

## REFRAMING MULTILINGUALISM IN A GLOBALIZED WORLD: TRANSLANGUAGING, LINGUISTIC INEQUALITY, AND POLICY DISCOURSES IN SOUTH ASIA

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### Abstract

*This study examines multilingualism as a dynamic sociolinguistic phenomenon shaped by globalization, transnational mobility, digital communication, and shifting ideological structures. Drawing on translanguaging theory (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2019) and plurilingual perspectives (Muñoz-Basols, 2019; Modiano, 2023), the research frames multilingualism not as a collection of discrete linguistic codes but as a fluid repertoire embedded in social, cultural, and political systems. While multilingual practices are widely normalized in daily communication, national language policies often remain rooted in monolingual or hierarchical ideologies that privilege dominant languages—particularly English—over regional and minority languages. In South Asia, and specifically in India and Pakistan, English is discursively constructed as a language of modernization, quality, and global competitiveness, while national languages such as Hindi and Urdu are symbolically elevated but functionally restricted. Regional languages, despite being widely spoken, continue to face institutional marginalization. Using a qualitative Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach informed by Fairclough's (1995) framework, the study analyzes contemporary policy documents, government frameworks, and scholarly discourse from 2017 to 2025. The findings reveal four dominant patterns: (1) English maintains hegemonic authority as a socioeconomic gatekeeper; (2) national languages serve symbolic roles without structural empowerment; (3) regional languages are relegated to cultural domains; and (4) significant gaps persist between policy prescriptions and lived multilingual practices such as translanguaging in classrooms. These results underscore the need for rights-based, inclusive, and contextually grounded language policies that align with UNESCO's multilingual education agenda and support equitable access to learning. The study argues that multilingualism should be treated as a pedagogical asset and a linguistic right essential for social justice, cultural sustainability, and educational transformation across South Asia.*

**Keywords:** Multilingualism; Translanguaging, Plurilingualism, Language Policy, South Asia, Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), Linguistic Rights; UNESCO, English-Medium Instruction

### 1. Introduction

Multilingualism is a significant sociolinguistic phenomenon in the modern world, the brilliance of which was predetermined by increased globalization, transnational mobility through digital interconnection, and unparalleled transnationalism. Linguistic milieus are created in the wake of transnational migration, online communication and intercultural interaction whereby people habitually mobilize numerous languages and semiotic resources to bargain in social, economic and cultural arenas. In modern academic work, it is always true that multilingual societies are a regular phenomenon across the world and not an exception (Li 2018). Present literature also tends to define multilingualism as a dynamical, fluid practice rather than a grouping of separate language codes (Otheguy et al., 2019). Another theory that has had a significant impact is the theory of translanguaging, which illustrates that multilingual speakers can combine the resources of different languages in a flexible manner instead of switching between languages with strictly delimitative boundaries (Li 2018). This reconceptualization indicates an epistemological change in the field of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics; those linguistic delimitations are viewed as a sociopolitical phenomenon than as cognitive facts that are not subject to change. The studies dating back to 2017 and

beyond are continuously based on the dismantling of monolingual suppositions and support a comprehensive view of multilingual repertoires that reflects more accurately the communicative activities of people that occur in hybrid and globalized environments (Canagarajah 2018; Baker 2024).

Simultaneously, the issue of multilingualism continues to be profound in the ideological, economic, and political models creating the language valuation or marginalization across the society. The nationalist or neoliberal ambitions often shape the language policies and do not correspond to the realities of linguistic usage on the ground, which creates conflicts between the experience of multilingualism in real life and the institutional expectations (Mohanty 2019). In many countries, the majority of languages are linked to modernization, quality and global competitiveness and minority and regional languages are only confined to the cultural or symbolic realms. In South Asia, such as, even though the language variety is high, policy language often favors the English language, which is established as the key to an increased social position and global interactions (Khan 2022; Rahman 2019). These hierarchies reproduce structural inequalities; that is, they provide unfair benefits to groups that have elite linguistic capital. This trend corresponds to the trends in the global world where English-medium teaching (EMI) serves as one of the indicators of economic opportunities, thus perpetrating inequalities between rural and urban residents (Ginsburgh & Moreno-Ternero 2022). As a result, the concept of multilingualism requires to be placed in the wider contexts of power, ideology, and historical background.

The international governance institutions have had a significant impact on present-day ideas of linguistic rights. Especially UNESCO has been on the offensive to re-brand multilingualism as an issue of equity, inclusive education and cultural maintenance (UNESCO 2025). The rationale behind its support of multilingual education based on the mother tongue (MTB-MLE) is based on empirical data that suggests that students attain the best results when instructional programs start in languages they understand. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages also reinforces the crisis of language which highlights the importance of protecting linguistic diversity at a time when language shift and endangerment are accelerated. UNESCO has been placed in a larger trend in the research of globally-oriented education in which linguistically responsive pedagogy, cultural sustainability, and the acknowledgement of linguistic repertoires of learners as pedagogical resources is advocated (Lin & He 2022; Turner & Lin 2024). However, there is still a discrepancy between the values of multilingualism across the world and the implementation of national policies, particularly in the postcolonial world. Although the provisions of global systems foretell the linguistic rights, national policies often focus on economic competitiveness and state cohesion, thus creating discrepancies that dictate access to education and the formation of an identity.

