

PROBLEMS FACED BY “PAKISTANI LIVING ABROAD MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS” IN LEARNING THEIR OWN MOTHER LANGUAGE I.E. URDU LANGUAGEAmmara Afzal*¹, Fatima Toor²

Original Article

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Abstract

This study aimed to address the problems that occur in the path of Pakistani living abroad multilingual students in learning their own native language; Urdu. This study was intended to bring forth the corresponding factors that influence this lack of competency among them and will tend to supplicate the resources and recommendations which could be adopted to alleviate this declining condition pertaining to the language acquisition among them. Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been employed. A questionnaire survey was performed to collect information from young children and the interviews of both the parents and their kids were conducted online to gather the data. The data has been represented in forms of tables and graphs. The results concluded that school preferences over language, child community, parents attitude are the most influential factors which have contributed to add to this detrimental language condition. Parents view one-parent one-language approach to be an efficient solution to this language loss and also agreed that the providence of Urdu related spare time activities could work in this regard. The results also conclude that positive attitude of parents towards Urdu language can also be a beneficiary act.

Keywords: Problems with multi-linguals, Mother tongue, Urdu Language, One Parent one Language Model, Diasporic children, Language Acquisition

Introduction

Pakistan is the sixth largest country of the world with an approximate population of 176 million people as per government of Pakistan (2001), with extreme linguistic and rich cultural diversity. Lewis (2009) estimated that there are approximately 72 languages being spoken in Pakistan. However, Rahman estimates that there are 61 languages in total being spoken, the rest are the different names of same languages been given to them by distinct social and cultural groups (Rahman, 2010). There are many languages being spoken based upon the different regional distributions like Balochi for Balochistan, Punjabi for Punjab, Sindhi for Sindh and are also based upon rich cultural and ethnic discrepancies, like Hindkho, Shina, batti, khowar, Pashto, Gujarie.t.c. Some of them are indigenous and others are non-indigenous. Wikipedia classifies 6 languages of Pakistan as “institutional” languages, 18 as “developing languages”, 39 languages as “vigorous”, exclaims 9 in troublesome conditions” and classifies 2 as the dying languages in Pakistan.

However, Urdu, among all enjoys most prestigious position and is regarded as an institutional and National Language of Pakistan. Although it is only spoken by 7% of Pakistanis as their first language, yet it is considered of paramount importance as it’s been considered an official language of Pakistan as per constitutional law of 1973.

Due to vast history of this Indo-Pak area, since been colonized by the British Empire, the dominance of English Language cannot be get rid of, even in this age. After even the decades, it has not been possible to eradicate this influence; instead it has now become successful in becoming a momentous need of Pakistani Society today. English is a language of military, of judiciary, of government and higher education in Pakistan (Hywel Coleman, Tony Capstick, 2012).

English is a medium of instruction in Elite Private schools, military schools and Non-elite private English medium schools (As per Coleman, Capstick 2012. classification of Pakistani schools). However, Urdu is a medium of instruction in State Schools and so-called Urdu medium private schools.

Shaimim (2011) has declared this bigoted and undue prevalent educational situation as “Linguistic apartheid”.

Rahman also talks about this educational apartheid among two distinct social groups; elite and marginalized group which is growing day by day owing to the unjust educational discrepancy between English medium and Urdu medium school systems (2010).

This duality is not only faced by people living in Pakistan, but more intensively it is experienced by the Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students. In this paper this shall be referred to as PLAMS for convenience.

It has become quite a cumbersome task for living abroad parents or Pakistani expats to make their children bilingually efficient in both the languages, i.e. Mother language (Urdu) and second language (generally English). However, EsraAkgul, Yazici and Akman (2017) found that parents in Pakistan and those living abroad did not find any disadvantage in raising their children as bilingual, but they found certain complexities and difficulties in this path of making their children bilingually efficient. They found that parents living abroad complain about the mixing of two languages by their children. They claimed that children are often unable to differentiate between the two languages and often mix the two in forming sentences. They also found that living abroad children are “late talkers” and are bad at using idioms, proverbs and often lack rich vocabulary as efficient multilingual children.

Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students find Urdu language difficult to write creatively or even academically. Not only this, but they often find it hard to grasp a good vocabulary of their mother language (Urdu) and also to converse eloquently and correctly in their native language. They often experience grammatical errors owing to overlapping of second language onto their first language (Urdu), which deteriorate their structure of sentences. One such good example is Mr. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari who is a young influential Pakistani political figure, brought up in a foreign land but is essentially a Pakistani. He has poor Urdu speaking skills, when it comes to his addresses he is even unable to discriminate between genders linguistically. This of course is an outcome of undue preference of second language onto the first language which fundamentally gave a trigger to this overlapping condition. This unusual and uncommon use of Urdu often puts him in ludicrous situations and this may cause a catastrophic effect on to his political career.

PLAMS also often do excessive code mixing which is obviously a result of the underlying confusion which they might have to experience owing to this simultaneous bilingualism phenomenon, at times. It is quite okay to mix the codes but excessive and undue mixing can lead to one of the language death in an individual in some cases or it may snuff away the essence of a particular language but this kind of inefficiency is often experienced by PLAMS in their mother tongue owing to the unavailability of

adequate input in a foreign land, in a response to a number of factors, which shall be brought into limelight in this paper.

