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INVESTIGATING FACTORS AFFECTING ON ENGLISH READING PERFORMANCE OF URDU AND SINDHI HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL LEARNERS IN THE PAKISTANI CONTEXT

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ABSTRACT

The current study investigated how Pakistani Urdu & Sindhi high school students' English reading performance was influenced by their family background, educational background, and prior language learning experiences. Additionally, this study also demonstrated how differences in home backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and prior language learning experiences among Urdu and Sindhi high school students affected their English reading performance.

The qualitative research methodology was modified for the exploratory study. To get a clear picture of the phenomena, the data was gathered through in-depth semi-structured interviews with a small number of participants. The data were evaluated from eight students: four learners from the Urdu group and four from the Sindhi group. The data was analyzed by using thematic analysis. Finally, the results were collected for the outcome of the study.

The findings indicated that the development of reading performance as a whole is significantly influenced by home setting, educational background, and prior language learning experiences. Second, high school learners do not have strong family background, a solid educational foundation, and good prior language learning experiences. These factors are responsible for the poor performance in reading. Moreover, in comparison to Urdu & Sindhi learners: Urdu learners have better home backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and past language learning experiences than Sindhi students.

Keywords: *English Reading Performance, Home Background, Educational Background, Past Language Learning Experiences, Urdu & Sindhi Learners, Higher Secondary School Learners.*

Background to the study

1.1 Introduction

It has been observed by the researcher that after five years of teaching the English language the students at higher secondary level lack in English reading performance. One day I experienced in a class reading test the students were unable to perform. It looks like the students' reading test was a burden for them. Additionally, the students find it problematic in English vocabulary and grammatical structures. The English language skills of students from non-native countries like Pakistan should be professional at the higher secondary level, especially in reading (Rajprasis et al, 2014). Secondly, it was also noticed that Urdu students are more competent than Sindhi students in Sindh Pakistan. Comparatively, Urdu students outperform Sindhi pupils in reading comprehension and general English language responses.

The probable cause could be related to home settings, educational experience, prior exposure to language acquisition, etc. Jamali Kivi et al (2021) claim that socio-cultural viewpoint plays a great role in L2 learning performance. Hos, R (2010) also claims that

inadequate learning backgrounds are often responsible for the poor reading performance of learners. Therefore the research aims to study whether the home background, educational background and language experiences in the past affect the English reading performance of higher secondary students and also find the difference in Urdu and Sindhi students' home background, educational background and language experiences in the past. There is very little research has been conducted in the viewpoint area. This research will not only fill the research gap but also find the difference between Urdu & Sindhi groups' home backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and language learning experiences in the past. The students enrolled in higher secondary schools in the public sector belonged to different ethnic, religious, educated, and uneducated backgrounds. The present study aims to collect results from public sector schools.

The study will be useful in nations as Pakistan where English is often spoken as a second language, official language, and more importantly medium of instruction in the public or private sector of education. Moreover, the present study will be beneficial in reforming home background and educational background so that the students will get the advantage in learning the English language.

Aims

The study aims to investigate influence of home background, educational background and language learning experiences in the past affect English reading proficiency and also finds the difference between Urdu & Sindhi students' home background, educational background and language learning experiences in the past of higher secondary learners in Sindh Pakistan.

1.5 Research objectives

1. To explore whether the home background, educational background & past language learning experiences affect reading performance of all higher secondary school learners at Sindh Pakistan.
2. To compare the difference of home background, educational background and language learning experiences in the past between Urdu & Sindhi students from higher secondary learners.

1.6 Research questions

1. What is the influence of home background, educational background and language experiences in past affecting English reading performance of higher secondary level students overall.
2. What are the differences of home background, educational background and language learning experiences in past between Urdu & Sindhi students from higher secondary school learners at Sindh Pakistan.

Review of Literature

2.1 The Impact of Home Background on Reading Performances

A better family environment is beneficial for their children's academic results and affects their reading ability (Chen et al, 2019). Additionally family status, money parents' education also plays a vital role in children's literacy and performance (Creemers & Kariakides, 2010). Likewise, the highly-educated mother boosts her children for a better reading process as compared with the low-educational mother (Magnuson, 2007). Multiple types of research have proved that there is a strong relationship between parents' participation, dedication, background of students' early literacy development, and reading performance.