The South Asian context of South Asian and especially of India and Pakistan offers a fascinating background of studying these contradictions since it is a complex interplay between the colonial pasts, the projects of national identity, and linguistic diversification. The Scheduled languages are officially recognized in India, but in Pakistan, there are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Saraiki, Brahui, Shina and many other languages. However, the discourse on the policy in the two countries builds linguistic hierarchies, which verbally promote English as the language of authority, advancement, and promotion (Khan & Zaki 2022). Hindi and Urdu are often put as symbols of harmony and cultural identity, but do not enjoy equal authority in the sphere of higher education, government, or the business world (Mohanty 2019). Regional and minority languages are widely spoken, but they are not given much institutional attention and are rarely used in areas of authority (Rahman & Pandian 2019). Such an arrangement creates a

hierarchical structure that is multilayered such that English is dominant in the elite institutions, national languages are symbolically powerful and regional languages are structurally marginalized. At the same time, according to classroom research, students are engaged in translanguaging in their natural state, and educational systems continue to impose monolingual or bilingual standards (Lin & He, 2022). These contradictions highlight the importance of the critical examination of the policy discourse as it will help to shed light on the process of states framing linguistic diversity and reproducing inequality.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

1. To analyze how multilingualism is conceptualized, valued, and structured in contemporary global and South Asian policy and sociolinguistic discourse (2017–2025).
2. To critically examine the ideological patterns and power relations embedded in Indian and Pakistani language-policy discourse using a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach.

### 1.2 Research Questions

1. How do India and Pakistan construct, prioritize, and hierarchize English, national languages, and regional languages within contemporary policy discourse?
2. How do policy narratives reinforce or challenge linguistic inequality when analyzed through a CDA framework informed by recent multilingualism research?

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Multilingualism is an omnipresent fact in South Asia as well as the rest of the world; however, national language policies often prefer hegemonic languages, in particular, English, and disenfranchise local and low-profile languages. The gap between the actual language use and institutional ideologies creates unfavorable educational results, socio-economic inequality and loss of linguistic diversity. Although the UNESCO has a strong multilingual rights agenda and empirical evidence on the benefits of using the mother tongue as the medium of multilingual education, policy language in India and Pakistan continues reproducing the colonial and neoliberal structures of inequality and constraining linguistic access to education (Khan & Zaki, 2022; Mohanty, 2019). Nevertheless, critical discourse analysis of such accounts is minimal and has not provided adequate understanding of how power, identity and opportunity is constructed. This paper is aimed to fill this gap by undertaking CDA-based research on policy discourses that influence multilingualism in South Asia.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Theoretical Foundations of Multilingualism: Translanguaging, Plurilingualism, and Repertoires

The idea of the reshaping of multilingualism in modern sociolinguistics has been based on the theory of translanguaging that redefines the context of multilingual practice as the blending of a single repertoire of communication instead of switching between different languages. Li (2018) claims that, by mobilizing linguistic, cognitive, and semiotic resources, multilingual speakers freely perform communicative functions, and thus does not support the structuralist view that the languages of an individual exist as internally delimited cognitive systems. Likewise, Otheguy, Garcia, and Reid (2019) point to the fact that multilingualism is constructed socially by instilling ideological differences between the otherwise homogenous communicative practices, highlighting the sociopolitical character of the language boundaries. Collectively, these models show that multilingualism should be conceived as an evolving, intertwined and emergent practice that is contextualized, identity-centered and interactional, and not as a series of compartmentalized linguistic skills (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2019).

To complement the idea of translanguaging, the European notion of plurilingualism expresses a paradigm whereby multilingual users do not have equal and stable, but partial, skewed, and developing abilities in several languages. Based on which, Munoz -Basols (2019) hypothesizes that the plurilingual model recognizes the validity of hybrid language practices of learners and offers institutional means of assessment and curriculum development. Moving towards a similar contribution, Modiano (2023) remarks that the European linguistic policy supports plurilingual competence as a democratic ideal, yet in reality, English usually predominates in the realms of higher education and mobility. These additions help to emphasise the idea that, although the concept of translanguaging is used to describe real-life practising of the principles of communicative practice, plurilingualism is used to create the institutional framework of acknowledging the partiality of competencies in order to make up a complete theoretical basis of contemporary multilingualism (Munoz-, 2019; Modiano, 2023).

### **2.2 Dimension of Multilingualism Cognitive, Creative and Intercultural**

The focus of studies into the cognitive aspects of multilingualism has moved beyond statements of a generalized notion of a bilingual advantage to the more specific, context-based interpreters. Lehtonen et al. (2018) discovered that cognitive gains could be achieved through particular sociolinguistic parameters, like permanent dual-language use or a high level of proficiency in two languages. Their results support previous generalisation and point out that the results of multilingual cognitive abilities are determined by experience, frequency of use, and sociocultural background and not by bilingualism itself. On the same note Baum and Titone (2024) state that cognitive flexibility in multilinguals is a byproduct of their ability to move between two or more linguistic conditions especially where the communicative norms need to be switched quickly. These studies combined prove that multilingual cognition should be perceived as an emergent phenomenon instead of an inborn one (Lehtonen et al., 2018; Baum and Titone, 2024).

