



RESEARCH PAPER

Language Ideologies in Practice: Elementary English Teachers' Perception of Students' Multilingual Resources

¹ Imdad Ullah Khan *, ² Syed Dawood Shah and ³ Raheela Naz

1. Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Swat, Pakistan, ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7933-901X>
2. MPhil Scholar, Department of English, University of Malakand, Pakistan
3. PhD Scholar, Department of English, NUML, Islamabad, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** | Imdad.Khan@uswat.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This study explores the language ideologies of Pakistani elementary English teachers regarding Pashto, Urdu, and English. English is associated with colonialism, power, and elitism, while Urdu is tied to Islamic education and national identity. Pashto, though emotionally valued, is seen as lacking instrumental worth and is marginalized due to negative media portrayals. Using qualitative methods – observations, interviews, and field notes – the study examines six teachers across three school types: English-medium private, Urdu-medium private, and Pashto-medium government schools. Findings reveal complex attitudes where English is pragmatically prioritized, Urdu holds symbolic value, and Pashto is underappreciated. Teachers' beliefs reflect internal conflicts shaped by sociopolitical hierarchies and linguistic capital. The study highlights the need for inclusive teacher training that acknowledges multilingual realities, integrates students' diverse linguistic repertoires, and informs language-in-education policy for more equitable classroom practices.

KEYWORDS Ideology, Multilingualism, Elementary Education, Language Attitudes, Language Hierarchy, Teacher Perceptions, Language Policy

Introduction

Multilingualism is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the world that has important repercussions for English as a foreign language teaching. In Pakistan, multilingualism is woven into the politics, history, and culture of this British postcolonial country. The fact that it is multilingual has led to the establishment of complex linguistic ideologies that are affecting attitudes, perceptions, and language use among the teachers (Khan et al., 2022). However, there is still a gap in research on how these ideological orientations influence English learning and teaching in primary/elementary schools in Pakistan. Against the backdrop of the current interest in linguistic ideologies in modern sociolinguistic research (Kroskrity, 2010; McGroarty, 2010; Woolard, 2020), this study attempts to investigate Pakistani elementary English teachers' ideologies of Pashto, Urdu, and English. These ideologies are significant as they can shape their perspectives on language use, instruction, and learning in their multilingual classrooms.

Multilingual educational institutions are common in Pakistan due to the country's rich linguistic backgrounds and resources. Teachers' perception of these linguistic resources can significantly impact how they teach, how students learn in academic settings, and the development of language competencies (Khan et al., 2023; Manan et al., 2019). Therefore, when teachers maintain a positive attitude towards the diverse language

resources their students possess and bring to the classroom, and when educators collectively address issues of multilingualism, their teaching methods can become more inclusive and effective in a multilingual classroom (Khan et al., 2021; McGroarty, 2010). This supportive environment in learning can enhance student engagement and create a sense of support for all learners in the classroom.

Framed within linguistic ideologies, the current study explores primary school teachers' views on using the three dominant languages as subjects and media for teaching. With the help of interview data, this research shows that educators' perspectives influenced classroom language use. Also, that a better accommodation of teachers' ideologies in language-in-education policy can benefit multilingual students' linguistic and cognitive development (Khan et al., 2020; Rahman, 2006). Understanding these individuals' perspectives toward multilingualism, which educators can consider, paves the way for a more just and empowered learning environment that ensures the success of each student. The choice of language for instruction is rather challenging and influenced by personal preferences, societal considerations, and language policies. Against the rich multilingual context of Pakistan, the current study investigates the following specific research questions:

Literature Review

Multilingualism in Pakistan

Pakistan, being an ethnically diverse country, accommodates more than 70 languages spoken across its regions (Tamim, 2014). Nevertheless, the three primary languages – Pashto, Urdu, and English – hold significant social and educational importance. Pashto is primarily spoken in the northwest region and serves as the native language of the Pashtun ethnic group. Urdu, designated as the national language of Pakistan, acts as a bridge language, facilitating communication among diverse linguistic groups. English, a remnant of the British colonial era in the Indian subcontinent, remains the language of instruction in elite educational institutions and is seen by many as a symbol of social status and a pathway to upward mobility (Khan et al., 2021b; Tamim, 2017). This multilingual context, where several languages coexist, has various societal implications, particularly in education, underscoring the need to examine the multilingual dynamics within the education system and educators' attitudes toward their students' multilingual repertoire.