2.2 The Impact of Educational background on Reading Performance

The students learn academic and reading skills at school (Gormley et al, 2005). The learners spend plenty of time learning reading skills at school after home. So it is useful to study the impact of educational background themes on reading performance. The educational background includes school type (Machen et al, 2013) quality teaching (Myrberg, 2007) school library, and teaching environment (Creemers & Kyriakides, 2010). Leithwood et al (2010) noted that quality teachers are considered the best resource for the school and also have a strong influence over students’ academic learning and reading skills. Well-trained and educated teacher plays a vital role in the student’s reading and academic skills (Greenwald et al, 1996). Thus quality teaching and knowledge lead the students to perform better in reading performance.

2.3 The Impact of Past Language Learning Experience on Reading Performance

The past learning experience has great importance in educational settings (Alves, 2008). Self-confidence is considered one of the key features in Past learning experiences. Because better self-confidence depicts a good past learning experience. Language learning is relatable to past learning experiences (Fujiwara, 2012). Thus, the learners get a good environment at school as well as at home. It directs the positive language learning experiences in the past.

Similarly, Pretorius & Ribbens (2005) compared Grade 7 and Grade 8 students in terms of reading performance and practices of South African children from advantaged & disadvantaged schools and also the reasons involve behind poor performance. The results suggested that grade 8 students were slow readers than grade 7 students. Most grade 8 children lacked access to a library either at school or at home.

In the Pakistani context, Zarif et al (2014) found record dropouts from a school of 5th & 6th-grade students in the year 2010-2011 at district Thatta of Sindh Pakistan.

The review of the literature suggests that students’ home background, educational background, and Past language experiences influence reading performance. Moreover, due to the different background there might be gaps between Urdu and Sindhi students in home background, educational background, and past language learning experiences. This paper discusses the factors that affect reading performance but also discovers the differences in the backgrounds of two linguistic communities speaking Urdu and Sindhi in the Pakistani context.

2.4 Conceptual Framework

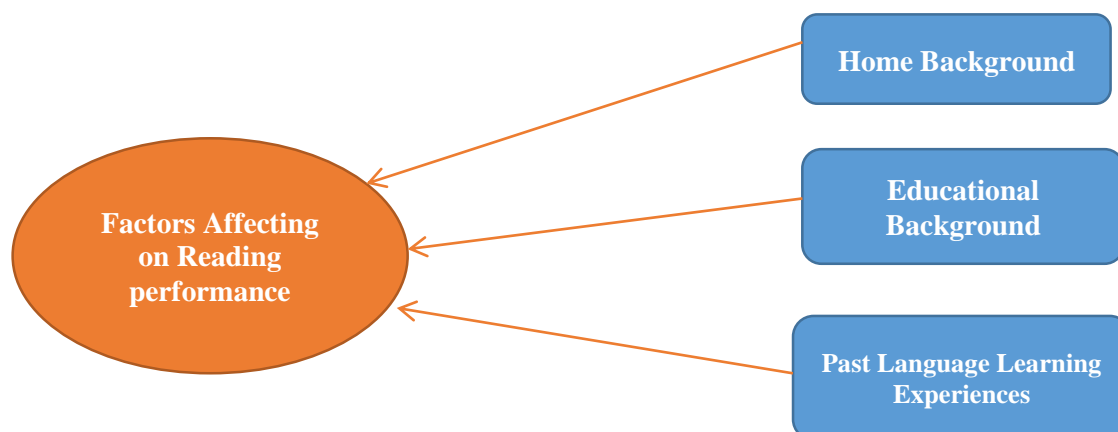


Figure1.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research approach/method/tool

The research approach adapted from the previous multiple studies. Qualitative approach is more verbal than the numerical (Dornyei, 2007). Fewer samples are utilized in the qualitative technique, which also produces rich, detailed data. (Collis & Hussey, 2003 Dornyei (2007) suggests that qualitative data collection from the large size can create problem rather than the collection from than the smaller size. In this case of the study to find the factors affecting on reading performance qualitative approach is feasible. This approach would not help in identifying the factors affecting on reading performance but also find the variation between two lingual groups home, educational background and past language learning experiences in Pakistani context.

