



## English Language Education in Kashmir: A Diachronic Study

Firdous Nazir

Maulana Azad National Urdu University

PhD English

Email: [fnkuloo@gmail.com](mailto:fnkuloo@gmail.com)

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### Abstract

Kashmiri students are acquiring English as their tertiary language. Urdu is the second language in Kashmir, whereas Kashmiri is the primary language. The children of Kashmir exhibit superior English proficiency compared to pupils from other Indian states. Although English is the third language introduced at their educational institutions, this situation persists. One explanation is that English is imparted to pupils at the pre-primary level at an earlier age. Furthermore, it presently serves as the medium of teaching in educational institutions. This category encompasses both government and private entities. Before the emergence of English, most textbooks published in languages other than English were written in Urdu. Nonetheless, English has now assumed the function of Urdu. It is the preeminent educational system in the region. Government schools have always regarded the grammar-translation method as an excellent pedagogical instrument over the years. The project garnered support from publishers who provided reference volumes with Urdu translations. This paper examines the history and evolution of English in the Kashmir Valley. Since its establishment in missionary schools, it has permeated other public and private educational institutions. English was introduced to Kashmiris via CMC during the period of British dominion in and around the Indian subcontinent. The paper discusses how English developed to become the predominant language of teaching. Technology illustrates the impact it has exerted on indigenous languages and cultures.

Keywords: Kashmir, English Language Education, Missionary Schools, Houseboat Wallas

## Introduction

Kashmiris are recognised for showcasing their proficiency in the English language in public demonstrations of class and authority. They exhibit this tendency while interacting with each other during social occasions like birthday parties, wedding ceremonies, or for that matter in intellectual conferences. Fluency in English is assumed to indicate intellect. Conversely, Parray (2021) asserts that individuals perceive the use of one's native language as indicative of ignorance or rural backwardness.

In Kashmir, English is extensively used in both educational and political spheres of life. It is used in both governmental and private sectors as well as the tourism and marketing industries. The advantages of the English language have somewhat mitigated its cultural and linguistic intrusiveness. Given the influence of social media, the unfortunate youth who were unable to stick to their education and dropped out earlier are now embracing the language again due to its influence and seamless impact on the modern generation. They want to gain this information by imitation and observation, especially on social media.

An exemplary instance of this is the houseboat enterprises operating on Dal Lake in Srinagar. The absence of formal schooling has not hindered their proficiency in English. Their exposure to thousands of English-speaking visitors proves advantageous. They became adept in the language by acquiring new vocabulary and grammar. Another case can be cited as that of auto drivers. Who imitate and ape the college and school-going students who often switch between languages to show off their education and class. They pick words and phrases and use them in their daily conversation. Sometimes the English language is passively imbibed. Illiterate individuals who engage with television and social media often assimilate English vocabulary. English language learning starts rather far back from home when

a neophyte is acquiring languages. To instruct newborns, expressions like "sit down," "come here," and "be quiet" are employed. This illustrates the deep integration of English into Kashmiri culture and everyday life.

English was initially introduced to Kashmir during the colonial government. Christian missionary schools such as Tyndale Biscoe (1880) were essential in the evolution of this language as an educational medium. Macaulay's Minutes of 1835 and Wood's Despatch of 1854 were significant and impactful enterprises vis-à-vis the development of English in the Valley. They advocated for the administration of higher education in British India to be administered in English. This method resulted in English being the official language of Kashmir. The foundation facilitated its extensive adoption in the valley's educational institutions.

## Implementing

In the latter part of the 19th century and the early 20th century, missionary schools in Kashmir were the pioneers in providing English education. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) operated schools that provided instruction in both religion and English. Their objective was to enhance the education and culture of the Western world. Over time, these schools transformed into prototypes for other institutions. Both public and private educational institutions laid considerable emphasis on the study of English.

English educators were primarily accountable for instructing the subject during its initial introduction. Nevertheless, by the mid-20th century, it had evolved into a pedagogical medium owing to the incessantly growing appetite for modernism. National education policy progressively included English in the curricula of government schools. In the 1960s, a trilingual formula was established, mandating students to study English as a second or third language, further establishing its role in education.

During this period, textbooks underwent a significant and remarkable transformation. A significant number were modified to offer translations into English. Consequently, they were accessible to a broader audience. They were first composed in the Urdu language. The grammar-translation method evolved as a significant teaching instrument, especially in rural areas. The lecturers employed Urdu to elucidate issues and enhance students' understanding. A government educator in Baramulla remarked, "To instruct complex English grammar, we employ bilingual techniques." This approach aligns learners' native languages with foundational principles (Ahmed 2019).

