Language and Literacy on and off-line: A Case Study with Multilingual Teenagers in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper reported on a post doctoral research which explored the literacy practices of teenagers, who lived in Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The research participants, from two families, were girls and boys aged fourteen having Punjabi as their first language. The academic literacy practices associated with teaching/learning in their schools are in English and Urdu, so, the focus of this study had been on out-of-school literacies and language choices. The data had been collected by means of observations and semi-structured interviews. The findings of the research were as follows: The teenagers were frequently engaged in varied multi-modal literacy practices, on and off-line, on paper and on screen. They included: (1.) reading internet websites and postings by friends on Facebook; (2.) reading The Quran, newspapers and magazines off-line; (3.) writing emails and updating their own postings on Facebook; (4.) texting via mobile phones. The research had also shown that English language was being used more frequently, in different types of literacy practices, as compared to Urdu and Punjabi. The research was informed by social practice view of literacy that has been developed within the New Literacy Studies tradition and by recent research on the ethnography of digital literacy.

Keywords. Literacy; Language; New Literacy Studies; Digital Literacy; Youth; Multilingualism

Multilingual Pakistan – An Introduction

Punjabi ranks at the top of all the languages in multilingual Pakistan as it is the most widely spoken regional language (Government of Pakistan, 2001). Although rich and diverse in nature, Punjabi is an unacknowledged language in Pakistan (Mobbs, 1991) as it has no status as the national, official or provincial language; thus, it is deprived of the prestige it deserves as compared to Urdu and English in our society. As a result, it is observed that the Punjabi native speakers,

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specially living in urban areas, are making a linguistic choice by adopting Urdu and English as their languages of communication. In the past, researchers have investigated Punjabi language from a historical, educational and political perspective (Rahman, 1996; Mansoor, 1993), but the realm of language choices and preferences in the literacy practices of Punjabi native speakers remains unexplored. This paper aims to fill the existing gap by looking at the nature, frequency, language and the role of medium in the out-of-school everyday literacy practices, on and offline, of young multilingual teenagers whose first language is Punjabi. As the study is based on a small sample size, the analysis and findings of this research will serve to highlight the emerging trends in the language choices and literacy practices of teenagers. The current research seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

1. What is the nature and frequency of out-of-school literacy practices of the participants?
2. Which language do they use for their on and off-line literacy practices?
3. What role does the medium play on their language choices and literacy practices?

Literature Review

In today's modern, globalized world, the notion of literacy has evolved as it is not restricted to reading and writing as mere activities; rather, the New Literacy Studies (NLS), developed by The New London Group, (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000) looks at literacy as a social practice which is deeply rooted in the social and cultural context in which it takes place (Gee, 2008). The idea that literacy is a social practice is further discussed in the form of six assertions:

1. "Literacy is best understood as a set of social practices; these can be inferred from events which are mediated by written texts.
2. There are different literacies associated with different domains of life.
3. Literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible and influential than others.
4. Literacy practices are purposeful and embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices.
5. Literacy is historically situated.
6. Literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making" (Barton, Hamilton and Ivanic, 2000, p.8).

Barton and Hamilton (2000, p.7) defined literacy practices as *"the general cultural ways of utilizing written language which people draw upon in their lives... literacy practices are what people do with literacy."* They further highlight, *"The notion of literacy practices offers a powerful way of conceptualizing the link between the activities of reading and writing and the social structures in which they are embedded…"* (Ibid, p.7). In a nutshell, literacy practices refer to the ways in which people use written language in their everyday lives. Literacy events, on the other hand, serve as a physical evidence of literacy practices. It is a concept pioneered by Heath (1982) who describes a literacy event as *"any occasion in which a piece of writing is integral to the nature of participants' interactions and their interpretive processes"* (p. 93). Any activity in which reading, or writing has a significant role, form and function is a literacy event. As Barton and Hamilton (2000) further describe, *"Events are observable episodes which arise from practices and are shaped by them. The notion of events stresses the situated nature of literacy, that, it always exists in a social context"* (p. 8).

While discussing the nature of literacy events, Barton and Hamilton (2000, p. 45, 46, 47), are of the view that

> Literacy events are activities where literacy has a role. Usually, there is a written text, or texts, central to the activity and there may be talk around the text. (45). Many literacy events in life are regular, repeated activities … In many literacy events there is a mixture of written and spoken language (46) … Looking at different literacy events literacy is not the same in all contexts; rather there are different literacies (47). There are different literacies associated with different domains of life … It is a useful starting point to examine the distinct practices in these domains, and then to compare, for example, home and school, or school and work-place (47).