3.2. Population and sampling

Population encompasses the group of people with common culture, civilization, language, belief, tradition, values and thinking (Creswell, 2012). Therefore the interview was framed to collect information about a) home background b) educational background c) past language learning experiences. Finally the output data allowed integration with the findings of qualitative findings to find the answers of the research questions. The study was carried out from the eight participants study from different public sector higher secondary schools in Sindh Pakistan: Urdu (n=4) and Sindhi (n=4). The participants were selected through the stratified random sampling. Each interview was recorded with the sound recorder and the length of the interview was fifteen to twenty minutes.

3.3. Research instrument

| | | |
|----------------------|---|---|
| <p>1. Interviews</p> | <p>To find the factors that involved in the poor reading performance overall. And also explore the variation of experience between Urdu & Sindhi students which are responsible for poor reading performance at higher secondary level. The results provide the deeper understanding of the phenomenon.</p> | <p>Semi- structured . 8 participants 4 from Urdu group 4 from Sindhi group</p> |
|----------------------|---|---|

Semi- structured interview was considered an appropriate procedure for data collection to gain the deeper insight of the research questions. Moreover the participants were asked about the parents’ education home background, educational background and past language learning experiences. Thus to find the factors affect the reading performance interviews are considered as appropriate research tool.

4. Results & Discussions

Qualitative data must be analyzed systematically to find meaningful conclusions (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Braun & Clarke (2006) argue that since thematic analysis is theoretically created for thoroughly analyzing, classifying, and interpreting themes within the data, it is a method of qualitative analysis. Thematic Analysis is feasible to discover the hidden factors that may influence the problem. Moreover, it is used for analyzing data from the investigator’s point of view. The positive outcome of the Thematic Analysis is used for transparency, accessibility, and more importantly interpreting the interview data, which is a compulsory need for the qualitative data. Hence Thematic Analysis is commercially used in qualitative research.

Below are the emerging themes after following the six-step model of Thematic Analysis.

1. Home Literacy Environment

2. Educational Background
3. English Language learning in the Past.

4.1 Home Literacy Environment

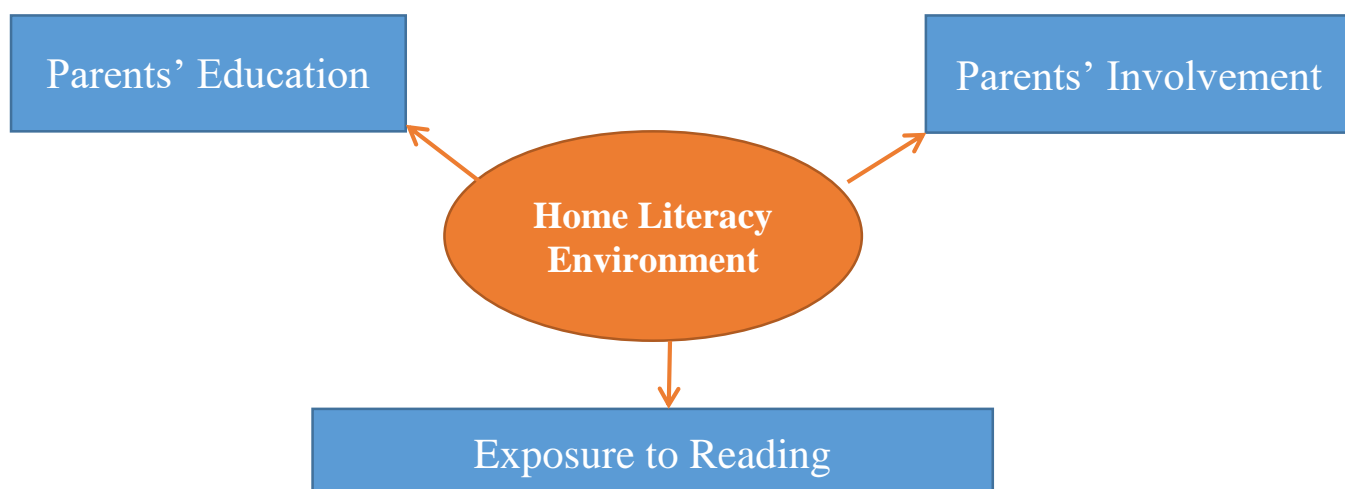


Figure 2 Home Background is divided into three sub-themes

Home Literacy is concerned with the three sub-themes Parents' Education, Parents' Involvement, Exposure to reading, and involvement.

