

## THE EVOLUTION AND IMPACT OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN PAKISTAN: A COMPREHENSIVE REVIEW

Ayesha Mehmood<sup>\*1</sup>, Muhammad Ali<sup>2</sup>, Iqra Yousif<sup>3</sup>

<sup>\*1</sup>MPhil Scholar, Department of English, The Islamia University of Bahawalpur (IUB);

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer in English, IKIU Qazvin Iran;

<sup>3</sup>Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jhang, Punjab, Pakistan

<sup>\*1</sup>[Ayeshamahmood.ly@gmail.com](mailto:Ayeshamahmood.ly@gmail.com); <sup>2</sup>[alinoorbzu@gmail.com](mailto:alinoorbzu@gmail.com); <sup>3</sup>[Iqrayousaf47@gmail.com](mailto:Iqrayousaf47@gmail.com)

Corresponding Author: \*

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### ABSTRACT

English has significantly shaped the linguistic and socio-economic landscape of Pakistan, influencing various facets of its society. This paper provides a comprehensive review of the evolution of English language learning in Pakistan, tracing its historical roots from the British colonial period to its current status and future prospects. It explores the role of English in Pakistan's educational system, its impact on socioeconomic opportunities, and its influence on cultural dynamics. By examining both historical developments and contemporary practices, this study highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with English proficiency in Pakistan. The paper concludes with insights into future trends and policy recommendations to address disparities and enhance the effectiveness of English language education in the country. English has long held a significant place in Pakistan's linguistic landscape, shaping educational policies, economic opportunities, and cultural dynamics. This paper explores the evolution of English language learning in Pakistan, from its colonial roots to its current status and future outlook. By examining historical developments, educational practices, and socio-economic implications, this study aims to provide a thorough understanding of English's role in Pakistan and its effects on national development.

**Key Words:** significantly, linguistic, socio-economic, landscape, explores, evolution.

### INTRODUCTION

In Pakistan, English serves as a bridge between global and local contexts, influencing various aspects of society. As a former British colony, Pakistan inherited English as an official language, which has evolved to become a critical tool in education, business, and international relations. This paper investigates the historical trajectory of English language learning in Pakistan, its current practices, and its broader impact on the nation's development (Shahid, Asif et al. 2022).

The English language occupies a pivotal position in Pakistan's educational, social, and economic framework. Rooted in the country's colonial past, English continues to hold significant influence, both as an official language and as a medium of instruction. Its role has evolved from being a symbol of elitism to a vital instrument for socio-economic mobility and global integration. In

contemporary Pakistan, English is not only a language of power and prestige but also a critical factor in education, employment, and international communication (Wang, Zhang et al. 2023)

This comprehensive review aims to delve into the historical development, current trends, and far-reaching impact of English language learning in Pakistan. By examining its evolution, this review seeks to understand how English shapes the lives of millions of Pakistanis and what challenges and opportunities lie ahead in its continued journey (Razzaq 2023).

### Historical Background

The foundation of English language learning in Pakistan is deeply intertwined with the country's colonial history. During British rule in the Indian subcontinent, English was introduced as a language

of administration, education, and governance. The British colonial government established English-medium schools and universities to produce a class of educated locals who could assist in running the empire. English quickly became the language of the elite, associated with power, privilege, and access to higher education (Talat, Gulfam et al. 2023).

When Pakistan gained independence in 1947, it inherited this colonial legacy. English retained its status as an official language, alongside Urdu, due to its entrenched role in government, the judiciary, and higher education. The early years of independent Pakistan saw a continuation of English as the language of the elite, particularly in urban areas and among the upper classes. English was the medium of instruction in prestigious schools and universities, creating a significant socio-linguistic divide between those who had access to English education and those who did not (Irfan, Shahzadi et al. 2021).

In the decades following independence, debates arose about the role of English in the newly formed state. While some advocated for Urdu to be the sole national language to foster national unity, others recognized the practical importance of English in global communication, diplomacy, and scientific advancement. As a result, English remained a crucial part of the education system, particularly at the secondary and tertiary levels, and continued to be a language of power and opportunity (Shah, Muhammad et al.).