Pakistani students who are educated in multiple languages face several challenges. The colonial legacy has resulted in educational systems that often fail to provide instruction in students' native languages (Durrani, 2012). English is perceived as a necessary skill, sometimes at the expense of local languages, shaping social capital for economic advancement (Rahman, 2006). Additionally, the diverse landscape of private and governmental educational institutions in the country presents numerous challenges for students and institutions striving to provide high-quality education. These challenges reinstate the need to inculcate multilingualism and harness indigenous resources for a well-developed sense of national identity (Khan et al., 2021c). Through a multilingual policy orientation and implementation, the recognition and promotion of regional languages will find their deserved place in formal educational curricula.

Mansoor (2003) is of the view that, when it comes to learning English, students face difficulties in exposing themselves to English-speaking environments and, due to Urdu, furthering themselves in higher educational levels. She points out that local languages are accorded a minor status whereas the students have difficulties learning the English

language in higher institutes of learning. Pakistan is a great challenge when it is considered in the light of a multilingual context, as Rasheed et al. (2017) have pointed out. The study revealed that students struggled to express themselves in English due to a fear of making mistakes. Manan et al. (2017) drew the same focus on the crisis of English teaching in Pakistani schools. They put the fact before that generally, amongst the classmates, the medium of communication is Urdu but does not prevail as a suitable English learning environment.

Manan et al. (2018) have proposed critically that multilingual language awareness may be the theoretical pedestal on which the country's multilingual education system bases itself, focusing more on diversity than linguistic discrimination. Analogously, in a study to prove how paramount English is in Pakistan, Khan et al. (2020) surveyed questionnaires among university students, from which it was found that the use of English is paramount in life and the education sector. They discussed translanguaging as a culturally responsive pedagogy beneficial to multilingual Pakistani university students who come from a linguistically rich environment where over 70 regional languages are spoken. Students identified dominance of Urdu and English as key hindrances in their cognitive understanding of the taught contents.

Language Ideologies and Hierarchy

Language ideologies refer to perceptions surrounding language use in given social settings; they include beliefs, attitudes, values, and practices. In Pakistan, language ideologies are shaped by historical, cultural, and socio-political factors that lay settings for language hierarchies. Inequality in language, based on colonial past and contemporary factors, upholds domination of English and more often substitutes English with notions of intelligence, modernity, and levels of socio-economic status. Local languages, like Pashto, can be conceived as languages of stigma and low value and are left to their respective traditional domains. Urdu, as a national language, treads the middle path of upholding solidarity and identity. Thus, comprehending the nature of language ideologies and their status becomes important in a multi-lingual setting to understand the perceptions and practices of teachers within a multi-lingual classroom.

Ideologies of language commonly find their way into the practices of elementary education. Ideas are commonly used in the context of monolingual English and standard English, in that they both provide communication and in a social relationship structuring manner (Khan et al., 2023c; Wiley et al., 1996). Work such as Fox et al. (2002), which emphasizes the relations of power that underpin language use, language politics, and identity formation, allows power relationships articulating language ideologies and social hierarchies to be furthered. Carlone et al. (2006) point out efforts made to challenge hierarchical models through collaborative projects with elementary school teachers, founded on the community and practice theory of education. The study focuses on the assimilationist beliefs of the educational system and English Language Learner (ELL) performance measures for the students, emphasizing the learning barriers that such educational systems could pose. This research essentially explains the relation of language, interaction, culture, and history in educational setup.