1.1 Statement of Problem

It is to be lamented upon, that in this age Pakistani children living abroad are quiet an expert in foreign languages but are unable to speak fluently and write correctly in their own mother language. Urdu is a language rich in culture and literature and is considered an important language among many distinct Asian languages. But unfortunately it is quite a fact that our new generation find it very hard to speak or write Urdu language efficiently. They prefer speaking other languages while living abroad, neglecting their own very prestigious mother language. Parents prefer speaking other languages which in turn changes the attitude of children towards their own language. But this is not the only case. Even if the parents pay heed towards the needs of their mother tongue, children grow up in an environment where they are able to speak their language but are unable to write in their mother language or in some cases are unable to speak fluently and accurately.

This research shall tend to focus on the problems faced by Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students in speaking or writing in their own native language i.e. Urdu.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the complexities faced by Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students in acquiring their native language i.e. Urdu language and which Urdu language skills are most affected among these PLAMS?
2. What are the resources or solutions that could be used to resolve this overlapping; a language related predicament among Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students?

1.3 Research Objectives

1. To find out the most common complexities that lies in learning native language (Urdu) by Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students.
2. To elucidate the possible resources that could be used to resolve the issue of overlapping of second language onto the learning of their mother tongue.

1.4 Significance of Study

Since the study is about the issues pertaining to the recession in the ability of acquiring first language among individuals living abroad, it will help to figure out the area of vexation, where the actual problem lies in acquiring Urdu among multilingual Pakistani children living abroad.

This study is beneficial for the promotion of Urdu language, which despite of being a rich language, is consistently being pushed behind among "Pakistani Multilingual Living Abroad Students" owing to the external factors which includes the preference of parents and at times lack of resources in a foreign environment.

This study will come up with the exact juncture where the problem lies, whether being multilingual affects their speaking, listening, reading or writing ability of first language. It will not only help to expose the area of discrepancies but also will help to bring out possible solutions to the problems faced by PLAMS or Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students acquiring their mother tongue efficiently. Thus, it is equally lucrative for the parents who are worried about the lack of expertise of native language among their children.

The study might indicate certain research gaps pertaining to the language related issues of PLAMS, which in turn will provide certain grounds upon which future researches could be conducted for further study in this area, as it will bring this crucial issue into considerable limelight.

1.5 Delimitations

This study solely focuses on the speaking and writing skills of the students and it does not cater the reading and listening skills. This study aims at providing an insight into the language related issues of PLAMS. The children/students selected for this study are between the ages of 8-13 years. It does not include students of above age. However, the problems discussed could be generalized for students of all ages, to some extent.

1.6 Method

The methods adopted for this study are both qualitative and quantitative type. First a quantitative survey containing questions had been provided to students under study (which they were asked to fill under their parent's assistantship), to figure out the level of difficulty faced by them.

Then, interviews of students along with their parents had been arranged by the researcher on zoom app meeting to further investigate the area of vexation, through the qualitative method.

2. Literature Review

Parents in Pakistan think that the education system of Pakistan should use English as medium of instruction because their children will not be able to learn English better in later years of their age so they must be taught in English. Their perception about bilingual education is negative but this is a myth. It is observed in society that private schools are imparting good education using English as their medium of instruction. Parents should be provided guidance and awareness with solid proofs and research that bilingual education is very much helpful for a child to learn a language in early years. Awareness sessions should be arranged to clear the misunderstandings of the parents about bilingual education. Teachers and curriculum both play a vital role in learning of a language so teachers must be trained to be bilingual in the classrooms and the curriculum should be developed in accordance to this policy (Habibullah, 2018). Myths and Realities about Language of Instruction in Pakistan: Parental Perspective. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 8, pp. 1055-1063).

The views of the parents living abroad and raising their children there and the parents living in their own country about bilingualism are different. The parents living abroad perceives raising their children as bilingual as native-like user of languages so that they can speak two languages but the parents living in their own country and raising their children as bilingual think that bilingual means the ability to read, write, speak and understand two languages. But there is an exception, the third type of parents. They raise their children as multilingual. For instance, parents living in Turkey, they focus on their children to learn Urdu as their own language and English as international language but children are also acquiring Turkish from the society. They think they are automatically learning the native language so there is no need to focus on it. (EsraAkgül, DilaYazıcı & BerrinAkman (2017): Views of parents preferring to raise a bilingual child, *Early Child Development and Care*).

A survey research by Dr. Mahmood shows that Punjabi is one of the major languages spoken in Pakistan but it does not have the high status. It is an alarming situation that even the people living in Punjab are not giving their mother tongue a good status in society. Punjabis are shifting from their language to English and Urdu. Punjabis are not literate in their mother tongue and their own culture. They are unable to read and write Punjabi (Mahmood, 2014).

English has become international language and lingua franca and it is being used by native speakers of many other languages throughout the world. It has become the need of today's world. Pakistan like some other countries has its own variety of English that is not accepted off Pakistan. Pakistani new generation idealizes American and British English as standard and tries to use that one. The Standard English is American and British throughout the world. Though Pakistan is producing its own varieties of English but its community still considers the American and the British English as standard (Parveen & Santhanam, 2021).