Parents' education has a strong impact on Home Literacy Background. Five out of Eight participants (U-1, U-2, U-3, S-1, S-2) stated that there both parents are well-educated and also have good jobs. Therefore they are getting a good environment at home. One spoke the narration that *"I am happy that my father is a govt. office clerk so there I am in a better financial position. He bears all my educational expenses and also gives me good pocket money"*. (U-2 highlighted that). This shows that the learner only has to focus on their studies, and this may be the reason for getting good grades. On the other hand, the remaining participants' (U-4, S-3,S-4) parents' lack of education leads the students towards poor performance in the educational field. Hence one S-3 highlighted that *"My father is a driver at a private firm. How he can help us in getting a good education. He is not educated well. Even when he is ill so I have to go to work instead of him because the company will cut the wage which we couldn't afford"*. This implies that poor parents' education leads to unfaithful behavior toward the children's education which leads to poor grades, and poor reading performance.

Parental Involvement has a great impact on the children's education. Many pieces of research have proved that students whose parents do check and balance their education, as a result, get good achievement in academic records. In the same manner, the three participants' (S-1,U-2,U-3) parents are very serious about their children's studies. S-1 emphasized that *"My parents are very serious about my studies, especially my mother. She often used to visit the school and meet the principal and class teacher. She used to discuss my studies."* Moreover, U-2 said that *"My mother used to check my diary, daily work at school, and also discuss daily school activities"*. These participants have highlighted that their parents take an interest in school academic activities. This may lead to a positive influence on the student's literacy and education. In contrast, U-1,S-2 parents do not take an interest in daily academic activities. S-2 said that *"My parents did not come to any parents-teacher meeting. They are having a difficult job. They do not have time and a having a busy schedule for a whole day. Even if I am having any trouble in education so I have to consult only with my teachers because my parents*

get tired of having a busy schedule.” Most parents are having busy schedules or have difficult jobs so they blindly rely on school administration or teachers’ ability. As a result, children are not able to perform well which leads to poor academic records.

Exposure to reading has also a great involvement in the home literacy environment. This sub-theme is related to the reading material at home or visits to the library. Three participants (U-2,U-3,S-1) often used the library. One of them noted that *“In my house, there is a library in which there are 45 to 50 books. My mother has a hobby of reading books and maintains a library. I take interest in reading those books.”* (U-3). These respondents are having access to the books. Their parents read the books and also motivate their children to read books. On the other side respondent (U-1,U-4,S-2,S-3,S-4) do not get motivation to read books. S-4 stressed that *“.....I do not have library books. We are having 5 to 10 books in our home which are related to our course.....”* This unavailability of books at home has a strong influence on poor reading performance as well as all levels of education.

4.2 Educational Background

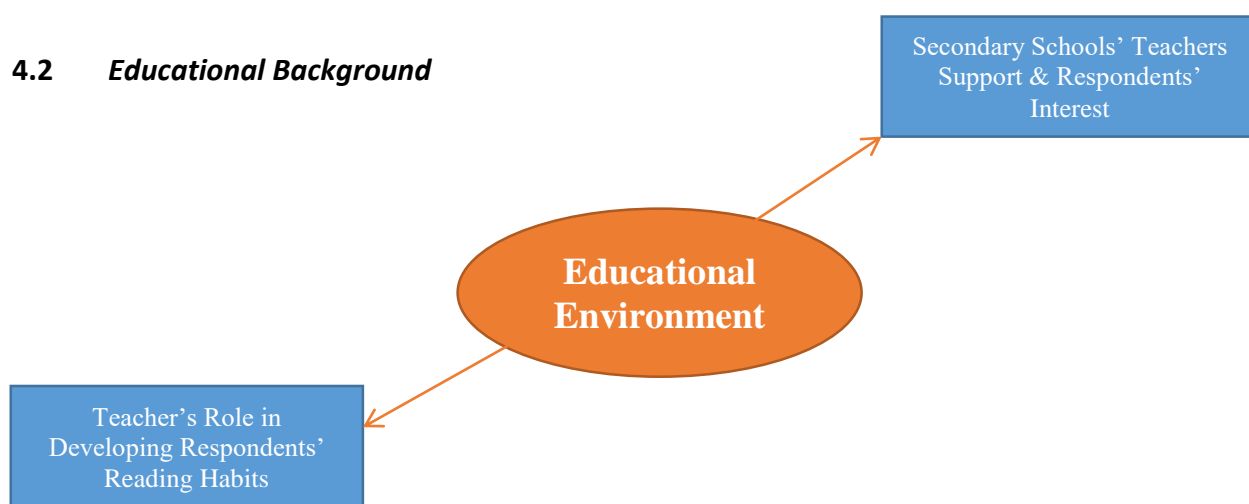


Figure: 3 Education Background and its sub-themes.

