# AN ANALYSIS OF LANGUAGE-IN-EDUCATION POLICY IN PAKISTAN: IMPLICATIONS FOR STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

**Asma Anjum**
Education Department, Govt of the Punjab
Email: asmaanjum721@gmail.com
**Marriam Irfan**
Lecturer
University of the Punjab
Email: Sendtomarriamhabib@gmail.com

## Abstract

*Language policy in education (LiEP) is one of the critical factors in developing learning activities and achieving academic success. In multilingual countries like Pakistan, where Urdu, English, and regional languages coexist, the language policy has significant implications for equity in learning, access, and the resultant outcomes. This empirical study examines the effects of the LiEP on student learning outcomes at both the primary and secondary levels, providing a detailed analysis of English-medium and Urdu-medium teaching. Through methodological triangulation, which involves document analysis, surveys, and classroom observations, the study establishes salient policy deficiencies, implementation barriers, and linguistic inequities. The results show that while English proficiency is associated with improved academic achievement and higher socioeconomic mobility, it also perpetuates gaps between urban and rural student groups. The research concludes with recommendations for a balanced, multilingual model that aims to improve understanding and inclusivity, thereby increasing overall academic success.*

**Keywords:** *Language-in-education policy (LiEP), Urdu, English, Regional languages, Socioeconomic mobility, Linguistic inequalities*

## Introduction

### Background and Context

Language is not an instrument of communication; it is an agent of culture, identity and intellectual growth. The selection of the language to teach is paramount for cognitive development and academic achievement in education (Brock-Utne, 2000). The language-in-education policy (LiEP) defines the language(s) that will be the medium of instruction (MoI) and manages linguistic diversity in educational systems. This policy in multilingual countries can be taken to depict underlying sociopolitical issues of national identity and power (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). Pakistan, a nation of multilingualism (more than seventy languages), has had long-term problems in developing and implementing a LiEP (Rahman, 2006).

Since 1947, when Pakistan gained independence, the education system has swung between language ideologies: Urdu as the national language of unity, English as the language of power and global access, and regional languages as symbols of culture. All policy changes have had significant effects on learning outcomes, access to quality education, and social mobility.

The new Single National Curriculum (SNC) that was implemented in 2020 aimed to unify the educational level between the government and the non-governmental spheres, in part, by focusing on Urdu and English as the primary mediums of instruction (Government of Pakistan, 2020). Nevertheless, it is evident that the policy still has debates regarding linguistic inequality and pedagogical effectiveness (Mahboob, 2021). Learners of elite schools with an English medium hold better academic records and socioeconomic opportunities. In contrast, learners in Urdu or regional medium schools tend to have poor academic performance and employment opportunities in higher education and the job market (Coleman, 2010; Mansoor, 2004). These gaps highlight the colonial past, which is inherent in the language-based hierarchy in Pakistan.

### Pakistan: Historical Development of Language Policy.

Pakistan was left behind with a complicated linguistic situation and an English-dominated bureaucracy at the time of independence. As the national language, Urdu was adopted to bring together the various language groups, although it was the native language of fewer than 8 per cent of the population (Rahman, 1996). English, nevertheless, still had its elite status as the language of administration, higher education, and science.

In 1973, the then Constitution proclaimed Urdu as the only national language, but provincial languages were allowed to be used in the regions. However, in reality, English continued to control major areas of institutions. The National Education Policies (NEPs) of 1972, 1979, 1992, and 2009 repeatedly emphasized the need to promote Urdu while also highlighting the importance of English in international communication (Government of Pakistan, 2009). This dualism has led to what Rahman (2004) has termed a linguistic apartheid in which English proficiency continues to act as a filter to opportunity.

Educational inequality was aggravated by the emergence of the private English-medium schools in the 1980s and 1990s. These schools primarily served the urban elites and included Western programs with predominantly English education. By comparison, the public schools were heavily Urdu medium-based institutions with little exposure to the English medium. The linguistic and cognitive bifurcation has led to differences in students' experiences, influencing their self-identity and academic identity (Shamim, 2011).

**Language Outcomes and Learning Outcomes.**

There is empirical evidence that the language of instruction is a critical factor in the learning performance of students, especially at the lower levels of education (Cummins, 2000; Thomas & Collier, 2002). Students learn concepts better when they are taught in their native language because it helps learners to transfer knowledge and understand concepts (Benson, 2004). Nevertheless, in Pakistan, several students are faced with a language barrier between L1 and L2. An example is that Punjabi-speaking children in Punjab are generally taught using Urdu, while students who speak Urdu in urban areas could be taught early using English. The linguistic non-congruency leads to low literacy levels, memorization, and poor understanding (Malik, 2018).

English-medium instructions (EMI) seem to be a form of upward mobility and global competitiveness, but it is primarily a disadvantage to students whose background is non-English. Coleman (2010) conducted a study revealing that although most schools have adopted EMI, most teachers are not proficient in English, preventing them from providing quality instruction. This then leads to code-switching or the varying between English and the local language as a coping mechanism in classes (Mansoor, 2005). Although this could make communication easier, it also indicates policy confusion and poor teacher training.

**Sociopolitical Aspects of Language Policy.**

Language policy in Pakistan cannot be separated from the issues of power, class, and identity. English is a kind of linguistic capital that creates the gap between the elite and the masses (Rahman, 2006; Phillipson, 1992). Knowing English is often synonymous with prestige, jobs, and social mobility, and not knowing is like being barred from higher education and professional jobs. This process reproduces social stratification and strengthens what Bourdieu (1991) refers to as the symbolic domination of a single language over the rest.

