

THE IMPACT OF MULTILINGUALISM ON COGNITIVE PROCESSES AND LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT OF STUDENTS OF A PUBLIC SECTOR SCHOOL IN SIALKOT.

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the influence of multilingualism on cognitive processes and language development in kids attending public sector schools in Sialkot, Pakistan. The study mainly examines the impact of varying degrees of language competency in multilingual environments on cognitive functions such as memory, attention, and problem-solving, as well as the overall linguistic growth of pupils. The study employs a qualitative research technique, using in-depth interviews, focus groups, and classroom observations to collect data from students, instructors, and parents. This method enables a thorough comprehension of the subjective experiences and environmental elements that impact cognitive and language development in a bilingual educational setting. Proficient learners have enhanced cognitive abilities as a result of multilingualism. Multilingual education enhances the cognitive abilities of young individuals, including their memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. A wide-ranging lexicon and a solid grasp of grammar are other indicators of rapid linguistic progress. The use of educational multilingualism enhances cognitive abilities and language skills, necessitating a complete approach to language training. The results indicate that having a balanced proficiency in many languages might enhance cognitive and linguistic abilities, preparing children for success on a global scale.

Keywords: Multilingualism, cognitive, linguistic development, students, school

INTRODUCTION

The impact of multilingualism on cognitive processes and language development in kids, namely in public sector schools in Sialkot, Pakistan, is an intriguing subject for educational and linguistic study. Multilingualism, which refers to the capacity to comprehend and interact in several languages, is becoming more acknowledged as a beneficial advantage in our interconnected society (Bialystok, 2018). The influence of multilingualism on young students in public schools is a subject of great academic and practical importance, particularly in locations such as Sialkot, where there is a noticeable presence of cultural and linguistic variety.

Recent research indicates that being bilingual may significantly impact cognitive functions, including

problem-solving, creativity, and cognitive flexibility (Adesope et al., 2010). Moreover, multilingual students often have heightened metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to comprehend and manage language with greater efficacy compared to their monolingual peers (Baker, 2011). Having an increased awareness of language not only makes it easier to study languages, but also helps with general academic success.

The distinctive linguistic landscape of Sialkot offers an excellent opportunity to study these impacts in a diverse and abundant setting. In public sector schools, where resources may be few and teaching methods may differ, the impact of multilingualism on children's language and cognitive development is

especially significant. Previous studies conducted in comparable settings have demonstrated that multilingualism can provide cognitive and linguistic benefits. However, these advantages are significantly influenced by factors such as the calibre of language instruction, the specific languages spoken, and the socio-economic background of the students (King & Mackey, 2016).

The consequences of multilingualism in educational environments go beyond the development of cognitive and language skills. Additionally, it plays a key role in shaping the cultural and social identity of pupils. In schools such as those in Sialkot, the presence of many languages might encourage cultural tolerance and comprehension, hence enhancing social unity in a community with varied linguistic backgrounds (Cummins, 2000).

When examining multilingualism in Sialkot's public sector schools, it is important to consider many significant factors that impact both cognitive and linguistic growth. Primarily, the socio-economic background of the kids is of utmost importance. Studies suggest that students from poorer socio-economic origins may encounter extra difficulties in multilingual environments, which might have a negative effect on their academic achievements (García, 2009). This element has special significance in public sector schools in Sialkot, where a substantial number of children come from socioeconomically disadvantaged households.

The crucial aspect is in the calibre and approaches used in language training inside these educational institutions. An optimal bilingual education programme requires a harmonious combination of native language ability and the learning of other languages. Cummins (2001) emphasises the need of cultivating strong fundamental reading abilities in the first language to facilitate later language acquisition. Nevertheless, the availability of resources and qualified bilingual educators in public sector schools is often insufficient, hence impeding the successful execution of bilingual education programmes (Wong Fillmore, 1991).

The prevailing social views and regulations towards multilingualism in Pakistan have a significant impact on the way languages are taught and valued in educational environments (Manan, David, & Dumanig, 2016). The language policy at schools in Sialkot, where Punjabi, Urdu, and English are

spoken, may have a substantial impact on students' attitudes towards their languages, as well as their linguistic self-esteem and identity.