As it has been displayed in the above figure that educational background is categorized into two basic sub-themes. 1. Secondary Schools’ Teacher’s Support & Respondents’ Interest 2. Teachers’ Role in Developing Respondents’ Reading Habits.

Secondary Schools’ Teachers’ Support and Respondents’ Interest are the sub-theme of the Educational Environment. Hence the Participants are from the higher secondary standard therefore the learners may have different secondary schools’ learning and educational background. Either they came from the public or private sector background. The private sector in the Pakistani context provides great facilities for reading to learners. As the secondary school teachers supported the respondents (U-1,U-2, U-3,S-1,S-2). U-2 said that *my school was situated in a very large area. There were three libraries. Thrice a week there was a unit of the library. I was not bound to read a particular book. I was allowed to take any book at home for reading. My teacher used different activities which motivated us to read books”*. These participants were having a good learning environment. Their teachers were supportive and encouraged them to read more and more books. Therefore they are having good reading skills and performance. In contrast: the other respondents (U-4, S-3,S-4) came from public sector schools. S-4 emphasized that *“My school was in an old building and there were limited benches for sitting. Mostly students sit on the floor. There was no library at my school nor did any teacher motivate us for reading.”* To conclude the difference can easily

notify. Some organizations lack basic learning facilities such as libraries. Moreover, the teachers did not support any students for reading.

Teachers' Role plays a vital role in developing respondents' reading habits. Five participants (U-1,U-2,U-3,S-1,S-2) are supported by teachers. U-1 emphasized that *"My instructors were really interested in students' reading and writing. They used to give the daily task of reading or writing and checking daily. My performance was evaluated and sent to my parents on their WhatsApp"*. The review of the participants shows us that the teachers are very serious about the student's reading and writing. They not only involve themselves but also tried to engage parents in student's performance. On the other side, the teachers did not take any part in students reading performance nor tried to improve. S-4 highlighted that *"My teacher did take part in reading activities. They came and start writing on the board and explaining something related to the topic. They did not take any part in reading nor motivate us to take part"*. This suggests that the teachers did not support young learners in reading. This leads to poor reading performance.

4.3 English Language learning in the Past.

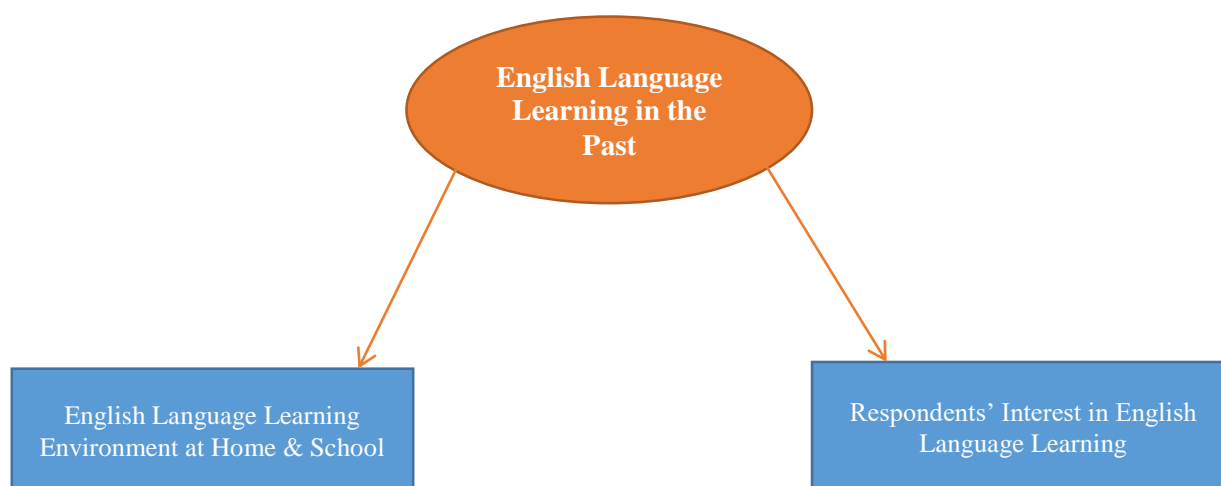


Figure 4: English Language Learning Experiences in the Past and its sub-themes.

