

Problems and Challenges to English Language in Madaris of Pakistan

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Abstract

Language is a communication tool to impart education at every level that is why different languages are taught for this purpose. In Madaris of Pakistan, Arabic is commonly taught as it is the language of basic Islamic sources i.e. The Holy Quran and Hadith. This paper will basically try to understand the learning of English as a language is not given importance, although it is very essential nowadays but besides this, it faces many problems and challenges in religious Madaris of Pakistan. Many factors are involved in this situation. In modern world, English language specially can be very helpful to the purposes of these Madaris. Learning of English language will help to impart, propagate and defend the message of Islam on a larger and wider scale. One can use it for da'wah and calling others to Allah. But some elements of Madaris are not well informed about to this fact that they have not such a larger vision to understand and absorb the facts. On the other side, supporters of teaching English language in Madaris are unluckily blind to the positive, historic, reformative role of Madaris. This situation is creating misunderstandings and these bodies are seen opponents while they must be supporting to each other. This article reviews the challenges and the problem and challenges to English language in Madaris as well as how to bridge the chasm created between the two schools of thought.

Keywords: *problems, English language, religious madaris of Pakistan.*

Introduction:

A sound number of Madaris exists in Pakistan, which play a key role in educating and building up the society. It is common, that the scheme of study applied therein, is in Arabic. The practice of other languages such as Persian, Urdu, and Pashto as a medium of expression has been adopted in these institutes since long. The significance of official language as well as the language of the developed nations i.e. English cannot to be ignored also it is referred as an international language. Like the other aspects of life, the importance of English is sensed in religious institutions also, but it is not

properly entertained. Now, it necessitates pointing out the problems and hurdles that lie there in the implementation of English in Madaris.

In this article, an effort has been knuckled down to solve this dilemma. It is hoped that it will elaborate the importance of English language and the challenges whatsoever, in detail. The procedure of the work is as follows:

At first the scope of education and character building has been highlighted from Islamic perspective. Then the historical review of Madaris and their social role have been described. Similarly, the curriculum being adopted in Madaris before British colonial era and after their exit from subcontinent has been discussed. The contemporary importance of English language has also been highlighted. The reasons of non-acceptance of English in Madaris have been discussed in detail. At the end the summary of the article and the solution to the problem has been provided.

Significance of Education in Islam

Islam pays great attention to education. It is the only religion started from the word "Iqra" which means "read", and in the first revelation the word *Qalam* i.e. "the pen" shows the signification of education. Many Quranic "Ayaat" and sayings of the Holy Prophet show the importance of education. For example:

Allah says in the Holy Quran:

يَرْفَعِ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ دَرَجَاتٍ¹

"Allah will rise up, to (suitable) ranks (and degrees), those of you who believe and who have been granted (mystic) Knowledge. And Allah is well-acquainted with all ye do."²

The Holy Prophet (peace be on him) says:

من سلك طريقا يلتمس فيه علما سهل الله له طريقا إلى الجنة.³

"He who steps towards knowledge, Allah (J) facilitates for him the path to Jannah."

There are several verses and *Ahadith* which show that Islam, which is the religion having complete code of life, has a wider and broader concept about knowledge. The Holy Prophet Muhammad (peace be on him) has been sent to all human beings irrespective of cadre, gender, caste, colour and language and was ordered to preach and propagate the message of Islam to the whole human beings.⁴

The Prophet Muhammad was the messenger of Allah and he is the one who laid out the foundation for the education of mankind. He used to teach his companions directly and also established different Madaris for this purpose. For example, the first ever Madrasah known as "*Suffa*" was established at Masjid-e-Nabavi, where the students from different walks of life used to acquire knowledge from the Holy Prophet. Similarly the Prophet deputed the Sahaba (R.A) - (companions of Prophet) in different areas which were assigned to impart the teachings of Islam to others. Hazrat Muaaz (R.A) was sent to Yamen for this.

