

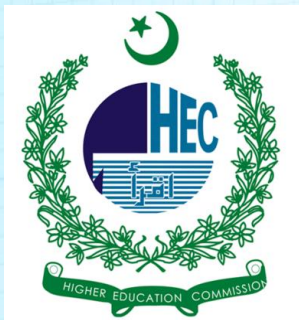
Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

Pakistan: A Case of Implicit Status Planning in a Multilingual Context



¹Nimrah Waseem

²Muhammad Waseem

³Sadaf Fatima

¹Assistant Professor, Federal Urdu University of Arts, Science & Technology. n.waseem@fuuast.edu.pk

²Lecturer, Iqra University

³Lecturer, Bahria University

Abstract

Language Policy is the manifestation of National ideology of a country. Language policy dictates the Education policy, guides the scope of the National Curriculum and medium of instruction for education. Sadly, Pakistan does not have a Language policy. Education policy is guided by Article 251 of constitution of Pakistan which proclaims Urdu as the national language, thus this is the only document which deals with the status planning. Corpus and acquisition planning are dealt to a certain extent in the National curriculum. The implicit partial monolingual language policy supports English as the most prestigious code. Urdu is the lingua franca and medium of education for the masses, leaving almost no place for regional languages. The Status and functions of Urdu and English are different on papers and on ground. This paper reviews the policy based actions and incidents in the history which unfolds implicit Status Planning of languages, in Pakistan its implications.

Key Words: Language planning & Policy, Status Planning, indigenous languages, multilingual context, monolingual policy and medium of instruction.

Introduction

Language fulfills the basic need of communication among human beings. Other than communication, there are many functions performed by language, for example; languages carries culture and represents regions and communities as well. Due to the same reasons Language Planning has emerged as an important task for nations across the globe.

Language Planning and policy became a field of knowledge in 1960's. For the first time, the term, "Language Planning" was mentioned by Einar Haugen in his book discussing the linguistic issues in Norway. Davies & Ziegler (2015) refers to Haugen (1959, p. 8) as he defines language planning as, "the activity of preparing a normative orthography, grammar, and dictionary for the guidance of writers and speakers in a non-homogeneous speech community." Language planning is planning of conscious and organized changes in the current structure or functions of a language. Today Language planning & policy is one of the most important sub fields of Sociolinguistics. It has two basic aspects; first, Language planning and second is the

Policy, where planning deals with the form and use of a language and policy implicitly and explicitly controls the influence and role of a language in the society. As Johnson (2013) discusses the types of language planning,, “there are four types of Language Planning; Status Planning, Corpus Planning, Acquisition Planning & Prestige Planning.”

Status Planning is selecting a particular language or varieties to play certain role in a society. Corpus planning is related to the decision made regarding the structure, vocabulary and forms of a language. Acquisition planning deals with the opportunities provided to a community to learn a language or acquiring specific skills in that language. Prestige planning is a long term planning to develop a positive attitude towards a language among masses. None of these types can exit in isolation. For long term success, Status planning depends on corpus and acquisition planning. Similarly status planning can only be useful if people have a positive attitude towards a language and use that language in various domains of life.

Historical Background of Status Planning in Pakistan

Pakistan does not have an explicit Independent Language Policy. National education policy and National Curriculum refer to the article 251 of the current constitution (1973) which talks about national, official and regional languages. The education policy 2009 also derives its principles form the same article. The Article 251 of the constitution of Pakistan (1973) says;

“(1) The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day. (2) Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu. (3) Without prejudice to the status of the National language, a Provincial Assembly may by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a provincial language in addition to the national language.”(p.g.152-153)

Pakistani society is predominantly multilingual where people of diverse ethnicities interact with each other in every day life. Absence of an explicit, well thought and well planned language policy has created many problems(Rehman, 2023). One of these problems is the unequal power relations among speakers of different languages (Abbas & Bidin, 2022). As per constitution, Urdu is the national language