In addition to the mental aspect of the process, multilingualism is closely associated with creativity and intercultural competence. According to Kharkhurin, Koncha, and Charkhabi (2024), multilingual people demonstrate improved divergent thinking, metaphorical thinking, and innovative problem-solving: specifically, in the process of solving problems that demand conceptual flexibility. Their practice links the experience of multilingualism to the broader creative possibilities since the movement across different linguistic systems stimulates another set of viewpoints and representational variety. Interculturally speaking, Baker (2024) believes that the multilingual speaker always exhibits a high level of intercultural awareness because of his/her constant interaction between meanings embedded in cultures differing in languages. In the same way, Canagarajah (2018), the author adds that multilingual practice generates what the author describes as spatial repertoires, which allows individuals to bargain identities and cultural demands in various communicative contexts. This body of research confirms the idea that multilingualism is an asset that enhances creativity and intercultural knowledge (Kharkhurin et al., 2024; Baker, 2024).

### **2.3 International Multilingual Policies of the World and the Region: UNESCO, the EU, and International Policies Comparisons**

The preference of linguistic rights, cultural-linguistic sustainability, and equal access to education have been among the key factors influencing the modern policymaking of multilingualism through the influence of UNESCO. In its report on languages matter in 2025, UNESCO emphasizes the importance of multilingualism to inclusive and quality education, especially involving use of mother-tongue-based multilingual education (MTB-MLE). To deny the exclusion and promote fair participation, the organisation claims that linguistic rights have

to be incorporated into national education strategies (UNESCO, 2025). To corroborate this argument, Turner and Lin (2024) observed that multilingual pedagogies that are based on translanguaging lead to student identity affirmation, participation, and academic understanding. The idea of language policy in UNESCO also encourages the concept of multilingualism as a right, which connects language policy with international commitments like Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (UNESCO, 2025; Turner and Lin, 2024).

Another powerful model of a multilingual government is the European Union. EU has 24 official languages, and linguistic access has been viewed as a key factor in democracy, transparency, and citizenship. The European Parliament Research Service (2019/2023) reports that multilingual administration implies less than 1 % of the EU budget, although it is at the center of civic equality. Yet, studies indicate that English is taking over the academic institutions, the world of science, and global mobility. According to Modiano (2023), despite the formal support of the idea of plurilingualism in the EU, the reality threatens to move towards functional bilingualism (L1 + English). To expand on this criticism, Ginsburgh and Moreno-Terrero (2022) point out that the world has become increasingly English-heavy due to Brexit, both in the economic and academic fields, which puts the idea of linguistic pluralism in the EU under consideration. Taken together, all these works depict how the policy ideals tend to fight with the global linguistic hierarchies (Modiano, 2023; Ginsburgh and Moreno-Terrero, 2022).

#### **2.4 Multilingualism: South Asia: India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Emerging Educational Models**

South Asia is home to some of the richest multilingual ecologies in the world but policies on language regularly do not support lived linguistic situations. Famously, Mohanty (2019) sets India as a multi-lingual reality and monolingual ideology as a paradox between the rich linguistic diversity of the country and the propensity towards promoting English and Hindi as educational and governmental languages. Likewise, Khan and Zaki (2022) demonstrate that the language policy of Pakistan presents English as a language of quality, modernisation, and global relevance, whereas Urdu is being presented as a language of national unity. Such discourses deprive the regional languages, which are Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi, of sufficient institutional support even though they are commonly spoken in day-to-day life. These observations underscore the role played by policy talk in South Asia, which supports linguistic inequalities that favor dominant languages (Mohanty, 2019; Khan and Zaki, 2022).

The same is reflected in Bangladesh. Even though Bangla remains the main national identity, English- medium instructions (EMI) has been on the rise especially among higher learning institutions and institutions of excellence. Rahman and Pandian (2019) have discovered that EMI introduces social disparities to advantaged students by being presented as the initial users of the English language at the expense of rural and first-generation learners. In addition to EMI, the Chittagong Hill Tracts have little institutionalised support of their Indigenous languages, as observed in other areas of the world where minority languages are marginalised. Simultaneously, new literature points out new multilingual pedagogues in the region. Lin and He (2022) found out that the translanguaging methods have a great effect on the classroom engagement and on the scaffolding between the languages, which is also cross-linguistic in the Asian context. On the same note, Machimana and Genis (2024) indicate that the multilingual approach of teaching is effective in the African multilingual classrooms, which may be closely applicable in South Asian policy reform. All these studies help to strengthen the necessity of linguistically inclusive education, based on regional realities (Rahman and Pandian, 2019; Lin and He, 2022).

