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Reorienting English Language Education in Pakistan: From Linguistic Hegemony to Inclusive Multilingualism

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Abstract

The predominance of English in Pakistan's educational system keeps repeating linguistic disparities shaped by colonial history. English is a global language with great usage, but the mindless elevation of English as the primary language of instruction has harmed student comprehension, disregarded local languages, and led to systemic academic underachievement. This paper presents a research-informed case study for reinventing English language teaching (ELT) in Pakistan using inclusive multilingual education, sociolinguistic equity, and culturally sensitive pedagogy.

Introduction

Pakistani post-colonial language ecology consists of English, Urdu, and more than seventy regional languages coexisting (Zaman, Jamal, & Buriro, 2025). In law, government, and higher education, English has a favoured role; most Pakistani students arrive in lectures knowing very little or none of the language [1,2]. The ensuing cognitive and affective inequalities in learning are not just pedagogical but also sociopolitically ingrained in what Bourdieu (1991) calls "linguistic capital," in which English competency defines access to power, prestige, and a job.

Literature Review

In this section, the literature review has been discussed in detail.

Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education in Pakistan

Malik et al. (2023) conducted a quasi-experimental study including bilingual Urdu–Sindhi schooling for grades 1–2 in Sindh. Their fundamental math and reading comprehension improved by 15 to 20 per cent when compared to peers from English-medium backgrounds, therefore confirming the success of MTB-MLE models. Under a six-month intervention combining Pashto with English instruction, rural Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Queshi & Farooq (2024) Pre-/post-assessment of students' language production and self-efficacy found statistically significant rises ($p < 0.05$).

Challenges in English-Medium Instruction (EMI)

According to Hassan's (2024) 200 university students at



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Karachi campuses, 68% claim they have moderate to high difficulty understanding EMI settings. Their academic performance inversely correlates ($r = -0.45$, $p < 0.01$) with EMI exposure. Ali & Khan (2023) said that EMI without targeted pedagogical training produces inequalities, urban/private students excel while rural/public students fail, therefore signalling growing stratification.

Critical Perspectives on Linguistic Imperialism

Using postcolonial theory, Raza & Mahmood (2024) looked at national textbooks: they argue these works dehumanise Pakistani identities, standardise native-speaking norms, and uphold a colonial perspective. Saeed et al. (2023) examined student opinions and found that although 85% of respondents believe English is required for jobs, 78% feel it distances them from their cultural identity and reduces their participation in class discussions.

Teacher Training and Capacity Gaps

Just 25% of government school English instructors have any in-service ELT training during the past five years, according to British Council Pakistan (2023). Less than 10% demonstrated mastery of communicative teaching strategies. In Punjab, Zulfiqar (2024) tested a mixed professional development initiative combining MOOCs with peer mentorship. Learners scored 12% higher on formative language tests ($p < 0.01$), and teachers exhibited notable improvements in classroom practice.

Emerging 2025 Directions

Although 2025 journal publications are still to come, early conference papers and ongoing field research allude to a developing policy change: The Sindh Education Conference (May 2025) included district-level trials mixing Sindhi, Urdu, and English in basic classes preliminary results suggest consistent comprehension increases in Sindhi-Urdu groups, matched by equivalent English competence to monolingual EMI. Starting with Punjabi, the Punjab Provincial Research Initiative (March 2025) is trialing dual-track education: first grades in Punjabi then English by grade 4. A pilot research (public policy bulletin) indicated a 22% rise in English student confidence without sacrificing regional language ability.

Language of Instruction and Learning Outcomes: What the Research Says

Empirical data from local as well as international studies have shown clear correlations between the language of instruction and academic success. According to the 2016 UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report, pupils achieve better, especially in the early years of education, when taught in their first tongue. Similarly, [3] found that Pakistani students attending government schools show considerably lower comprehension and memory when taught English rather than Urdu or regional languages. This cognitive disadvantage is exacerbated by underqualified teachers, inadequate resources, and teaching strategies emphasising rote memorisation over communicative skills [4]. Since many students lack the academic language competency required to interact critically with information, English-medium instruction (EMI) often produces

surface-level knowledge even in higher education [5].

Coloniality and the Myth of Neutral English

English in Pakistan is sometimes promoted as a neutral, global language cut free from its colonial past. Research in critical applied linguistics [6,7] nevertheless shows that English, especially in postcolonial contexts, offers a vehicle of epistemic and linguistic imperialism. Its imposed dominance devalues indigenous knowledge systems and conceptions of reality and produces a deficit narrative about local languages.

Especially among rural, working-class, and female students, the belief that English equals modernism and intelligence has produced what [8] calls "linguistic subordination." Studies by Mansoor (2005), for example, reveal how English-medium policies in Pakistan lead to identity conflicts among students trying to match their linguistic reality with institutional expectations.

Toward a Research-Informed, Multilingual Language Policy

International best practices and sociolinguistic realities must serve as the foundation of an equitable English language policy for Pakistan. A sustainable route forward is provided by research-based methods like Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE), which has been successfully implemented in nations including the Philippines, Ethiopia, and Nepal [9,10].

Key recommendations Include

Foundational Education in L1: Early grades should be taught in students' mother tongue; English should be taught as a topic and progressively scaled back in higher grades [11]. Contextualised ELT Pedagogy: Pakistani ELT has to mirror learners' social reality instead of imposing native-speaker standards. Task-based learning and contextualised materials prove more successful than imported grammar-based syllabi [12]. English teachers' capacity-building: According to a British Council 2021 survey, approximately 65% of English teachers in Pakistan lack professional ELT pedagogical training. Programmes for in-service certification and focused professional development are vital [13,14].

Conclusion

Reforming English language instruction in Pakistan calls for a redefining of English's function rather than a rejection of it. English has to be positioned not over but rather with local languages. A policy informed by research has to understand that language carries access, identity, and culture in addition to being a tool of education. Pakistan can only expect to close the language gap and democratize access to high-quality education using inclusive multilingual education anchored in empirical data and equity-oriented pedagogy.

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