

A qualitative study on the effect of linguistic discrimination on the university students

Author

Rimsha Sarooj

rimshasarooj@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This research is an attempt to investigate the impact of linguistic discrimination on the academic performance of BS level students in Iqra University Islamabad. Linguistic discrimination is defined as the ideologies and practices which are used to legitimate, regulate and reproduce an unequal division of power and resources defined on the basis of language. Academic performance is how well a student meets the standard set by the institution. These standard includes grades, oral and written tests, presentation performance, homework completion and participating in class activities. The objective of the study is how linguistic discrimination impacts the academic performance of undergrads. In order to achieve the objective, qualitative research design was used. For the purpose of data collection, interviews were conducted on 20 undergrads students of Iqra University Islamabad. Using content analysis method, Findings of the research indicate that linguistic discrimination most likely affects student's performance in ways like fear of negative evaluation, restricts communication with others, isolation, low self-esteem and discriminatory jokes by fellow students. This research can be very useful for the university authorities in creating a policy that could address the issues faced by students due to linguistic discrimination.

Keywords: *linguistics discrimination, undergrads, academic performance, negative evaluation. Low self-esteem, isolation, discriminatory attitude.*

Introduction

Often, people treat others differently on the base of their use of language. This use of the language includes the use of the native language or use of characteristic of language like the accent, size of vocabulary. Sometimes people treat others differently because of someone's ability or inability to use one language.

In every institute whether Educational or Occupational, individual come from different ethnic group where they interact with each other. Same is the case of a university, everyone including students, lecturer, administrates and staff members come from different ethnic origin. Their origin provides them with a rich cultural background including a different language and dialect. Their classrooms are also linguistically heterogeneous. This diversity can have a positive as well as a negative impact on individuals. We see that in university environment students get bullied, laughed on, devalued and criticized. These behaviours from students effect their interaction patterns. Similarly, in the classroom settings, students get judged because of their use of language or accent. This ultimately affect their performance in class presentation, participation, tasks ultimately leading them to self-isolation and demoralization.

The study has examined how students coming from different background to a common place influence the lives of others. Students from different ethnic identities come together, interact and influence the lives of others. This interaction is carried with the help of language. However, on the base of the difference in language they speak, people sometime makes judgment about others. These perceived judgments often lead them to treat them unjustly. This unjust treatment often effects the lives of others at many level including their view about themselves, how they interact with fellow students as well as the teacher, and in the educational context by effecting their class performance. The primary objective of this study is to how linguistic discrimination impact the academic performance of students of Iqra University Islamabad Campus. More specifically, this study has addressed the aspects of student that get effected including personal, social and educational.

In the recent years, researchers have greatly emphasized on linguistic discrimination in educational settings. A study done by a Colombian researcher examined the effect of linguistic discrimination in the English teaching program. Result concluded that standard language, native-speaker idealization, pressure from professor, disesteem of own language and the discriminatory behaviours affected student's performance like anxiety, communication hesitation, devaluation of student's language, academic performance homogenization, mother-tongue restriction, prominence of high-proficiency students, discriminatory jokes, difficulty in interaction, and isolation. This study concluded that academic performance is affected by all types of discriminating attitudes, either in professors or classmates. Linguistic discrimination limits class participation which affects academic performance (Rojas et al., 2016).

Another study stated that in a hierarchical scale English is at the top as the language of empowerment because of employment followed by Urdu, and the mother-tongue comes last (Mansoor, 2005). If the mother-tongue happens to be Punjabi—the language of the dominant majority—there is more culture shame for it than if it is Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi or Brahvi (Mansoor, 1993).

One of the study focused on the effect of language policy on the poverty reduction in Pakistan. Using qualitative study, this study focused on how the language used in government and private school affect poverty reduction differently. The government school participants

faced social and academic disadvantage due to language based exclusion and marginalization (Tamim, 2014).