Behavioral and attitude variables are significantly linked with bilingual children. First behavioral attitude refers to the parents' use of language; children are more proficient in language if parents are using it in conversation. The other variable, attitude, is linked with parents' individual characteristics. The birthplace, nationality, level of education and how well off they are economically, is related to attitude and behavior towards a language and its usage. When parents use a language and shows a specific attitude towards it then it affects their children as well and their language use (Tuominen, 2010).

Poet IshratAfreem points out that Pakistanis living abroad are not teaching Urdu to their children. In United States children have to learn two languages and Pakistanis don't choose Urdu as their second language. Parents want their children to shift from Urdu to English. The foreigners want to learn Urdu and they are learning it but Pakistani parents are abandoning Urdu from their homes. Poetic Symposiums should be arranged to propagate Urdu and whenever these are arranged people's participation is in good number. She added that our children ask the question 'why should they learn Urdu?'

Methodology

3.1 Sampling and Population

For the purpose of this study 10 children were taken as samples and interviewed who were living abroad and were between the ages of 6-11 years.

Seven of the total number were living in United Arab Emirates and were the students of different international schools of UAE, and were essentially children of Pakistani expats whose first language was Urdu. Three of them were living in Germany and were studying there in international German schools. The children were selected on convenient basis for the parents and those who were willing to voluntarily contribute to the study were brought under study for this research work.

3.2 Data Collection

Data was gathered in the form of compiled answers congregated from the questionnaire survey that contained questions pertaining to their daily life use of language which is sometimes a mixed language influenced by the overlapping effect of either of the language, and their ability to write in their mother tongue. It also carried questions which were regarding the difficulty faced by them in speaking or writing in their own native language. Data was then represented in the form of graphs.

Data was also accumulated in the form of answers gathered from the interview of parents along with their children to figure out the degree of deviation in their style and performance of native language.

The purpose of this is to figure out the area where the problem lies, so as to further elucidate the possible solutions for the identified problems.

3.3 Data Collection Tools

For the questionnaire survey analysis the data was represented in the form of graphs using simple statistical software called Microsoft Excel. Data was also collected qualitatively by taking the interviews of students along with their parents using the technique of observation and the thematic analysis technique by using a renowned meeting software application called zoom and was represented in the form of tables. The Likert scale was also used to assist them to express their degree of agreement and disagreement.

Data Analysis

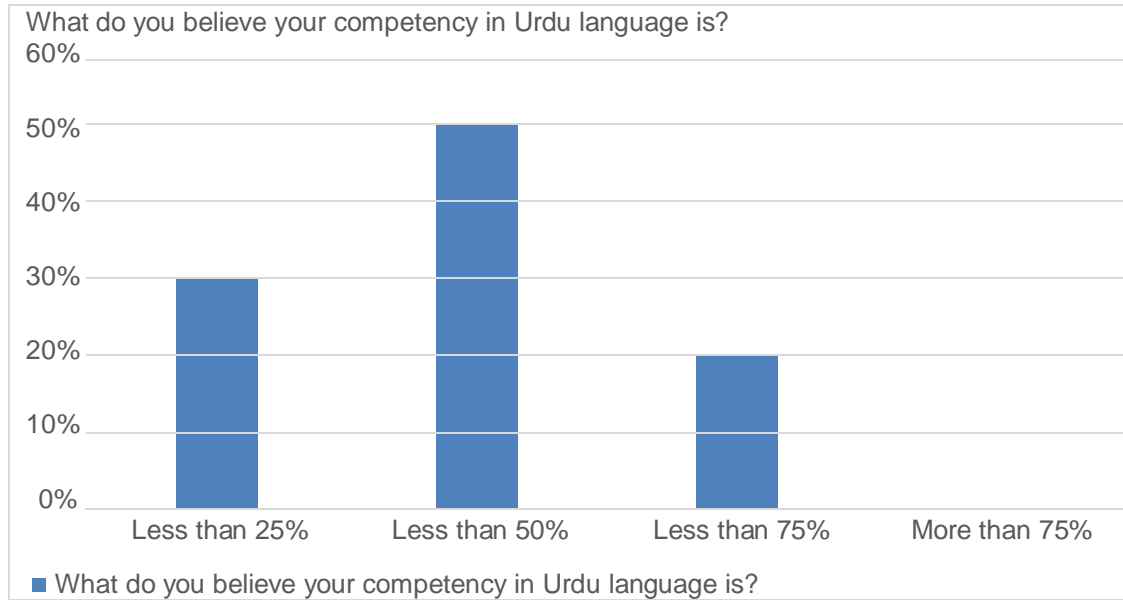


Table 4.1

Question related to their competency in Urdu language were asked to students. 50% of the students believed that their competency in Urdu language is less than 50% which means that they are not very efficient in their own native language. 30% of them believed that their competency is less than 25%. Only 20% of them responded that their efficiency in their mother tongue is less than 75% which could be considered a good performance in their language. 0% of them believed that it is more than 75%.

