A Prisma Review: Teachers' Agency Towards the English-only Education Policy in Pakistani Higher Education

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Abstract

This review-based study examines teachers' agency regarding English-only education policy in Higher Education (HE) in Pakistan. For the review process, 190 scholarly studies published between June 2011 and June 2024 were gathered using keywords based on Boolean operators. The study finalised 12 relevant studies through the PRISMA flowchart. The sampling size of the scholarly articles (n=12) was collected from Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Francis & Taylor databases between 2011 and 2024. By analysing existing literature using the PRISMA framework, the study intends to decode the hurdles teachers face and their responses to the constraints enforced by such policies. The review explores both the nature and extent of teacher agency, highlighting pedagogical adaptation as the central theme along with lower-order themes like Teachers as transformative agents, Celebratory or guilty multilingualism and Flexibility in Assessment. Likewise, the study also identifies the influencing factors as the central theme to the agency of teachers, along with the sub-themes like Institutional Support, Policy constraints, Student Language Proficiency, and Personal Beliefs and Attitudes. The findings suggest that teachers use various strategies to navigate English as MoI due to the contextual and systematic challenges. The study contributes to the impact of language policies on teaching practices and teacher autonomy, underscoring the necessity of a supportive environment to leverage teachers' pedagogic skills and linguistic knowledge. The study, moreover, opens new avenues for future studies regarding decolonial perspectives, evaluating textbook materials and examining ideologies for professional development that benefit postcolonial performativity in educational settings.

Keywords: English-only language policy, Pedagogical adaptation, influencing factors, PRISMA, Policy constraints

1   Introduction

This scholarly endeavour systematically reviews the published journals between 2020 and 2024 in English concerning teachers' agency towards English-only Medium of Instruction (MoI) in higher education in Pakistan. Pursuing this, such an endeavour not only explores the extent and nature but also the factors influencing teachers' agency in the context of English-only as MoI published in the last five years. Since Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country, linguistic diversity can be strengthened when learners' home languages are given privileges within the classroom. In this regard, teachers' autonomy and decision-making can play a significant role against the monolingual language policy at the university level.

1.1   Background:

In the backdrop of the National Education Policy (2017), the policymakers and implementers have enforced an English-only language policy in higher education in Pakistan, while the contrasting demands of the university students and the officials require proper review

in the classroom settings (Ashraf, 2018; Jabeen, 2023; Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022). Regardless of the emphasis of the university officials on the monolingual education policy, teachers' agency in Pakistani classrooms matters a lot as students of diverse languages require flexible instruction in their home language, so that students' comprehension and engagement can be developed.

In the classroom setting, the role of teacher agency is crucial who understanding, negotiating, and appropriating the language policy considering the pedagogical context. The mandate of theory-building in language policy and planning is visualised at the macro level, while the role of teacher agency is visualised at the micro level (i.e., classroom setting) where the teacher utilises his/her pedagogy, analysing the needs of the learners. The multi-layered and complex phenomenon of language policy can be visualised in the linear process where the policy order flows in the linear order from the pen of the policy signer to the intellect and choice of teachers' pedagogy (Johnson & Freeman, 2010). According to Menken and García (2010), the agency in the implementation has a significant role which analysing the real-time situation and local context, though the learners may benefit to a wider extent.

As teachers play a pivotal role in the implementation of language policy, they utilise agency to act independently to achieve desired learning outcomes within the timeframe. Pakistan is the home of 74 vernacular languages; likewise, the classrooms are diverse in terms of learners' home languages at the tertiary level. With this regard, this systematic review of the last fourteen years (2011 to 2024) embarks to explore the nature, the extent and the influencing factors to teachers' agency within the parameters of the English-only language policy at the university level. Further, the study examines how teachers utilise, adjust, and deal with such mandates of the policy designers and stakeholders and also identifies classroom dynamics to empower educators and develop teaching efficacy in higher education. This article, therefore, proposes to answer the following research objectives and research questions:

1.2 Research Objectives:
The current review study is based on two objectives, as follows:
- To systematically investigate the nature and extent of teachers' agency in response to the English-only Education policy in HE Pakistan,, published in journals between 2011 and 2024.
- To identify the key factors influencing teachers' agency regarding English-only education policy in higher education in Pakistan

1.3 Research Questions:
RQ1: What is the nature and the extent of teachers' agency in response to the English-only Education policy in HE Pakistan published in journals between 2011 and 2024?
Rationale: This research question explores the extent and nature of teachers' agency in the context of monolingual education policy, inspecting how they resist, adapt, or innovate within the constraints of the policy. Besides, this also identifies the diverse forms of agency practised by teachers, such as pedagogical strategies, autonomy and decision-making.
RQ2: What are the key factors influencing teachers' agency regarding English-only education policy in HE Pakistan published in journals between 2011 and 2024?
Rationale: Understanding the key factors which either enable or resist teachers' agency, enacted in education policies. The key factors may be professional development, institutional support, personal beliefs, opportunities, and socio-cultural contexts.