Another paper, "Policy and Linguistic culture" provides an extensive review on the usage of language in the Pakistani context. Examples are cited from different socio-ethnic groups in the country to understand the language policy that is related to the linguistic culture in Pakistan explaining that despite clearly articulated policy promoting all regional and ethnic languages in Pakistan, English and Urdu remain the dominant language. The linguistic culture although being vague, informal, abstract and unwritten still influences the outcomes of formally written language policy which hinders the implementation of formal language policy.

A study "Language Controversy: impacts on national politics and secession of East Pakistan" shed light on the role of language in determining the future of a nation that led to the creation of Bangladesh. East Pakistan faced problems after the time of partition on the basis of Urdu being the national language. Language became the major factor in contributing the feeling of mistrust between the east and west Pakistan that gave rise to the voice of separation (Boasberg et al., 2019).

A study "Urdu Medium Intermediaries Issues Getting Higher Education in English Medium Institutions: Evidence from Pakistan" examines the role language choice in the educational system of Pakistan and how these influence the education of a student. Educational system of Pakistan promoting English medium studies leaves most of the country with confusion and threat to pursue higher education. System discrimination affects the confidence of Urdu medium students and cease their choice to pursue higher education (Mubin, 2014).

Another study studied the problems of linguistic discrimination in the communicative space of Tajikistan. Many individuals as well as the minorities faced discrimination due to language, religion, nationality or social background. This paper addresses the problem of rights of educational, sociolinguistic and legal basis of linguistic discrimination. It proposes to make certain adjustments in language building and securing the interest of ethnic and interethnic groups by making a justified language policy (Studies & Bilgiler, 2017).

One of the study examines the discrimination in education ranging from gender to face, social class, age, financial status and other characteristics while particularly focusing on the discrimination on the basis of social class and financial status. Results concluded that the language classes in the private schools involves translation and memorization teaching methods where stress and inattention disturbs students while students receive laughing or criticizing from the teacher (Ghaffarzadeh, 2016).

Pakistan is a country with multiple ethnic identities residing in a proximal area. Each ethnic group has different set of ideas, belief, traditions, customs, language and religion. People with different ethnic identities come together at different platforms like offices, educational institutes, governmental settings.

The prior studies have identified and addressed various issues faced by individuals as well as a student in Pakistan. Adequate researches are done on the issues of English supremacy in the institutes, language policies, language created issues that led to partition of a country and the effect of linguistic discrimination on the Urdu mediums. Though remarkable work has been done but these studies have not identified the possible influence of the discrimination on the basis of language they speak on the account of a student in a formal institute.

However, this research will investigate how linguistic discrimination can affect undergrads academic performance in Iqra University Islamabad. No study has yet addressed the effect of any discrimination of the student and the career of education in Pakistan.

A concept of linguistic human rights provides a ground to this research. Linguistic human rights include the “right to be recognized as a member of a language community; the right to interrelate and associate with other members of one’s language community of origin; the right to maintain and develop one’s own culture” (UNESCO, 1996, p. 5). Linguistic human rights are the human and civil rights regarding the individual and collective right to choose the language for communication in a private as well as public atmosphere. These rights include the right to one’s own language in an authorised, organizational and legal actions, in education, and in media that is freely chosen by concerned individuals. Linguistic human rights give rights on individual as well as on collective, private as well as public level. Often we see the linguistic rights of students were and are continuously crushed.

The concept of social justice provides support to the issue under study. Social justice is basically the fair and just relation between the individual and the society. Every individual must be provided with equal wealth, opportunities for personal activities and the social privilege. In the concept of social justice, a theory of justice addresses the problem of distributive justice. One of the principle of this theory, “the greatest principle equals liberty principle” concerns with the distribution of rights and liberties equally among individuals. These rights include the right of freedom to speech.

The two principle of justice state that First: every individual is to have an equivalent right to the broadest essential freedom good with a comparable freedom for other people. Second: social and financial disparities are to be arranged with the goal that they are both (a) sensibly expected to be to further everybody's potential benefit, and (b) appended to positions and workplaces open to all.