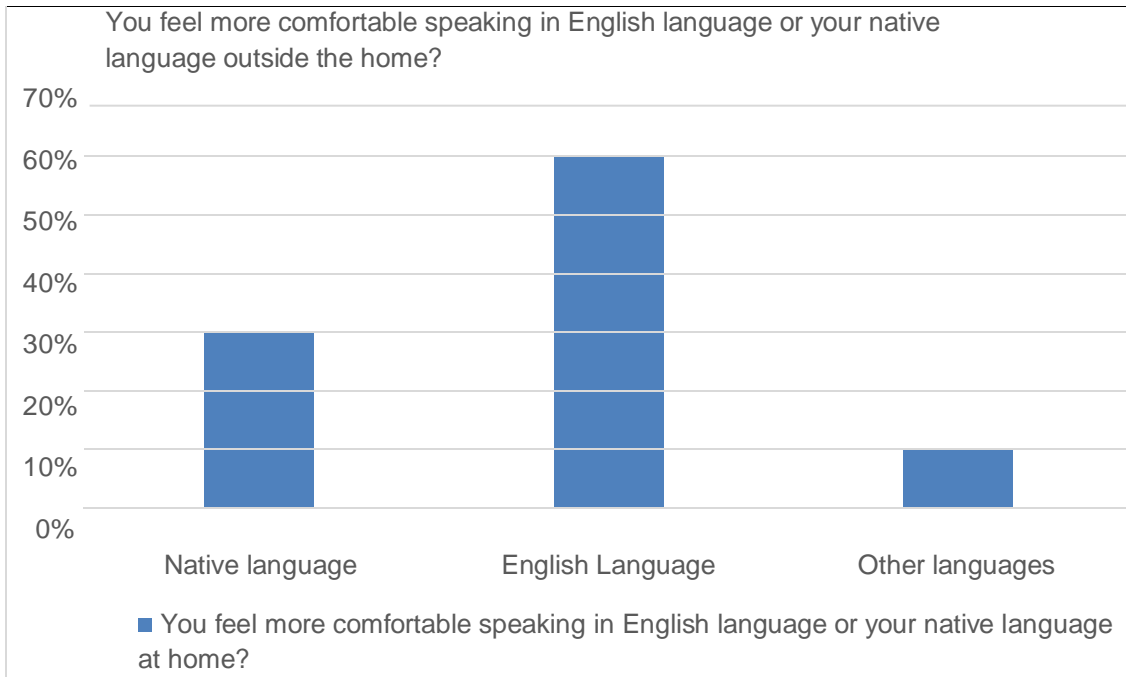


Table 4.2

Question was asked to students about their own preference of speaking a particular language outside their homes to which 60% of them responded that they prefer speaking in English language whatever the situation they are in. While only 30% of them responded that they feel more comfortable with their own native language outside their homes and they prefer staying intact with the situations where they can use their own language freely. Only 10% of them responded that they speak other languages like German (students living in Germany) or their own indigenous languages, depending upon the understanding of the interlocutors.

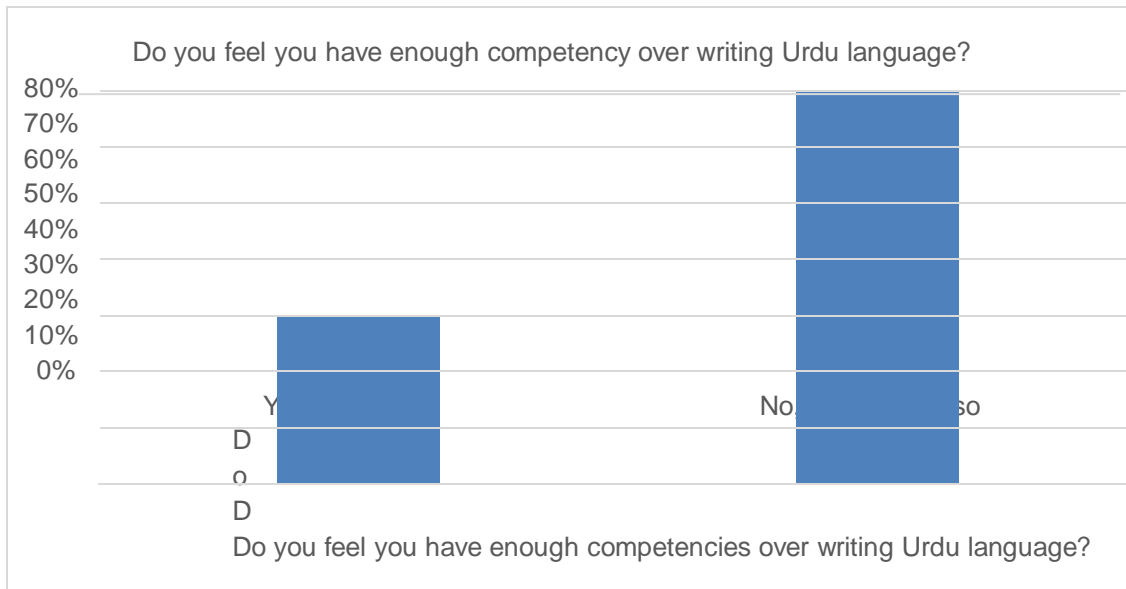


Table 4.3

Students were asked to respond about their efficiency in writing Urdu language, to which 70% of them responded that they lack efficiency in writing Urdu language and find it quite hard to write on their own (i.e. Without an external assistance). Only 30% believed that they have enough competencies over writing Urdu language.