1.4 Research Scope:
First of all, geographically, the higher education institutions in Pakistan will be the prime focus of this study, exploring the nature and influencing factors that come across due to the monolingual language policy. Secondly, temporal scope can be visualised through the

recent literature review published between 2011 and 2024, considering the trends in teachers' agency and education policies. Thirdly, the conceptual focus can be visualised through the two main key concepts, namely teachers' agency and monolingual education policy. The former concept reviews how teachers employ their agency (like autonomy, adaptive techniques, and decision-making process), countering the English-only language policy. The latter concept reviews the possible consequences and socio-political implications of the monolingual education policy in higher education. Notably, the methodological scope, this systematic review will encompass quantitative, qualitative and mixed-method studies addressing the themes of teachers' agency and monolingual education policy in HE Pakistan. However, the database will be collected from Google Scholar, Science Direct, Scopus, and Web of Science.

1.5   Methodological Approach:

This study is based on a systematic review methodology in which the research will combine existing literature reviews related to teachers' agency and monolingual education policy at the tertiary level in Pakistan. Besides, this study will provide a comprehensive and unbiased description of the current state of knowledge.

2   Methodology

This study uses the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-analyses (PRISMA) as a framework to ensure comprehensiveness and transparency throughout the review procedure. This paper, in the subsequent section, provides both inclusion and exclusion criteria, the data collection procedure, and the eligibility criteria for the retrieved papers. Figure 1 shows a comprehensive description of the sequential stages involved in the review process.
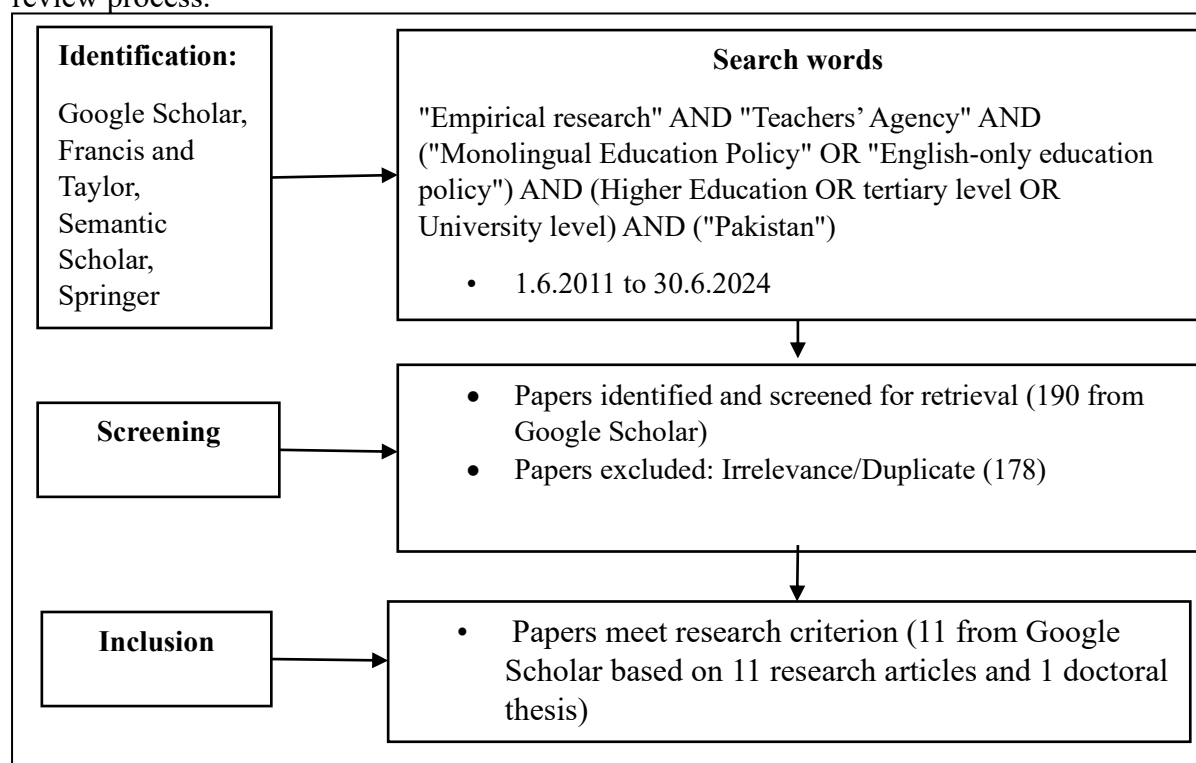
Identification:

