

Attitudes Towards Education Among the Baloch of Karachi

**A survey for understanding one
community's view on the education
of their children**

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ATTITUDES TOWARDS EDUCATION AMONG THE BALOCH OF KARACHI

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Background on the Baloch people

The exact number of Balochi speakers is not known, although estimates range from 7 to 10 million. Most Baloch live in a number of S. Asian and Middle Eastern countries. Their homeland covers an area about the size of Britain extending into three countries: Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan. Although the Baloch have traditionally been pastoral nomads, farmers and fishermen, there are increasing numbers of Baloch living in urban areas.

Balochi is a Northwest Iranian language related to Farsi (a Southwest Iranian language) and Kurdish (also a Northwest Iranian language). It has three major dialect groupings:

- (1) Eastern
- (2) Western, or Raxshani
- (3) Southern, or Coastal (also called Makrani)

In addition to the variations in dialect due to the large geographic area inhabited by the Baloch, there are influences on the language from a number of neighboring languages. Prior to about fifty years ago, Farsi was the language used for official and literary purposes in the Balochi area. Since the creation of Pakistan, Urdu has also influenced the language heavily, particularly in the city of Karachi. But there has been an ever increasing level of literary activity in Balochi itself including the production of monthly magazines, a large number of poetry books, a translation of the Quran, and a translation of the New Testament.

The Baloch have a very low literacy rate: around 15%. The development of a literacy program is vital for their society. Research over the last 50 years has shown the value of beginning literacy in the mother tongue. However, the Baloch live as minorities in countries where the national language is different from their mother tongue. Literacy in the mother tongue functions as a stepping stone into literacy in the national language. Again, research has shown, "Children who are given the opportunity to develop their first language learn a second language more easily than children who have not had that opportunity. This first language development is more important than 'time on task' in the second language."¹

Literacy efforts and the need for a survey

A foundation for Balochi mother tongue literacy is being laid through linguistic research and literacy efforts in Karachi, Pakistan. Here dwell the largest concentration of Baloch people anywhere in the world numbering somewhere between 1.5 and 2 million speakers (Southern dialect). Already many books focusing on literacy in Balochi have been produced including story books, health books, and primers. A dictionary containing 21,000 entries is in its editing stages. Literacy work is now at a stage where training of teachers and writers needs to happen. If Baloch men and women could be trained in Karachi to carry on literacy work, they could help raise the literacy rate among Baloch not only in Karachi, but in other Balochi speaking areas as well. This is because the Baloch living in Karachi have relatives throughout most of the Balochi speaking world.

¹ Dutcher, Nadine with colloration of G. Richard Tucker. First published in 1982. Updated in 1995. *The Use of First and Second Languages in Education - A Review of International Experience*. Pacific Islands Discussion Paper Series, No. 1, East Asia and Pacific Region. Country Department III. World Bank, Washington D.C.

Kalakot, Lyari is one of the areas in Karachi which is almost entirely Baloch. The people generally have a very low income compared to other parts of the city. A pilot literacy project was carried out during 1998 and 1999 by Eunice Tan, one of the foreign literacy workers. She taught two mother-tongue reading programs to 1st year students at a local tuition center. After some pre-reading activities, she used a Balochi primer to teach reading and writing. She also incorporated Urdu and English into the program (both spoken and written forms). The other teachers at the tuition center testify that by the middle of first class, her students had achieved a level of reading ability equal to or above the 3rd class students in all languages. However, these same teachers are still hesitant to use her methods in their own teaching.

Linguistic and literacy personnel who live in the locality of Kalakot decided to carry out a survey during August of 1999. The purpose of the survey was to see how members in the community view education and to check on the feasibility of starting a mother tongue literacy project here. Three organizations worked together to help carry out the survey: The Kalakot Literacy Committee (a newly formed committee whose goal is to see literacy take hold in this area), The Language Project of the Church of Pakistan (the sponsor of the project), and The Young Educational Society (a local tuition center being run by about 20 volunteers).

For a period of about 2 weeks, pairs of men and pairs of women went around Kalakot and the surrounding community interviewing people and writing their comments down on a survey form (attached). No one knows for sure just how many people live in this area. Estimates range from 20 to 70 thousand. 175 survey forms were completed, 102 by men and 73 by women. Respondents ranged in age from 14 to 65 years of age with the average being 34 years old. Although a larger number of responses would be desirable to confirm the results we have gathered, it is believed that what has been collected so far gives valuable input with which to continue planning a pilot project.