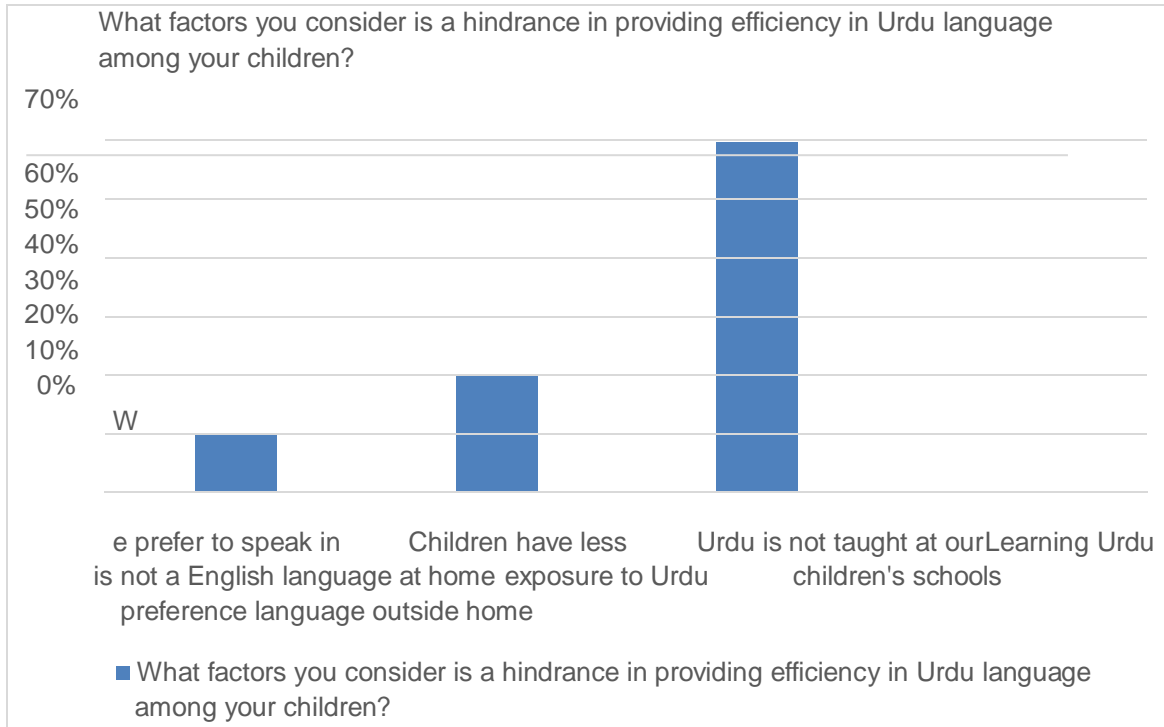


Table 4.4

Parents were asked to respond about the factors that they think influenced their children efficiency in Urdu language. 60% of parents believed that Urdu language is not taught or is given importance in their children schools. 30% of them believed that they have less exposure to Urdu language outside their home so this factor affected badly their skill of Urdu language. 10% of them responded that they personally want their child to speak in English so they prefer speaking in English language at their homes this might has impacted their efficiency of Urdu language.