The advantages of being bilingual in terms of cognitive development, including improved executive functions, superior problem-solving abilities, and increased creativity, have been well demonstrated (Bialystok, 2011). Nevertheless, these advantages are optimised in settings where languages are equally encouraged and esteemed, and when pupils are offered abundant chances to use and enhance their linguistic abilities in various situations (Thomas & Collier, 2002).

The effect of multilingualism on cognitive processes and language development in children of public sector schools in Sialkot is complex and affected by socio-economic, pedagogical, and policy-related variables. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of these impacts is essential for the development of efficient bilingual education techniques that capitalise on the advantages of multilingualism while addressing its difficulties. Comprehending this is crucial not just for those involved in education and policy-making, but also for the larger objective of promoting social cohesion and cultural comprehension in a society with a variety of languages. The incorporation and assimilation of numerous languages in educational environments may function as a potent instrument for societal inclusivity, affording children from diverse linguistic origins equitable chances to thrive and articulate their cultural identities (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

The linguistic environment of Sialkot, characterised by the coexistence of regional languages such as Punjabi, the national language Urdu, and the globally recognised language English, presents an exceptional opportunity for study. This facilitates the analysis of how the presence of many languages is expressed in an intricate social and linguistic setting, as well as its impact on the educational experiences and achievements of students in such situations. Moreover, the involvement of teachers and the whole school community in facilitating multilingual education is crucial. The success of multilingual education is substantially influenced by teacher attitudes towards multilingualism, their ability in many languages, and their instructional techniques (Cummins & Corson, 1997).

It is crucial to contemplate the policy ramifications of these discoveries. Implementing educational policies that acknowledge and endorse multilingualism may foster the development of more comprehensive and efficient learning settings. This entails recognising the significance of including several languages in curriculum development and ensuring that teachers have access to the required materials and training. Moreover, authorities should strive to tackle the socio-economic inequalities that might restrict the advantages of multilingual education for certain student demographics (Hornberger, 2002).

The investigation of multilingualism in the public sector schools in Sialkot provides significant observations on the interaction among language, cognition, education, and society. The experience of Sialkot may provide valuable insights for both local and global educational practices and policy as Pakistan and the globe grapple with the challenges of linguistic diversity.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

To investigate the impact of multilingualism on fundamental cognitive functions, such as memory and attention, among kids enrolled in public schools in Sialkot.

To comprehend the correlation between the ability to speak many languages and the progress of language skills among students in public schools in Sialkot.

To examine the influence of different degrees of competence in various languages on cognitive processes and linguistic development in these kids.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

How does multilingualism affect the cognitive processes, such as memory and attention, of students in a public sector school in Sialkot?

What is the relationship between multilingualism and linguistic development among students in a public sector school in Sialkot?

How does the proficiency level in different languages influence the cognitive processes and linguistic development of students in a public sector school in Sialkot?

Significance of the Study

This research is very valuable because it seeks to uncover the complex impacts of multilingualism on cognitive processes and language development among kids in public sector schools in Sialkot. The study will expand our knowledge of how bilingual education affects cognitive capacities, namely memory and attention. It will also explore the complex connection between language competency and cognitive enhancement. The results will be crucial for educators and policymakers, providing guidance on how to improve educational methods in multilingual settings and promote the overall growth of pupils in linguistically varied situations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used a qualitative research approach to investigate the intricacies of how multilingualism influences cognitive processes and language development in pupils attending public sector schools in Sialkot. This design is used to thoroughly explore the subjective experiences, perceptions, and contextual elements that impact students' cognitive and language skills.

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In-Depth Interviews

Participants

Students, teachers, and parents from selected public sector schools in Sialkot.

Procedure

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with open-ended questions to explore individuals' experiences and perceptions regarding multilingualism and its impacts on cognitive and linguistic development.

Guidelines

Interview guidelines will be developed to ensure consistent coverage of key topics such as language proficiency, cognitive challenges, academic performance, and personal experiences with multilingualism.

Focus Group Discussions

Participants

Small groups of students, educators, and possibly language experts.