The challenge of producing well-written English text poses a significant obstacle for non-native speakers. Written expression adheres to varying standards across different societies, making it difficult for foreign speakers to fully integrate it into their normal way of expression. By exploring how monolingual perspectives impact educational systems, we can gain a more informed understanding to better serve multilingual populations. Rhetorical strategies in Parks (2010) utilize hierarchical terms that position the teacher

educator as a crucial figure in teacher development: a reflective practitioner responsible for monitoring their language and actions. On the other hand, Schwartz et al. (2016) highlight a key aspect in their recent study on the implementation of language policy and ideology in Bilingual Education Programs (BEP). The technical and administrative hurdles, coupled with the challenges faced by teaching communities and principals in program implementation, underscore the need for significant investments in education and a shift in attitudes towards teaching multilingually and adapting existing learning methodologies. Thomas (2017) observes that federal education language teaching policies for emerging bilinguals influence art education practices. This literature review sheds light on the intricate relationship between complex language ideologies in education and its diverse applications. Keeping this in mind will enable school educators to create an inclusive and stimulating school environment for all students.

The language beliefs and attitudes of teachers are of great relevance to how classrooms should operate and how teaching practices should be carried out. The language ideologies underlying these perceptions lead to how teachers value, use, and even see languages in the learning process. Research has proven that teachers' beliefs on language very much affect language policies and practices in classrooms, not to mention the types of interaction that students from various linguistic backgrounds bring to the classroom (Wiley & Lukes, 1996). For instance, where the teacher's attitude toward the multilingual competencies of the students is positive, there are high chance that the teacher will make use of the competencies while teaching, hence encouraging a healthy inclusive environment for learning. On the other hand, educators with negative language ideologies are likely to attach low value to the linguistic resources that students bring with them, and in the process, probably undermine their confidence in the use of those resources.

Material and Methods

Over the past few decades, the concept of language ideology has evolved in the field of language education. Initially, it was viewed as a crucial interface influencing social structures, discursive practices, and communication norms (Blommaert, 1999; Kroskrity, 2010). However, over the last four decades, language ideology expanded into an evaluative dimension of language education, manifesting individual identities, which point to the necessity of differentiated linguistic competencies (Banes et al., 2016). Nowadays, language ideology is one of the wider phenomena that can make possible a deeper look at languages and cultures, emphasizing semantics structures. This evolution points to the fact that language ideology, which used to be understood essentially as a conceptual frame, is now taken to have shifted into a practical tool to illuminate power relations, inequality, and the treatment of minority languages in education (Fairclough, 2013). The current study is grounded on the language ideology framework—it seeks to understand attitudes, beliefs, and orientations of value that surround language use in society. Quite relevant to practices and educational endeavors, language ideology plays a major role in influencing the way people perceive and deal with their plural languages.

The current study used qualitative approach based on analysis of interview data and classroom observations combined with field notes (Friedman, 2011; Mack et al., 2005). This approach seeks to establish in-depth and comprehensive language ideologies of the teachers, relative to their classroom practices. The study sample included six teachers of English at the elementary level, where two teachers were representing each of the school contexts under investigation. The participants are two teachers from an English-medium private school, two teachers from a Pashto-medium government school, and two teachers from a private school where the medium of instruction is Urdu. These differences point out language ideologies across diverse school environments.

Table 1
Participant Teachers' Demographic Data

S No.	Participant name	Affiliation	Private/public	English/Urdu/Pashto medium
1	Tawseef	Rural Primary School	Private	English-medium
2	Azhar	Rural Primary School	Private	English-medium
3	Asim	Rural Primary School	Private	Urdu-medium
4	Jawad	Rural Primary School	Private	Urdu-medium
5	Ali	Rural Primary School	Public	Pashto-medium
6	Zahid	Rural Primary School	Public	Pashto-medium

Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews and classroom observations; field notes based on visits to the institution helped record the context information. These sources helped in investigating what the teachers think of language ideologies, their views about using multilingual resources in the classroom, and opinions on using the three languages as subjects and mediums of instruction. According to the ethical guidelines of conducting research with human participants, pseudonyms are used for the participants, and the names and locations of the schools are anonymized. Information shared during interviews with the research participants has been treated with confidentiality. Thematic data analysis, a qualitative method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns within the data, will be employed (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Thematic analysis aims to uncover recurring themes and patterns in teachers' responses, shedding light on the complex interplay between language ideologies and classroom practices. Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The analysis is supported by NVivo 14 to effectively organize and interpret the data.