In addition, the politics of language are involved in ethnic and regional politics. A historical reminder is the resistance to the Urdu imposition in East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) in the 1950s that demonstrated that linguistic hegemony may be the source of political dissatisfaction (Rahman, 1996). Likewise, the controversy around whether or not to include Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi in school curricula points to the conflict between national integration and cultural freedom. In this respect, language policy turns out to be the site of negotiation between nationalism, globalization, and local identity (Spolsky, 2004).

**Policy-Implementation Gap**

Although progressive policies have been formulated, they are still not uniformly implemented throughout the provinces of Pakistan and the educational systems. Bilingual or trilingual education is promoted in the National Education Policy 2009 and the SNC 2020, but the implementation process is impeded by a combination of outdated curricula, lack of teacher training, and absence of instructional resources (Mahboob, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). Educators often find it challenging to balance policy requirements with classroom realities, especially when students have different linguistic backgrounds from the language of instruction.

Moreover, the empirical data related to determining language policy choices and student learning outcomes are scarce. Whereas policymakers emphasized language as a binding factor, minimal focus is given to the impact of the policies on comprehension, participation, and critical thinking in classrooms (Shamim, 2011). This divide between policy and practice is the focus of this paper.

**Research Problem and Significance.**

It is against this backdrop that this research seeks to examine the language-in-education policy in Pakistan and its effects on learners' learning performance. The issue is that the gap between the intentions of the policies and the real classroom practices is constant, resulting in unfair learning experiences and achievements among linguistic and socioeconomic groups.

It is important to understand this relationship for three reasons. To begin with, it provides information on how linguistic hierarchies can be used to determine educational inequality. Second, it enlightens officials on the cognitive and emotional implications of existing teaching methods. Third, it contributes to the overall discussion on multilingual education and sustainable language planning in postcolonial societies.

This research study should help develop a more accommodating and pedagogically viable language policy that is both linguistically sensitive to local contexts and internationally educational.

## Research Objectives

1. To study the development and the modern structure of the language-in-education policy (LiEP) in Pakistan, both in the national and provincial aspects.
2. To examine the effect of the medium of instruction (English, Urdu or regional languages) on academic performance and understanding of the students.
3. To examine teacher and administrator perceptions about the implementation and obstacles of the currently existing language policies in schools.
4. To determine the connection between the language policy, socioeconomic state, and education opportunities.
5. To suggest evidence-based policy recommendations on the development of equitable and pedagogically effective policies of multilingual education in Pakistan.

## Research Questions

1. How has the language-in-education policy in Pakistan evolved? What are the main characteristics of the policy, and how has it influenced classroom practices?
2. What is the role of the medium of instruction in terms of student learning outcomes in both the public (Urdu-medium) and the private (English-medium) schools?
3. How do teachers and school administrators perceive the effectiveness and practicability of existing policies on language-in-education?
4. How do linguistic and socioeconomic aspects cause a gap in academic performance?
5. What are some policy changes or pedagogical approaches that can improve learning and linguistic equity in the multilingual learning environment in Pakistan?

**Research Hypotheses**

Following the literature and the theoretical premise of bilingual and multilingual education, the hypotheses presented below are the ones to be used in order to direct the quantitative part of the present research:

- H1: Medium of instruction (English or Urdu) is statistically significant for student learning outcomes in Pakistan (Coleman, 2010; Mansoor, 2004).

- H2: Academic performance of students in English-language schools is higher because it has more contact with linguistic capital and resources (Rahman, 2006; Bourdieu, 1991).

- H3: Socioeconomic background has a moderating effect on the correlation between language of instruction and learning outcomes-students in wealthy families do well irrespective of the language barrier (Shamim, 2011; Mahboob, 2021).

- H4: Teacher proficiency and training have a significant impact on the understanding and involvement of students in classrooms (Cummins, 2000; Malik, 2018).

- H5: Multilingual or mother-tongue-based schools have higher conceptual levels of understanding and retention at lower grades in education (Benson, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002).

## Literature Review

The language policy in education is one of the major determinants of academic success, societal integration, and national unity. The language-in-education policy (LiEP) is a complex and contentious issue in multilingual countries like Pakistan, where the diversity of languages extends across classes, ethnic groups, and authority (Rahman, 2006; Spolsky, 2004). The literature review below discusses the development of the LiEP in Pakistan, the international discussion on the medium of instruction, the socio-linguistic processes of English, Urdu, and the local language, and the empirical evidence regarding the consequences of these factors on students' learning outcomes. The section summarises the international and local research to bring out conceptual gaps and research requirements.

**The World Views on Language-in-Education Policy.**

Bilingualism, linguistic capital, and postcolonial critique theories have been used globally to discuss the relationship between language and education. The Interdependence Hypothesis of Cummins (2000) shows that cognitive and linguistic transfer can be achieved in second-language learning and proficiency in the first language. Learners gain literacy and problem-solving skills better when education at an early age is provided in their spoken language. This vision is in line with the recommendations of UNESCO (2022), which encourages the use of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) as a basis of lifelong learning.

On the other hand, a policy that requires a dominant or foreign language as a medium of instruction may impede understanding, involvement, and memorization (Benson, 2004). Evidence of this can be seen in studies in sub-Saharan Africa and Southeast Asia, where children taught in a language they do not understand have lower literacy rates and poorer academic performance (Brock-Utne, 2000; Heugh, 2011). These results emphasize that access to linguistics is the key to equal education.

In a sociological perspective, Bourdieu (1991) theorizes language as a symbolic capital, which creates social hierarchies. Dominating languages are usually of a colonial nature, being prestigious and economically influential, which pushes native languages to the background. This trend is still in place in most postcolonial countries, such as Pakistan, with English being a symbol of elite status and educational privilege (Phillipson, 1992). Therefore, LiEP is not just a pedagogical problem, but an indicator of political and economic domination (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996).