### **3. Research Methodology**

The current research will use the qualitative research approach to explore the way in which multilingualism is framed, constructed, and ideologically placed in the present discussion of language-policy in India and Pakistan. The combination of the multilingualism issues with the question of identity, power, inequality and even the state ideology makes it more suitable to use the qualitative approach to the analysis of the discursive processes which the policy discourses influence to form linguistic hierarchies. Qualitative inquiry also allows a researcher to be close to texts, context, and ideological patterns, which subsequently allow the researcher to make interpretations in how language policies make certain meanings of linguistic value and marginalisation natural. This interpretive method can be compared with sociolinguistic and critical traditions that understand language as a socially situated practice being affected by historical, political, and institutional forces (Mohanty, 2019; Khan and Zaki, 2022). This research is based on the meanings, framings, and representations that a policy text contains and is oriented toward the numeric measurement of language behaviour, which, based on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), outlines how multilingualism shapes and is reproduced ideologically.

In a qualitative study, the author chooses CDA as the fundamental analysis tool because of its ability to relate textual characteristics at the micro-level to the macro-level structure of power, ideology and social inequality. The three-dimensional model by Fairclough (1995) offers a strong prism through which to consider the way in which the discourses create hierarchies between English, national languages, and regional languages in South Asia. Even though the model by Fairclough was created earlier, before the 2017-2025 window, its relevance to the present should be explained with the help of recent application, e.g., by Khan and Zaki (2022) CDA of policy discourse in Pakistan, or by Turner and Lin (2024) concerning multilingual education through critical-sociocultural lenses. Such new works show that CDA is still highly appropriate in exploring postcolonial language policies marked by multifaceted conflicts between nationalism, neoliberalism, and language varieties. In the present research, CDA is used not as a strict coding system but as an interpretive research tool that sheds light into the way in which policy texts generate, legitimise, and institutionalise particular language ideologies.

#### **3.1 Research Design**

The proposed study has an interpretive qualitative research design, which is based on documentary analysis and critical discourse analysis. Documentary analysis is the systematic analysis of written material, which entails taking out themes, viewpoints, and patterns of ideologies. This is in line with the sociolinguistic orientation of the study where policy texts are not considered as an administrative text but as an ideological artefact that influences the way in which the citizens perceive language, identity and education. The interpretive design also allows flexibility, which enables the researcher to investigate ways linguistic hierarchies are situated in different levels of discourse, including the type of lexical selection and discursive patterns as well as socio-political settings.

Such a methodology aligns with the studies of multilingualism that focus on the socially constructed essence of language, identity, and power (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2019). The design makes the study place the linguistic policies in the context of larger histories of colonial rule, world market demands, and ideologies of states. Through the application of CDA in a qualitative paradigm, the study will unveil some of the assumptions that govern the policy of language and the discourse of education, especially the prioritization of English and national languages and the marginalization of the regional languages. The qualitative design is flexible

which is necessary to study different types of text including policy documents, government reports, institutional guidelines and research-based analysis.

### **3.2 CDA Framework**

The main analytic scheme in this paper is Fairclough (1995) three-dimensional CDA model. The relevance of the model in the study of inequity, identity, and ideological power in the language-policy discourse is confirmed in contemporary studies (Khan and Zaki, 2022; Turner and Lin, 2024). The textual analysis being the first dimension, implies the investigation of the vocabulary, modality, metaphors, nominalisations, and other linguistic aspects that prove ideological placement. As an example, the terms modernisation, global competitiveness and quality education are commonplace in the policy literature to support the promotion of English-medium instruction. It is analyzed in the context of the deployment of such terms to render English seem indispensable and unavoidable.

The second dimension is the discursive practice analysis, which examines the way texts are generated, disseminated and received within larger regimes of institutions and politics. This entails the study of policy-making, institutional players and socio-political forces that influence the language policy discourse. Indicatively, growing pressure of global neoliberal agendas on South Asian education policies can be seen in the prevalence of references to the international standards and global mobility and the focus on particular linguistic priorities in accordance with the economic agenda (Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero, 2022; Rahman and Pandian, 2019).

When the textual and discursive attributes are related to wider social-political frameworks, including colonial legacies, class stratification, nationalism, and linguistic inequality, it is the third dimension, which is the social practice analysis. This dimension enables the research to explain how linguistic policies recreate linguistic hierarchies that enshrine English as an intermediary of socio-economic authority and leave regional languages to a symbolic position (Mohanty, 2019). The textual analysis done under the prism of historical and ideological frameworks, CDA can offer a holistic perspective on the multilingualism construction and struggle in the context of policy discourse.

### **3.3 Research Sample**

This paper will use policy documents, government reports, higher education guidelines, curricular frameworks, and academic analyses created between 2017 and 2025 as the sample of this study. India and Pakistan were chosen as the countries where the texts were used since these are the countries of highly multilingual societies where the language policy traditionally and politically is controversial. Documents such as the updates to the National Education Policy of India (NEP), the revisions of the education policy in Pakistan, English-only instruction, and Higher Education Commission (HEC) language policy can be mentioned. The fact that these documents have an impact on educational governance as well as their direct discussion of language, led to their inclusion.

Peer-reviewed journals were also consulted to put the policy discourse in context with the current scholarly interpretations of the issue including academic articles on topics like SAGE Open, Applied Linguistics Review and Language Testing in Asia. These articles have been chosen due to their topicality to the multilingualism, CDA, translanguaging, as well as postcolonial language policy. All academic sources are within the 2017-2025 period and contain proper DOIs.