Results and Discussion

Language ideologies and power hierarchy

The teachers have different perceptions about the three languages - English, Urdu, and Pashto - and their relation to power hierarchy in their historical, social, and educational contexts. Their ideological perspective toward English is complex, reflecting a mix of admiration and resentment. The following sections discuss each of the three languages and how the participant teachers perceive these languages through an ideological lens.

English

The participant teachers both abhor and admire the English language in their British postcolonial teaching context. They express negative views of English due to its association with colonialism, western culture, hegemonic power, and elitism. They see English as a language that was imposed on them by the West, and that it has been used to destroy their culture and propagate the culture of the British colonizers. Tawseef, a teacher at an English-medium private school, expresses his negative view of English that it was imposed on the people of the Indian subcontinent by the West through invasion and colonization:

Western forces deliberately introduced English to our region after conquering us, leaving behind our language and traditions. They planned to undermine our rich culture and introduce their way of life, but unfortunately, their strategies have worked and we still struggle with their cultural domination to this day (Tawseef, Int., 2)

Analogously, Azhar believes that English is deeply intertwined with Western culture and lifestyle. He sees English not just as a language but as a symbol of Western dominance and influence. According to him, the association between English and Western

culture is so strong that it has become inseparable: "English is a tool used by the West to try and impose its culture on us, rather than merely a language. Illustrating the relationship between language, culture, and power, indigenous languages and practices are disappearing." He even sees English as antagonistic to Islam and believes that it has been used to target their religion Islam and its associated culture: "Since 1857 (the year of the Indian "Mutiny"), our religion, Islam, and its associated culture have been under attack from the English, who seem to have no intention of stopping, using their language and culture as a weapon." Like Azhar, Tawseef believes that English has been entrenched in society asserting that it is hard to live without it. He blames the younger generation for their fixation with English language and culture. Despite their apparent animosity and distaste for the language, he believes that modern parents are paradoxical since they send their kids to English-medium schools in Western nations, where they think their children will get a good education.

According to Azhar, English is valued more than wisdom in his social context and, as such, is often given more importance than traditional wisdom or knowledge. He believes that English language proficiency is often seen as a measure of intelligence or sophistication, overshadowing the value of traditional knowledge: "English is valued more than our own knowledge and traditions, which is causing our culture to suffer." Relatedly, Ali thinks that because English is such an integral part of our society, it is difficult to operate in any area of life without it. "Because English has become so embedded in our society, it is difficult to imagine it working without it. Anywhere you travel, you will need to speak this language to finish tasks that require a level of literacy."

The participants believe that learning English is necessary for success in life. However, they also perceive that learning English is easier for the rich compared to the poor and thus contributes to maintaining or even exacerbating the socioeconomic divide between social classes. Following are the difficulties the participant teachers highlighted that are faced by the poor in learning English. The participants mention that learning English is expensive, and the poor cannot afford to pay for English language education. They believe that the elite English-medium private schools, which provide a better environment for learning English, are beyond the reach of the poor. This, according to them, relates to differences in access between those who can afford and those who cannot. They say the private sector and NGOs make English a requirement for even the most basic jobs because they offer better life opportunities. This forms an exclusion for the poor who cannot afford to acquire better English proficiency and cannot acquire these job opportunities. The participants have ascertained that the base skill for being able to get better job opportunities is proficiency in the English language. They think that, without English proficiency, the poor can hardly avail themselves of any opportunities in respectable services. They further say that even for very ordinary jobs like clerks or drivers, at least the knowledge of English is a must.

The participants viewed that English-proficient people are powerful, wealthy, and prestigious. They said English-speaking people have better opportunities for a job; they are considered educated and respectable members of society. It paves the way for social stratification, where the rich, who have access to English education, get more success opportunities than the poor. They view English as one of the forms of linguistic capital through which they derive social status and as a tool for manipulation and control. English proficiency is believed to be a key contributor toward helping in attaining economic and educational opportunities and also keeping in place the current socioeconomic disparities. There is a high perception among the participants that there is a link between English proficiency and social class. In their view, English is a high- and rich-class language and those who speak English are considered more enlightened and respectful.