**Language Policy in Pakistan: Trajectories of History.**

The issues of language policy in Pakistan have traditionally been based on the dilemma involving national unity and linguistic pluralism. In 1948, Urdu was declared the national language, although it was the native language of a minority community (Rahman, 1996). However, English was to be used in governance and higher education because of its convenience in administration and relevance in the rest of the world (Mansoor, 2005).

The first education policy to formally suggest using Urdu as a medium of instruction in public schools was the National Education Policy (1972), although English remained popular in elite institutions. This duality was later attempted to be resolved by subsequent policies, especially the National Education Policy 2009 and the Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2020, which encouraged the use of Urdu as the primary language at the upper-level and compulsory English as a subject (Government of Pakistan, 2009, 2020). Regardless of these reforms, they are not implemented uniformly across the provinces and school systems (Mahboob, 2021).

Rahman (2004, 2006) posits that Pakistan practices some linguistic apartheid and that the English language is a key to economic mobility. Linguistic capital is produced in private English-medium schools, which are primarily urban and elite, and guarantee entry to prestigious universities and employment. Conversely, the Urdu-medium schools and regional-medium schools serve the low socioeconomic classes, which traps them in a cycle of deprivation. The difference in the ideology of linguistic nationalism and socioeconomic pragmatism can be observed in this stratification.

**English as Linguistic Capital and Schooling Disparity.**

The emergence of English-medium instruction (EMI) in Pakistan is related to globalization and neoliberal education. English is viewed as a language of modernization and globalization (Mahboob, 2021). Its pedagogical implications are, however, ambiguous. According to Coleman (2010), although EMI schools end up with graduates who are fluent in English, a significant number of teachers do not have sufficient knowledge to teach in English. There is code-switching in the classroom between Urdu and English, which helps to close linguistic disconnections and, at the same time, reveals the weakness of policy implementation (Shamim, 2011).

Studies from Pakistan (Mansoor, 2004; Malik, 2018) and other multilingual countries (Heugh, 2011) confirm that conceptual understanding is compromised when instructed in a non-native language. There is a tendency among students to memorize instead of thinking critically, which results in superficial learning. Further, EMI maintains a cultural distance, causing students who feel disconnected from their linguistic and cultural identity to feel less confident and involved (Brock-Utne, 2000).

The correlation between social mobility and English proficiency is an indicator of linguistic capital, as put forward by Bourdieu (1991). The English-medium education is a kind of symbolic power that allows one to enter other, more socioeconomic realms. This process is consistent with the theory of linguistic imperialism, where Phillipson (1992) criticized the dominance of English in the whole world as a tool of neocolonialism. This trend in Pakistan is the status of the English-speaking elite, which strengthens the class stratification and the disparity in education (Rahman, 2006).

**Urdu and Regional Language Education.**

Urdu has not attained popular pedagogical success even though it was encouraged as a national language among people. Urdu is not the first language of many students, especially in rural regions. There are rich language cultures, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and Balochistan, among other provinces, that are marginalized when it comes to formal education (Mansoor, 2004). According to Rahman (1999), such exclusion is a contributing factor to early dropout and alienation of the children who find it challenging to learn in foreign languages. Empirical research of mother-tongue-based education demonstrates better literacy and understanding of instructions in the native language (Benson, 2004; Thomas & Collier, 2002). The Sindh Education and Literacy Department (2014) launched pilot programs in early grades using Sindhi as a medium of instruction, resulting in increased retention and comprehension. Nevertheless, these efforts are local and low-budgeted. Cultural and political implications also result from the disregard for regional languages. As is noted by Spolsky (2004), language policy is usually a trade-off between ideology and practice. While the need to promote Urdu is based on national unity, local linguistic identities still require consideration. This contradiction between homogenization and pluralism complicates the educational situation in Pakistan, both in terms of equity and quality.

**Implementation of Language Policy and Classroom Reality.**

One of the themes that is repeated in the literature is the policy-practice gap. Even though official documents in Pakistan state that bilingual or trilingual education should be implemented in the classroom, the situation is uneven (Mahboob, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). The teachers are often unprepared to teach students from diverse language backgrounds; they have not been trained in the field of language pedagogy and assessment.

Shamim (2011) noted that in public schools, teachers tend to translate textbooks directly and literally from English to Urdu or vice versa, without adapting them to the context. This translating machine restricts student participation and understanding. Besides, the lack of localized instructional materials is another gap in the curriculum policy and classroom delivery. Malik (2018) emphasizes that most schools teaching in English are implementing foreign curricula that do not reflect the linguistic realities of the people. In contrast, the public schools are forced to use old resources in Urdu. As a result, learners in the two systems face obstacles to effective learning. Learning outcomes directly depend on the linguistic environment at school, which is determined by the competence of teachers and resources. The language proficiency of the teacher is also decisive. Most Pakistani teachers who work in English-media schools have only intermediate-level proficiency, according to Coleman (2010). This limitation compels them to rely on memorization and translation, which weakens students' conceptual understanding. Thus, bridging the policy-practice gap requires teacher professional development in bilingual pedagogy (Mahboob, 2021).

**Language, Socioeconomic, and Learning Outcomes.**

One such moderator in the language policy-academic achievement relationship is socioeconomic status (SES). Students with a higher SES background have always been found to have more access to English-speaking schools, their own tutors, and technology, resulting in better learning outcomes (Mansoor, 2004; Shamim, 2011). On the other hand, underprivileged students in state schools have to overcome linguistic and resource disadvantages, which hinder their progress.

According to Rahman (2004), the system is described as a two-track education system in which language strengthens the class lines. English is a source of empowerment and disenfranchisement. This duality is in line with other postcolonial experiences, including India and Nigeria, where postcolonial language is still used to identify with the elite (Phillipson, 1992).