Highlights of the survey

Purpose of education

When asked why children go to school, most people replied, "To get an education." However, after probing further, 96 respondents gave more detailed responses that were thought-provoking:

To make better people and a better society: 45%

To be better off financially: 15%

To give children and society a brighter future (this response combines the two above): 27%

To give children knowledge / training: 18%

The expected answer to this question was, "To get a good job." Yet the responses given show that the Baloch people are more interested in their society as a whole and in having children who grow up to become "good people."

Which type of school?

Most people saw schools and madressas (a private, religious school) as equally acceptable in giving a good education. Only 24% of the people interviewed preferred tuition centers, although most would agree that tuition centers are a good place to enhance children's learning.

While the majority of people preferred expensive, English-medium schools, they said the high fees are prohibitive for them. Half of the people interviewed said they liked government schools

because the fees are low. Yet about 67% said they preferred private schools because the quality of education is better.

Half of the respondents felt that a cheap or free school can give a good education. They said that a good education doesn't depend on fees, but on school management, a child's intelligence, the educational standard, the teacher, the environment, and the family. However, one third of the people interviewed still thought that a cheap or free school cannot give a good education.

Fees

People were asked how much a mother and father would be willing to pay per month to give their children a good education. Most people said Rs 150 or less, although the range was between free and Rs 8000.

If people are short on money and they need to decide on who to send to school, 71% said they would send their sons (preferably the eldest) while 19% said they'd send their daughters (preferably their eldest). Many respondents added that they would choose those who had an interest in school or who were smart.

Amount of education

When people were asked how much education someone should receive in order to obtain a good job, most thought graduation (14th class) was important. Nine percent of the respondents were skeptical, saying that education doesn't guarantee a good job. Looking at the school drop-out rate statistics of the people interviewed, the majority of respondents dropped out of school after reaching 8th class, thus showing that in practice, reaching 8th class seemed most important. When the jobs of people interviewed were compared with the level of education they obtained, those with better jobs had reached 10th class.

Extra-curricular education

People were asked to state what children would take interest in learning beyond academics. Many suggestions were given, but by far the most popular answer was computers (53%).

Children who drop out of school

Who is responsible for entering children into school and deciding on their removal? From the survey, it is clear that parents fill this role. If a child doesn't want to go to school, again it is usually the parents who will convince him to continue on in his or her studies, although other family members may also be involved.

Why do children drop out of school? The most common response given (49%) was because of a lack of attention or interest, whether by the parents or by the child himself. Home-related matters (41%) were the next biggest reason (lack of interest on the parent's part, home problems, personal matters, community environment, values, etc.). After that came money related matters (30%), meaning that the family's low income didn't allow the children to attend school. Next were child-related matters (23%), meaning that the child lacked interest, lacked intelligence, lacked self-esteem, or was influenced by bad company. Following this came education-related matters (15%), meaning the education wasn't good, was too difficult, was badly managed, or was boring. Some even said it was due to a lack of extra-curricular activities or that the child feared the teacher. Finally, 2% of respondents said they didn't know why children dropped out of school.

Language use

The people interviewed in this survey identified 5 languages used in the local education system: Urdu, English, Sindhi, Arabic, and Balochi. When asked which languages are best for children to receive an education in, English and Urdu were chosen about equally (50%). Twenty-four percent also chose Balochi.

Domains of learning

Half of the people interviewed answered the question, “What do children from Balochi culture learn from their parents, their religious teacher, their school, and media (TV, radio, audio cassette, video cassette)?” Most said children learn manners, respect, character, and social skills from their parents; they learn about the Islamic religion from their religious teacher; they gain education, training, and general and world knowledge from school; and they learn bad habits or nothing from media. However, one third of the people did say children could learn education, knowledge and other “good” things from media.

