imparted through language and language is developed through education. Every society has an education system of its own and most of the world societies are multilingual in their set up. It is therefore a challenging task to plan the language usage in the education system of a multilingual society. All the languages of a multilingual region don't get equal opportunities of development. This inequality results in the hierarchy of the status of languages. Languages used in the education system are considered as more prestigious than the languages which are not used in the education system. The hierarchy brings along it the issues like language rights, language empowerment, language promotion, language policy, language shift, language attitudes and language planning.

Language has primarily two roles in education. It is studied as a subject, and is used as medium of instruction. The choice of language as a subject of study and also the choice of language as a medium of instruction has a direct influence on the language in education policy of the country and is determined by various socioeconomic and political factors. The choice of language in education is also related to language empowerment and the values of status and prestige. In the present case, that is, the position of

English in the education system of Jammu and Kashmir, the English language can be localized by looking at it with respect to its status as a 'medium of instruction' and 'subject of study' at different levels of the education system.

1. English as the Subject of Study

English, even though, a non-native language to the state of Jammu and Kashmir, is taught as a subject of study at all the levels: primary, secondary and higher education levels. It is taught as a compulsory subject at these levels except at the post graduate level.

1.1. English as a subject of study at the levels primary and secondary education

English is taught as a compulsory subject at the primary and secondary levels of education. English as a subject of is taught from the perspective of the development of language among the students. The courses prescribed are meant for enlightening the students about the language and its grammar to develop the communicative competence among the students both in the spoken and the written form. Perhaps the most obvious classroom practice for English as a subject of study' is the study of grammar and spelling. The 'English as a subject of study' includes learning of the sound system, word formation, history and other such aspects of that language. The courses in the initial grades focus on the development of the vocabulary among the learners so that they can communicate in the target language in the later stages of the development.

1.2. English as a subject of study in the Undergraduate and post-graduate Curriculum (Higher Education)

Jammu and Kashmir has a well spread education system. There are 7 state universities and 2 central universities in the state. There is one autonomous college i.e; National Institute of Technology, Srinagar. In addition to the universities, there is a large number of colleges, both government-run and private, operating in the state. The colleges are mostly affiliated to the Universities of Jammu and Kashmir. The higher education system is wide spread consisting of almost seventy five government-run institutions and 270 private institutions.

At the undergraduate level English is taught as a compulsory subject for three years and for each year different textbooks are prescribed by the Board of Studies for Undergraduate Courses, University of Kashmir. The textbooks are supposed to serve the purpose of background material in English language teaching-learning. In addition, there is provision for teaching English literature as an optional subject for three years at the undergraduate level to those students who aspire for higher studies in the subject. The

literature course is mainly literary' in character and emphasizes the development of higher order skills.

At the post-graduate level, English is offered as an optional subject of study with focus being on the literature in this language. Simultaneously, the university offers courses that focus on studying the structure and usage of the English language.

2. English as the medium of instruction

Even though the Three Language Formula gives a due place to a regional language as the medium of instruction in at least primary schools, the Kashmiri language is nowhere visible as a medium of instruction at any of the levels from primary to the higher. The reasons for this include the structure of the education system which at the primary level is dominated by the private institutions where the medium of instruction is either Urdu or English. At the higher education level the teaching almost exclusively takes place through the medium of English language except the teaching of the other languages, like, Urdu, Persian, etc. as subjects of study. This places English in a very prestigious position in the Jammu and Kashmir state. Although the official language of the state is Urdu, yet English has established itself as the most dominant language in the domains like media, administration, law and education. As mentioned earlier, the English language is most dominant in the domain of education where it is taught as a subject of study right from the primary to the higher education levels and also functions as the medium of instruction at all these levels.

Conclusion:

With respect to its status as a subject of study and medium of instruction, English is very well placed in the education system of Jammu and Kashmir. English is taught as a compulsory subject of study from

primary to the higher levels with the exception of the post-graduate level where it is offered as an optional subject. More importantly, it is the medium of instruction officially at the secondary and the higher education levels and unofficially at the primary level where according to the Three Language Formula the mother tongue should serve as the medium of instruction. Furthermore, English continues to be the language of the government, public administration, the legislature and law courts. It is the language of commerce and largely of business.

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