The Prophet also gave importance to female education. He started educating women in his house. The house of Aisha (R.A) was a Madrasah for Muslim women where they got the solutions of their religious problems. Besides this, the prophet also supported the acquiring of various skills and sciences. He permitted Hazrat Zaid Bin Sabit to learn the Hebrew language from a Jewish institute situated in Madina. It is a proven fact that only in the period of 17 days this Sahabi learnt the Hebrew language to almost a comprehensive level.

Role of Madaris in Educating People:

Madaris play a vital role in preserving, propagating and defending the teachings of Islam. They are considered as non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for free education, boarding and lodging their students. Madaris are termed as important in seeking Islamic knowledge. It makes the society well-established, peaceful and civilised by improving the ratio of education.

Madaris are the sanctuaries of the religion. They provide experts in different fields of education. They train the individuals and impart knowledge from elementary stage up to high level. They provide men of character. They save the people to be deviated from the right path of Islam. They enlighten the hearts of Muslims with the spirit of Islam. They provide leaders in all walks of life whether they are spiritual, political, economic, ethical or social.

Evolution of Religious Madaris: A Historical Overview

Madaris' system of education has been started from the Prophetic era. The Holy Prophet used to give education informally to the tribes of Arabs and delegations came to him for getting education. They used to learn the basics of Islam. Similarly he established some places as Madaris for the purpose of educating people in a formal way.

Dar-e-Arqam ⁵ was the house of one of the companions of the Holy Prophet in which a Madrasah had been established before Hijra. Sayyiduna Musa' b bin Umair (R) was sent as an educator to teach the inhabitants of Yasrib (old name of Madina) the Holy Quran on their demand.

Suffa (a place in Masjid-e-Nabawi) was a specific place for education. Suffa produced many *ulama* and jurists among the companions of the Prophet.

In subcontinent, the Madaris system was started properly under the patronage of Sultan Qutbud'din Aibak (1210 A.D.). Mostly mosques were the centers for imparting education. They transmitted world education in addition to the religious education. Sultan Muhammad Ghori was the first one who established Madaris in subcontinent under the official control and proper directions when he conquered Ajmir Sharif in 1206 (A.D.)⁶. Sultan Shamsuddin Altamash set up a network of Madaris under his kind supervision as he was taking keen interest in religious knowledge. Almost all Mughal emperors supervised Madaris and paid their struggle but the most profound work was done by Aurangzeb Alamgir (D. 1707), who was a great scholar and well-

learned by himself. He changed the curriculum of Madaris system by adding some subjects according to the needs of that time without interfering and challenging the sovereignty of Madaris. He delivered the task to Mulla Nizamuddin Siharvi (1748) to revise the syllabus. His revised syllabus is known as *Dars-e-Nizami* which is still being followed in Madaris nowadays, although some subjects have been left behind and ignored.⁷

Curriculum of Madaris: An Analytical Survey:

Madaris are the branches of Suffa and they perform that duty to focus mainly on Quran and Hadith which are the basic sources of Islam. Hence these Madaris serve the mankind to teach them Quran, Sunnah and other necessary subjects helpful for referred above those two sources, like Arabic grammar and literature etc. as the language of both is Arabic.

As time passed, the needs of the society diversified and the jurists and scholars added new subjects to the old courses. In Umayyad era, *Mantiq* (Logical Sciences), Philosophy and *Hikmat* was added as there was a great assault of Greek on Muslim beliefs. They learned, taught and translated their books into Arabic to defend the message of Islam. Mamoon established an intellectual center "*Bait-ul-Hikmah*" (The House of Wisdom) for that purpose. At first it was just a personal library and gradually it became a major institution in which Muslim scholars as well as Jews and Christians used to come and contribute their knowledge and researches. It was the center to study humanities, science including mathematics, medicine, astronomy, zoology, chemistry and geography etc.⁸

Pre-colonial Era:

The curriculum taught in the Madaris of subcontinent in pre-colonial era, designed by Nizamuddin Siharvi was followed to prepare ulama, jurists and scholars to serve and to educate people for the service of the state and to secure the Islamic culture and virtues. It was contained of several subjects including medical science, engineering, architecture, algebra and geometry. This system lasted till the last Mughal king Bahadar Shah Zafar (Nov. 1862).