### **3.4 Research Instruments**

The main tool in this research is a CDA coding protocol that is designed based on the textual, discursive 3, and social dimensions of Fairclough (1995). The protocol contains groups

of identification of keywords, metaphors, ideological markers, mode, evaluative language and representations of various language groups. The protocol was used to manually code each document that was read several times in order to identify the salient patterns.

A thematic analysis grid is a secondary tool that brings emerging themes in the dataset together. Inductively, the themes were drawn based on the repetitive linguistic constructions of the documents, including the English as modernisation, national languages as unity, and regional languages as heritage. This grid provided an organized study of each theme and was able to make a comparison across countries. Besides this, the study used memo-writing to record interpretive thoughts, observations, and theoretical links in the analysis process.

### **3.5 Data Collection**

The data collection was done through a number of phases. To begin with, the related national policy documents were found based on the official websites of the ministries, government archives and institutional portals. Such texts were downloaded, and changed into readable formats. Academic databases, including JSTOR, Google Scholar, Scopus, and Web of Science, were used to find scholarly articles. The articles published between 2017 and 2025 that covered the area of multilingualism, English-speaking instruction, translanguaging, or South Asian language policy were not excluded. Once the corpus was assembled, all documents were sorted chronologically and thematically in an attempt to make their systematic analysis easier.

The choice of documents was not based on ideological correspondence but on the impact on mass communication, policy-making and education application. Inclusion criteria included that the documents had to specifically cover language policy, educational language models, multilingualism or linguistic rights. The exclusion criteria eliminated the articles that did not have significant discussion of language or lacked adequate text to be used in CDA.

### **3.6 Data Analysis**

The entire process of data analysis involved three distinct phases that were interconnected as per the three-dimensional model by Fairclough. During the textual analysis stage, every document was marked with the help of key words, evaluative language, inclusion and exclusion patterns, metaphors, and repetitive phrases that constructed language roles. Towards the terms indicating hierarchy (e.g., global standards, quality education) and those putting the regional languages in the symbolic or cultural role (e.g., heritage, mother-tongue comforter) were focused.

The discursive practice stage entailed the investigation of the production and distribution of the documents. These involved the study of institutional actors that came up in formulating the policies and the socio-political situations that saw the texts being drafted. This phase elucidated the way discourses regarding English-medium instruction and national languages are spread both formally and informally.

The last analytical level related the textual and discursive patterns to the larger social practices. To take one example, this dominance of English in the policy-making sphere was viewed through the prism of neoliberal educational reform and postcolonial stratification of classes (Ginsburgh and Moreno-Ternero, 2022). The exclusion of local languages was put in context with the historical accounts of nation-building and language homogenisation (Khan and Zaki, 2022; Mohanty, 2019). This triangulated analysis made the CDA shed some light on the more profound ideological frameworks that underpin multilingualism in South Asia.

**4. Results and Findings**

**4.1 Theme One: Hierarchical Positioning of English as a Language of Power**

The discourses on policy in India and Pakistan inductively bring about the position of English as a pivot to progress, movement, and international competitiveness. A text study serves to prove the presence of frequent application of such semantic domains like international standards, quality education, modern knowledge systems and global integration in defining English-media instruction or English proficiency. In Indian policy papers, English is over and over again represented as the language medium through which the nation is connected to the body of global science work and gateways to economic prosperity. The Pakistani texts use a lexical frame that is based on the high performance, professional competence and market demands to justify the primacy of English. These discursive decisions make English an essential competency natural and present it as a necessary skill to survive in a global economy. As a result, these portrayals create a sense of inevitability: the application of the English language is not so much a policy choice but an irresistible world necessity.

The institutional agents such as higher-education councils, planning commissions and corporate bodies continue the domination of English at the discursive practice level. These schools officially promote the use of English as the language of instruction in high learning levels, hence, equating competence to intellectual acumen and professional field. On the plane of social practice, the glorification of the English language reinforces linguistic inequalities in terms of classes which have their origins in the colonial past. English is used as a gate keeping tool that grants entry to elite schools, administrative professions and a private sector job. On this basis, English-medium education is de facto indicator of upward mobility, thus increasing the linguistic divide between the privileged and marginalised groups.

**Table 1**

*Discursive Indicators of English Privilege in Policy Texts*

| Descriptor Policy          | Used in | Implied Value          | Ideological Function                       | Countries Observed |
|----------------------------|---------|------------------------|--|--------------------|
| “International standards”  |         | Global legitimacy      | Normalizes EMI adoption                    | India, Pakistan    |
| “Quality education”        |         | High academic value    | Frames English as superior                 | India, Pakistan    |
| “Modern knowledge systems” |         | Scientific advancement | Associates English with modernization      | India              |
| “Professional competence”  |         | Employability          | Positions English as essential for success | Pakistan           |

**4.2 Theme Two: National Languages as Symbolic Resources Rather Than Functional Tools**

Hindi in India and Urdu in Pakistan are national languages built around discursive practices as symbolic signifiers of unity and cultural identity and not as entirely functioning tools of educational or professional activity. The policy texts in India often describe Hindi as an integrative, historical lingua franca that represents a common heritage and continuity of culture. Equally, the Urdu is referenced as the language of national unity in Pakistani policy texts, thus supporting its symbolic meaning. However, even with this rhetoric uplift, neither Hindi nor Urdu is formally declared to be the official language of scientific study, higher education or technical progress, highlighting a strong gap between their ideological glorification and their actual relegation to the high priority officials.