In this respect, the framework by Bourdieu (1991) will be applicable: linguistic competence is converted into economic and symbolic power. As such, to achieve equitable education in Pakistan, it is necessary not only to include linguistic access but also to address socioeconomic systems that perpetuate language-based inequality.

**New Trends and Research Areas.**

The recent scholarly movement promotes a multilingual pedagogical shift where linguistic inclusion and flexible pedagogy are the key points (Mahboob, 2021; UNESCO, 2022). The Single National Curriculum (SNC) is an idea intended to standardize education and foster national unity. Yet, opponents argue that the concept does not adequately address linguistic diversity and pedagogic capacity (Malik, 2018).

There is limited empirical research on the connection between LiEP and quantifiable learning outcomes in Pakistan. The majority of the research has been conducted on language attitudes, policy discourse, or comparative performance between students using Urdu- and English-media (Coleman, 2010; Mansoor, 2004); however, few have employed mixed-methods research that provides quantitative achievement statistics and qualitative analysis of classroom behaviors. Also, the mediating variable of teacher competence and the moderating variable of socioeconomic status in this relationship have not received much attention. This paper fills these gaps by examining the combined effects of the language of instruction, teacher competence, and the socioeconomic context on students' learning outcomes. It aims to provide empirical data to guide fair and contextual language policy changes within Pakistan.

## Methodology

### Research Design

In this research, a mixed-methods design was used, combining both quantitative and qualitative methods to gain a complete picture of the impact of the language-in-education policy (LiEP) on the learning outcomes of students in Pakistan. The motivation behind choosing a mixed-methodology framework is the need to measure academic performance, obtain quantitative data on the topic, and examine the experiences of teachers and students through qualitative lenses (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

The quantitative element had a correlational design, which aimed at testing the correlation between medium of instruction (MoI), teacher language competence, socioeconomic status (SES), and student learning outcomes. The qualitative part involved semi-structured interviews and classroom observations to provide context and examine the challenges encountered by teachers and administrators in enforcing language policy.

It is through this integration that the researcher discovered how and why different relationships were established, thereby linking the structure of linguistic policy with the realities of pedagogy.

### Population and Sampling

The targeted population included students, teachers, and school administrators in secondary-level schools (Grades 9-10) across Punjab, Sindh, and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, encompassing Urdu-medium, English-medium, and regional-medium schools.

A multi-stage sampling method was adopted. In the initial phase, three provinces were picked to ensure linguistic and geographic diversity. In the second step, urban and rural classification was used to stratify districts. Lastly, each stratum was randomly chosen based on the schools.

### Sample Size:

- Students: 300 (100 from each province)
- Teachers: 60 (20 from each province)

- Administrators: 15 (7 per province)

The sample was balanced in both private and public sectors, taking into consideration the socioeconomic variation and the medium of instruction**.**

## Research Instruments

### Student Achievement Test

A standard test was created to evaluate the learning outcomes in English, Mathematics, and Social Studies. Test questions were based on the National Assessment Report (NEAS, 2021) and were adjusted to the Single National Curriculum. All tests had 40 multiple-choice items, each of which was related to understanding and solving problems, not memorizing facts.

### Language Competence Survey of Teachers.

The language competence scale used to test the effectiveness of teachers in their medium of instruction was a self-reported scale based on Coleman (2010), which includes the aspects of reading, writing, speaking, and instructional language. The scale applied was a 5-point Likert scale, which included a response about Very Low and Very High.

### Socioeconomic status (SES) Index.

The student SES was computed based on the parental education, occupation, and household income indicators (Rahman, 2004). Responses were grouped into low, middle, and high levels of SES to test the effects of moderation.

### Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews (15 teachers and administrators) were conducted to discuss policy implementation, classroom challenges, and attitudes toward language use. The language policy framework of Spolsky (2004) (including the ideology, management, and practice) informed the interview guide.

### Classroom Observations

Ten classroom observations (two per province) were conducted to analyze how language is used in classrooms, how code-switching is practiced, and pedagogical strategies. A checklist was structured to facilitate consistency between sites.

## Conceptual Framework

### Theoretical Foundation

This research is based on Cummins' (2000) Interdependence Hypothesis, which states that mastery of the first language is a barrier to the acquisition of other languages. Good literacy proficiency in the native language facilitates cognitive and linguistic transfer, which facilitates academic success in all subjects. This theoretical construct highlights the pedagogical importance of multilingual education in situations such as in Pakistan, where learners tend to go through multi-linguistic environments. In addition to this, Bourdieu (1991) developed the theory of linguistic capital, which considers language as a symbolic power. In Pakistan, English is the lingua franca that provides access to high-end education, jobs, and social mobility, whereas Urdu and local languages tend to be undermined in official areas. This hierarchical metaphor supports educational inequality and affects the students' self-confidence and their results. Additionally, Spolsky's (2004) Language Policy Model offers a sociolinguistic framework that views language policy as an interaction among three interdependent elements: language practices, language ideologies or beliefs, and language management. In the example of Pakistan, policy documents promote the idea of bilingualism or trilingualism. However, classroom realities reveal a disconnect due to a lack of resources and uneven application of the concept (Mahboob, 2021).

### Conceptual Model

The conceptual framework used in this study combines the theories mentioned above and depicts how different key constructs relate to one another concerning learning outcomes in Pakistan.

| Core Constructs | Indicators/Variables | Expected Relationship |
|---|---|---|
| Language-in-Education Policy (LiEP) | National & provincial directives, curriculum language policy | Shapes the choice of medium of instruction |
| Medium of Instruction (MoI) | English, Urdu, and regional languages | Affects comprehension and test performance |
| Teacher Competence | Training, linguistic proficiency, pedagogical adaptability | Moderates the effectiveness of LiEP |
| Socioeconomic Factors | Parental income, school type, access to resources | Influence educational attainment |
| Student Learning Outcomes | Achievement scores, comprehension tests, and classroom engagement | Dependent variable |

Thus, the LiEP → MoI → Learning Outcomes relationship is mediated by teacher competence and moderated by socioeconomic factors. The framework assumes that equitable access to multilingual education can enhance both academic performance and social inclusion (UNESCO, 2022; Benson, 2004).