The early post-independence period also witnessed the gradual expansion of English language education beyond the elite class. While English-medium schools were still largely concentrated in urban areas, there was a growing recognition of the need to teach English more widely. However, the quality of English education varied greatly, with rural and public schools often lagging behind their urban and private counterparts (Asif, Afzal et al. 2020).

The historical evolution of English language learning in Pakistan set the stage for its future role in the country. Over time, English transitioned from being a colonial imposition to becoming an essential skill for navigating the modern world. Its continued prominence in Pakistan reflects broader global trends and the enduring influence of colonial legacies on postcolonial societies (Nauman 2019).

### **Colonial Legacy**

The colonial legacy of English language learning in Pakistan is rooted in the British Empire's strategic use of language as a tool of governance and control. During the British colonial period in the Indian subcontinent, English was introduced as the language of administration, education, and the judiciary. The British rulers established English-medium institutions with the intention of creating a class of local elites who could serve as intermediaries between the British authorities and the local population. This group, often referred to as "Anglicized" or "Westernized" elites, was essential for the colonial administration, as they were expected to be loyal to the British Crown and help in maintaining colonial order (Jabeen 2020). English was thus associated with power, privilege, and access to opportunities. It became the language of the educated and the affluent, creating a sharp socio-linguistic divide between those who could speak English and those who could not. Proficiency in English was a prerequisite for entering the civil service, obtaining prestigious jobs, and gaining admission to the best educational institutions. Consequently, English emerged as a key marker of social status and mobility (Abbas 1993).

In education, the British introduced English as the medium of instruction in schools and universities, particularly in urban centers. The curriculum was designed to instill British values and knowledge systems, often at the expense of local languages and cultures. This focus on English contributed to the marginalization of indigenous languages and the creation of a dual education system, where English-medium schools were seen as superior to vernacular-medium schools (Durrani 2012).

At the same time, English served as a unifying language in a region characterized by linguistic diversity. The subcontinent was home to numerous languages and dialects, and English provided a common medium of communication for the educated elite across different regions. However, this also meant that English was often seen as an alien language, disconnected from the cultural and linguistic realities of the majority of the population (Rahman 2020).

The impact of this colonial legacy persisted even after Pakistan gained independence in 1947. English continued to be the language of governance, the judiciary, and higher education.

The new Pakistani state faced the challenge of balancing the need to promote Urdu as a national language with the practical advantages of retaining English for international diplomacy, science, and technology. As a result, English remained a powerful tool for social and economic mobility, while also perpetuating inequalities rooted in the colonial period (Rahman 2020).

The colonial legacy of English in Pakistan has had long-lasting effects on the country's educational and social structures. The language's association with power and prestige has made it a desirable skill for many Pakistanis, but it has also reinforced social divisions and contributed to the marginalization of regional languages and cultures. Understanding this legacy is crucial for addressing the contemporary challenges of English language learning in Pakistan and for developing more inclusive language policies that reflect the country's linguistic diversity (Rahman 2010).

### **Post-Colonial Developments**

After Pakistan gained independence in 1947, the country faced the complex challenge of building a national identity while dealing with the colonial legacy of English as a dominant language. The early post-colonial period was marked by debates over the role of English in the new nation. While there was strong advocacy for Urdu to be promoted as the national language to foster unity, English was retained as an official language due to its entrenched role in governance, education, and international relations (Aftab 2017)

#### **1. English as an Official Language:**

Immediately following independence, English continued to be the language of government, the judiciary, and higher education. The new state, grappling with administrative challenges, relied heavily on English-speaking bureaucrats and legal experts trained during the colonial period. English was seen as essential for maintaining continuity in governance and for engaging with the international community (Majeed 2014).

#### **2. Educational Policy and Language Planning:**

In the early years, Pakistan's educational policy was shaped by the need to establish a cohesive national identity while recognizing the practical advantages of English. The 1959 Sharif Commission on Education recommended that

English should be taught as a second language from the earliest stages of schooling. This marked the beginning of a dual-language education system, with Urdu or regional languages used as the medium of instruction in public schools, and English predominant in elite private schools. The divide between English-medium and Urdu-medium education became more pronounced over time, contributing to socio-economic disparities. English-medium schools, often concentrated in urban areas, were better resourced and provided access to higher education and better job opportunities, reinforcing the association of English with social mobility (Hajjaj 2022).