The symbolic framing of discursive practices takes the form of the repetitive use of the national languages in the context of culture and patriotism, without necessarily being linked to economic competitiveness or higher-level literacy. Policies or committees making policy documents highlight emotional, historical, and nationalistic connections to these languages but do not reflect structural changes that would make them more widely applicable academically or administratively. In the practical level of social practice, such a relationship has allowed the hierarchical order where national languages hold sentimental value, and English dominates in the elite domains. The corresponding pattern is the manifestation of postcolonial linguistic hierarchy where the national languages are rhetorically glorified but substantively limited.

**Table 2**

*Symbolic vs. Functional Roles of Hindi and Urdu*

| Language        | Symbolic Policy            | Role in Functional Education/Administration             | Role in Observed Impact            |
|-----------------|----------------------------|---|------------------------------------|
| Hindi (India)   | National cultural identity | unity, Limited role in higher education and STEM fields | Reinforces English dominance       |
| Urdu (Pakistan) | National shared heritage   | cohesion, Restricted in bureaucracy and elite schooling | English remains gatekeeper         |
| Both            | “Heritage languages”       | Not tied to professional advancement                    | Creates symbolic–functional divide |

### 4.3 Theme Three: Marginalization of Regional and Minority Languages

The third major conclusion is the systemic sidelining of the local and minority languages in both countries. Punjabi, Tamil, Pashto, Balochi, Bengali, Malayalam and Sindhi, among others are examples of languages commonly listed as cultural or heritage languages in policy documents, but not as potential mediums of higher learning, government or the workplace. Indian sources place such languages in the frames of discourses of cultural authenticity and traditional knowledge, and Pakistani documents see them as the valuable elements of national diversity but not the tools of socioeconomic development. Such demarcation restricts regional languages to specific spheres of social life and makes them seem irrelevant in prestigious areas.

Discursively, one would find that regional languages do not feature much in a discourse regarding scientific literacy or economic development or global competitiveness. Their limited presence in the policy discourse makes them linguistically insufficient to the current requirements and thus, strengthens the linguistic inequality and limits the quality education of the communities that depend primarily on these languages. This marginalization creates structural disadvantages socially: students whose first languages are not English or the dominant national one face learning obstacles, lack advancement, and are underrepresented in the spheres of influence. This means that marginalization of regional languages arises to be one of the major ways in which inequality is being propagated in South Asia.

**Table 3**

*Policy Treatment of Regional and Minority Languages*

| Language Group                                   | Policy Framing           | Institutional Support       | Consequence           |
|--|--------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| Indian regional languages (Tamil, Bengali, etc.) | Cultural/heritage assets | Minimal in higher education | Low academic mobility |

| Language Group   | Policy Framing        | Institutional Support                            | Consequence                  |
|--|-----------------------|--|------------------------------|
| Pakistani regional languages (Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, etc.) | Localized markers     | cultural Not used in elite schools or governance | Social inequality persists   |
| Indigenous/minority languages                                | Endangered peripheral | or Weak integration                              | MTB-MLE Linguistic attrition |

#### 4.4 Theme Four: Persistent Policy–Practice Gaps in Multilingual Education

The fourth theme illustrates a massive discrepancy between the official language policy and language practices that actually take place both in schools and communities. India and Pakistan have a history of policy documents promoting monolingual or controlled bilingual frameworks that focus on English and a National language. Nevertheless, observations and empirical research in classrooms indicate that the most common type of communication between students and teachers is translanguaging, which is a free mixture of languages. Even though there are formal limitations against code-mixing teachers actively use the regional languages to give explanations, control classroom interaction and scaffold comprehension. This opposition suggests that the actual education practice is dynamic and multilingual, but policies still have strong and rigid language ideologies.

The discursive practice studies reveal that the policy texts dishearten the hybrid language practices by categorizing them as unstructured, informal, or undesirable despite the existence of solid empirical evidence in their favor regarding the importance of a hybrid language practice in pedagogy. At the social practice level, marginalized students are disproportionately affected by this policy practice gap, as they are dependent on their entire linguistic repertoire to interpret learning in school. When monolingual models are encouraged in educational institutions, the students are deprived of the cognitive and identity-based advantages of relying upon their native languages. Translanguaging is therefore depicted as a problem in official policy and as a solution in practice of education. It is the conflict between policy and practice that supports the necessity of a paradigm change to multilingual pedagogies that reflect linguistic realities.