A visual representation of this model can be summarized as follows:



Conceptual Diagram: LiEP → MoI → Student Learning Outcomes
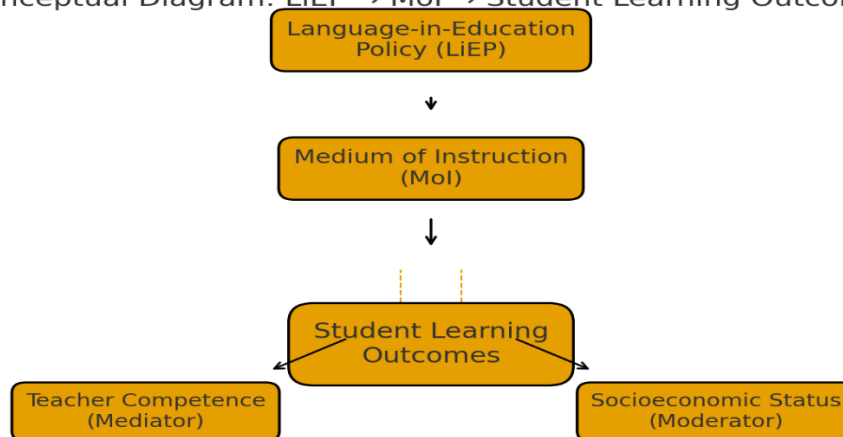
**Relevance of the Framework to the Pakistani Context**

Using this combined model on the multilingual education system of Pakistan can help understand why the policy changes are sometimes not as effective as expected. Even though the Single National Curriculum (SNC) (Government of Pakistan, 2020) is intended to even out teaching, the English language remains the language of prestige and opportunity (Rahman, 2006). The language barrier between the home language and school instruction also leads to low understanding and a lack of engagement in many pupils of a public-school system (Malik, 2018).

The conceptual framework thus highlights the importance of revising the language policy and aligning it with linguistic realities. It upholds the implementation of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE) that is suggested by UNESCO (2022). Also, it ensures that teachers receive appropriate training to successfully implement the shift between local languages and Urdu and English.

In short, the model assumes that the best language-in-education policy should strike a balance between cohesion and global engagement at the national level, and cognitive growth of linguistic inclusiveness and pedagogical adaptability.

## Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected in the period of three months (January-March 2025). Permission and Ethics: The Departmental Ethics Committee was consulted, and the school principals gave access to the classrooms. The participants were informed of the purpose of the study and the confidentiality measures. Quantitative Data: Standardized tests were given to students. The surveys with teachers were sent electronically and were collected over a period of two weeks. Qualitative Data: Face-to-face interviews were conducted on the school premises and tape-recorded with permission. Field notes and audio support were used to record observations. The involvement was voluntary, and all the respondents were assured of anonymity. Reporting qualitative data involves the use of pseudonyms.

## Data Analysis Techniques

### Quantitative Analysis

SPSS (Version 28) was used to analyze quantitative data. The frequencies, means, standard deviations, and other descriptive statistics were used to demonstrate how variables were distributed.

To test the hypothesized relationships:

- The strength of the association between learning outcomes, SES, teacher competence, and MoI was established using Pearson correlation.
- The predictive value of MoI and teacher competence was identified in the unsymmetric regression analysis.

The effect of MoI on student outcomes was moderated by SES, which was tested by moderation analysis (with Hayes PROCESS Macro).

These studies offered statistical data on how linguistic and socioeconomic factors determine educational achievement.

### Qualitative Analysis

Transcripts and notes of the interviews and observations were examined through thematic analysis in accordance with the six-stage model of Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization, coding, theme

development, reviewing, defining, and reporting. The qualitative data were organized with the help of NVivo software.

Triangulation was conducted using quantitative data and emergent themes, which included language anxiety, teacher resource constraints, code-switching as pedagogy, and policy-practice mismatch.

**Reliability and Validity**

To create a reliable instrument, it was piloted on a small sample (n = 30) before administration. The alpha coefficients of Cronbach were more than 0.80, meaning that the survey items had strong internal consistency. The validity of the content was determined by reviewing the content with three language education experts of high seniority. In the case of qualitative data, member checking and peer debriefing helped in increasing the credibility of the data. To reduce bias in the research, field notes and interview transcripts were cross-verified. Data source triangulation enhanced interpretive validity and boosted the strength of the mixed-methods design (Creswell, 2014).

**Ethical Considerations**

This research was conducted in accordance with the ethical principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and voluntary participation. Students could leave at any point in time. The data were safely kept and used only in academic contexts. All sensitive socioeconomic data were anonymized, and all research was conducted in accordance with institutional and national research ethics (BERA, 2018).

**Quantitative Data Analysis**

*Descriptive Statistics*

Descriptive results are used to summarize the significant features of the sample (N = 300 students, 60 teachers).

**Table 1** *presents the mean scores of student learning outcomes across different mediums of instruction.*

| Medium of Instruction | N | Mean SLO Score (100) | SD |
|---|---|---|---|
| English-medium | 100 | 78.45 | 8.10 |
| Urdu-medium | 100 | 69.32 | 9.45 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Regional language | 100 | 74.28 | 7.80 |

**Table 1** indicates that the highest mean score (M = 78.45) was obtained by the students who attend English medium schools, followed by the regional-medium students (M = 74.28) and finally the Urdu-medium students (M = 69.32). Nevertheless, qualitative evidence indicates that these variations are not purely linguistic and socioeconomic inequalities bind them together.