#### **3. Expansion of English-Medium Education:**

From the 1970s onwards, there was a significant expansion of English-medium schools across Pakistan, driven by globalization, the demand for higher education, and the growing influence of the private sector in education. This period saw the proliferation of private English-medium schools, catering to a wider section of the population. However, the quality of English education varied widely, with elite schools offering high standards of instruction, while many low-cost private schools struggled with inadequately trained teachers and poor resources (Mahboob 2002).

#### **4. English in Higher Education and Professional Advancement:**

English maintained its status as the language of higher education in Pakistan, particularly in fields such as science, technology, medicine, and engineering. Proficiency in English became a key criterion for admission to prestigious universities, scholarships, and competitive examinations. This further entrenched English as a crucial tool for professional advancement and access to global opportunities. The dominance of English in higher education also influenced language policy in primary and secondary education, as parents increasingly sought English-medium instruction for their children to improve their future prospects. This trend contributed to the growing popularity of English tuition centers and the emphasis on English in private schooling (Majeed 2014)

#### **5. Socio-Economic Implications:**

The expansion of English-medium education contributed to both opportunities and inequalities

in post-colonial Pakistan. On one hand, English provided access to global job markets, international scholarships, and higher education opportunities abroad. On the other hand, the unequal distribution of quality English education exacerbated socio-economic disparities, with rural and low-income students often left at a disadvantage. The emphasis on English also had implications for linguistic and cultural identity. While English facilitated global communication and access to knowledge, it also led to concerns about the marginalization of indigenous languages and the erosion of cultural heritage. The tension between promoting English and preserving local languages remains a critical issue in Pakistan's language policy (Majeed 2014).

### 6. Government Language Policies:

Over the decades, government policies have oscillated between promoting English for its global utility and emphasizing Urdu for national cohesion. Various education policies and reforms have attempted to balance these objectives, with mixed results. English has continued to play a dominant role in Pakistan's education system, but the language gap between urban and rural populations, as well as between different socio-economic groups, has persisted (Mahboob 2002). In the post-colonial era, English in Pakistan has transitioned from being merely a colonial legacy to becoming a central component of the country's education system and socio-economic structure. While it has opened doors to international opportunities and professional success, it has also reinforced existing social inequalities and posed challenges to the preservation of linguistic diversity. The ongoing debate about the role of English in Pakistan reflects broader questions about national identity, equity in education, and the country's place in the globalized world (Ahmad and Khan 2017).

### Current Practices in English Language Learning

In contemporary Pakistan, English language learning is a critical component of the educational landscape, influenced by both global trends and local socio-economic dynamics. The practices surrounding English language education have evolved significantly, reflecting the increasing importance of English for academic success,

professional advancement, and global connectivity (Durrani 2012).

### 1. English in the Education System:

**Primary and Secondary Education:** English is introduced as a compulsory subject from the early grades in both public and private schools across Pakistan. However, there is a stark contrast in the quality of English language instruction between private English-medium schools and public Urdu-medium schools. In private schools, English is often the medium of instruction for most subjects, whereas in public schools, it is typically taught as a subject alongside Urdu and regional languages (Asif, Afzal et al. 2020).

**Curriculum and Assessment:** The curriculum for English language learning varies widely, with private schools generally offering a more comprehensive and advanced curriculum compared to public schools. The national curriculum emphasizes reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills, but the focus on rote memorization and exam-oriented learning often limits the development of practical language proficiency (Shamim 2008).

**Examinations:** English language exams are a crucial part of the educational system, with significant weight given to English proficiency in secondary and higher secondary examinations. Performance in English exams can greatly influence a student's academic trajectory, particularly in gaining admission to prestigious universities (Rahman 2001).

### 2. Private Sector and English Language Institutes:

**Proliferation of Private Schools:** The rise of private English-medium schools, particularly in urban areas, has been a major trend in Pakistan's education sector. These schools cater to a range of socio-economic groups, from elite institutions that offer high-quality education to low-cost schools that provide basic English instruction. The private sector's role in English language education has expanded significantly, driven by the demand for English proficiency as a key to better job prospects (Shamim 2008).