Urdu

The participant teachers of the study were of the view that Urdu is a necessity for keeping the unity of the diversified linguistic communities living within Pakistan. People relate it to a symbol of national integration and national identity and think that Urdu is an instrument to keep communities having different languages together and treat it as a tool for communication among them. They also associate Urdu with the Islamic religion and believe it is indispensable for getting an Islamic education. They assert that, if done away with Urdu, the nation wouldn't have unity and then there would be more biases at the provincial level. Besides, there will be no cohesion at the national level. The participants make it clear that they have their firm belief that Urdu would act as an instrument towards the conservation of national unity from the threat of disintegration based on linguistic diversity. They also underlined the fact that Urdu is a language of correspondence between speakers of different languages in a multilingual Pakistani society. The following lines illustrate these aspects of the study by quoting relevant excerpts from the data.

Azhar: Although speakers of each language are proud of their mother tongue, removing Urdu from four provinces could potentially undermine unity and exacerbate provincial prejudices because all Pakistani speakers of Urdu are proud of their national language. (Int., 2)

Jawad: For Pakistanis, God has shown His plan by providing a common language that is greater than the unique languages of Pashtun, Punjabis, Sindhis, and Baluchis. This is a language that belongs to everyone and yet belongs to no one as a mother tongue. (Int., 1)

The above excerpts are based on the ideology of national monolingualism that the national unity of the country is predicated upon a monolingual national consensus. Plurilingualism is viewed negatively as a potential source of disintegration that can lead to separatism among the different provinces of the country that have strong major regional languages like Punjabi, Balochi, Pashto, Kashmiri, and many others. These views of the participant teachers are rooted in the national education policy of Pakistan which also views Urdu as a symbol of national integration and cohesion (GoP, 2009). It considers Urdu to be important for maintaining unity among the diverse linguistic communities in Pakistan. The policy emphasizes the need to give importance to Urdu as a national language to prevent provincial prejudices and promote a sense of national pride and identity. However, the policy does not provide any concrete steps or strategies to promote the use and development of Urdu as a national language.

The participants also associate Urdu with the Islamic religion and consider it necessary for obtaining an Islamic education. Azhar states "Urdu is used to translate the sacred book of Muslims, the Quran, and a large body of religious literature has been translated into the language. Because *madrasahs* (religious seminaries) use texts that have been authored in or translated into Urdu, Urdu is an important language for Muslims." The widespread use of Urdu to propagate Islamic teachings is considered a useful role for the language. This usage of the language is seen to link Urdu with Islamic religion. As Zahid stresses "Since much Islamic literature is only available in Urdu, Pakistan's Islamic language, Urdu, is essential to preserving the vitality of Islam. The only option to learn about Islam in Pakistan is through Urdu texts, because many people here do not comprehend Arabic, even if they can read it." Contrarily, as stated previously, English is considered antagonistic to Islamic culture and values due to its Western origin and perceived representation of a foreign culture. Urdu is, therefore, considered an antidote for the cultural onslaught of English. Jawad, for instance, stresses: "Since people would have

fully embraced English and forgotten Islam in the absence of Urdu, leading to a more globalized perspective devoid of our Islamic values. Therefore, the survival of Urdu in the region is crucial to Islam's survival."