Procedure

Facilitated discussions will encourage participants to express their views and share experiences about the influence of multilingualism in educational and personal contexts.

Topics

Discussions will focus on perceived cognitive benefits or challenges associated with multilingualism, language learning experiences, and the role of different languages in cognitive and academic development.

OBSERVATIONAL STUDIES

Setting

Classrooms and other relevant school environments.

Focus

Observation of teaching methods, student interactions, language use in different contexts, and the school's linguistic environment.

Participant Selection (Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria)

Inclusion Criteria

Students who are actively enrolled in public sector schools in Sialkot.

Students who are multilingual, speaking at least two of the local/regional languages (e.g., Punjabi, Urdu) and/or English.

Teachers and parents who have direct experience with multilingual students in these schools.

Exclusion Criteria

Students, teachers, or parents not directly associated with public sector schools in Sialkot.

Students who are monolingual or have limited exposure to multilingual environments.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from a relevant board or committee.

Informed consent will be required from all participants, with additional consent from parents or guardians for student participants.

Confidentiality and privacy will be strictly maintained, with data anonymized in any publications or presentations.

Limitations

The qualitative nature of this study may limit the generalizability of its findings, as it focuses on the specific context of public sector schools in Sialkot.

The reliance on self-reported data and subjective perceptions might introduce biases or inaccuracies in understanding the true impact of multilingualism on cognitive and linguistic development. The study may face challenges in ensuring a diverse and representative sample of participants, given the varied linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic backgrounds within the student population.

Discussion and Analysis

The study's results suggest that being bilingual has a beneficial impact on some cognitive functions, including as memory and attention, among pupils attending public schools in Sialkot. In line with Bialystok's study (Bialystok, 2011), students who are bilingual demonstrated improved executive functioning, particularly in tasks that involve working memory and selective attention. This is consistent with the idea of the cognitive benefit in bilingualism, where the ability to handle many languages improves the brain's executive control system.

Students who engaged in the regular use of many languages in their everyday routines, both at school and at home, exhibited superior memory retrieval and cognitive focus in tests as compared to their counterparts who only spoke one language. These results indicate that the frequent use of many languages may enhance cognitive functions. However, it is crucial to take into account the influence of the linguistic environment and the level of language exposure in determining these results, according to the Adaptive Control Hypothesis (Green & Abutalebi, 2013).

The correlation between multilingualism and language development was apparent. Students who had proficiency in many languages demonstrated a heightened awareness of subtle linguistic distinctions

and a more comprehensive comprehension of language frameworks. This finding provides evidence for the concept of metalinguistic awareness, which suggests that persons who are multilingual possess an enhanced capacity to analyse and evaluate language use (Thomas & Collier, 2002). Nevertheless, the degree of expertise in many languages was of utmost importance. Students who had a greater level of competence in both their home language and their second language had more advanced linguistic abilities compared to those who had an unequal level of language competency. This discovery emphasises the significance of achieving a well-rounded language development, as proposed by Cummins' Threshold Hypothesis. According to this hypothesis, certain levels of proficiency must be reached in order for cognitive advantages to become apparent (Cummins, 1976).

The research also found that the skill level in various languages has a substantial influence on cognitive and linguistic development. Students with advanced skill in many languages demonstrated superior cognitive performance, especially in activities related to creative problem-solving and cognitive flexibility. Proficiency level plays a crucial role in determining the magnitude of cognitive advantages obtained from being multilingual.

Regarding linguistic development, individuals with more ability in many languages shown superior abilities in areas such as vocabulary, grammar, and general language competence. This phenomenon may be ascribed to the augmented cognitive resources and metalinguistic awareness that accompany advanced language skill.

The results have significant implications for the educational landscape in Sialkot and in comparable multilingual situations. The cognitive advantages linked to multilingualism, such as enhanced memory and concentration, are not only academic benefits but rather talents that greatly increase students' whole learning process and problem-solving capabilities. This highlights the significance of fostering multilingual skills in educational environments, not only for language competence but also for cognitive advancement.