**Table 4**

*Policy–Practice Gap in South Asian Multilingual Classrooms*

| Policy Position               | Classroom Reality                  | Social Implication                                    | Example Context         |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|-------------------------|
| EMI preferred                 | Translanguaging widely used        | Students rely on regional languages for understanding | Urban & rural schools   |
| Code-mixing discouraged       | Teachers mix languages for clarity | Enhances comprehension                                | Science & math classes  |
| Monolingual mastery idealized | Hybrid repertoires dominate        | Marginalized penalized learners                       | Low-income communities  |
| Standard language ideology    | Flexible linguistic use            | Identity affirmed through repertoires                 | Multilingual households |

## 5. Discussion

This research indicates a stratified hierarchy of language with several layers and levels of linguistic stratification that determine modern multilingual realities in India and Pakistan. Yet, in as much as both countries are ranked as one of the most diverse linguistic nations in the



world, there is a recreation of historical, ideological as well as economic structures in the policy discourses in favor of some languages- particularly English- above others. This discussion summarizes the four main themes that were revealed during the analysis and places them in the context of the overall theoretical and empirical literature on the subject represented in the literature review. The other issues raised in the discussion include contradictions between language practices and institutional policy, ideological basis of language hierarchies, and how such relations affect linguistic equity, educational opportunity, and social justice. This part is a critical interpretation of the roles that policy discourses still play in perpetuating linguistic inequality and paying little attention to lived multilingual realities through the prism of translanguaging theory, plurilingualism, and the multilingual rights framework presented by UNESCO.

In postcolonial South Asia, the persistence of the use of the English language in policy discourse highlights because the language remains a symbol of prestige, mobility and globalisation. It is evident that the results indicate that English is not merely presented as a secondary language but rather presented as a prerequisite to success in higher learning, employment and globalization. This is indicative of a neoliberal ideology that puts English as a human capital on par with the world trends as pointed out in recent studies. The proficiency of the English language is time and time again associated with the following concepts: quality education, international standards, and professional competence-lexical expressions that present English as the key to the accessibility of the global knowledge system. Such representations are consistent with general trends outlined in the literature, in which the English-medium instruction (EMI) is transformed into an economic policy, but not a teaching option (Ginsburgh and Moreno-Tertero, 2022). The connotations are extreme: English turns into a gatekeeping resource that disproportionately affects urban, middle-class, or elite populations that get access to English-medium education at an early age. In that way, the discourse makes English the default language of upward mobility, which establishes the educational privilege and marginalizes those communities, the most powerful linguistic assets of which are located outside the elite linguistic spaces.

This order of national languages is further strengthened by the symbolic upliftment of the national languages which upheld a rhetorical allegiance to linguistic unity but curtailed the functional scope of Hindi and Urdu. The evidence shows that national languages are often appealed to in policy texts but seldom are associated with the types of high-status functions that would question the dominance of English. This symbolic-functional differentiation emphasizes the ambivalence of South Asian language policy in that although national languages are glorified as historic, cultural and identity-making, they are not structurally enabled in aspects of scientific research, digital technology, or tertiary education. This tendency can be repeated by Mohanty (2019) who states that India is a multilingual reality and monolingual ideology: national discourses of unity conceal more profound inequalities in the distribution of languages. In Pakistan, the results are in line with the analysis conducted by Khan and Zaki (2022) who find that Urdu is discursively connected to national identity but is functionally marginalized, especially in high-elite education and government bureaucracy. This discrepancy between rhetoric and reality shows the systematic hesitation to make national languages a full-fledged academic and administrative instrument, and thus to restrict their symbolic significance at the cost of their transformative force.

Marginalization of regional and minority languages takes place the most, and this tendency can be associated with the legacy of colonial inequality as well as modern socioeconomic systems. These results demonstrate that regional languages are always situated

as a heritage, a tradition or a cultural treasure-discourses which boast of their aesthetic worth but do not make them part of institutional power. A fact of representational void concerning regional languages in higher education, economic growth, or scientific literacy suggests a profound level of structural bias limiting their functional growth. These languages are commonly used in rural or marginalized communities in both India and Pakistan, and their subordination in policy terms practically re-creates the effects of class and caste segmentation. This reflects the academic evidence that linguistic hierarchies are also related to social stratification, wherein the perceived modernity of English is the exact opposite of the perceived locality of regional languages (Rahman and Pandian, 2019). These are educationally and socially ruining consequences. The learner who depends on regional languages must study the academic content using the unfamiliar languages which in most cases results in poor understanding, decrease in confidence and poor performance. This relationship adds to the linguistic and injustice, where the pressure of adapting is put on the marginalized communities whereas the language practices of the dominant groups are not questioned.

Among the most important discoveries is that there is an everlasting disjuncture between language policy and classroom practice. Although the policy focuses on English or controlled bilingualism, multilingualism dominates the South Asian classrooms instead of being an exception. The teachers tend to move back and forth between English, national languages and regional languages, scaffolding the knowledge of students though such practices are discouraged by institutional guidelines. The students also utilize their entire linguistic repertoires- they do translanguaging to perceive the content, negotiate meaning and articulate complicate ideas. These practices are consistent with the theory of translanguaging, which maintains that multilingual communication is fluid and dynamic and involves a specific context (Li, 2018; Otheguy et al., 2019). The lack of policy-practice congruence points to the irrelevance of mono or bilingual instructional frameworks to multilingual cultures. The policies which propose linguistic purity or language division disregard decades of findings that multilingual pedagogies can help students understand more, develop identities, and engage (Lin and He, 2022; Turner and Lin, 2024). Such continuation of language policy restrictions, therefore, demonstrates a more ideological adherence to monolingual standards based on colonial education systems.