**Language Institutes and Tuition Centers:** The demand for English language skills has also led to the growth of private language institutes and tuition



centers. These institutions offer specialized courses in English, including preparation for international exams such as IELTS, TOEFL, and SAT. Many students and professionals attend these centers to improve their language skills for academic and professional purposes (Rahman 2001).

### 3. Digital and Technological Tools:

**Online Learning Platforms:** The advent of digital technology has transformed English language learning in Pakistan. Online platforms, mobile apps, and digital resources offer learners access to English language courses, practice exercises, and interactive content. These tools are particularly popular among younger learners and those in urban areas, who have better access to the internet and digital devices (Dildar, Hassan et al. 2015).

**E-Learning and Distance Education:** The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of e-learning and distance education in Pakistan. Many schools and universities shifted to online classes, incorporating digital tools for English language instruction. While this transition has improved access to English education for some, it has also highlighted the digital divide, with many students in rural areas lacking access to reliable internet and digital devices (Channa 2017).

### 4. Teacher Training and Professional Development:

**Teacher Qualifications:** The quality of English language teaching is heavily dependent on the qualifications and training of teachers. In private English-medium schools, teachers often have higher qualifications and better English proficiency compared to those in public schools. However, there is a general need for more rigorous and standardized training programs for English language teachers across the country (Kasi 2010).

**Professional Development Programs:** Various government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have initiated programs to improve English language teaching in Pakistan. These programs focus on enhancing teachers' language skills, pedagogical methods, and use of technology in the classroom. Despite these efforts, there remains a significant gap in the availability and quality of professional development opportunities, particularly in rural and underserved areas (Warsi and Khurshid 2022).

### 5. Challenges and Issues in English Language Learning:

**Disparities in Quality and Access:** One of the major challenges in English language learning in Pakistan is the disparity in quality between urban and rural areas, as well as between private and public schools. Students in rural areas and public schools often face challenges such as inadequate resources, poorly trained teachers, and lack of exposure to English outside the classroom (Tahir, Qadir et al. 2014).

**Overemphasis on Examinations:** The education system's heavy reliance on standardized exams has led to an overemphasis on rote learning, with less focus on developing practical language skills. This has resulted in students often lacking confidence in speaking and using English in real-life situations, despite scoring well in exams (Shamim 2011).

**Socio-Economic Barriers:** Socio-economic status continues to play a significant role in access to quality English education. Students from lower-income families may not have the financial means to attend private English-medium schools or access supplementary language learning resources, perpetuating cycles of inequality (Shamim 2008).

### 6. Cultural and Linguistic Considerations

The widespread use of English in Pakistan presents both opportunities and challenges, particularly in the context of the country's rich cultural and linguistic diversity. English has become a powerful tool for socio-economic mobility and global engagement, but its dominance also raises important questions about the preservation of local languages and cultural identity (Akram 2017).

#### 1. Language and Identity:

In Pakistan, language is closely tied to identity, with Urdu serving as the national language and numerous regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi playing vital roles in the cultural and social life of different communities. The increasing emphasis on English, especially in education and professional settings, has led to concerns about the marginalization of these indigenous languages (Dad and Ibrahim 2018).

For many Pakistanis, proficiency in English is associated with modernity, progress, and access to global opportunities. However, this association can also create a sense of alienation for those who are

less proficient in English, reinforcing social divisions. The perception that English is a marker of intelligence and success can impact self-esteem and lead to feelings of inadequacy among those who are more comfortable in their native languages (Abbasi, Ibrahim et al. 2022).

## **2. Impact on Regional Languages:**

The dominance of English in education and media has contributed to the declining use of regional languages, particularly in formal and professional contexts. As English-medium education becomes increasingly preferred, younger generations may have fewer opportunities to learn and use their mother tongues, leading to a gradual erosion of linguistic diversity.

This shift also impacts cultural practices, as language is a key vehicle for the transmission of traditions, stories, and values. The diminishing use of regional languages could result in the loss of cultural heritage, as well as the weakening of community bonds that are often strengthened through shared language (Rasheed, Zeeshan et al. 2017).