English Language Learning in the Past has a great impact on reading proficiency. This is considered the key theme of the current study. As shown in the figure the main is subdivided into two sub-themes.

English Language Learning Environment at Home & School plays a vital role in the development of reading proficiency. Three participants (U-2,U-3,S-1) have a good learning environment. U-2 noted *"I have a library at my home. When I was younger, my parents encouraged me to read books. In secondary school, I do not feel many problems in understanding or performing the task of English Language given by the teacher."* The response of the participants showed that these learners had a good environment for reading at home. This is also supported by the school teachers. In contrast: the respondents (U-4, S-3, S-4) did not get a better learning environment. U-4 emphasized *"There was no library at my school and home. The teachers used to teach grammar only in English. He used the L1 language in communication and does not speak in English."* The outcome of these participants explained that the teachers used old traditional procedures for the English language. This discourages the formation of reading habits and eventually results in reading comprehension failure.

Respondents' Interest suggests the reading, speaking, common usage, and more importantly their liking of English. Five respondents (U-1,U-2,U-3,S-1,S-2) have an interest in learning English. "I have an interest in reading from the primary classes. I used to read books about magical and mystical stories. With time, my interest developed more. Now I read novels in my leisure time."(U-1 emphasized that). On the opposite S-4 said" I was not having an interest in reading books at the primary level but with respect to time I started taking an interest in books but the problem is that I did not understand the deep-level language written in the books. So my all efforts went in vain." The findings of the sub-theme suggest that the students in the majority are having supportive arguments towards respondents' interest. But on the other side, the participants showed interest but due to poor language proficiency they couldn't make themselves up to the mark.

4.4 Comparison of Urdu & Sindhi Students' Background

In order to find the answer of research question it is really useful to draw the outcome of the study on the table. Moreover the comparison can easily be done and also easily understandable. The main themes & sub-themes are listed in column in below table. The ranking order is explained in a traffic light colors: green= high, yellow= medium, red= low. The ranking order yellow= medium indicates the learners' fathers' education is less than mother, they are having less than 10 books at home, medium reading at home or school. The green color indicates good parental education, involvement and great motivation for reading either from school or home. The red color denotes less parent's education, involvement and motivation to read at home or school.

| Home Literacy Environment | U-1 | U-2 | U-3 | U-4 | S-1 | S-2 | S-3 | S-4 |
|--|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|--------|--------|
| Parents' Education | Green | Green | Green | Red | Green | Green | Red | Red |
| Parental Involvement | Red | Green | Green | Yellow | Green | Red | Yellow | Yellow |
| Exposure to Reading | Red | Green | Green | Red | Green | Red | Red | Red |
| Educational Background | | | | | | | | |
| Secondary Schools Teachers' Support | Green | Green | Green | Red | Green | Green | Red | Red |
| Teachers' Role in Reading Habits | Green | Green | Green | Yellow | Green | Green | Yellow | Red |
| English Language Learning Experiences in the Past | | | | | | | | |
| English Learning Experiences at Home & School | Yellow | Green | Green | Red | Green | Yellow | Red | Red |
| Respondents' Interest | Green | Green | Green | Yellow | Green | Green | Yellow | Red |

Table: 1 Comparison of Urdu & Sindhi students' Background

4.4.1 Urdu & Sindhi Groups' Home Literacy Environment

The table directs that Urdu students have better parents' education than Sindhi students. Mothers and fathers of Urdu students support more and also showed involvement in the learning and also motivate them for language proficiency. Parents also take an interest in the daily academic work of their children and motivate them to read. In contrast, Sindhi parents motivate less to their children for learning therefore Sindhi students lack English Language proficiency than Urdu Students. This suggests that Home Literacy Environment is useful in the development of language proficiency.