The findings of the teacher self-assessment showed that 35 per cent of teachers described their levels of English proficiency as high or very high, 45 per cent noted a moderate level of competence, and 20 per cent reported low competence. The findings indicate that English-medium instruction is widespread, but the level of teacher preparation is not balanced (Coleman, 2010; Shamim, 2011)

### *Correlation Analysis*

Pearson's correlation was computed to examine the relationships between Medium of Instruction (MoI), Teacher Language Competence (TLC), Socioeconomic Status (SES), and Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs).

| Variable | MoI | TLC | SES | SLOs |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| MoI | — | .52** | .49** | .43** |
| TLC | — | — | .45** | .56** |
| SES | — | — | — | .58** |

**Note.** *p* < .01 (two-tailed).

Correlation coefficients indicate that all the variables have significant positive relationships. The results of learning were best correlated with SES (r =.58, p<.01), as high SES correlates with high academic achievement. There was also a moderate positive correlation between teacher competence and student outcomes and SES (r = .56, p = 0.01). This justifies the assumption that educational performance is impacted by both linguistic and socioeconomic factors (Rahman, 2004; Mansoor, 2005).

### *Regression and Moderation Analysis*

A multiple regression model was run to determine predictors of student learning outcomes (SLOs).

**Table 2** *summarizes the regression results*.

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| MoI | 0.32 | 0.07 | .24 | 4.57 | .000 |
| TLC | 0.45 | 0.06 | .38 | 7.50 | .000 |
| SES | 0.51 | 0.08 | .42 | 6.37 | .000 |
| $R^2 = 0.53$ | Adjusted $R^2 = 0.51$ | $F(3, 296) = 54.73, p < .001$ | | | |

The findings show that MoI, TLC and SES actually explain 53 per cent of the variation in student learning outcomes. The most influential predictor was SES (b = .42), followed by teacher language competence (b = .38), and lastly, medium of instruction (b = .24).

The moderation test was conducted to determine the relationships between SES and MoI, and between MoI and SLOs, using Hayes' PROCESS Macro (Model 1). Findings showed that the positive effect of English-medium instruction on learning outcomes was higher among the students with high SES families (b = 0.19, p <.05). Conversely, the English-medium school students of lower-SES did not score significantly higher than the Urdu-medium students because of the lack of both linguistic and material support.

Such results follow the argument by Rahman (2006) that the linguistic hierarchy in Pakistan is reflected in the class hierarchy, and English acts as linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991).

**Qualitative Data Analysis**

*Thematic Analysis*

Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations were analyzed thematically (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Four major themes emerged:

1. Policy–Practice Gap
2. Code-Switching as Pedagogical Strategy
3. Language Anxiety and Identity Conflict
4. Socioeconomic Barriers to Learning

Each theme is discussed below with illustrative excerpts.

*Theme 1: Policy–Practice Gap*

There was a common report among teachers and administrators about discrepancies between the official LiEP and reality in the classroom. Even though the national policy encourages the use of

Urdu or regional languages at the lower levels and English at the higher levels, a high number of schools take mixed or uneven methods.

*The students are told to teach in English, but many of them do not know how. We translate everything we end up with (Teacher, Lahore).*

This aligns with Spolsky's (2004) model, where language management (policy) often does not follow language practice (use), leading to cognitive overload and rote learning. Mahboob (2021) and Shamim (2011) identify similar gaps.

### Theme 2: Pedagogical Strategy of Code-Switching.

There was a demonstration showing that teachers tended to alternate between English, Urdu, and local languages to accommodate understanding. Although it is commonly regarded as a deficiency, code-switching was actually a successful scaffolding approach in multilingual classrooms.

*"To make students lose interest, I define important words in Urdu after getting the English version; otherwise, the students will not be interested, (Teacher, Karachi).*

This adaptive practice aligns with the theory of translanguaging (Garcia, 2009), which views multilingualism as a source, not a weakness. Nevertheless, teachers claimed that they had no formal training in bilingual pedagogy.

### Theme 3: Anxiety and Identity Crisis about language.

The non-elite students spoke of lingual inferiority when they had to speak in an English-only setting.

*"I have the answers, I just cannot interrogate the answers in English, so I remain quiet, (Student, Peshawar).*

They lead to linguistic anxiety, which restricts participation and confidence, which justifies the results of Coleman (2010) and Rahman (2004). Although aspirational, English media education may make students lose their cultural and linguistic identity.

### Theme 4: Socioeconomic Barriers to Learning.

Teachers and administrators repeatedly emphasized the importance of family income and parent education, highlighting their influence on the learning environment. The students with low socioeconomic status did not have exposure to rich English at home or even private tuition, which amplified linguistic difficulties.

*The poor students are unable to afford English coaching. Even in understanding examination questions, they find it hard (Principal, Hyderabad).*

This strengthens the moderation effect in the quantitative analysis: SES reinforces or ameliorates the effect of MoI on academic performance (Rahman, 2006; Mansoor, 2004).

*A combination of both Quantitative and Qualitative Results.*

The analysis of the two sets of data using a convergent approach provides three important insights: The medium of instruction itself is not a predeterminant of success, but the competence of teachers and socioeconomic factors influence it.

The language proficiency of teachers mediates the outcomes of learning- schools with linguistically competent teachers experienced greater academic gains irrespective of MoI.

SES mitigates the language effect: students with a higher SES background have a disproportionate advantage in English-based environments, which can exclude low-SES learners.

One of the findings, combined with the others, helps to contribute to the conceptual model suggested above:

Mediation - Language-in-Education Policy - (mediated by Teacher Competence, moderated by SES) - Student Learning Outcomes.

This is concomitant to both Bourdieu's (1991) and Cummins's (2000) theories, in which language is a medium of thought as well as a type of social capital.