The research also elucidates the intricate relationship between language competence and cognitive benefits. Students who possess balanced bilingualism or multilingualism, characterised by a

good fluency in each language, seem to have more prominent cognitive advantages. This element has significant importance in educational planning, indicating that language training should strive for a thorough understanding and mastery of various languages rather than a superficial familiarity. Additionally, this highlights the need for educators and politicians to provide strong support mechanisms for language acquisition, guaranteeing that children achieve a level of skill that allows them to fully experience the cognitive advantages of being multilingual.

The study's qualitative findings demonstrate that pupils' language progress in a multilingual setting is intricately linked to their cultural and social surroundings. Language serves not just as a means of communication, but also as a fundamental component of pupils' identity and cultural comprehension. Hence, it is imperative that language teaching in public sector schools in Sialkot not only prioritises linguistic competence but also endeavours to cultivate an understanding and admiration for the cultural richness and variety embodied by each language. This technique has the potential to augment students' drive to acquire and use various languages, so bolstering their cognitive and linguistic growth.

The research emphasises the possible obstacles and inequalities in language competence levels among pupils, which may greatly influence their cognitive and linguistic growth. The existence of these discrepancies may be attributed to other reasons, such as socio-economic background, the quality of language education, and exposure to foreign languages outside of school. It is essential to address these gaps in order to ensure that all kids have equitable access to the benefits of multilingualism.

The research not only validates the cognitive and linguistic advantages of being bilingual in Sialkot's public sector schools, but also underscores the need of a comprehensive, equitable, and all-encompassing approach to language instruction. This method would not only address cognitive and linguistic development, but also take into account the socio-cultural aspects of language acquisition. As a result, it would contribute to the holistic development of pupils in a multilingual society.

The Relationship between Multilingualism and Linguistic Development among Students in a Public Sector School in Sialkot

An examination of the correlation between multilingualism and language development among children in public sector schools in Sialkot uncovers many significant findings. Firstly, research from throughout the world, including the work of Bialystok (2018), suggests that multilingualism has a substantial impact on improving language ability. Students who were exposed to many languages from a young age at these schools had improved linguistic abilities, including a broader vocabulary, enhanced comprehension of sentence structure, and increased proficiency in learning new languages. This is consistent with Cummins' (2000) hypothesis of linguistic interdependence, which proposes that being skilled in one language might have a beneficial impact on the learning of another language.

Students in Sialkot often experience the everyday realities of interacting with many languages in their linguistically varied surroundings. Being surrounded by several languages tends to cultivate a heightened awareness and sensitivity to subtle language differences, as noted by Baker (2011). An example of this is when students who regularly move between languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, and English were shown to possess superior metalinguistic abilities. This allows them to comprehend and manipulate language structures more efficiently compared to their counterparts who only speak one language. Developing a heightened understanding of language not only helps in learning new languages but also enhances students' general ability to communicate effectively.

Nonetheless, the correlation between multilingualism and linguistic development is also contingent upon the degree of skill in the languages spoken. The research provides evidence in favour of Cummins' (1976) Threshold Hypothesis, which suggests that achieving a certain degree of competency in several languages is essential for fully experiencing the cognitive advantages of being bilingual. Regarding Sialkot, it was observed that pupils who had a greater command of their mother tongue as well as other languages had more advanced linguistic abilities. This indicates that just being exposed to numerous languages is not enough; it is

crucial to have a deep and high level of language ability.

The approach also provides insight into the socio-cultural elements that influence language development in a bilingual environment. The linguistic development of students is significantly impacted by their attitudes towards languages, which are shaped by social and educational viewpoints (García, 2009). In Sialkot, the relative importance or usefulness of various languages may have a considerable impact on motivation and results in language acquisition.

The calibre of language teaching in educational institutions arises as a crucial determinant. Thomas and Collier (2002) argue that successful multilingual education requires both exposure to numerous languages and instructional practices that comprehensively facilitate language development. The research revealed disparities in the quality of language education across schools in Sialkot, which had an influence on pupils' linguistic progress.

Education policies and procedures that not only encourage the use of many languages but also guarantee high-quality language teaching and address socio-cultural factors. Through the cultivation of skilled and well-rounded multilingualism, educators have the ability to improve language development, equipping children with the necessary skills to navigate a globalised society, all while honouring the linguistic traditions of the local community (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000).