The modern notion of literacy encompasses technological advancement, globalization, digital media and ethno-linguistic diversity (Barton and Lee, 2013) which has resulted in a major paradigm shift in literacy research as Luke indicates (2003, p.401) *'the last breakthrough'* in literacy research highlights a shift from a psychological to a social view in which knowledge, situation, context, discourse, power, *'identity'* and *'being'* (Street, 2003, p. 77) are taken into consideration. Weaving the threads of researches conducted on social media reveals that it has been widely researched in relation with literacy (Buck 2012; DePew, 2011; DePew and Miller-Cochran, 2010; Coiro et al., 2008), digital literacy practices (Danet &Herring, 2007); language (Guiller and Durndell (2007); identity (Buckingham, 2008; Meden, 2009), gender stereotypes (Bailey et

al., 2013), personality and self-esteem (Zheng, 2015), self-presentation (Herring & Kapidzic, 2015), profiles (Kapidizi and Herring, 2011), posting photos (Junco, 2013), images (You et al., 2014), emotional expressions (Parkins, 2012) and self-disclosure (Sheldon, 2013).

There exists a close yet subtle, complex and intricate relationship between literacy and language as mentioned by Bodomo and Lee (2001, p.8), *"literacy is embedded in language through different ways of using text and discourse."* Both are interconnected as Li (2010) observes that

> "language and literacy practices do not exist in isolation from one another just as cultures and communities do not exist as discrete entities, but rather interact with one another in various degrees of complementarity or conflict" (p. 143).

As it has been observed in multilingual societies, the use of certain languages is considered more appropriate and prestigious in different social, cultural, political and institutional contexts and situations; similarly, literacy practices have become another site to exhibit one's language choices and preferences. The choice and preference of language becomes a complex task in the digital literacy practices of multilingual users using social networking sites as they have to select one language over the other as Danet and Herring (2007: p.21) note, *"... wherever multilingualism exists, language choice becomes an issue. Language choice online depends on the technological, socio-cultural, and political context."*

Theoretical Framework

The research is informed by the social practice view of literacy that has been developed within the New Literacy Studies tradition and by recent research on the ethnography of digital literacy as most of the recent research conducted on the language and literacy, on and off-line, of youth is associated with it (Alvermann, 2002). New Literacy Studies (NLS) tradition approaches literacy from a social perspective viewing literacy as closely intertwined within a socio-cultural context. Gee (2008: p. 82) believes that, "Literacy has … indeed, no meaning apart from particular cultural contexts in which it is used. ¨ Literacy is not just as a mere set of reading and writing skills; rather, it considers the *"... multimodal and digital texts"* (Walsh 2008: p. 101). According to O'Brien and Scharber (2008: p. 66-67), digital literacies are defined as,

"socially situated practices supported by skills, strategies, and stances that enable the representation and understanding of ideas using a range of modalities enabled by digital tools."

Research Methodology - Demographic Details of Research Site

The current research is a case study of the online and offline linguistic practices of multilingual teenagers in Islamabad. Case study is widely used as a methodology in social sciences. It aims to study a phenomenon in its real-life context. It is exploratory in nature as the focus of study is an individual, organization or event. In the words of Yin (2009: p.18), *"A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident."*

Islamabad is the capital of Pakistan with a population of 1.7 million (Government of Pakistan, 2011). It is a cosmopolitan city and people have settled here from different parts of Pakistan. 71% of the population belongs to the Punjabi community, which is followed by the Urdu Speaking Muhajirs at around 10%, people belonging to Pashto speaking community account for 10.51%, and Sindhi, Balochi, Kashmiri are 7% (National Population Census, 1998). These figures are drawn from the data collected through questionnaires where the people were asked to mention their first language during the national population census conducted in 1998.

Islamabad has a high literacy rate at 84% (Academy of Educational Planning and Managements Report, 2013). These statistics are based on the definition of literacy which was used in the 1998 national census according to which a person aged 10 years and above is literate if he/she *"can read a newspaper and write a simple letter, in any language."* It is the center of several renowned and prestigious educational institutions. The educational system of Pakistan is primarily comprised of public and private sector institutions (Qadir and Riaz, 2014). In Islamabad, there are 430 public sector and 507 private sector institutions including all levels of education (Academy of Educational Planning and Managements Report, 2013). The medium of instruction and communication in private institutions is English, whereas, in public sector institutions, the medium of instruction is varied as both English and Urdu languages are used for teaching/learning purposes.