However, despite the strong belief of the teacher participants in the utility of a single language to reflect national unity, they are also well aware that Urdu functions merely as a linguistic symbol of national unity but has limited instrumental function in social domains and determination of social class status. As compared to the strong instrumental utility of English and its economic benefits within and outside the country, Urdu carries little career prospects in the country and no international promise of career engagement. The participants perceive Urdu as a language that is primarily used by the poor, while the rich continue to use English as a status symbol. Here are some quotes that support this perception:

Tawseef: The poor are unable to learn Pashto or English; the only language they can learn well is Urdu. Their limited ability to communicate in English frequently prevents them from pursuing further education or employment, which feeds the cycle of poverty. (Int., 2)

Ali: MA English students suffer from a superiority complex because they believe everyone else is ignorant and stupid. Conversely, those pursuing an MA in Pashto have a sense of inadequacy since they are not given the respect they deserve. (Int., 3)

Tawseef: The affluent do not want the poor to learn English, go to college, get rich, or catch up to them. It appears that our educational system contributes to the continued affluence of the wealthy and the poverty of the poor. (Int., 2)

Jawad: Language should not hinder success, and everyone should have equal opportunities to learn and excel in Urdu and English. Both languages have unique strengths and should be valued equally. However, here in Pakistan, Urdu is for the poor, while English is for the rich and powerful. (Int., 1)

As evident from these quotes, the participants consider Urdu as the medium of the lower socio-economic class, while English is the language of the ruling elite and powerful. The teachers believe that rich people use English as a status and power-keeping language, whereas Urdu is left to the poorer class to use. Such a mindset builds in a socio-economic rift between classes and upholds the belief that English is a means for more avenues towards success and personal development.

Pashto

Most of the teachers were found to express love and pride toward Pashto as their mother tongue and love toward Pashto as an ancient, sweet, and rich language. Zahid asserts that he would still consider Pashto to be ancient, lovely, and rich even if it weren't his mother tongue. He believes that Pashto is one of the most elaborate languages and that everything can be explained in it: "Pashto is a way of life, not just a language. Each character in the word Pashtun denotes a characteristic. Pashto is far more than just a language for communication. It serves to preserve history, customs, and traditions." Ali thinks of Pashto as one of the finest languages in the whole world. He perceives Pashto not as a language but a code of life (*Pukhtunwali* – Pashtun code of honor), where each letter of the word "Pashtun" is attached to a quality. Another participant, Tawseef thought, that, in comparison to English, Pashto is an older language. He regrets that Pashto has not kept pace with English's rapid modernization. He believes that although Pashto is a rich

language with a large vocabulary, it is also a challenging language to read and write. Azhar agrees that Pashto is a sweet-sounding language but that Arabic (the sacred Islamic language) has a more sophisticated tone and a more extensive vocabulary. He also believes that Urdu is a more sophisticated language than Pashto, with a more extensive vocabulary.

Despite their love for Pashto, the teachers also express frustration with its lack of practical utility outside of their homes and oral interaction. They believe that Pashto does not carry any weight in the job market, domains of power, or any areas of life where literacy is important. They feel that a master's degree in Pashto is not valued and that Pashto speakers are often ridiculed. According to the teachers in this research, the Pashto speakers are mostly presented either as uneducated persons or simpletons on the national electronic media channel of Pakistan. They even believe that the media always presents Pashtun as an illiterate individual who has a talent for guarding, gardening, or cooking, and can only provide that talent if he speaks Urdu in a heavily accented manner that seems funny to people from the other provinces. Tawseef says, "A Pashtun would never be shown in a TV program as an educated individual. He is consistently presented by them as being illiterate. Either he will be cooking or gardening and chatting in a comical and forced Urdu accent, or he will be stationed as a guard in front of a business or residence. He will never be depicted as intelligent or in a professional capacity." Azhar also points to the fact that, due to their Pashto-accented Urdu, Pashtuns are targeted in TV dramas using ethnic stereotypical terms because their Urdu is incorrect according to the dominant Punjabi speakers' standard of Urdu. These aspects of the data show how the participants express their feelings when they feel that speakers of the Pashto language are portrayed in the media negatively or stereotypically, which can stigmatize both the language and its speakers.

Overall, the teachers' perceptions reflect a power hierarchy where English is seen as the most valued language, followed by Urdu, and then Pashto. English is associated with opportunities, success, and power, while Urdu is seen as a symbol of national unity but undervalued in practical terms. Pashto is deeply loved but devalued in terms of its utility and status.