and English is the co-official language of Pakistan. It is mentioned in the constitution that English will enjoy the status of the official language for 15 years and by that time steps will be taken to keep Urdu as the sole official language to function in all domains at national level. But no provision were made to replace English with Urdu. It reflects that right after independence, an influential group was present among ruling class who wanted to keep English as the official language in order to keep the asymmetrical class structure of the society intact. Therefore, no serious efforts were made. Ahmad and Ullah (2020), discuss about the Urdu-English divide, “The debate about its lack of implementation divides Pakistani society as some support its implementation while others oppose it.” The ruling class supports English in the name of equity and accessibility of English across the borders in all domains. (Urdu is spoken by around 90 million as mother tongue and 80 million as the second language all across the globe. (worlddata.info). It is Pakistan’s primary lingua franca and around 37.7% Pakistanis translanguage between Urdu and English on Social Media. (Ahmad et al.2023). On the contrary, English still enjoys the status of the most prestigious language in Pakistan which is supported by the ruling class. English language is used as tool to keep lower class away from the power structures of the society. Zaidi & Zaki (2017) say, “Power is associated with English and it has been the language of an elite class that has influenced the country since its birth”. Similarly, regional languages are ignored despite the constitution approves promotion of regional languages. In fact the regional languages have become most affected victim of this policy, Rehman (2006). Though officially regional languages are not given any special status in education system except in Sindh, these languages are partially used as a medium of instruction in regional schools (Mehboob & Zafar, 2025).

Status Planning is the primary step of language planning as rest of the aspects depend on it. Once the status and functions of languages or varieties are fixed, steps are taken for the acquisition and corpus development of the languages. The implicit language policy to support English and its implications and adverse effects on Urdu and regional languages needs to be investigated in detail.

Discussion

Language planning is an integral part of Interior and Foreign policy. It has impact on the social structure of the country. Many problems in Pakistani society and its

education system are due to absence of language policy. Urdu being National language serves many purposes like creating harmony and integrity but the speakers of indigenous languages feel neglected (Gul et al. 2025). Mansoor, (2003) says, "Pakistan as a multilingual country faces numerous problems in language planning in higher education." All of the sub types of language planning are inter-linked. None of them can be implemented in isolation. Hassan et.al, (2015) say, "The first one is status planning which is to giving status to a language and selecting a language to standardize it." Status planning decides that which language or languages serves the best interest of the nation. Yudina, Melnichuk and Seliverstova, (2020) say, "Language policy and planning is a wide research and activity field where language is primarily considered as an object"(pg.2) . According to Kloss (1969) Status planning refers to changes and alterations made in the role and status of a language, and the role and functions with regards to the state and unlike corpus planning, Status planning can be done without help of Linguists, sociologist and academicians. At government level most of the time these decisions are taken by politicians and statesmen. "Those concerned with this type of language planning take the corpus of the language for granted; they are primarily interested in the status of the language, whether it is satisfactory as it is or whether it should be lowered or raised." (Kloss 1969).

Status planning is highly context- sensitive phenomenon. Monolingual societies and multilingual societies are essentially different in their structure and cultural practices. Same policies cannot be applied on both of them. The policy adopted by the government should be well thought to meet the long term interest of the country as well as create harmony among the different ethnicities in the country.

Pakistan declared Urdu as its national language right after independence in 1947. The constitution of 1956 gave Bengali the same status. Pakistan never came up with an independent language policy but Education policies had been working as proxy language policies. As per Suhag & Khan (2020) from 1947 to 2009, there had been Nine (1947, 1959, 1969, 1970, 1972, 1979, 1992, 1998, & 2009) education policies. After separation of East Pakistan (Independence of Bangladesh) in 1971, the constitution of Pakistan 1972 declared Urdu as the sole national language and kept a period of 15 years to replace English in all domains in life in Pakistan. The article 251

in the constitution gives right to provincial assemblies to pass laws in order to promote regional languages and use them in addition to National Language. The Education policy (NEP, 2009:11) explains the scope of Official, National and regional languages in Pakistani context: "English is an international language, and important for competition in a globalized world order. Urdu is our national language that connects people all across Pakistan and is a symbol of national cohesion and integration. In addition, there are mother tongues/ local vernaculars in the country that are markers of ethnic and cultural richness and diversity."

Language policy provides guidelines for education policy. "In the development procedure of quality of education, educational policies are plays a key element role." (Schultz, 1961; Psacharopoulos & Woodhall, 1985). The education policies in Pakistan promoted English language as the way to modernization under the influence of globalization. The ground realities of local context have been ignored in education polices. "The preparation process of educational policy is mostly considered as a highly politically unfair practice." (Lee, 2001). Similar to many post-colonial countries, after independence of Pakistan, all the governments have taken Top-down approach to implement education (Language) policy in Pakistan. In this approach policies are imposed on people without considering the intricacies of local context and socioeconomic and ethno-linguistics realities. Such policies are bound to create resentment among people which could lead to instability. (Rehman, 2019).