Profiles of Selected Families and Participants

Since this paper reports on the pilot study of a postdoctoral research conducted by the main author, just two families participated in the study. We primarily used convenience sampling technique for sample selection which revolved around the participants' age, gender, location, first language, and their language status. The specific criteria for selection were that the participants must be aged 14-16 since the focus of this research is on teenagers, resident in Islamabad and have Punjabi as a first language while also being fluent in English and Urdu. The rationale behind selecting middle class multilingual participants lies in the fact that the broader aim of the study is to explore the literacy practices of those who have the choice, resources and medium of selecting their desired language of communication. Also, there should be equal numbers of each gender. We contacted the potential participants and explained to them the nature and purpose of the study after which they expressed their willingness to take part in the research.

The sample consists of four multilingual teenagers, two boys and two girls, aged fourteen. The different literacy practices of these participants were observed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. All the four teenagers were interviewed. The duration of each interview was about 20 minutes. Both the researchers conducted the interviews. The interviews were conducted in Urdu language keeping in view the desire of the participants who wanted to use Urdu for interview purposes. The interviews took the form of a flowing conversation where the aim was primarily to explore the reasons behind their literacy practices which were observed before conducting the interviews. The participants belonged to middle class families and their parents were literate with diverse educational background as all of them were graduates having a bachelor's degree in subjects such as Engineering, Business Administration, Computer Science and Humanities. Both families consisted of four members, had above average income, had lived in Islamabad for 15-20 years and owned above-average sized properties. The head of the household was employed as Sales Manager in a local bank and Business Developer in a local Information Technology (IT) company respectively. Pseudonyms were used to protect the identity of the participants. In Family 1, Bilal (male) and Hira (female), both aged 14, participated in the study. Family 2 was represented by Qasim (male) and Maha (female) who were both aged 14.

Process of Research

The process of data collection for this study took place in 2017. During this period, we observed and took notes of literacy practices of the participants. The

nature of this research required us to visit and spend a considerable amount of time with the participants who participated in this research. Visiting the research site personally enabled us to collect data which was firmly grounded in natural setting and context. It also familiarized us with the background of families. When we visited the homes of participants for the first time, the parents introduced us to their children and told them that we would be a part of their family for some time. Their trust and cooperation allowed us to be an active participant in the whole process rather than just a formal, neutral and objective observer. The first visit was informal in nature where we introduced ourselves and encouraged all the family members to talk about themselves and their life in general. Later on, we explained to them the topic and purpose of our study and their role in it. During the discussion, we assured them that they would be treated with respect and dignity. At the end of this initial meeting, we finalized the time to visit them.

Participants' Literacy Practices

The phase of data collection phase was primarily based on observations because we wanted to get first-hand knowledge of the participants' literacy practices daily before conducting the interviews (Gillham, 2000). We started with informal/open observations in which we noted their daily routine. We carefully noted the nature and frequency of their literacy practices and the time which they dedicated to different practices daily. With their permission, we got an access to their Facebook and mobile phone messages. Ethical considerations were closely followed as we sought their permission before accessing their Facebook and mobile messages. With special reference to mobile messages, they agreed on forwarding us the messages they wanted to share. We took our research diaries with us in order to note down the details of their literacy practices and our personal feelings and reactions to various situations. Collecting data through observation resulted in in-depth insights of the participants' literacy practices.

Data Analysis and Discussion

The following section deals with data analysis highlighting the nature, frequency, and language of the participants' literacy practices based on data drawn from observations and interviews:

Nature of Participants' Literacy Practices

In exploring the literacy lives of participants, it is important to pay attention to the nature of their literacy practices. During the fieldwork, it was observed that all participants were engaged in very similar types of reading and writing

activities. Their out-of-school reading activities mainly constituted of reading the holy book *The Quran*, magazines, newspapers, emails, websites, and posts on social media, thus, covering both the paper and screen mediums.

Among different reading practices, recitation of the Holy book of Muslims *The Quran*, which is in Arabic, held a prominent place in the everyday life of the participants. The recitation was at the top of their priority list, although its time was not fixed. They usually recited it after morning prayers when there were fewer chances of distractions. Along with the recitation, they regularly offered prayers, in Arabic, five times a day at specific times.