Collectively, these results highlight the underlying conflict between the experienced multilingualism of South Asian communities and the ideological monolingualism of policy. This tension is not just in theory - but it has concrete implications to educational equity, linguistic rights, and social mobility. The speakers of regional and minority languages are deliberately marginalized when English is still the key to success. The symbolic glorification of national languages, which happens in reality to be confined, does not struggle in the preeminence of English. And where translanguaging practices are not supported, schools also deny students their best learning instruments. Such relations contribute to what UNESCO (2025) defines as an international linguistic inequality crisis, when millions of children are studied in languages they do not know perfectly. These practices are contrary to the ideology of mother-tongue based multilingual education (MTB-MLE), which has been demonstrated severally to be beneficial to student achievement and language diversity.

The other important implication of findings is the necessity to reconsider the language policy in the frame of rights approach. The multilingual model of UNESCO underlines that language is no longer a means of communication but a basic human right that is associated with dignity, cultural identity, and equitable access to knowledge. However, the linguistic rights are rarely considered in the policy discourses discussed in this paper. They instead strive

to be efficient, competitive and united as a nation, frames that privilege economic and political interests with educational and cultural equity. A rights approach would also ensure that the policymakers do not view linguistic diversity as a liability but as an asset. It would entail the spread of regional languages in schools, teacher training on multilingual pedagogy and providing the students with the opportunity to study in languages they know. These reforms would not only help South Asia to be better in terms of their learning outcomes but also help to conserve the rich linguistic heritage in South Asia.

Another issue that is discussed in the context of the necessity to balance the use of language policy with such models as translanguaging and plurilingual is emphasized. It has been demonstrated that the best way to learn is through translanguaging research, where students have the opportunity to utilize their entire linguistic repertoires, especially in offers where complex reasoning is involved. The European Union supports plurilingual methods which provide institutional frameworks to justify fragmented abilities in several languages and not focus on a balanced competency. These combinations would reduce the distance between the multilingual reality and the monolingual policy frameworks by integrating the strategies into the South Asian policies. This would entail the replacement of language segregation with language integration, reengineering of curricula to incorporate multilingual activities and creation of assessment strategies that would appreciate the diverse linguistic resources. These reforms would bring the South Asian schooling systems to the modern international standards and meet the domestic language requirements.

Lastly, the results indicate that language policy change is impossible without addressing the underlying ideological frameworks that perpetuate language inequality. Policies are not only made in an empty vacuum but they mirror the political, economic, and historical realities that are a part of the same societies which give rise to them. The English even in postcolonial settings such as India and Pakistan still possess colonial status, national languages still serve as identity politics, local languages are characterized by historical marginalization. Breaking these hierarchies is easier said than done because they are based on deep seated notions about language, power and modernity. It also presupposes a social discussion that will appreciate multilingualism as an asset and not as a problem that should be controlled. It is not only pedagogical, but a social and political need to have policy aligned with multilingual reality.

## **6. Conclusion**

The discussion in the study shows that multilingualism in South Asia and especially in India and Pakistan is in a complicated and highly stratified linguistic context that is driven by the experiences of colonialism, nationalist philosophy, and recent neoliberalism. Even though it is a fact that both countries are multilingual countries, their language policies favor the English language as the language of socioeconomic promotion, international competitiveness, and the ability to get an elite education. The national languages, like Hindi and Urdu, are figuratively elevated but not functionally empowered in the higher learning and administration as well as science. The regional and minority languages are mostly marginalized even as they are presented as a source of culture but not academic or economic instrument. This stratified linguistic system is still replicating past disparities and suppressing the opportunities of vast groups of people. The results of the CDA prove that policy discourse is not simply an expression of the linguistic dynamics that take place in the society but it forms and strengthens power relations between the languages.

Simultaneously, the paper draws a strong attention to the fact that the official policy on the language and its everyday practice are loosely interconnected. The important principle of dynamic multilingual and translanguaging in the South Asian classrooms, workplaces and

communities has resisted the monolingual or bilingual policy frameworks. Teachers and learners use their complete linguistic repertoires to comprehend, form identity and collaborate in the learning process that are not understood or disapproved on the institutional level. To address this gap between policy and practice, there is a need to bridge the paradigm shift to multilingual pedagogies and rights-based language planning that can be consistent with contemporary lived reality of multilingual societies. Multilingual rights framework provided by UNESCO, and the concept of translanguaging and plurilingual, provides avenues of creating equitable, inclusive and culturally sustainable language policies. Finally, this paper highlights the importance of the fact that linguistic diversity is not a challenge but a resource. Additive multilingualism, reinforcing the role of the mother-tongue educational system, and legitimizing new forms of translanguaging are some of the steps which have to be taken in order to achieve linguistic justice and enhance educational performance and preserve the rich linguistic legacy of South Asia.

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