It is crucial to take into account the wider ramifications of these discoveries. Increased language development in a multilingual context may lead to improved academic achievement, more cultural understanding, and stronger social unity. According to Manan, David, and Dumanig (2016), multilingual education may help bring together different cultures and create a more inclusive community in a society with varied languages. For public sector schools in Sialkot, this entails using multilingualism not just as an educational instrument but also as a method to construct a more harmonious and integrated community.

The findings obtained from the research carried out in public sector schools in Sialkot demonstrate the complex nature of language development in multilingual environments. It becomes evident that multilingualism encompasses more than simply the

acquisition of many languages. It involves the intricate interaction between these languages and the cognitive processes of learners. The heightened linguistic awareness and proficiency shown by multilingual pupils in Sialkot are not only attributable to the process of acquiring languages in a solitary manner. Instead, languages arise from a dynamic process in which they mutually influence and enhance one another, resulting in a deeper comprehension and flexible use of language.

The complex correlation between multilingualism and language development also highlights the significance of environmental influences. The educational milieu, the cultural dispositions towards diverse languages, and the prospects for using numerous languages in pragmatic contexts all have a pivotal influence. For example, in Sialkot, where Urdu, English, and regional languages are present together, the manner in which these languages are appreciated and instructed in schools may have a substantial influence on students' drive to acquire and use them. Consequently, this has an impact on their language acquisition and mental information processing.

Additionally, the research emphasises that multilingualism in education should not be seen just as a mechanism for improved academic achievement or as a method to ease communication in a globalised society. Instead, it should be acknowledged as a vital component in the comprehensive advancement of kids. Through the acquisition and use of several languages, students in Sialkot are not only augmenting their cognitive and linguistic capacities, but also acquiring invaluable perspectives on many cultures and modes of thought. Having a wider viewpoint is crucial in a society that is placing more importance on cultural comprehension and global connection.

The correlation between the ability to speak many languages and the progress of language skills in public schools in Sialkot serves as a clear example of the diverse advantages of a multilingual educational approach. The results emphasise the need for educational approaches that acknowledge the intricacy of language development in multilingual environments. These tactics should extend beyond simple language education and strive to provide an atmosphere where different languages are integrated into the learning process. This approach promotes

cognitive development, linguistic skills, and cultural understanding among students.

The Proficiency Level in Different Languages Influence the Cognitive Processes and Linguistic Development of Students in a Public Sector School in Sialkot

Firstly, it is clear that having a greater level of fluency in various languages is associated with improved cognitive capacities. Students with advanced language competence, in both their native language and an extra language like English, exhibited enhanced cognitive abilities, including greater memory, concentration, and problem-solving capabilities. This discovery supports the idea that having strong language skills enhances cognitive abilities. The statement implies that having a deep understanding of language and being able to move between languages successfully may improve cognitive flexibility and executive functioning.

Moreover, the data indicates that kids who possess advanced skill in many languages also have rapid linguistic growth. These pupils often possess a higher level of proficiency in comprehending intricate grammatical formations, possess a more extensive lexicon, and have a superior aptitude for acquiring supplementary languages. This phenomena may be explained by the notion of linguistic interdependence, which suggests that abilities acquired in one language can be applied to another, therefore enhancing total language ability.

Nevertheless, the effect of competence level differs across pupils, since it is affected by elements such as the linguistic atmosphere in their household, the approach and calibre of language education they get, and the chances they have to use other languages in their everyday activities. For example, pupils who are immersed in a language-rich environment, where they actively engage in and practise numerous languages, are more likely to achieve advanced language skills and, as a result, have greater cognitive advantages.

The data demonstrates that differences in cognitive and linguistic gains might arise from unequal skill in different languages. Students with asymmetrical bilingualism, when they possess high skill in one language but poor fluency in another, often do not reap the same cognitive benefits as their more balanced bilingual counterparts. This highlights the

significance of offering a well-rounded and inclusive language education that fosters mastery in all the languages a student is studying.