Apart from the recitation, all of them showed keen interest in reading English newspapers and magazines which was evident from a great deal of time they spent on reading newspapers/magazines. In addition to reading daily newspapers *The News* and *Dawn*, English magazines were very popular among the participants, including *Times Magazine, The Express Tribune, Dawn Sunday Magazine, Dawn Young World*, and *The News Us Magazine*. Remarkably, all the magazines were in English as not even a single Urdu magazine was read by the participants. When asked about the reason behind reading English newspapers and magazines only, Bilal replied:

> "The reason being that I feel that reading Punjabi script is difficult. [that's why] I have not come across any Punjabi newspaper, magazine etc. in my life"

Hira shared her opinion in this regard and said:

> *"I have not seen Punjabi language in the written form ever. I do not know how Punjabi language is written that's why I cannot read it."*

They mostly read articles on topics such as music, movies, showbiz, entertainment, art, horoscope and fashion. They preferred not to read editorials on politics, current affairs, and economics as they viewed their out-of-school reading activities as a source of enjoyment and fun. O'Brien (1998, p. 29) also made the same observation when he contrasts, *"reading in school, which they (students) often view as boring and irrelevant, and reading outside of school, which they often view as useful and enjoyable."* For the participants, the activity of reading newspapers/magazines had a social-interactional purpose with their family members as well who used to join them during their reading sessions. The reading sessions revolved around sharing of views and opinions by the participants with each other and their parents on different articles. Although the

participants engaged in silent reading, at times, they used to read aloud comics and certain excerpts from articles which they deemed interesting. It was observed that both the participants and their parents were actively involved in these sessions making it a rich socio-cultural literacy event.

In terms of online reading, Facebook is the most popular social media site among the participants as all of them had accounts on it and they were seen actively using Facebook daily. In addition to Facebook, they visited other websites as well and the most regularly visited websites among the participants were www.msn.com and www.yahoo.com where they spent most of their time reading articles on international fashion, music, movie reviews, health and following the news on their favorite actors, singers and celebrities etc.

Closely related with reading, it was observed that the participants made use of the digital media and mobile/smart phones for all their out-of-school writing activities which included writing emails, commenting and updating their own status on Facebook and texting on mobile with friends. At times, they were seen posting quotes, proverbs and poems on their Facebook wall since most of their digital literacy practices had a recreational and informational purpose.

It is worth mentioning that the participants were engaged in more reading activities as compared to writing. One reason, based on my personal inference, might be the fact that they are frequently engaged in writing activities in their schools such as assignments, quizzes, and exams. So, once they are out of school, they prefer to spend their time in reading the texts they like.

Literacy Practices vs. Literacy Medium

Modern technological advancements have revolutionized the nature of literacy practices (Gee, 2004). Keeping in view the time participants spent on different out-of-school literacy activities daily, it is interesting to note that most of the literacy practices of participants were online rather than offline as they made extensive use of mobiles, computers and various Smartphone Applications. They used internet on a daily, regular basis for browsing, downloading, and visiting social media websites. It is interesting to mention that of all the reading activities which took place, half of the total number of reading activities was of printed material, but all the writing activities took place on screen as we did not come across anything handwritten by the participants during our fieldwork.

The fieldwork reveals that the favourite online literacy practice of participants involved social media, i.e. reading and posting on Facebook. The

time participants, taken as a group, spent on screen literacy ranged from a minimum of two to a maximum of five hours per day where they dedicated an average of three hours daily to Facebook. Although the topics of their posts and comments varied every day, the most common topics were homework, school gossips related to teachers and fellow students, fashion, sports, music and movies. Since all of them actively used Facebook as an informal medium of interaction with their friends, they had the liberty to communicate in a language of their own choice, but it was observed the language which dominates their online literacy practices is English. In addition to English, Urdu language was used at times as they switched and moved from English to Urdu and vice versa (Discussed in detail in the section on code switching/mixing). Punjabi language had no presence in the languages which they used for their online or offline out-of-school literacy practices. When asked about the reason behind selecting English for their online communication, Maha replied:

> "Whenever I communicate with people in the written form, it is in English. Whenever I talk to people, then, I prefer Urdu language. English language has become a standard in every kind of communication. Honestly speaking, I use English whenever I want to create a good impression on others and I think that if you want to ruin your impression, you should use Punjabi."

Language and Literacy: On and offline

The findings of this research show that when it comes to language choice and preference, English is the main language of their out-of-school literacy practices even though most of their academic activities at school are centered on English. Their out-of-school literacy practices were English dominated although they had the freedom to use the language of their own choice. Among other factors, digital media have a strong impact on the choice of participants' language who, being multilingual, always find themselves making more use of English as compared to any other language.