This is the core issue with language planning. Policies are not made by linguists, instead policies are made through political intervention. Most of the post-colonial countries are suffering because of the same practice. In majority of the post colonial countries the education system is the tool to inforce neocolonialism. Tamim & Tariq, (2014) refers to "(Pennycook, 1998, Rehman 2006, Skuntneb-Kangas 1998, Tollegson 1991), Language policies and question of language has been a subject of debates because of the implications for resurrection of inequality." Due to inappropriate status planning, English is the most prestigious code and all the official correspondence is done in English. English speakers have more access to the high profile jobs and opportunities. On the other hand, Urdu has been portrayed as a rival language to regional languages creating a political rift where uneducatd majority of population is unable to analyze the situation correctly.

Role of regional languages in the economy, education and entertainment is almost negligible. It has caused a strain among communities. Speakers of indigenous languages feel deprived and their right to education in their mother tongue is denied. People are pushed to use either Urdu or English and their new generation is losing fluency in their mother tongue. Moreover, some of the minor languages are endangered. Kuo and Jernudd (1994) explain, "Linguistic identity is associated with ethnic and cultural identity.

Language loyalty could lead to inter-ethnic conflict when the functional status or sentimental values of one's own ethnic language are at stake." There is restlessness among different ethnic groups due to this policy, as Ali & David, (2021) say, "Regional language activists have become more vocal about their language rights and are emphasizing the importance of the role of mother tongues in education."

Urdu was throughout politically exploited during Independence war and later the politicians promoted and exploited Urdu-Bangla conflict to achieve their political interests. Hussain & Hussain (2022) states that enforcement of Urdu as the sole national language became a cause of breach between East and West Pakistan. It is evident that the conflict of East and West Pakistan was primarily rooted in economical clashes which were falsely covered by the clash of civilization or language. (Alavi, 1987). The data available at the official website of Pakistan Institute of development Economics unfolds the unequal distribution of resources and expenditure. Pakistanis from all across the country speak Urdu with diverse level of proficiency. It is a symbol of national solidarity (Amjad et al. 2023). Urdu is primarily used as lingua franca of masses and medium of main stream media. It has resulted in a distress among the speakers of indigenous and minor languages as they feel being marginalized and developed a resentment against Urdu. (Rafi & Fox, 2024). English still enjoys the official status, it is the language of bureaucracy, military, judiciary, medium of education of elites and higher education and rest of the powerful sectors. To support the use of mother tongue, UN also recommends to adopt additive bilingual policy for multilingual countries. Mitova, P. (2021) says that using mother tongue is the birthright of every human being. It is considered as the fundamental right of every individual. Moreover it is scientifically supported that education in mother tongue helps in cognition development.

In Pakistan multiple education systems and boards are functional. Some board consider English as the medium of instruction others have Urdu and Arabic for the same purpose. But, neither federal government of Pakistan have diligently worked to replace English with Urdu in all public and private sectors, nor the provincial governments ever worked for the promotion of indigenous language and upgrading them as the medium of education so the children may have education in their mother tongue. Specially, after eighteenth amendment in the constitution, the provincial governments should have shown interest in the promotion of regional languages. Except in Sindh, where Sindhi is used as co-official language, no laws have been passed from provincial assemblies protect indigenous and minor languages in rest of the provinces. Job opportunities are quite limited in regional and almost negligible in minor languages. No where in Pakistan except in Sindh, indigenous languages are not employed as the medium of instruction in educational institutes. Students are bound to study either in Urdu or in English. The higher education is completely in English. The competitive exams are conducted in English despite Supreme Court's ruling.

As a result of these circumstances, with increase in globalization and Urbanization people are willingly shifting to Urdu. Educated class is either dominantly bilingual or use English, especially in formal situations (Fatima & Nadeem, 2025). In Pakistan, the ones who are not able to use English or Urdu are legged behind and do not have access to better opportunities. Grzech (2013) says, "In 2008, a major shift occurred in the demographic structure of the world's population occurred: for the first time in history, the majority of people lived in the cities. The multilingual and multicultural cities pose a particular challenge to the key assumption of linguistic nationalism: One people, one language, one state." The policy makers and elites of Pakistan follow the same ideology where Urdu is presented as the symbol of unity and English is status symbol and considered necessary for speedy development and progress of Pakistan.

Conclusion

Pakistan is a multilingual country and the government's negligence towards this reality is disappointing. Pakistan has an implicit partially monolingual language policy under the international influence of globalization which fulfils the needs of neocolonialism. It can be labelled as partial monolingual policy because the most

favoured language is English. It is the language of ruling class. Urdu is the national language but only for the sake of documentation. Urdu which has been promoted in the name of unity of the nation, has no access to high level judiciary, bureaucracy, military or official correspondence. On the other hand, regional and indigenous languages have been completely neglected. It has developed resentment within masses and has caused prejudice among different sections of the society. This implicit language policy has adversely affected education in Pakistan. Government has to revise the policy, keeping the needs to local context.