The importance of the publishing sector cannot be overstated. Oxford University Press and local publishers developed handbooks in both English and Urdu. Students were able to attain proficiency in English in addition to their native languages with the aid of these bilingual textbooks. Furthermore, proficiency in the English language was prioritised in teacher training programs. They equipped educators with the essential resources to instruct proficiently in the language.

Innovative methods enhanced the English education offered by private colleges. Schools like Delhi Public School (Srinagar) and The Presentation Convent prioritised immersive environments. They encouraged the students to converse only in English. Discussions, storytelling, and workshops on spoken English became integral elements of their pedagogical methodology. As a consequence, the pupils' confidence and fluency were enhanced (Khan 2021).

### **Current Situation**

Currently, English serves as the principal medium of instruction in all educational institutions in Kashmir. This includes both governmental and private institutions. Its domination permeates not just formal education but also social, cultural, and

economic spheres. Proficiency in English is regarded by many as a necessity for advanced education, improved career opportunities, and social advancement.

English has significantly influenced the culture and language of the region. The acquisition of knowledge and global communication has been facilitated as a consequence. Nonetheless, it has presented a challenge to the measures implemented to safeguard native languages. Concerns have arisen over the extinction of regional languages and traditions. Historically, Kashmiri and Urdu were regarded as the preeminent languages in the realms of education and culture.

The growth of digital platforms and social media has expedited informal language acquisition. English-language content is available on YouTube, Instagram, Facebook, etc. Beyond the classroom, they aid individuals in developing language proficiency. A young entrepreneur from Anantnag remarked, "I acquired English phrases and commercial terminology through social media platforms. The English words are vital in aiding me to promote my handicraft enterprise internationally" (Bhat 2022).

The overfocus on English has sparked intense debate. Academics assert that the priority of English is damaging to cultural diversity since it weakens national languages. The diminished use of Kashmiri and Urdu in public and academic contexts has impeded the transmission of these languages to subsequent generations. The prevalence of English has led to social inequalities. Rural areas have comparatively restricted access to advanced English education than urban regions.

Case studies of government schools in rural Kashmir demonstrate a significant discrepancy in the quality of English instruction offered by these institutions. Urban schools possess proficient teachers and sufficient resources. Rural schools have two primary challenges: insufficient quality materials and

poor teacher preparation. The skills and opportunities accessible to students in urban and rural regions have increasingly diverged as a consequence of this.

Nonetheless, several instances of educational success illustrate the transformative impact of English training. Several persons from Kashmir, originating from underprivileged backgrounds, received scholarships to study at esteemed colleges and universities overseas. Their success can be ascribed to their proficiency in the English language. Local entrepreneurs and professionals have said that proficiency in English has been advantageous to them. It facilitates their connection with consumers globally, so enhancing their businesses and careers.

The challenges of English language acquisition in multilingual societies have been widely studied, but few works specifically address the unique sociolinguistic context of Kashmir. Studies on language acquisition emphasise the importance of exposure, access to quality instruction, and socioeconomic factors in shaping proficiency. Research by Cummins (1979) on linguistic interdependence highlights the role of first-language proficiency in acquiring a second language.

In the Kashmiri context, the role of regional languages like Kashmiri and Urdu complicates the learning of English. Socioeconomic factors, such as the divide between private and government schools, further exacerbate inequalities. Rural learners often face a lack of trained teachers and insufficient learning materials, as noted in previous studies. This research builds on these findings, focusing on the linguistic inequities specific to Kashmir.

### Concluding Reflections

The English education system in Kashmir exhibits its effectiveness and its complex consequences. The English language presently predominates in education,

originating from institutions established by missionaries. This has resulted in substantial alterations in the valley's educational, social, and economic landscape. It has created global opportunities. Conversely, it raises concerns over the preservation of cultures and languages.

It is essential to balance the benefits of English education with the necessity of preserving national languages and traditions. Consequently, a refined methodology is necessitated in this context. Collaboration among policymakers, educators, and stakeholders is essential. They are required to ensure fair access to high-quality English education. Furthermore, they should promote the use of Kashmiri and Urdu in educational environments and public spheres. A multilingual worldview that embraces variety has the potential to benefit Kashmir. It can preserve its culture while also benefiting from English education.

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