Methodology

In order to examine the influence of linguistic discrimination on the academic performance of students of Iqra University Islamabad, the qualitative research approach was chosen because the qualitative methods are designed to discover meaning that people give to certain events that they go through (Merriam, 1998). Moreover, with the help of qualitative research design, the depth, complexity and richness in the phenomenon can be explored. More specifically, the case study method was used to get an in-depth information about a situation rather than going with a statistical finding. This design is useful for testing whether the scientific theories and models have application in the real world i.e. the effect of linguistic discrimination on the academic performance of undergrads students. The qualitative research method used for this study are listed with description below.

Target population

The population targeted in this study were the undergrads students of Iqra University Islamabad from the following departments: Department of Business Administration. Department of Computing and Technology. Department of Electronic Engineering, Department of Fashion and Design and Department of Social Sciences using convenience sampling. Convenience sampling is the simplest technique for inspecting, on the grounds that members are chosen dependent on accessibility and readiness to partake. Helpful outcomes can be acquired, however the outcomes are inclined to huge inclination, on the grounds that the individuals who volunteer to partake might be unique in relation to the individuals who decide not to and the example may not be illustrative of different qualities, for example, age or sex.

Research Sample

A sample of 20 participants were drawn out from the target population using convenience sampling as it makes participant recruitment convenient and easily accessible. 10 male undergrads students were taken and 10 female undergrads students were taken from the target population.

Research tool

Semi-structured questionnaires were administered on the students with prior informed consent using one-on-one interviewing. The questionnaires included a demographic sheet and open-ended questions measuring the impact of linguistic discrimination on personal, social, educational (classroom setting) domains in a university setting.

Data analysis

For the purpose of data analysis, content analysis method was used. Words and concepts answered in the open ended questionnaires were quantified and analysed in terms of their presence, meaning and relationship, then inferences about the message within those were made. The data collected through interviews was analysed by coding the text into manageable code categories for analysis. Then it was further categorized into the code-category which was summarized further. Conceptual analysis was used that involved quantifying and counting the presence. The goal was to examine the occurrence of selected terms in the data.

Results and Discussions

Three distinct themes emerged from the research data. The major themes identified from the result of this study included:

1. Preferring few students.
2. The effect of Discriminatory attitude on other students.
3. Group formed on the basis of ethnicity.

A few minor but important themes in addressing the research question:

4. Fear of judgment
5. Mocking

The above mentioned categories answered the research question; how linguistic discrimination effect the academic performance of students.

Theme 1: 13 out of 20 participants reported that few students are preferred by other students and teachers while ignoring others. Teachers prefer students that are fluent in English

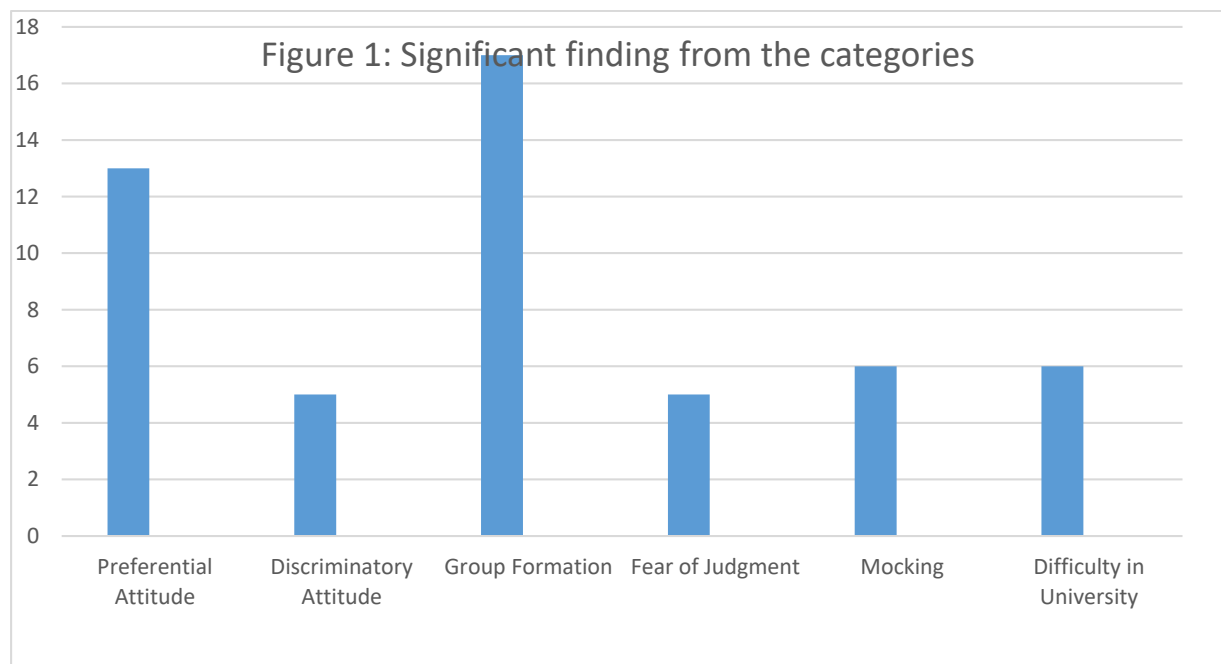
Theme 2: 15 out of 20 participants highlighted how badly discrimination effects the academic performance of students as well as their self-perception. Few students dropped courses, got F grade, remain silent and less interactive. They lost confidence. As well as they excluded themselves from participation in activities that would put them in front of others.