Suggestions

Many countries have trilingual policies and their education systems are successful. In order to address the current confused and implicit policy, in Pakistan, all major regional languages should be declared as national languages. It will promote harmony in the country and will definitely support indigenous languages through creating new opportunities in the field of economy, education and entertainment etc. This policy will neither have any adverse effect on unity of the nation nor will it damage the status of Urdu. Urdu is used as lingua franca by 170 million people around the world. Urdu will be still used at federal level and as a lingua franca in Pakistan. As there is no other language to replace it. Urdu is an indigenous language of sub-continent where as English will always be considered as a language of others by the people. At primary level medium of instruction should be mother tongue. English should be taught from initial stages because in this way students will have direct access to the higher education and latest research based literature. Command on English will save time and energy for unnecessary translations. Social and cultural prosperity developed through Language Status Policy will fetch all diverse education systems into main stream which will result in improved literacy and progress in the field of education.

References

- Abbas, F. & Bidin, S. J. (2022). A Critical Analysis of the Language Planning and Policy (LPP) in Pakistan and its Impact on Indigenous Languages of Pakistan. *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 8(1), 85-96. Doi: <http://dx.doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911521>
- Ahmad MS, Nawaz S, Khan S and Bukhari Z (2023) Digital Pakistan in COVID-19: rethinking language use at social media platforms. *Front. Educ.* 8:967148. doi:

10.3389/feduc.2023.967148

- Ahmad, A., Iqbal, L., & Ullah, I. (2020). Challenges and Opportunities of English and Urdu contest: Language Planning and the Implementation of Article 251 in Pakistan. *Global Legal Studies Review*, V(III), 77-87. [https://doi.org/10.31703/glsr.2020\(V-III\).10](https://doi.org/10.31703/glsr.2020(V-III).10)
- Alavi, H. 1987. 'Pakistan and Islam: ethnicity and ideology'. In Halide, F. & Alavi, H. (eds.) 1987. *State and ideology in the Middle East and Pakistan* London: Macmillans and New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Ali, A., David, M., K., (2021). Pakistan needs a multilingual educational model to protect minority languages. An initiative of the Asia Institute. ISSN: 2652-550X. Retrieved from, <https://www.melbourneasiareview.edu.au/pakistan-needs-a-multilingual-education-model-to-protect-minority-language-groups/>.
- Amjad, J., Tehseem, T., Mehmood, S., and Sundas, M., (2023). Language Policy And Planning: Attributing Urdu For Solidarity And Cultural Fusion. *Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology* 20(2), 1053-1069. ISSN 1567-214x
- Ashraf, H., (2023). The ambivalent role of Urdu and English in multilingual Pakistan: a Bourdieusian study. *Language Policy* (2023) 22:25–48 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-022-09623-6>
- Constitution of Pakistan (1973). Retrieved from, https://na.gov.pk/uploads/documents/1549886415_632.pdf
- Davies, W.V., Ziegler, E. (2015). Language Planning and Microlinguistics: Introduction. In: Davies, W.V., Ziegler, E. (eds) *Language Planning and Microlinguistics*. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137361240_1
- Dr Tabassum Mehboob, & Roheen Zafar. (2025). Language Policy And Medium Of Instruction In Pakistan'S Education System. ` , 3(01), 1495–1509. Retrieved from <https://assajournal.com/index.php/36/article/view/267>
- Fatima, S., & Nadeem, M. U. (2025). Family language policy and heritage language transmission in Pakistan—The intersection of family dynamics, ethnic identity, and cultural practices on language proficiency and maintenance. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 16, 1560755. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2025.1560755>