All people interviewed answered the question, “From where does someone learn about Islam, reading and writing, morals, health, Pakistani history and culture, and Balochi history and culture?” Following are their responses:

Islamic education: mostly from a madressa

Reading and writing: mostly from school

Ethical / Moral education: mostly from the home

Health: mostly from the home

Pakistani history & culture: mostly from school

Balochi history & culture: mostly from home, especially from one’s grandparents

What was most interesting in watching people answer this last question was when they got to the part about health. Nearly everyone had to think longer on this topic before they could tell where someone usually learns about health-related issues. Then they would chose “at home” as a default. This reveals a need for some sort of health education program in this community.

Interest in a Balochi mother tongue school program

The main reason for the survey was wrapped up in the final two questions: Would people like to see a school available where Balochi was the main language of instruction for the first 3 years of a child’s education? Urdu and English would also be used to some degree during these years, and after year 3 the main language of instruction would either be Urdu or English. Also, if such a school existed right now, would they send their kids there?

The results of this question were very encouraging. Eighty-six percent of people interviewed said, “Yes” to both of these questions. Some even commented, “We would love to send our children to such a school, but one does not yet exist.” Only ten percent responded negatively. (The remaining four percent gave conflicting answers to the two questions.) When these responses were compared according to gender, the men tended to favor mother tongue education over women (90% of men responded positively as compared to 78% of the women).

Conclusion and suggestions

According to the results of this survey, community support for a Balochi mother-tongue literacy program is strong in the Kalakot area - much stronger than the researchers originally thought. However, respondents made it clear that such a program should be used mainly as a bridge into

both Urdu and English. Therefore, it is concluded here that with continued local support and cooperation, a community-based project can successfully be carried out in Kalakot.

Evaluation of students' success in learning to read and write in Urdu and English will be an important component of any literacy program formed. The results can then be made public to show the benefits of beginning literacy in the mother tongue. Materials and training need to be made available to the wider public including madressas, schools and tuition centers among Baloch-majority communities. The training would focus on the use of the materials as well as on creative teaching methods. Writing workshops could also be held in order to help refine the skills of Balochi writers, to provide more Balochi materials to read, and to promote the use of an orthography which is easy to learn and is similar to Urdu.

Other suggestions by the researchers:

- * Balochi, Urdu and English should all be taught. Attention will be given to listening and oral skills in Urdu and English until the children can read and write in Balochi.
- * Since including English was seen as important, methods of upgrading teachers' English-speaking ability should be researched. This could even be used as an incentive for literacy workers (for example, free English lessons for those who volunteer their time to this work).
- * Whatever program is developed, students should eventually be prepared to enter the public school system.
- * Fees for the program should be cheap enough to allow poor families to attend (around Rs 50 to 100 per month). This may mean some kind of income-generation project is needed for the program.
- * Health education should be included in the instruction since it was shown to be a need.
- * An ethical component should be included as well since the Baloch view the purpose of education as producing "good people." This could be done by using reading materials that contain morals (such as Aesop's fables) or by including a module on a regular basis that specifically teaches ethics. This would also be an excellent place to put some teaching on drug abuse, a social problem in the Kalakot area.
- * Because parents have the greatest influence on whether or not their children are educated, strong parental involvement in the program should be encouraged.
- * The good role that media can play in education should be promoted.
- * If finances allow, teaching on computers should also be given, possibly as an extra-curricular activity.
- * If possible, potential Baloch teachers and writers should visit and observe another successful literacy project (perhaps among the Parkari in Sindh).
- * A newsletter could be produced specifically for the staff at tuition centers and schools in Baloch areas. It could include articles on what's being done to promote mother tongue literacy and the results. It could also include information on new publications and training opportunities.
- * More research should take place focusing on the interest in an adult literacy program. A pilot project for adults could also be set up.

Other suggestions by the Kalakot Literacy Committee:

- * A teacher training and literature development workshop should be conducted for the teachers at the Young Educational Society tuition center.
- * Funds for a pilot project need to be sought.
- * In order to set a clear direction and to gain community support, the Kalakot Literacy Committee needs to write up a mission statement as well as its aims and objectives.