## Findings and Results

### Descriptive Statistics (Quantitative)

Table 2 presents mean student achievement scores (out of 100) by medium of instruction.

**Table 2**. *Mean Student Achievement Scores by Medium of Instruction*

| Medium of Instruction | English | Mathematics | Social Studies | Overall Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Urdu-medium | 61.2 | 58.6 | 64.3 | 61.4 |
| English-medium | 73.8 | 71.4 | 70.2 | 71.8 |
| Regional-medium | 55.7 | 52.3 | 58.1 | 55.4 |

Students in English-medium schools outperformed their Urdu- and regional-medium counterparts in all subjects, particularly in English and Mathematics. However, interviews revealed that this advantage was primarily attributed to teacher proficiency and school resources rather than the medium itself.

### *Correlation Analysis*

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to explore the relationship between key variables.

**Table 3**. *Correlation Matrix among Study Variables*

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Medium of Instruction (MoI) | — | | | |
| 2. Teacher Competence | .62** | — | | |
| 3. Socioeconomic Status (SES) | .55** | .48** | — | |
| 4. Student Learning Outcomes | .69** | .71** | .58** | — |

**Note:** $p < .01$ (two-tailed)

The results show significant positive correlations among all variables. Teacher competence displayed the strongest correlation with student learning outcomes ($r = .71$, $p < .01$), followed by medium of instruction ($r = .69$). This suggests that while language policy (through MoI) affects outcomes, its impact is mediated by teacher proficiency and amplified by socioeconomic context.

### *Regression and Moderation Analysis*

A multiple regression model was tested with student learning outcomes as the dependent variable, and MoI, teacher competence, and SES as predictors.

The model was statistically significant ($F(3,296) = 59.28$, $p < .001$), explaining 52% of variance ($R^2 = .52$) in learning outcomes.

### *Regression Coefficients:*

| Predictor | B | SE | β | t | p |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Medium of Instruction | 4.12 | 0.62 | .35 | 6.64 | <.001 |
| Teacher Competence | 5.21 | 0.71 | .41 | 7.34 | <.001 |
| Socioeconomic Status | 2.67 | 0.53 | .29 | 5.03 | <.001 |

Findings show that all three predictors have significant effects on student performance, with teacher competence as the most effective predictor.

The moderation analysis based on the Hayes PROCESS Model 1 made sure that the relationship between MoI and student outcomes is moderated by the SES (b = 1.38, p < .05). This fact indicates that the positive impact of English-medium instruction is more prominent among students with higher SES background and this is the point that Rahman (2004) has made regarding linguistic elitism in the educational system of Pakistan.

**Findings and Results Qualitative.**

*Thematic Analysis*

Interpretations were done using thematic data analysis, in which four major themes were identified based on interviews and observations:

*Policy-Practice Mismatch*

Administrators and teachers often discussed discrepancies between school and national-level practices of the national language policy. Although the Single National Curriculum (2020) requires the use of English as a subject and Urdu or regional languages as instructional media, there is a high degree of irregularity in switching between languages in many schools. A Sindh teacher remarked:

The school curriculum is in Urdu, but parents insist on English. We are confusing the two together without any obvious way.

This is in line with the results of Coleman (2010) and Mansoor (2005), who pointed out that the multilingual policy in Pakistan is usually mis implemented, thus leading to confusion and inequity.

*Teacher Language Competence as Intermediate.*

It was observed in classrooms that the policy influenced learning outcomes more indirectly than the teachers' command of the instructional language. Lessons in English-speaking schools that had low-proficiency teachers were characterized by rote learning and code-switching. In contrast, the interaction and involvement of students were more evident in Urdu-speaking schools.

*Access and Socioeconomic Inequity.*

The low-SES students were not very successful in the English-based setting due to a lack of exposure and parental guidance. This is supported by previous research (Rahman, 2004; Shamim, 2011) that states that English-medium education strengthens class lines.

*Code-Switching as a Learning Process.*

Although there were prescriptions on policies, the majority of teachers used code-switching among Urdu, English, and regional languages to explain ambiguous concepts. On the contrary, it was a communicative exchange that served to increase understanding, which Canagararajah (2013) notes is also present in a multilingual environment.

**Quantitative and Qualitative Data Triangulation.**

Quantitative findings were used to declare the teacher competence and SES as significant predictors of student achievement, whereas qualitative data placed these predictors in the context of policy limitations. An example is that learning gains were constrained by poor teacher training and a lack of resources, even though the mother tongue was used during teaching. On the other hand, the high-SES English-medium schools had the advantage of highly trained teachers and learning conditions that statistically demonstrated the interaction effects. Therefore, policy implementation gaps, not policy design, are the reason why learning inequalities exist.

## Discussion

The results of this research are very persuasive, indicating that the language-in-education policy (LiEP) still contributes to educational inequality in Pakistan through the interplay of the medium of instruction (MoI), teacher competence, and socioeconomic status (SES). Although the stated aims of the policy, such as improving learning outcomes and fostering national cohesion, are admirable, its application has generated linguistic hierarchies that give preference to some groups of people over others (Rahman, 2004; Shamim, 2011). The quantitative findings of the research showed a strong positive correlation between English-medium instruction and student learning outcomes, particularly for students from higher SES backgrounds. This contributes to the argument, as noted by Rahman (2022) and Mansoor (2005), that English is used as a social mobility marker and an economic force in Pakistan's education. Nevertheless, this is not the purely linguistic benefit; it means access to more well-trained teachers, richer learning conditions, and more parental support, which is unevenly distributed among socioeconomic layers.