With reference to language choices in different online literacy practices, a lot of similarities exist between the participants from the two families. The two participants from Family 1 had similar preferences, using English and Urdu (in roman script) for emails, status updates and comments on Facebook. However, both used English for sending text messages on mobile phones. This preference for English might be due to the content which was always short, precise messages related to different school-based activities. When it comes to browsing internet websites, both read English web pages only. The same trend was witnessed in Family 2 with slight differences in terms of emails and Facebook status updates.

Both participants' English-only approach was evident in writing emails as they made sure not to code switch/mix in any other language in email writing. Apart from emails, it was noticed that Qasim's Facebook status updates were all in English as well. But, on the contrary, his mobile texting was primarily a blend of two languages, namely, English and Urdu.

Exploring their language choices in offline literacy practices resulted in notable similarities as all the participants from two families had the same language preferences and choices. For instance, the *Holy Quran* was read in Arabic by all participants. When it comes to reading newspapers/magazines, only English-language based newspapers and magazines were read by the participants.

Code Switching and Code Mixing

The phenomenon of code switching, and code mixing was also observed in the digital literacy practices of participants. Code switching/mixing is widely researched in spoken communication, but, it has largely remained unexplored in the domain of writing in the past (Sebba, 2012). However, the recent and emerging research trends in the field of literacy, globalization, and digital literacy practices (Danet and Herring, 2007; Thurlow and Mroczek, 2011) reveal the writing domain as an interesting site to explore language choices, nature and the purpose of code switching/mixing in a multilingual context.

There are various instances when code switching/mixing were observed in writing as the participants switched from English to Urdu and vice versa in their posts on Facebook and text messages on mobile phone. Originally, in contrast to Perso-Arabic script, Romanised version of Urdu language was used by participants on Facebook and mobile text messages which is evident in the following examples. For instance, updating Facebook status in the morning was the most celebrated ritual among the participants which was accompanied with sending text messages on the mobile phone. For example, Bilal writes on his Facebook wall,

"Subha Bakhair… Rise and Shine"

Translation: [Good morning… Rise and shine]

Hira updates her status and writes,

"Subha mubarik… Have a blessed day!!!"

Translation: [Good morning… Have a blessed day!!!]

Maha had the following status to share,

"A very happy, good morning to everyone!!! Abhi school main miltay hain… a lot of interesting news to share…!!! Excited!!! Hmmmm….!!!"

Translation: [A very happy, good morning to everyone!!! Let's meet in school… a lot of interesting news to share …!!! Excited!!! Hmmmm….!!!]

Qasim sends a mobile text message to his friends on a Monday morning:

"Monday morning…☹ ☹ ☹ … abhi tou week shuru hua hy… Oh God… meri madad farma !!!"

Translation: ["Monday morning…☹ ☹ ☹ … the week has just started… Oh God… Please help me…!!!"]

    The nature of code switching/mixing also reveals that both the languages are used to serve different purposes. English is used when the aim is to be formal and share information, whereas, Urdu is mostly used for informal, pleasurable purposes, for instance, when they shared a joke, an unexpected mood swing, a school gossip or expressed their like/dislike on a famous fashion trend. Urdu is used primarily when they wanted to express their feelings, emotions and personal impressions about something, thus, revealing a certain level of affiliation, attachment and association with Urdu. Most of such posts were accompanied by emoticons. For instance, after a long, hectic day at school, Bilal updates his status, along with an emoticon expressing his worried and distressed state of mind:

"Main skuul say bohat ziaada thak gaya hun aur tung aa chukka hun… kya karuun…??? :/ :/ :/"

Translation: [I am extremely tired and sick of school… what should I do…??? :/ :/ :/]

Hira updates her status before her exams:

"Exams ka mausam aa chukka hy… iss dafa tou bohat dar la raha hy… pata nahi kyun"

Translation: [Exam season has arrived… I am really scared this time… don't know why…"]

Maha replied and wrote:

"Exams kay mausam ko chorro… bahar ka mausam enjoy karo… main tou bohat khush hun…!!! ☺ ☺ ☺

Translation: [Leave the exam season and enjoy the spring season… I am very happy…!!! ☺ ☺]

The prevalence of code switching reflects the high level of comfort participants have in both languages as they felt quite at ease with using English and Urdu in their writing activities. In addition to Urdu, the participants made extensive use of English words, phrases and sentences revealing their high level of competence in English and the sense of prestige which they associate with it. The most widely accepted theories of code switching/mixing do not view it as a neutral phenomenon; rather, it has been a social identity marker (Blom and Gumperz, 2000; Myers-Scotton, 2006). Researchers have confirmed this with many studies (Blommaert, 2003; Juffermans, 2011). Thus, at the micro level, the language choices of participants reveal them to be active agents in creating and maintaining the hierarchy of languages in a multilingual social milieu where English ranks at the top of the hierarchy.