The graduates of those Madaris were not only jurists but were also skillful engineers, expert doctors, astronomers, experienced architects and good administrators.

The engineer who built Taj Mahal, named Ahmad (D. 1649 A.D.) from Lahore was a graduate from that system of education. It was an up-to-date system.⁹

Colonial Era:

When the British government made the subcontinent as her colony, besides other changes she changed the syllabus of Madaris according to the needs of the British government. It poisoned the fountain of trust that governed and supported Madaris economically. Thus a great gap has been created between the Madaris organisers and the British Empire. As a result Muslims

established an opposite opinion to English government, English culture and English language. They started a religious war against western ideologies. Even some *Ulama* gave *Fatwa*¹⁰ against English language. However some *Ulama* urged to seek English as Islam believes in harmony but they could not succeed.
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On the other hand, the British Government wanted supporters for themselves. They divided the Madaris education system into two sects, old and new, religious and secular. Thus it was the "Dark Age" in which a great gap has been produced between the Madaris and modern institute and hence we observe a great difference between Mister and Mullah.¹² The religious sect took Islamic knowledge while secular minds preferred modern education. Madaris gave importance to Arabic and Persian languages while secular sect was inclined towards English language. Both sects were not able to own and absorb the other.

The evolutionary changes in Madaris curriculum show that this system is dynamic and is not static. It has the capacity and flexibility to absorb changes to meet the needs of the relevant time.

Importance of Learning Foreign Languages in Islam:

Islam exhorts his believers to learn and acquire education beneficial to them. Knowledge is the lost treasure of a Muslim¹³ as the Holy Prophet said, "so it's the sacred duty of every man and woman to seek knowledge." As it is a fact that a language is the sole tool of communication. For this purpose the Holy Prophet sent Zaid bin Sabit (R) to learn Syriac language in order to make correspondence with the Jews as well as other people.

عن زيد بن ثابت: أن النبي صلى الله عليه وسلم أمره «أن يتعلم كتاب اليهود» حتى كتبت للنبي صلى الله عليه وسلم

كتبه، وأقرأته كتبهم، إذا كتبوا إليه¹⁴

It is also said that Ibn-e-Abbas (R) used to have a translator with him. Some jurists say that an emperor has to keep two translators with him as it will be substitute to two witnesses which is the required number.¹⁵

Islam is a universal code of life, not confined to any language, place, time, and race; rather it is related to the people of all languages, places, times and races. Different languages are needed at different times to fulfill its universal appeal. In the modern world English is a global language. It is a medium and a gateway to modern education. So the Madaris need English as language for acquiring their education and to study critically the viewpoint of West and thus they will be able to defend the true message of Islam. It is the duty of every Islamic Theologian to know the need of the hour and to guide the people to a straight path. In modern era, many thoughts and theories have been introduced by the Western philosophers such as secularism, deism, agnosticism and atheism etc. They are required to be scrutinized in the light of true Islamic narrative. These ideologies are almost in English language, so they can be criticised and discussed only after the English language is understandable for

them. Similarly the orientalisists have their own style of attacking on Islamic virtues; their compilations are nearly all in English language. If somebody wishes to know the actual thoughts of orientalisists he cannot achieve this target without knowing English.

In this regard, it is a known fact among the jurists that a person cannot become a competent religious scholar if he is unaware of the modern narrative:

"من لم يعرف باهل زمانه فهوليس بعالم"

Role of English Language in Modern Era:

In the modern world the importance of English language cannot be denied. It has become an international language spoken and understood worldwide. It is medium of modern physical and metaphysical knowledge.