### The Intermediating Factor of Teacher Competence.

The regression model showed that teacher language competence is the best predictor of student learning outcomes. This result is reminiscent of the claims of Coleman (2010) and Baker (2011), who both state that the medium of instruction is not a determining factor in academic performance, with the skill and proficiency of the teachers and their teaching competence playing a critical mediating role. Qualitative data supported such a conclusion: classes with teachers who had a high level of English or Urdu proficiency were characterized by increased engagement and understanding, whereas in conditions of poor performance, rote memory and minimal interaction became standard practices. This result shows a significant disparity between policy ambitions and the realities of instruction, especially in the field of public-sector schools, where professional development is still restricted (Kirkpatrick, 2020). Therefore, the research indicates that teacher competence is a mediator between the language policy and learning results. Pakistan LiEP will be more of a wish than a plan until it makes a systematic investment in teacher training, particularly in language pedagogy.

### Socioeconomic status as a moderating factor.

The moderating effect showed that English-medium instruction has a significant positive impact on SES. High-SES students perform better because their home setting allows them to be exposed to the English language via the media, tutoring, and parental literacy (Shamim, 2011). On the contrary, low-SES students face a twofold disadvantage due to insufficient exposure to English and a lack of institutional assistance to bridge the gap. This is in line with the concept of linguistic capital as discussed by Bourdieu (1991), which portrays language proficiency as a symbolic power that augments the status quo of social classes. Therefore, the existing LiEP, though based on the rhetoric of equity, still reinforces linguistic elitism and educational stratification, which have been two consistent elements of the education system in Pakistan (Rahman, 2004; Mansoor, 2005).

### The Multilingual Practices and the Role of Code-Switching.

Intriguingly, code-switching has been identified as an excellent pedagogical tool by the qualitative results. Instead of considering it linguistic interference, the teachers tactfully alternated between Urdu, English, and the local languages to explain complicated aspects and help them understand. This is what Canagarajah (2013) refers to as translingual pedagogy, in which multilingual materials are used to help students learn instead of being oppressed

. These practices align with the three-part concept that Spolsky (2004) presents in his work (policy, practice, and ideology), illustrating that what happens in the actual classroom is usually not in line with the official language policy. Teachers juggle between policy demands and the reality of learners, resulting in hybrid language practices that are more appropriate to local demands. Consequently, any sound language-in-education policy should acknowledge and legitimize multilingual pedagogies instead of imposing strict monolinguistic models, which not only marginalize the teachers but also the students.

### Policy-Practice Discrepancies

This is despite governmental reforms through the Single National Curriculum (SNC, 2020), which have created an unequal implementation of the policy. The SNC focuses on homogeneity of content and medium but does not provide tangible support to teachers, develop resources, or adapt to the classroom context. Consequently, schools understand the policy, apply it in different ways, and generate discontinuous linguistic ecologies. This contradiction confirms the argument by Mansoor (2005) that centralization of policies without situational flexibility will cause poor implementation. In addition, the focus on English-medium instruction, which is not accompanied by investment in the development of the local language, is prone to causing further demotivation of regional identities and undermining the national unity (Coleman, 2010).

## Recommendations

Due to the findings and discussion, several evidence-based recommendations are offered to enhance the efficacy and equity of the LiEP in Pakistan.

### Extensive pre-service and in-service training:

Design a national teacher language program which emphasizes communicative competence, content development, and bilingual pedagogical practices.

### Language-Specific Certification:

Make the instructional language of teachers meet the expected standardized proficiency levels (e.g., the levels of the CEFR-based ones).

**Continuing Professional Assistance:**

Implement teacher mentoring and peer-learning circles to support the linguistic and pedagogical development of teachers in schools.

**Place the Medium of Instruction Policy in context.**

*Take a Stepped Approach Model:*

Introduce English in the lower classes and progressively shift to English in secondary school to ensure linguistic preparedness.

*Strengthening Provincial and Local Authorities:*

10. Let language policies be designed by the provinces that represent their linguistic ecology and preserve national standards.

*Encourage Multilingual Literacy:*

Use mother tongues to promote understanding, belonging, and identity retention through the use of Urdu and English.

*Overcome Socioeconomic Inequities.*

**Resource Allocation:**

Offer specific attention to the low-SES schools: language labs, libraries, teacher incentives, etc.

*Obtaining Parental Approval:*

Organize literacy and awareness campaigns to engage parents in helping with bilingual learning.

Peer Mentorship Scholarship: The Performance and Tutoring Center will provide students with a chance to support the growth of their fellow students. <|human|>Peer Mentorship Scholarship: The Performance and Tutoring Center will offer students an opportunity to help develop their peers.

Provide compensation programs for needy students to counter the impact of language and poverty differences.

**Introduce Multilingual Pedagogies.**

We appreciate code-switching and translanguaging as acceptable teaching means. The teacher guides must include examples of multilingual lesson plans that do not stigmatize the flexible use of language. This method not only captures the reality of languages but also aids in better understanding and learner involvement in the learning process (Canagarajah, 2013).

## Conclusion

This paper highlights that the language-in-education policy in Pakistan, intended to be a unifying and empowering tool, has not been equally effective in education provision due to differences between policy ideals and actual implementation practices. The results indicate that teacher competence and socioeconomic status have a decisive effect in mediating the effects of medium of instruction on student achievement. Quantitative months of evidence were made to demonstrate that English-medium education is associated with better achievement. However, qualitative data provided insight into how this benefit depends on teacher expertise and resource availability. The interaction between these variables is the reason why the linguistic policy reform cannot guarantee educational equity. To continue, Pakistan needs to embrace a context-sensitive, teacher-centered, and multilingual education policy. Linguistic diversity can be viewed as an asset rather than a challenge, as it can advance inclusiveness, cultural identity, and cognitive growth. To put it briefly, successful language policy has nothing to do with a preference for one language over another. However, it is about establishing a situation where all children can learn successfully, no matter the language being taught or their socioeconomic status.

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