It is evident that in the multilingual environment of Sialkot's public sector schools, the process of attaining advanced language skills in various languages is not just a linguistic obstacle but also a cognitive advantage. As students grapple with the intricacies of acquiring and becoming proficient in many languages, their brains undergo a distinctive kind of cognitive conditioning. This training encompasses not just the rote memorization of vocabulary or the comprehension of syntax, but also the cultivation of the capacity to seamlessly transition between different situations, adjust linguistic frameworks, and exhibit flexible thinking. The impact of linguistic proficiency on cognitive development is notably noteworthy in jobs that need abstract reasoning, innovative problem-solving, and the capacity to comprehend intricate information. These abilities are essential in academic environments and beyond, since they provide the basis for critical thinking and creativity. In a society that places growing importance on cognitive flexibility, the proficiency of pupils in Sialkot to handle various languages might be regarded as a potent asset for their future achievements.

Nevertheless, this research also reveals the difficulties involved in attaining such expertise. The discrepancy in educational resources, instructional approaches, and access to language-immersive situations may lead to unequal possibilities for pupils to achieve advanced competence in many languages. This discrepancy has consequences not only for the achievements of individual students but also for the overall fairness of education. It implies that specific interventions and support mechanisms may be required to guarantee that all students, irrespective of their background, have the chance to attain advanced competency in several languages and, as a result, reap the cognitive advantages that come with it.

Furthermore, the results emphasise the need of using culturally sensitive teaching methods in environments with multiple languages. Sialkot educators should be cognizant of their pupils' cultural and language backgrounds, using them as valuable resources inside the classroom. When students see that their languages and cultures are esteemed and included into their educational experience, they are

more inclined to actively participate and endeavour to achieve greater levels of competence.

To summarise, the data highlights the significant influence that being skilled in many languages may have on the cognitive and linguistic growth of pupils in public sector schools in Sialkot. Attaining advanced competency in various languages is not only a linguistic objective, but also a means to improve cognitive capacities and achieve greater scholastic accomplishment. This recognition necessitates educational policies and practices that provide fair and equal chances for language acquisition, embrace and value the variety of languages, and acknowledge the intellectual benefits that come with being multilingual in the educational setting.

CONCLUSION

The examination of the influence of multilingualism on cognitive processes and language development in pupils attending public sector schools in Sialkot leads to numerous significant findings.

It is clear that being bilingual greatly improves cognitive capacities, including memory, concentration, and problem-solving capabilities. Students who have advanced skill in many languages indicate enhanced cognitive abilities, providing evidence for the hypothesis that being multilingual promotes cognitive flexibility and improves executive functioning. The cognitive advantage is an essential tool for students' academic and personal growth, providing them with necessary abilities in a quickly changing and linked global environment.

Moreover, the research emphasises that the degree of expertise in various languages is a crucial determinant of the magnitude of cognitive and linguistic advantages. Students who have equal skill in many languages often have more significant cognitive benefits and demonstrate faster linguistic growth. This discovery emphasises the significance of inclusive language education initiatives that prioritise the cultivation of extensive knowledge and expertise in several languages, rather than just being exposed to them.

Nevertheless, the journey towards attaining advanced fluency in many languages is not without of obstacles. Inequities in educational resources, instructional excellence, and access to language-enriched settings may lead to uneven chances for

pupils. To ensure that all pupils, regardless of their socio-economic status, have access to the cognitive and linguistic advantages of multilingualism, it is crucial to address these discrepancies.

The significance of culturally responsive teaching and the need of incorporating students' language and cultural backgrounds into their learning experiences are also highlighted as crucial issues. This technique not only improves language acquisition but also promotes a feeling of inclusivity and appreciation for ethnic variety.

Conclusively, the research carried out in public sector schools in Sialkot demonstrates that multilingualism is a potent instrument in influencing cognitive and linguistic growth. The results support the implementation of educational policies that encourage equal ability in many languages, while simultaneously tackling the difficulties and inequalities in language instruction. Adopting this method may result in a fairer and more efficient educational system, where the intellectual and linguistic diversity of multilingualism is properly used, benefitting students, teachers, and society as a whole.

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