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

- Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education. (2009). *National Education Policy: 1998-2010*. Retrieved from, <http://unesco.org.pk/education/teachereducation/files/National%20Education%20Policy.pdf>
- Grzech, K. (2013). Planning language, planning identity: A case study of Ecuadorians in London. SOAS Working Papers in Linguistics, Vol. 16 (2013). Retrieved from, <https://www.soas.ac.uk/linguistics/research/workingpapers/volume-16/file88046.pdf>
- Gul, S., Rathore, M. S. U. H., & Riaz, S. (2025). Linguistic diversity and language policy in Pakistan: Challenges and implications for national integration. *Competitive Research Journal Archive*, 3(1), 306–314. <https://thecrja.com/index.php/Journal/article/view/98>
- Hassan, A., Dilpul, N., Gill, M., Aziz, S., Azam, S., Kauser, S., Akbar, S., (2015). International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Culture (Linqua- LLC) December 2015 edition Vol.2 No.4 ISSN 2410-6577. Retrieved from, http://ijllc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/LLC.Vol_.2.No_.4-FOR-PRINT.pdf
- Hussain & Hussain. Language Politics in Pakistan: Urdu as Official versus National Lingua Franca .Annals of Human and Social Sciences. Jul-Sep 2022, Vol. 3, No. 2. Pp 82-91. [http://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022\(3-II\)08](http://doi.org/10.35484/ahss.2022(3-II)08)
- Johnson, D.C. (2013). What is language policy?. In: Language Policy. Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics. Palgrave Macmillan, London. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137316202_1
- Kloss, Heinz. 1969. *Research possibilities on group bilingualism: A report*. Quebec: International Center for research on Bilingualism. Retrieved from, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED037728.pdf>
- Kuo, C. Y. and Jernudd, B. H. 1994. “Balancing Macro and Micro-Sociolinguistic Perspectives in Language Management: The Case of Singapore“. Pp. 70-89 in *English and Language Planning: A South East Asian Contribution*. T. Kandiah and J. Kwan-Terry (eds.). Singapore: Times Academic Press. Retrieved from,

<https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Balancing-Macro-and-Micro-Sociolinguistic-in-%3A-The-Kuo/f3e7ef2df362a2045a035488e9f63e7628bcb099>

- Lee, C. C. (2001). Culturally responsive school counselors and programs: Addressing the needs of all students. *Professional School Counseling*, 4(4), 257. Retrieved from, <https://eric.ed.gov › id=EJ634440>
- Mansoor, S. 2003. "Language Planning in Higher Education Issues of Access and Equity," *Lahore Journal of Economics*, Department of Economics, The Lahore School of Economics, vol. 8(2), pages 17-42, Jul-Dec. Retrieved from, <https://ideas.repec.org/a/lje/journal/v8y2003i2p17-42.html>
- Motivia, P. (2021). Linguistic human rights and the right to mother tongue education: the overlooked components of the human rights regime. University Of Strasbourg. Retrieved from, <https://repository.gchumanrights.org/server/api/core/bitstreams/bc35e30c-ee7a-4d07-9501-ec84faa58651/content>
- Natalia V. Yudina¹, Marina V. Melnichuk² & Oksana A. Seliverstova.,(2020). Language Policy and Planning in Russia, China and the USA through the Lens of MassMedia of the 21-st Century. *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*. 2020:11 (3), 242-269. Retrieved from, <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1273613>
- Psacharopoulos, G., Woodhall, M. (1985) *Education for development*. World Bank Publications. Retrieve from, <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/477701468137718173/pdf/multi-page.pdf>
- Rafi. M.S.,& , Fox.R.K.,(2024).Exploring the role of first language in ecological awareness and communication across Pakistan: A mixed method study. *Language Sciences* 101 (2024) 101599. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langsci.2023.101599>
- Rahman, T. (2006). Language policy, language vitality and multilingualism in Pakistan. In A. Saxena& L. Borin (Eds.), *Trends in Linguistic: Lesser Known Languages of South Asia* (pp. 73- 106). Berlin: Mouton de Grutyer.Retrieved from, <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Language-policy%2C->

Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

multilingualism-and-language-in-1-

Rahman/21de02d1ae03a140a632428aa39ea24648a47086

Rahman, T. (2019). Mother Tongue Education Policy in Pakistan. The Routledge International Handbook Policy in Asia (eds) Andy Kirk Patrick & Anthony J. Liddicoatdi Coat (pp.364-381).Publisher: London Routledge 2019. Retrieved from,

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/335292298_Mother_Tongue_Education_Policy_in_Pakistan

Rahman, T. (2023). *Language and education policies and power in Pakistan*. Khayaban-e-Adab.

Schultz, T. W. (1961) "Education and Economic Growth." In N. B. Henry, ed. Social Forces Influencing American Education. Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press for the National Society for the Study of Education. Retrieved from, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/016146816106201003>

Suhag, A. K., & Khan, N. (2020). National Educational Policies of Pakistan with reference to Social Justice: A Critical Analysis. *Global Educational Studies Review*, V(III), 166-174. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2020\(V-III\).17](https://doi.org/10.31703/gesr.2020(V-III).17).

Tamim, T. & Tariq, H. (2014). Language Policy, Languages in Education and Physical Wellbeing. Retrieved from, <https://www.numl.edu.pk/journals/subjects/1566368101Language%20Policy%2011.2.pdf>

Zaidi, S. B., & Zaki, S.(2017). English Language in Pakistan: Expansion and Resulting Implications. *Journal of Education & Social Sciences* Vol. 5(1): 52-67, 2017 DOI: 10.20547/jess0421705104.