APPENDIX

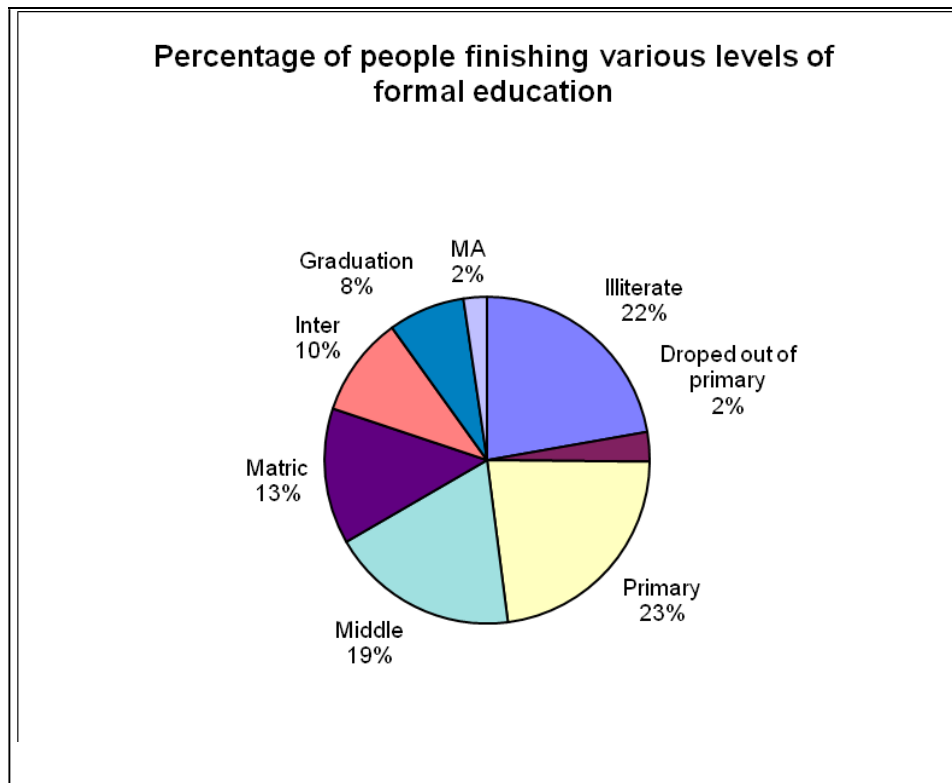
Highlights concerning the respondents' personal data

Personal data was taken from each person responding in the survey. Each person was asked to tell their level of education, age, occupation, number of children, and address. From this data, some general statistics of interest were gathered.

*NOTE: The following data probably does not truly represent the Kalakot community as a whole. Most surveyors were literate, and as such may have surveyed their friends and family who were also literate. This is okay since the survey wasn't focusing on this information. However, the reader should not assume these statistics accurately portray the situation in Kalakot. The information that follows is included for those interested in the background of people interviewed.

Education level:

People interviewed ranged in their level of education from no education (22%) to receiving a Masters degree (2%). (See the chart below.) "Illiterate" in the chart (and throughout this paper) refers to those who never went to school and to those who dropped out before 5th class. "Quran Sharif" refers to those who graduated from a class where they learned to read the Quran. Local people consider this equal to at least a primary education.



This chart above shows a rate of 75% literacy for respondents. This seems very high considering the overall literacy rate among the Baloch is considered to be around 15%. Some of this is certainly due to the fact that illiteracy is much more common in the rural areas. Part of the difference may also be due to the small sampling of the survey (compared to the total population) or it may reflect an imbalance in the type of people surveyed. The average class attained for all people interviewed was about 7th class (about 8th class for males and 5th class for females).

Something that is interesting to note is that for those people who actually started formal schooling, 97% continued on and finished 5th class, 67% finished 8th class, and 43% finished 10th class. This shows that the drop out rate is relatively low, particularly during the primary years. This observation is only correct if the people interviewed gave exact answers when asked about their level of education, instead of estimating.

There is one last interesting note concerning education levels between men and women. The following chart shows that in the older generation the gap between education of men and women was fairly large. But that trend is now changing and the gap has lessened dramatically. This means Baloch women in the Kalakot area are getting much more education than they have in the past.



Occupation

The majority of women described themselves as housewives. Only 4 of the women responding had jobs. Eleven single women were students.

The majority of men worked as government servants, laborers, shopkeepers and businessmen. A little less than 8% of them were unemployed.

Children

Female and male children of respondents were exactly equal in number. For those people over the child-bearing ages, the average number of children per family was 6.