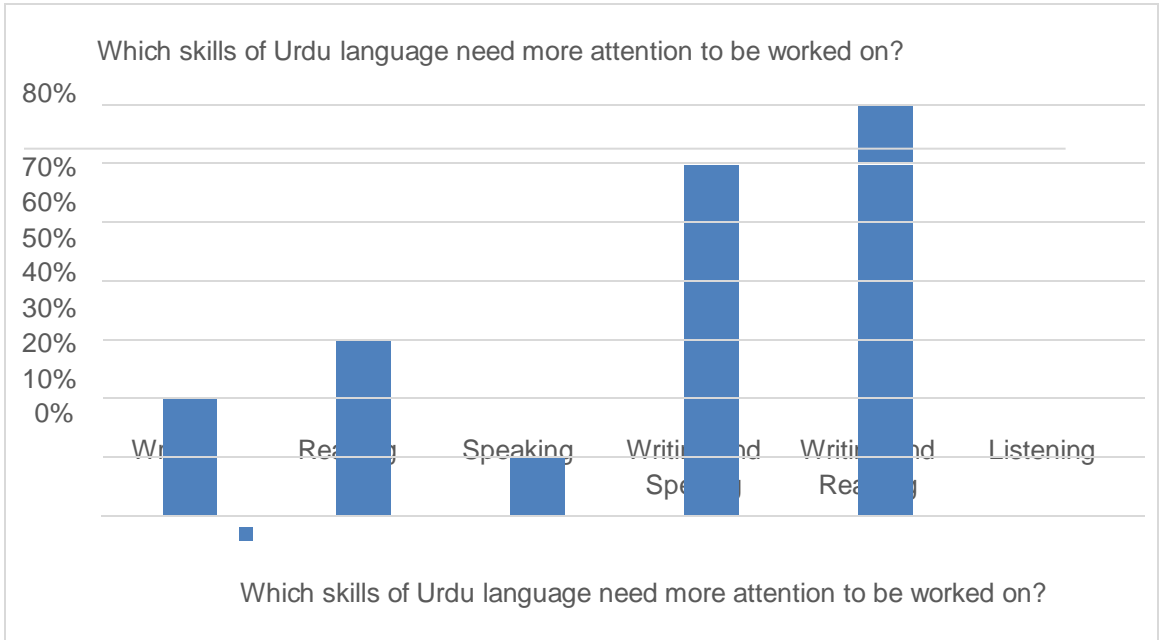


Table 4.5

Parents were asked to respond about the languageskills which they consider are most affected by this over preference of English language.60% of them responded that writing and speaking both skills if their children have been affected as far as Urdu language is concerned. 20% of them responded that only writing skill of Urdu language is disturbed by the external factors. 10% of them responded that the speaking skill of their children is more affected.10% of the parents responded that their child feels more difficulty in reading and writing Urdu language. No parent responded that either listening or reading is affected alone.

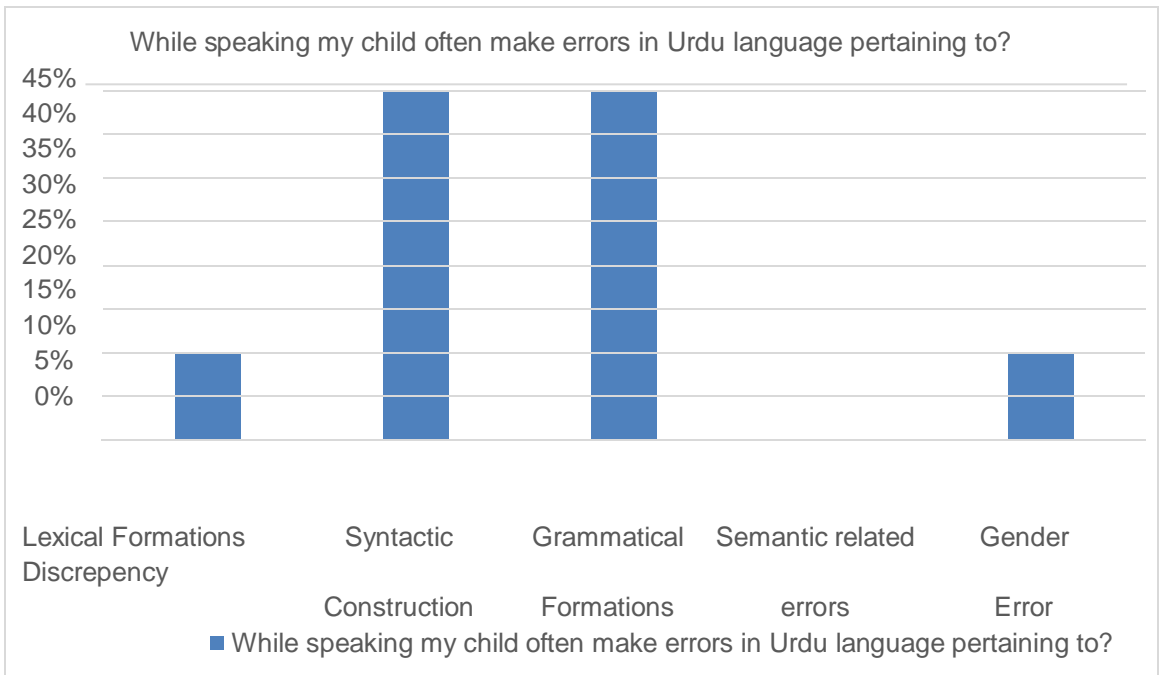
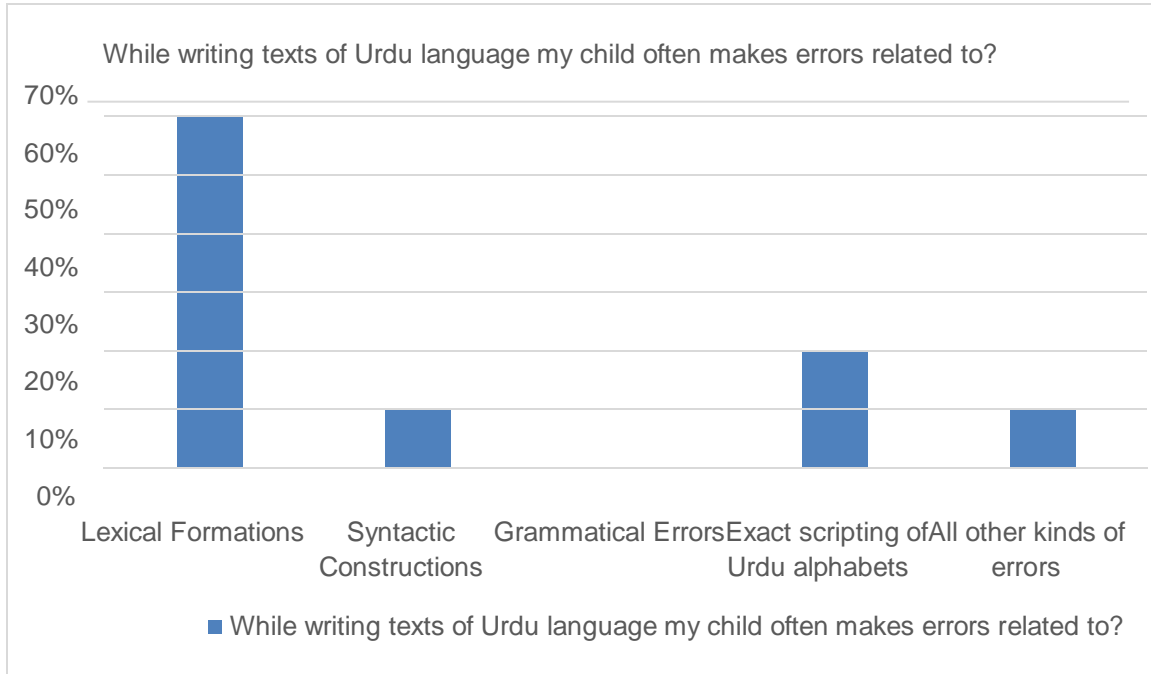


