

## LANGUAGE IN EDUCATION

UMER MEHMOOD, SAAD IFTIKHAR, KASHAN AWAN

### TOPIC: CRITICAL DISCUSSION OF FUTURE LANGUAGE POLICIES/SCENARIOS

Examining the educational landscape in 2016 reveals a stagnant adherence to existing practices, particularly in the context of language policy in Pakistan. The term 'practices' is chosen deliberately, highlighting how policy intentions often fail in implementation, especially when applied experimentally to marginalized children, leading to further segregation.

English continues to play a pivotal role as the primary medium of instruction among the privileged elite, closely intertwined with social class. This dominance is underscored by statistics from the ASER survey of 2015, showing stark contrasts in school enrolment between the wealthiest and poorest quartiles: private schools, often teaching in English, are predominantly chosen by the wealthy, while the poorest rely on government schools.

The significance of English extends beyond education, serving as a marker of wealth and a gateway to both material success and cultural capital, as noted by Bourdieu. Despite sporadic challenges, such as a 2015 Supreme Court directive promoting Urdu for official use, the influence of English remains largely unscathed in elite corporate and educational sectors due to judicial exceptions emphasizing its international utility.

Recent military actions have seemingly curbed trends toward Islamization in education, yet the integration of Islamist ideologies in textbooks and media continues, supported by religious factions and media outlets influenced by past regimes and international policies.

A promising development is the growing promotion of indigenous languages through media and print, though these have yet to gain traction as primary mediums of instruction, especially in government schools. There is cautious optimism that such efforts may eventually reverse the dominance of foreign languages in Pakistan's education system.

Fundamentally, the debate over language policies persists, with proponents like Sabiha Mansoor advocating for a dual approach of Urdu and English up to intermediate levels, supplemented by mandatory teaching of regional languages from primary through graduate levels. However, the challenge lies in ensuring equitable implementation across all sectors, as past attempts often marginalized the poor while privileging the elite.

The ideal policy, as envisioned by some, advocates for prioritizing mother tongues in early education, transitioning to Urdu and regional languages in secondary education, and reserving English for higher education. Yet, concerns persist that such reforms might be selectively applied, further segregating society along linguistic and socio-economic lines unless equitable access is ensured.

In conclusion, while discussions on language policies in Pakistan persist, substantive change remains elusive without addressing entrenched socio-economic disparities and ensuring inclusive educational practices across all sectors.