Languages as subjects and media of instruction

Based on the above ideological understanding of the three major languages in their teaching context, the teachers in the study have mixed views about languages as the media of instruction. Some teachers prefer English as the medium of instruction, while others prefer Urdu. However, using Pashto – the mother tongue of all the students in the study – was not considered a suitable choice. There is a consensus among teachers that English is important for the future success of the students, as it is associated with opportunities, upward socio-economic mobility, and communication with future international imagined communities. They believe that English should be taught as a subject in both government and private schools. However, there are differing opinions on the age at which students should be exposed to English. Some teachers believe that English should be introduced from a very early age, while others believe that it should be introduced later after students have become proficient in Urdu. However, in terms of using English as a medium of instruction, the teachers showed greater unanimity in supporting the introduction of English at the beginning of schooling:

Azhar: I think we should introduce English later, after grade 4, to lessen the burden on students who are already learning Urdu. (Int., 1)

Zahid: I believe in starting English early, as young children learn new languages best at a young age. (Int., 3)

Tawseef: I agree with starting with Urdu, our national language, followed by English for international communication, to avoid overloading students' brains with too many languages at once. (Int., 2)

Whereas they considered it desirable to expose students to English-medium instruction in government-run schools, the teachers also believed that the transition in the medium of instruction in the current education system from Pashto to Urdu and then English is a great hurdle for students in performing optimally. In their view, using too many languages in education burdens the students and hampers their growth in learning both the languages as well as the teaching content. Jawad, the teacher at the Urdu-medium school, supports the decision to introduce Pashto as a subject in schools but believes that introducing all the languages at the same time is too much for the students. He states,

We should have started teaching the students in grade four English and grade three Urdu. They've since introduced a new subject. We are instructing them in three languages concurrently –four if we include Arabic, which is a prerequisite for the Islamic studies program. Just think of the burden that language learning causes for students. (Jawad, Int., 1).

As in the case of English, all the participants also perceive Urdu as an integral part of the curriculum, agreeing with the current policy that it should be so from the very beginning of schooling. Zahid considers Urdu as 'the symbol of our country's unity', and therefore 'every person should be able to use it'. Ali, the Pashto-medium government school teacher, is also a strong supporter of Urdu. He believes the language is easier for students to learn and understand as compared to Pashto which has difficult orthography. According to him, it is also difficult for the students to understand the variety of Pashto written in the textbooks as it is quite different from the one the students speak. Azhar, the English-medium private school teacher, is also a strong supporter of Urdu as MoI, even in private schools. Asim, the teacher at the Urdu-medium school, supports Urdu as a taught language because he believes his students need it in the immediate future.

Azhar does not see any practical use for Pashto in education and believes that it is a waste of time for students to learn Pashto as a subject. He states, "Since we already know Pashto, we should study other languages rather than squandering students' time on Pashto." Zahid does not support Pashto as a subject in schools and believes that it is unnecessary in the current circumstances. He states, "These days, it's imperative to master Urdu and English. Put Pashto away. Since we cannot teach four languages at once, we must make choices. Additionally, selecting Urdu and English is desirable."

Conclusion

The data in the current article shows an intricate relationship between teachers' language ideologies and the way they deal with students' multilingual resources. The findings demonstrate a complex landscape in which language is merged with historical, social, and educational context for the shaping of perceptions about power, identity, and social hierarchy (Fairclough, 2013; Khan et al., 2023a). However, the perceptions of English ideological views by teachers contain a mixture of desire and hate, as it is linked with colonialism, being a Western culture, and elitism (Amna et al., 2023). Urdu language, on the other hand, is regarded more as a facilitator for national unity and Islamic education and is considered the main source of marginalization of the lower socio-economic classes.

The Pashto language is adored as sweet and rich but lamented for its lack of utility. These perceptions are a sociological expression of views held by language and power relations that further influence educational practices and impact social stratification (Ashraf et al., 2021).