Table 4.6

Parents were asked that what area in Urdu language they feel needs more attention. 40% of the parents responded that their child feel more difficulties in the grammatical formations. 40% of them responded that their child is more subjected to syntactic constructions. 10 % of them answered that the child make errors pertaining to lexical formations. And again 10% believed that their child make errors which are related to gender discrepancies which make them difficult to present gender differences linguistically.

Not any number of parents mentioned about the difficulties faced by the children in semantic constructions.

**Table 4.7**

Parents were asked to point out what kind of errors their children experience while writing text in Urdu language. 60% of them responded that they experience difficulties related to lexical formations. 20% of them responded that they are not even able to write the exact scripting of Urdu alphabets (like problems with dots and word construction). 10% of them responded that they make errors in syntactically constructing the sentences accurately while writing. 10% responded that they usually make all kinds of errors while writing. No parent refers to grammatical errors in writing texts in Urdu language.

Based upon the data collected through interviews the factors which the parents believe are most influencing the efficiency of Urdu language among PLAMS is categorized under the following themes and is represented along with the frequencies and respective percentage in the following table 4.8.

Table 4.8 Factors that most affect their Urdu language efficiency with respect to parents

FACTORS	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
School Preferences	5	50%
Child Community	2	20%
Child Activities	1	10%
Parents Attitude	2	20%

Table 4.9 Parents attitude could be controlled by using one-parent-one-language model;

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	3	30%
Agree	4	40%
Neutral	2	20%
Disagree	1	10%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Parents who were in favor of one parent one language model strongly agreed and agreed with the statement of its efficacy. However some parents also disagreed with its efficacy owing to complexities involved in this method.

Table 4.10; Child activities should involve materials or mediums which uses Urdu as their main language like watching cartoons in Urdu.

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	3	30%
Agree	5	50%
Neutral	1	10%
Disagree	1	10%
Strongly Disagree	0	0%
Total	10	100%

Certain suggestions were given to parents among them most of them suggested that watching cartoons and other activities if performed in Urdu language can work better to provoke the required zest to learn Urdu language and thus can prove to be a useful trick to make them learn Urdu language. Almost 80% of participant parents agreed to this suggestion.

Table 4.11: Writing difficulties could be improved by making children read Urdu novels, fiction and encouraging creative writing in their free time at home.

	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Strongly Agree	5%	50%
Agree	3%	30%
Neutral	1%	10%
Disagree	1%	10%
Strongly Disagree	0%	0%
Total	10%	100%

Parents were of the view that reading Urdu novels, fiction and other informative books in Urdu language in free time at their home can reduce the deficiency that occurred in Urdu language as a result of language negligence that is experienced by students who study in international schools abroad. 80% of parents hold the view that Urdu reading can compensate this devastating situation. Not only this but this could also reduce the complexities faced by them in writing Urdu language as constant reading can overcome this overreaching situation.

5. Discussion

The present study was conducted to figure out the complications faced by PLAMS in learning Urdu language and the skills which are more affected owing to the inability of certain conditions and surroundings which assists individuals to learn or to have competency over their own language. Since, the living abroad students have to face a lot of obstacles learning or maintaining their own language, there are certain facts which actually influence the learning of their own language.

Most of the parents believe that Urdu language is not taught in their children schools which is a big factor that plays a significant role in the catastrophic decline of their language. As the sample was collected from the individuals living in United Arab Emirates and Germany, it was complained by Parents that their children are exposed to the environment and community in which people are generally Arabic, Germans, Philippine and belong to some other ethnic groups. This creates a language gap among them and they are unable to use their language which results in the deterioration of their own language as they have to use English language most often owing to the cultural diversity in that multicultural society. Some parents also hold the view that they themselves prefer speaking English language at home because they want their kids to speak English fluently. This often causes the mother tongue to be pushed aside.

Some parents also mentioned that the activities which the kids adopted while staying home were also being performed in English Language, so they are less exposed to their own mother language, like watching cartoons, plays and movies in English Language. All these factors contribute to provide environment or atmosphere which unconsciously and ultimately pushes their mother tongue aside. Hence, the kids face difficulties making syntactic constructions, grammatical formations accurately. While speaking these kids often make errors mostly informing accurate grammatical sentences (like use of "Jaye Ga" instead of "Jaon Ga" or "KaryGa" instead of "Karun Ga"), syntactic constructions (like formations of complete sentence that make complete sense), gender discrepancy errors (like difficulty in discriminating between masculine / feminine, generally in case of animals / birds / objects and even persons).