4.4.2 Urdu & Sindhi Groups' Educational Background

In conclusion of table Urdu students are having better educational backgrounds. Their secondary teachers supported and motivated them well so that is why they are competing well in higher secondary level. But on the other side, Sindhi students also get good educational backgrounds but are not good as Urdu students. Their secondary teachers taught the basic of the language but in higher secondary advanced level is required. So in that case, Sindhi students can't compete with Urdu students. To conclude, educational background has a great impact on language proficiency.

4.4.3 Urdu & Sindhi Groups' English Language Learning in the Past

Sindhi students are having good English language learning experiences in the Past. They learned the English Language with a limited amount of books at home and school. So in that case they are having limited knowledge of the English language. In opposite, Urdu students have a wide range of variety of books available at home and schools. Also, their parents supported them well. As a result, Urdu students have had better English language experience in the past. Therefore, the results direct that English language learning in the past lead strong impression on English language proficiency.

4.5 Summary of the Interviews Findings

Thematic Analysis has concluded deeper insight of the research questions. It has been expected that the below finding provides the clear understanding of the factors affecting reading performance.

Interview Findings: 1

The interview results concluded that majority of students did not have good home, educational background and past language learning experiences. U- 3 , S-3 , S-4 participants did not have good support from parents and teachers (See Table 1). Moreover, students overall reading performance are low and their factors also supporting the statement. In table 1 it has been clearly spotted that home background, educational background and past language learning experiences of students were not good overall. Only three out of five respondents like U-2, U-3, S-1 having educated parents, library at home, get motivation from parents and teacher, and having well past language learning experience. Secondary schools' teacher support and their motivation for developing reading habits is the key feature of educational background. The students overall did not have better learning opportunities in the past or lack in educational and home background. It has been concluded that factors: home background, educational background and past language learning experience have a great impact over reading performance. Thus the higher secondary students of Sindh Pakistan lack in home background, educational background and past language learning experiences direct towards the poor reading performance.

Interview Finding: 2

The results revealed that parents' education and parents' involvement and exposure to reading plays a vital role in getting results in class reading performance. In comparison it has been found that Urdu students are rich in home literacy background (see table 1). Sindhi students lack in parents' education, parents' involvement. Moreover they did not get any motivation from parents to the exposure of reading. The difference in home literacy background may be due to different social and cultural variations. Urdu students responded favorably when compared to Sindhi students in terms of their family backgrounds, educational backgrounds, and past language learning experiences (See table 1). Urdu parents and teachers gave good support to them.

5. Conclusion and recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

In light of the main findings of this study, Thematic Analysis has proved that home literacy background, educational background and English language learning in the past has a strong influence over reading habits and ultimately reading performance. The overall home background, educational background and past language learning experience of Urdu & Sindhi students are not good. Moreover it has been found that Urdu students' parents are more educated and supportive and having positive attitude towards their children. They provide library, motivate them to learn more and more to their children. Urdu students' educational background is better. They were sent to the good institutes in the past, which were having good library and teacher's support. Past English language learning experience of Urdu students is good. In contrast: the parents of Sindhi students were less educated than Urdu students. They showed less involvement and motivate less to their children for improvement and reading. Sindhi students' educational background was also less privileged and they mostly came from public sector organization. To conclude the overall home, educational background and past language learning experience are not good. Additionally Urdu students are having good home background, educational background and English learning experiences in the past than Sindhi students.

5.2. Practical implication

The finding of this study is very beneficial for policy makers and implementers in different ways. They would know the current status of reading proficiency of Urdu & Sindhi students' groups and also the factors affecting at higher secondary level of Sindh Pakistan. This can be use the finding of this study to fill the gaps. They would also identify the role of parents, home background, educational background in the development of the reading proficiency to get maximize output. The curriculum and books could also be modified in the light of the findings of this study. The appointment can be made and training of teachers can be conducted considering the role of teacher education institution highlighted in this study.

5.3. Recommendation from the findings

1. It is recommended that parents should involve themselves in the students' learning activities. This will be the positive attitude towards children which motivate them to improve the English language learning
2. The parents must maintain the library at home and inspire their children to read more and develop reading habits among them.
3. The parents' education also necessary for the improvement of children. So parents must educate themselves.
4. The teacher responsibility is to motivate the learners in reading.
5. The teacher should design activities which motivate the learners for library

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