Discussion

The out-of-school literacy practices of participants are dominated by digital media which have changed the nature, choice and frequency of practices and activities they are regularly engaged in. The findings of the study suggest that the participants exist in two literacy worlds simultaneously, i.e. digital and print, which are used for different functions and purposes. Understanding the purpose and function of literacy practices is of crucial importance in any literacy research. Heath (1980, p.128-129) mentions seven functions of literacy in the following words:

> "(1) Instrumental (2) social-interactional (3) news-related (4) memory supportive (5) substitutes for oral messages (6) provision of permanent record, and (7) confirmation."

In addition to the above-mentioned functions, researchers (Mikulecky, 1990; Klassen, 1991) have documented another purpose of literacy: relaxation and

pleasure. The functions of my participants' literacy practices seem to fall in the instrumental, social-interactional, and news-related categories. In terms of languages, English and Urdu languages were associated with different functions of literacy. The instrumental and news-related functions of literacy were served by English language mainly because the participants' source of gathering different types of information came from English through digital and print mediums. The social-interactional function of literacy was served by a mixture of the two as revealed in the Facebook messages. It is probably due to the involvement of social relationships and the fact that Urdu lies close to the hearts of participants being their common medium of communication in their everyday life.

The nature, purpose and medium of my participants' literacy practices were closely related. It was observed that for the reading activities, participants used both print and digital mediums which were primarily guided by the nature and purpose of reading activities. For instance, the participants preferred the print medium for the recitation of *The Quran* even though its online version is easily available on the World Wide Web in downloadable formats and on Android apps as well. This preference might be the product of the local, cultural upbringing where children start learning to read *The Quran* in the form of a book from a very early age. This special kind of affiliation with the book from early childhood was a hard-break habit which made them reluctant to switch to the digital media. So, all of them were in favour of reading *The Quran* off-line. Similarly, we do not see a shift from print to digital when it comes to reading newspapers/magazines as they enjoyed holding them and flicking through the pages with their evening snack. In contrast to the recitation of *The Quran* which was a solitary activity, reading newspapers/magazines was more of a social activity where all the family members used to sit together and share their opinion on different news.

The medium of out-of-school literacy practices of participants also serve to determine their language choices and preferences as both are interrelated at a deeper level. Although internet is increasingly becoming an important site of linguistic diversity, English language still dominates the cyber world (Kelly-Holmes, 2012). Our participants' extensive use of English language in their digital literacy practices reinforces the idea of dominant use of English by those who actively use the internet. In this way, the digital media has, in turn, played a significant role in empowering English as the participants feel that they are not left with any other choice except to use English for their survival in the cyber world. Interestingly, Urdu websites were not popular among the participants even though the number of Urdu websites on the internet is substantial in the form of Urdu dictionaries, translation software from Urdu to other languages, and Urdu newspapers and magazines. But English dominates the literacy lives of the

participants which is used for informational, recreational, and pleasurable purposes, activities and practices.

The interconnectedness of medium and language choices reveals deeper ideologies at the macro level bringing to light the issues of positioning of these teenagers in the wider socio-cultural and socio-political scenario in Pakistani society. For these teenagers, English has become a source of sharing experiences with the wider global community. So, at this point, English stops being just a 'language'; rather, it serves as a linguistic passport which has linguistically empowered them in order to engage in a digitally media-led world which might lead to the social and linguistic marginalization of other, less powerful languages and, in turn, their speakers.

Conclusion

The findings of this research reflect the nature, preferred medium and language choices of the participants for their out-of-school literacy practices. The participants engage in multimodal literacy practices, but, the relationship between various literacy practices and language remains complex as their language choices are guided by wider socio-political and socio-cultural factors. Their choices and preferences are also indicative of their own positioning within the social and linguistic hierarchy in Pakistan. Looking further at the language and literacy lives of these young teenagers will enable us to understand the emerging trends of literacy among youth in this multilingual country. Since the research was limited to two families, selecting a big sample size will help the future researchers to generalize their findings. Other variables such as gender, identity can be explored by future researchers to further explain the phenomenon of literacy in a multilingual context.

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