Through English one can understand and share modern ideologies. Through English one can also understand and share the viewpoints of the world to the people.

Molana Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, a Deobandi scholar used to emphasise that we have to know about the western ideas and the attacks against Islam¹⁶. By acquiring necessary knowledge regarding English language one can easily clear the ambiguities and misunderstandings of the people of the world and can respond to questions related to Islam.

English Language and Madaris:

Organisers of Madaris are not ignorant to the importance of modern education as well as English. In many Madaris English has been included in the course. Learning and teaching of English language in Madaris will open floodgates of opportunities to *ulama* for learning of modern knowledge and interaction with the outside world. It will also help in removing the misunderstandings, hatred and the religious and secular minds.

All registered boards of Madaris especially *Wifaq-ul-Mardarishas*¹⁷ included English language in primary curriculum (i.e. *E'dadia* and *Mutawassita*) but unluckily the standard of English is not up to the mark. It cannot fulfill the needs of the society.

Some Madaris' teachers strictly deny the importance of English language as they have the early hatred blazing for English in their minds while some of them avoid it due to many factors which hurdle on way of its learning.

Problems and Challenges to English Language in Madaris:

Here are some problems and challenges to English language in Madrasah system of education which result in the disinclination of *ulama* and students of Madaris system to English language. They are discussed in detail below:

1. Disinclination of the Government toward Religious Madaris:

The government from the very beginning has been treating madaris like a step mother. They supervise and fully support schools, colleges, universities and other institutes established for modern education but unfortunately they

do not pay due attention to Madaris. Almost all Madaris are dependent on the charity of the common people. Although a few of them are under the government umbrella but almost all are deprived of the shelter of the government. The government devised a plan to improve the condition of Madaris but they were not sufficient. Government should take serious steps, supervise and fully support Madaris like schools, colleges and universities and bring it into the mainstream.

2. The Reluctance and Hatred:

Some religious minds have anti-Western sentiments because of West's conspiracies against Muslim world. They do not show an interest in learning and getting modern education and thus the Muslim world is falling behind of all other nations.

3. Lack of Communication:

There is a great chasm and gap between the Muslim world and the West. They have no interaction between them that's why English language is considered an alien language for the Muslims. Similarly, there is also a lack of interaction and communication between the religious and secular minds.

4. Mutual Antagonism for Religious and Secular Extremism:

Both the religious and secular classes have no passion to tolerate and endure each other. They have touched the boundary of extremism. They ignore the positive role of each other. Thus English language, modern education and religious education find no space for themselves.

5. Considered a Dichotomy:

In some religious sectors English language is considered as the contrasting language to Arabic. That's why they do not like to learn English language.

6. Viewed as Interference:

The induction of English language in Madrasah system is often considered as an attack on their sovereignty and autonomy. That's why they strongly oppose any kind of interference in their system of education.

7. Considered to Dilute the Essential Theological Nature of Madaris:

Some of the ulama consider English language like poison for the future of the students. They think that if the students are taught English language and other modern education that will lose or affect their spirituality. This is because every language has a social philosophical cultural background which shall automatically be imposed upon the minds and habits of learners.

8. Considered a Colonial Legacy:

As there is found a great hatred against the colonial forces. Hence some of the Madrasah teachers and organisers consider it a colonial legacy.

9. Lack of Interest:

Although many Madaris have included English language as a subject in their syllabus but unluckily it is at a very primary level. Due attention is not being given to it and that minor amount cannot fulfill the need of the society.

How to Overcome the Problems and Challenges:

1. To Provide Opportunities for Mutual Interaction:

The religious scholars, Madrasah organisers and secular minded people are if provided opportunities to interact and communicate, it is hoped that it will create mutual understanding of each other's views and the importance and positive points of each other. They will get closer to each other and the gap between them will be bridged. They will feel helpful and supportive towards each other rather than opposing each other. It will build a gateway toward moderation by getting modern education and foreign languages especially English language.