Some of the errors spotted were also related to their lexicon (forming incorrect words of Urdu or usage of excessive replacement words of English Language). However, this condition could be reduced with the passage of time as the child grows, if proper attention is given to him to save not only the language but also their cultural norms. This condition could be reserved by reducing the effect of factors which contributes to bring forth this condition. As discussed earlier the most influencing factors are school's preference over particular language, children multicultural community, parent's attitude towards particular language and child indoor activities which consistently use English language, respectively.

The errors which the PLAMS undergo in writing Urdu language are mostly lexical formation. Parents complained that their children are unable to write words accurately. The sentences makesense in written language but they are unable to write the words accurately. Some parents also complained that their children are even unable to write exact scripting of Urdu language (like they often make mistakes in putting dots at the right place and joining contractions of alphabets appropriately to form words).

Most of the parents hold that the speaking and writing skills of Urdu language need to be worked on more, as they often make mistakes while speaking and writing, since their kids are not taught Urdu language in their international schools and they themselves prefer to speak English Language outside home owing to the cultural diversity they have in their community and neighborhood.

Parents were given certain suggestions/recommendations to which they had to respond with respect to the degree of agreement or disagreement based upon factors which they feel were most influencing, causing a dwindle in their language efficiency. Parents strongly agreed or at least agreed to the viewpoint that Urdu language speaking efficiency could be saved by adopting the one-parent one-language model. This approach is actually beneficial for raising simultaneous bilingual children as it is the need for them to use English language outside home for communication purpose. Mother plays a significant role in child language thus; mother could be given this responsibility. Ishrat Afreen; an Urdu poetess said that mother's job is to teach Urdu language to her kids to preserve our culture. Parents were asked about the use of Urdu language during children home activities like watching cartoons, playing games and dramas in Urdu language can actually help to promote accurate use of Urdu language, to which almost most of them agreed or strongly agreed.

Writing difficulties could be improved by making children read Urdu novels / books in spare time and encouraging free and creative writing in their spare time. This was agreed by almost all of the parents with a single exception, who declared it to be or waste of time as Urdu language according to him has less exposure as the participant himself laid stress upon usage of English language.

Some Lucrative Recommendations for promoting use of Urdu Language among PLAMS

1) Parents should have positive attitude towards use of Urdu Language

It has been proven that parents attitude towards a particular language, drives their kids to use that particular language. For example looking from social variable approach parents of Elite Class prefers speaking English. Language, thus the children are equipped with the same language more efficiently. Hence, PLAMS should be encouraged by Parents to use Urdu language at least at home. Language practice at home is responsible for maintaining attitudes of children towards a particular language and its proficiency (Lia, 2008; Menken, 2008).

2) Children should watch cartoons and television plays in Urdu language

If the parents actually want to encourage usage of Urdu language and want their kids to speak Urdu language efficiently, they must ensure that their kids at least should watch television plays and cartoons in Urdu language while living in a land that is completely alien to their own cultural norms. This could work as an effective remedy, as listening to a particular language paves path for effective speaking. Listening efficiently forms a concrete foundation for speaking that language efficiently (Renukadevi, 2014).

3) ONE-Parent-ONE Language Model

One parent one language is an approach that is used by the parents for raising their simultaneous bilingual children. This method adopts the usage of one language by one parent at a time. This is beneficial for PALMS in the cases where the external environment does not support the use of mother tongue. This way mother tongue and culture in relation to it can be saved from being in danger zone. However, it is also helpful in reducing the code-mixing and preventing confusion among bilingual children. This method is more supportive if both parents belong to different ethnic communities. For example one is Pakistani and other is Turkish.

4) Reading of Urdu Poetry, Novels, Books should be encouraged at home

Expats should encourage reading of Urdu novels, dramas, poetry to their children so as to encourage its efficient usage. Ishrat Afreen (an Urdu Poetess) lamented upon the fact that our new generation is devoid of the essence of Urdu language. According to her, mother should work to teach her child Urdu language at home, as no institute or school in U.S can teach Urdu to new generation. She while addressing in a seminar encouraged mothers to evoke Urdu learning ability among children, as children learning abroad have no expertise on speaking Urdu efficiently. Mothers should work at

home to make their children read Urdu fiction books, poetry to gain the expertise in their mother tongue. This way most of the scripting difficulties among them could also be reduced.

6. Conclusion

This study was conducted to figure out the issues pertaining to the gaining of efficiency in Urdu language among Pakistani Living Abroad Multilingual Students. PLAMS declared that they face hurdles in communicating in Urdu language at times and find Urdu writing particularly scripting to be an inconvenient task. Parents hold the view that international schools do not focus on the mother languages of the indigenous communities, also the constant exposure to the multicultural communities plays a vital role in making PLAMS inefficient in their own language. Speaking and Writing skills are affected most among PLAMS and according to the parents this issue could be resolved by making them read novels in Urdu language and performing other indoor activities using Urdu language. Parents also declared One-Parent One-language approach to be an effective method.

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