## **3. Balancing Multilingualism:**

Pakistan is a multilingual society, and finding a balance between promoting English for its global utility and preserving local languages is a significant challenge. While English is essential for international communication and economic advancement, there is a need to ensure that it does not overshadow or diminish the importance of other languages spoken in the country.

Some efforts have been made to promote multilingual education, where students are taught in both their regional language and English. This approach not only helps preserve linguistic diversity but also allows students to develop strong foundational skills in their mother tongue, which can enhance overall cognitive development and academic performance (Manan, David et al. 2016).

## **4. Language Policy and Education:**

Pakistan's language policy has often been a subject of debate, with different governments adopting varying approaches to the promotion of English, Urdu, and regional languages. While there has been a push to make English more accessible through public education, there is also recognition of the

need to promote Urdu and regional languages to maintain cultural and national identity.

Education policies that emphasize the importance of mother-tongue instruction in the early years, followed by gradual introduction of Urdu and English, have been advocated as a way to foster linguistic and cognitive development. However, the implementation of such policies has been inconsistent, and the quality of instruction in regional languages often remains inadequate (Rahman 2008)

## **5. Attitudes towards English:**

Societal attitudes towards English are shaped by its association with power, prestige, and success. For many parents, ensuring that their children learn English is seen as crucial for their future prospects, leading to a strong demand for English-medium education and private language tutoring.

At the same time, there is a growing awareness of the importance of preserving local languages and cultures. Some communities and cultural organizations actively promote the use of regional languages in literature, media, and education as a way to counterbalance the dominance of English and maintain linguistic diversity (Rahman 2008).

## **6. Globalization and Cultural Exchange:**

English also plays a role in facilitating cultural exchange and global connectivity. It enables Pakistanis to engage with international media, literature, and academic discourse, enriching their cultural experiences and broadening their perspectives. However, this global engagement can sometimes come at the cost of local cultural practices and traditions, as Western norms and values are often disseminated through English-language media (Khan, Khan et al. 2019).

Cultural and linguistic considerations are central to the discussion of English language learning in Pakistan. While English offers significant advantages in terms of global communication and socio-economic mobility, it also presents challenges related to the preservation of local languages and cultural identity. Balancing the promotion of English with efforts to sustain Pakistan's linguistic diversity is essential for fostering a more inclusive and culturally vibrant society. As Pakistan continues to navigate the complexities of globalization, it will be important to ensure that language policies support both

national development and the protection of its rich cultural heritage (Khan, Khan et al. 2019).

### **Conclusion:**

The journey of English language learning in Pakistan is a testament to the complex interplay between history, socio-economic factors, and global influences. From its colonial roots as a language of power and privilege, English has evolved into a crucial tool for education, professional advancement, and international engagement. The expansion of English-medium education and the proliferation of private language institutes reflect the growing demand for English proficiency, driven by its perceived value in the global job market and higher education. However, this evolution has also highlighted significant challenges, including disparities in the quality of English education between urban and rural areas, and between public and private schools. The emphasis on English has contributed to socio-economic inequalities, with access to quality English language instruction often determined by a student's financial background. Moreover, the focus on exam-oriented learning has sometimes undermined the development of practical language skills, leaving many students with theoretical knowledge but limited confidence in using English in real-world situations.

The integration of digital tools and online learning platforms offers new avenues for English language learning, especially in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. These technologies have the potential to democratize access to English education, but they also risk exacerbating the digital divide if not accompanied by efforts to improve infrastructure and access in underserved areas.

Culturally, the prominence of English raises important questions about the balance between embracing a global language and preserving Pakistan's rich linguistic heritage. As English continues to play a dominant role, it is crucial for policymakers, educators, and society at large to ensure that language policies promote inclusivity, equity, and respect for linguistic diversity.

In conclusion, the future of English language learning in Pakistan will depend on addressing these challenges while leveraging opportunities to improve access and quality. By fostering a more inclusive and balanced approach to language education, Pakistan can harness the benefits of

English proficiency while also preserving its cultural and linguistic identity. The continued evolution of English in Pakistan will be a key factor in shaping the nation's socio-economic landscape and its place in the global community.

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