According to most participant teachers in this study, Urdu is considered a compulsory subject that must be included at the primary level from the beginning of schooling. Some teachers emphasize the importance of Pashto in education, while others hold negative views. These differing perspectives on language among teachers highlight the complexity and contested nature of language ideologies in Pakistan's multilingual ecology where languages are embedded in power structures contingent upon social, economic, political and historical factors (Rahman, 2006; Ullah, 2020). This complexity is largely shaped by teachers' language ideologies, as evidenced by Black (2006) and Ashraf et al. (2021), and can influence a teacher's approach to language teaching and the value assigned to different languages in the educational environment. Consequently, without addressing the complex attitudes and beliefs towards different languages, educators may struggle to effectively integrate local or indigenous languages into the elementary education system (Blommaert, 1999). English, as a global language, needs to be integrated alongside regional and local languages to support their preservation and vitality.

Further, the teachers in this study perceive a dichotomy in the value they attach to Pashto: while they profess an undying love for Pashto as their mother tongue and an indispensable part of their identity and culture, they appreciate its value as a language and the cultural capital it brings along. They relate Pashto with their ethnicity and consider Pashto as a symbol of their cultural living, especially its richness in the field of literature, music, and dance. But, conversely, they lament Pashto's devaluation in practical domains, except as a family language and as a marker of Pashtun ethnic identity. They would conceptualize that proficiency in Pashto is not valued in the market or the domains of power. This dual perception reflects the complex interplay between language and ethnicity on one side, and the dynamics of society so intertwined with the impact of Pashto and its value in various contexts on the other.

Language ideologies and the perception of languages is complex (Fairclough, 2013). However, there was general concurrence among the participants that English is important to their future opportunities and upward social mobility, though opinions diverged as to at what age students should be exposed to English. The respondents almost had a unanimous agreement that the introduction of English was to be at a different time, even if it was at an early stage of schooling. The role of Urdu is also pervasive from the very onset of education in the sense that it is deemed an important part of the curriculum, reflecting its perceived role as a symbol of national unity (Manan et al., 2019). The shifting from Pashto to Urdu and then to English during the elementary education level is an exercise that teachers feel is cumbersome for the students and not conducive for their maximum learning. This shows that there is a complex play of language ideologies, educational policies, and practical considerations at play that need to be understood to define approaches to languages in education (Rahman, 2006). The balanced approach moving forward needs to be made in line with the development of students and a socio-cultural context to have effective language education strategies.

The current article contributes to research on language ideology and teachers' attitudes toward multilingual resources in classrooms. However, the study has limitations, such as a small sample size of participants and the three school contexts under investigation. Additionally, the self-reported data from teachers may be influenced by their desire to provide socially acceptable answers. Furthermore, the study did not include other

crucial stakeholders and primarily focused on teachers' views. Particularly missing are the views of students, parents, or policymakers. Future research on this topic is expected to yield more robust outcomes if the sample for the study is more diverse and extensive, involving a broader range of stakeholders to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the interplay between language ideologies, language-in-education choices, and language teaching practice. Furthermore, longitudinal studies can systematically track the evolution of language ideology over time, offering insights into the inner workings of language use in educational settings.

Recommendations

In light of the findings in the current article, it can be asserted that to move toward more inclusive and effective language education strategies, it is essential to acknowledge and address the complex language ideologies that teachers hold, which are deeply intertwined with historical, social, and political contexts. A balanced approach is needed – one that situates English as a valuable global language without undermining the cultural capital and identity tied to local and regional languages such as Urdu and Pashto. Integrating these languages into the curriculum in a way that affirms their value can help mitigate the hierarchical language structures that reinforce social stratification. It is imperative that teacher training programs critically engage with teachers' beliefs about language to better equip them for multilingual classrooms. Educational policy frameworks should mandate the inclusion of diverse stakeholders – such as students, parents, teachers, and policymakers – in the development and review of language-in-education policies. This participatory approach will ensure a more comprehensive and context-sensitive understanding of language ideologies and their impact on classroom practices. Government and educational institutions should fund and support longitudinal studies that systematically track shifts in language ideologies over time. These studies will provide evidence-based insights into how evolving beliefs influence teaching practices outcomes, thereby enabling more responsive and adaptive language planning in multilingual settings.

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