Theme 3: 17 out of 20 participants highlighted on the fact that in a university setting, the group are formed on the base of ethnicity. Students make those students friend who are of their ethnic group. They have a shared sense of oneness. While on the other hand teachers also give more importance to students who are of their ethnic group.

Theme 4: 5 out of 20 respondents added that students fear being judgment because of which they don't interact with others. They start to hesitate to speak in the classroom. Also they avoid in participatory activities which in turn effect their grades.

Theme 5: 6 out of 20 respondents reported that students are mocked in the university setting by fellow students.

Theme 6: 9 out of 20 respondents added that students coming from other cities had a difficult time adjusting in the university. They don't feel comfortable while talking to others as well as participating in the class because of their incompetency to speak fluent English.



The *figure 1* demonstrated the results in the form of graph. 13 out of 20 participants reported preferential attitude. 5 out of 20 participants reported discriminatory attitude by others. 17 out of 20 participants reported that groups are formed on the base of ethnicity. 5 out of 20 participants reported fear of evaluation. 5 out of 20 participants reported preferential attitude of teachers while 6 out of 20 participants reported mocking by other students.

The finding of the analysis backs to the theory of justice. Every individual has the right to equal and fair relation between people in the society. Every individual should be provided with equal rights. These rights also include the right to expression, we have the right to make up their mind, to say what they want to say, to think what they like and to share their ideas with others. Results provide evidence of discrimination among people on the base of the language they speak. A significant number of respondents reported that people have preferential attitude because of the language they speak. Every individual should be provided with the right to speak in the language they want to speak and communicate with others. In the same way, every individual has the right to be accepted the way they are and to be treated with equality but results show that students discriminate others because of the language they speak or their inability to speak in English. A striking findings of the research explains that people often form group with other on the base of their ethnicity. In the university, students make groups with students who are of their ethnic group as they are aware of the people of their ethnicity. This also points out to another issue within our society which is the non-acceptance of the other ethnic group or considering them inferior or incompetent. While in the classroom setting, students make group with students who can speak fluently in English

as our education system considers a person competent who can communicate in the university as well as in the classroom in English.

A significant number of student reported that they come across fear of evaluation. Students in university fear being evaluated or criticized due to which they do not take part in university activities which in turn effects their academic performance. According to the theory of justice, no one has the right to discriminate others. It is the right of everyone to enjoy opportunities equally.

Students in university are mocked in number of ways. Other students make fun of them on the way they talk, the medium through with they talk, the way they behave and the way they dress. The theory of justice puts light on the provision of equality among people. Each individual has the right to be free of any harm or hurting attitude by others.

Significant respondents highlighted the issues faced by student who come from far off cities as they have difficult time adjusting with other as well as in the environment. Student as well as our general population are not welcoming to a different person or even a different ethnic group. Due to which they lose the ability to understand the other person. Every individual is entitled to acceptance and freedom. But due their non-accepting attitude students get discouraged leaving them incompetent, discouraged and left behind.