2. Government and NGOs' Support:

Madaris are the best NGOs serving the nation free of cost since its inception. They face lots of difficulties. They cannot afford to teach modern languages as they have limited sources to provide Islamic education. Students of Madaris live from hand to mouth. They are commonly from have-not section of the society. Teaching of English language is an extra burden for Madaris.

Similarly, the government has also ignored the Madaris. If the government start taking interest in imparting Islamic education and support the Madaris by giving monetary benefits like schools, colleges and universities, it will result in renowned scholars having necessary knowledge to fulfill the need of the day.

3. Opening up Minds:

The organisers of Madaris as well as secular minds must try to understand the cry of the day. They must not consider English language unlawful and unnecessary, while the secular section of the society must not ignore the importance of religion over English language. Our attitude must be pragmatic and realistic based on ground realities.

4. Elimination of Extreme Thinking:

Both the sides should be proactive, not reactive on each other's thoughts. Both should avoid the extreme thinking and encourage the mutual understanding.

Conclusion:

1. Madaris are facing lots of problems and challenges; however its importance cannot be minimised.
2. Some subjects are needed to be added in the curriculum of Pakistani Madaris in order to compete the graduates of Madaris with the graduates of colleges and universities. It must be revised.
3. Tolerance and harmony should be produced by following commonalities and discussing controversies should be avoided.
4. Students should be encouraged to do researches on different issues. It will reduce extremism.
5. Government must support Madaris and monetary benefits must be given.

6. The importance of modern education and languages in the modern era cannot be just washed away. Its importance should be accepted openly and mindfully.
7. As English is a gateway to modern education so proper attention may be given.



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References:

- ¹ Al mMujadalah, 58:11
- ² Abdullah Yusuf Ali, English translation of The Holy Quran
- ³ Tirmizi, Muhammad bin 'Essa, Chapter: Importance of seeking knowledge, Hadith:2646
- ⁴ Allah says in the Holy Quran: قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي رَسُولُ اللَّهِ إِلَيْكُمْ جَمِيعًا
Say: "O men! I am sent unto you all, as the Messenger of Allah. (Surah Al-A'raf, 158)
- ⁵ The first formal Islamic centre for imparting knowledge established by the the Holy Prophet Muhammad (SAW). It was, in fact, the house of Arqam bin Abi Arqam who was a companion of the Holy Prophet (SAW). He was the one who embraced Islam at a very young age. His house was chosen as a madaris in the initial period of Islam as it was a hidden and secure place.
- ⁶ Deeni madaris me taleem, Salim Mansoor Khalid, p: 94, Institute of policy studies, Islamabad.2005.
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Wisdom
- ⁹ پاکستان کے تعلیمی تقاضے: Dr. Mahmood Ahmad Ghazi, p: 108
- ¹⁰ Verdict, legal ruling by Islamic religious scholars
- ¹¹ Madaris reforms, Major General NasrUllah Tahir Dogar, page: 8, NDU journal 2010.
- ¹² Deeni madaris me taleem, Salim Mansoor Khalid, p:97
- ¹³ The Holy Prophet said "الحكمة ضالة المؤمن" Tirmizi, Hadith:2687
- ¹⁴ Bukhari, Muhammad bin Ismail, Hadith:7195
- ¹⁵ Hashiyah Bukhari, by Dr. Mustafa Deeb, Hadith Teacher in University of Damascus
- ¹⁶ Deeni madaris me taleem, Salim Mansoor Khalid, p:100
- ¹⁷ Wifaq ul Madaris Al-Arabia, is the largest federation/ board of religious madaris around the world. It was founded in 1959.It controls all madaris which are run by Deoband School of thought. Its main office is in Multan. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wafaq_ul_Madaris_Al-Arabia,_Pakistan)