**CPEC international agreement Need for language planning and policy (part I)**

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The agreement to create the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) was formally signed in 2015 between the two governments of China and Pakistan. There are two main parts to the agreement: One is the development of energy, infrastructure, economic zones and development of Gwadar Port leading to the creation of approximately a million jobs; and two, social development through cultural exchanges and transfer of knowledge through academic training. Above all, CPEC is seen as critical for job creation providing increased employment opportunities; especially for the lower income groups. CPEC also views education including the acquisition of Mandarin and culture as central to promoting better understanding and improved human capital.

A two year study was conducted by Lahore School of Economics to investigate the soft variables of language and culture to facilitate successful implementation of CPEC Project. The focus of the study was to analyze the present language situation and language needs of all stakeholders in the following areas; language and employment; language and class dynamics; and language and education.

The importance of the project is immense. The research findings are pertinent as they indicate that there is a need for a coherent and clearly stated language policy recognized by employees/ workers; and is stated to be the most important factor in the entire CPEC project. The presence of a multilingual workforce belonging to various ethnicities and nationalities points to the importance of a common language for cross culture communication, effective team building, information sharing, and employee responsiveness without any language barriers or adversely affecting any line of work.

The question of the level of Mandarin required for operating in a CPEC dominated environment needs to be understood. For the present Mandarin is seen to be important by workers at lower and middle level with 10-12 years of schooling for upward mobility

Apart from the economic benefits to be derived from learning Mandarin, it is also seen as bridging the cultural gap between the two countries and hence a key player in the social and political context. The benefits to be derived from learning Mandarin are seen in economic terms; keeping in view, the large size of the CPEC project that began in 2016 and is expected to continue for several years.

Multicultural understanding is an intrinsic part of the drive to teach Mandarin in Pakistan. Unlike English where the focus was on creating a class of ‘baboos’, ability to speak and understand Mandarin is viewed as bringing the two cultures, Pakistani and Chinese closer. This is seen as essential as the two cultures are very different and there has been very interaction at a people to people level.

Unfortunately, existing opportunities for learning Mandarin for local employees indicate that these are outside the formal education system of schools and colleges. The key public sector organization identified for teaching Mandarin to the working class is TEVTA that has created opportunities for the largest number of people with ten years of schooling in all districts of the Punjab. However the need for learning a technical language which makes it quite difficult for workers to comprehend technical terms (that are in Mandarin) at the workplace. Consequently, very few youth trained by TEVTA, remain unemployed.

The national language Urdu emerges as the dominant language, it is the formal language of communication with superiors such as managers and supervisors in the workplace and faculty members in language training institutions. However, there appear to be no opportunities for Chinese employees to learn Urdu in the study area. This is reflected in the limited communication between Pakistani and Chinese employees. In the power plants, reliance on translators is in evidence. Feedback from higher and middle management such as supervisors and workers indicate Urdu may also emerge as a link language; as the Chinese are also learning Urdu both in China and in private academies in Pakistan. This is contrary to the impression held by Mandarin teaching institutions that the Chinese are not interested in making an effort to learn Urdu and that they are not good at learning languages.

The status of English as a link language has yet to change. Presently, Mandarin is not posing a challenge to the use of English, as it has not been introduced as a subject in public schools or colleges in Pakistan. Moreover, its status as an international language gives it an edge over Mandarin. Its role as a link language is likely to grow with the proliferation of CPEC projects and closer association with China as the Chinese are also learning English as it was introduced as a subject at school and later at college levels. It is also used along with Mandarin at the management level. As such. Urdu may also emerge as a link language as the Chinese are also learning Urdu both in China and in private academies in Pakistan.

The question of the level of Mandarin required for operating in a CPEC dominated environment needs to be understood. For the present Mandarin is seen to be important by workers at lower and middle level with 10-12 years of schooling for upward mobility. It is required for certain types of jobs such as for translators, for technical workers, for reading instructions on machines and for simple communication with Chinese personnel.

All students studying Mandarin in Confucius Institutes, displayed highly positive attitudes to both Mandarin and Urdu; however, there was a significant differences in reasons for learning Mandarin. Whereas, the male students displayed an instrumental motivation such as higher education and employment opportunities; the female students displayed an integrative motivation towards learning Mandarin and wanted to learn it to enhance their verbal repertoire.

Gender inequity in employees working in CPEC projects was a matter of grave concern. There were negligible number of females working at all levels of management. Although, the number of women working in urban areas are low; there is a significant difference between female workers in industries in rural and urban areas. Female workers work in rural family farms, or as daily workers; but this inequity could be lack of trust and fear of sexual harassment in industries.

In the absence of an official policy on language in the workplace to fill the gap; some recommendations are being put forward. The first suggestion is that the number of translators could be increased to improve the working environment in CPEC projects. Secondly, creating employment opportunities for the large number of unemployed educated youth from rural and urban areas; by the acquisition of Mandarin is possible only if the quality and content of Mandarin courses is made relevant.

Presently there are several gaps in the acquisition of Mandarin. The corpus of Mandarin learning materials needs to be reviewed for their efficacy and linkages to the market. In-house training in Mandarin and Urdu can be organized for those already in employment. To expand opportunities, Mandarin could be taught as a special subject in public and private schools at the secondary level.

It is a matter of concern that a large number of TEVTA institutes graduates in Mandarin are unemployed. Teaching Mandarin for special purposes should be explored such as for technical programs, business and enterprise and general communication. Learning outcomes of each program should be specified.

Creating opportunities for Chinese management and workers to learn Urdu should also be a priority for the government as it is anticipated that in the long run Chinese workers will be replaced by local persons; in which case the demand for Mandarin may decline at this level. Affirmative action to ensure employment of women who have acquired proficiency in Mandarin to enable them to benefit from the opportunities created by CPEC.

To conclude, the emphasis on Mandarin is especially useful and beneficial for blue-collar workers and those who are engaged in technical trade activities as it is opening up new avenues of work resulting in their upward mobility. It is expected that learning Mandarin will have a positive impact employment levels of those who are situated at the lowest rung of social ladder because in terms of job promotions and advancement workers who are fluent in Mandarin are preferred.

The motivation to learn Mandarin is thus very real. At the same time while learning Mandarin will create more employment opportunities at the lower end of the class hierarchy it is not likely to alter the existing class structure. The question remains whether Mandarin will like English produce marginalizing hierarchies of educational and economic opportunity. More studies are required to explore these linguistic challenges for effective communication between Chinese and Pakistani students, employers, and employees; to ensure successful implementation of CPEC project.

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