The current study found that people treat other differently on the basis of language they speak. It was found out that teachers and student prefer students who are fluent in speaking in English. While a few students also group up with students that are fluent in English as they consider them competent. Few students judge others on their dressing and the way they talk. The most important finding was that students who are discriminated are not only effect on the academic level but are badly effected on their personal level as well as in their social domain. While ethnicity seemed to play an important role in group formation in the university. This group can actually benefit many while is not in favor of a few who don't belong to a certain ethnic group. The findings also indicated that students are mocked in the university premises which leads them to fear of evaluation and negative judgments. The results had supported the research objectives that not only linguistic discrimination effects the academic performance but also badly impaired the individual on the personal and social account.

Conclusion

The paper has argued how linguistic discrimination effects the academic performance of students in Iqra University Islamabad. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that ethnicity plays a very crucial role in group formation as well as preferential behaviors are also backed on the account of ethnicity. The finding of the study contributes in several ways to our understanding of the role of ethnicity in our country. Ethnicity contributes a sense of ones among people of one group which is in turn favorable in the university setting while on the other hand, few students are badly affected by the highlighting role of ethnicity in the university setting. Students not only are demoralized on their academic account but their social interaction and self-perception is also affected. Not only students fear being judged, they also stop interacting and participating in the class as they are discriminated on the base of language they speak. They also lose confidence and start considering themselves incompetent for the university. However, this approach will be useful in creating insight among teachers and students of the effect of linguistic discrimination on the academic, personal and social level of a student. This issue needs an immediate attention as it is affecting our present generation while affecting their future progress.

Limitation

This study is an attempt to address the influence of linguistic discrimination on the academic performance of Iqra University Islamabad which can be very helpful for the universities authority to regulate policy designs that could minimize discrimination, create an accepting environment for students of different ethnic background in classrooms and well as other university settings.

However, it limits to investigate the same issue in other educational institutes as all of the universities are linguistically heterogeneous. It fails to address the perspective of teachers who is coming from a different linguistic background teaching linguistically different students in a classroom. It limits to investigate if a similar phenomenon occurs on MPhil and PhD level.

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Appendixes

Informed Consent Form

The following research is conducted by a social sciences student of Iqra University Islamabad. The aim of the study is to identify the effect of linguistic discrimination on the academic performance of undergrads in Iqra University Islamabad.

If you agree to participate, one-on-one interview will be conducted in which you will be asked a few questions. The interview will take 15-20 minutes approximately. The interview will be recorded so that the answer can be transcribed for the purpose of research.

Your participation will be entirely voluntarily. The data collected will be confidential and will be used only for the purpose of research. Your identity will not be enclosed at any stage of

research. You can clear any doubt related to the research before or during the interview. If you feel uncomfortable at any time of the interview, you can leave the interview without any consequences.

Your participation will be highly appreciated.

Consent

I am aware that all of the information I will provide will be kept confidential. I may clear any doubt about the research at any time I wish. I can leave the project any time I wish without any consequences.

Signature of Participant

Demographic sheet

1. Sex _____
2. Age _____
3. Enrolled degree title _____
4. Birth place _____
5. Current Residential city _____
6. How long have you been staying in the current city? _____
7. Ethnic background _____
8. Mother tongue _____
9. Language spoken at home _____

Questionnaire

1. Do you think that your ethnic/regional language allows you to perform well during the class?
2. Do you think the class environment is affected by different ethnic languages of students?
3. Do you think your ethnic language doesn't hinder your interaction with others?
4. Have you observed any preferential attitude toward some of your classmates? If yes, what is the possible reason?
5. Do you think that people make group with others for a particular reason?
6. Have you witnessed that a student has left a class because they were considered different on the base of language they speak?
7. Have you observed a discriminatory attitude toward a classmate because of his/her regional language?
8. Do you think that there is situation that result in exclusion of some students in the class?

9. Have your motivation and fear to speak in the class increased or decreased?
10. What would you suggest to a student who is faces linguistic discrimination?