Google Scholar, Francis and Taylor, Semantic Scholar, Springer

Search words

"Empirical research" AND "Teachers' Agency" AND ("Monolingual Education Policy" OR "English-only education policy") AND (Higher Education OR tertiary level OR University level) AND ("Pakistan")

- 1.6.2011 to 30.6.2024

Screening

- Papers identified and screened for retrieval (190 from Google Scholar)
- Papers excluded: Irrelevance/Duplicate (178)

Inclusion

- Papers meet research criterion (11 from Google Scholar based on 11 research articles and 1 doctoral thesis)

Figure 1: Selection and screening process (papers 2011–2024)

Figure 1: Alt Text: This figure showcases the selection and screening process that includes the search engines (Google Scholar, Taylor & Francis, Semantic Scholar, Springer), search words ("Empirical research" AND "Teachers' Agency" AND ("Monolingual Education Policy" OR "English-only education policy") AND (Higher Education OR tertiary level OR University

level) AND ("Pakistan"), time frame (1.6.2011 to 30.6.2024), and screening process encompasses both included (11) and excluded papers (178).

2.1 Literature Searching, Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

A wide-ranging search for literature review was conducted on Google Scholar, Francis & Taylor, Springer, and Semantic Scholar regarding teachers' agency towards the English-only education policy in Higher Education in Pakistan. Viewing the research objectives, the study could find 11 scholarly works based on 11 papers and one thesis between 2011 and 2024 (See Appendix A).

This review-based study used Boolean operators like AND and OR to search for more relevant and specified results. Viewing this, the keywords include: "Teachers' Agency" AND ("Monolingual Education Policy" OR "English-only education policy") AND (Higher Education OR Tertiary level OR University level) AND "Pakistan" AND "Empirical research". However, the cutting edge for the literature review was 14 years, from 2011 to 2024.

In addition, the inclusion criteria for the eligibility of studies were based on the following items:

1. Articles published in English journals
2. Empirical studies in the Pakistani context
3. Teachers recruited from higher studies as participants
4. Focused on teacher agency

Since the researchers have used the concept of teacher agency in diverse forms, this study mainly selected and included such papers and theses which address the role of teachers' agency at the university level in Pakistan. Besides, the inclusion criterion includes whether "teacher's agency" is used as a key term in the title, in the abstract, or in the theoretical framework. Regarding exclusion criteria, this review-based endeavour excluded non-journal publications like book chapters, conceptual papers and proceedings.

In addition, the researcher manually searched major journals to supplement the number of candidate articles related to teacher education and language policy, including the International Journal of Educational Reform, Journal of Language and Education, Language Policy, and Teaching and Teacher Education. The retrieved data, initially, was cross-examined to sort duplicates from the total (N=190) candidate articles. Thereafter, the titles and abstracts of the candidate articles were screened comprehensively to identify whether the candidate articles were eligible or ineligible for a set of inclusion criteria. The subsequent section discusses the analysis procedure.

3 Data Analysis

Employing Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stages of the thematic analysis framework, the study analysed the retrieved papers for review between 2011 and 2024. The selected framework is based on six stages, namely, getting familiar with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. First of all, the researcher read all the selected studies, noting down relevant themes and impressions of teachers' agency. Secondly, codes were generated relevant to the nature and extent of teacher agency in the ESL/EFL context, along with the factors influencing teacher agency. Thirdly, similar codes were used to establish broader themes like Teacher curriculum adaptation, instruction strategies, decision-making power, and Institutional support. Fourthly, the produced themes were examined, ensuring their relevance to the research objectives. Fifthly, finalised themes were defined and named to ensure alignment with the research objectives. Finally, the report will be furnished through the emerging themes and citations from the selected papers regarding monolingual education policies and teachers' agency. Table 1 exhibits the themes generated from the findings of the selected papers.

Table 1: Teacher Agency in the English-only Higher Education Classroom

	Higher-order Themes	Lower-order Themes
Teachers' Agency in Higher Education	Pedagogical Adaptation	Teachers as transformative agents
		Celebratory or guilty multilingualism
		Flexibility in Assessment
	Influencing Factors	Institutional Support
		Policy constraints
		Student Language Proficiency
		Personal Beliefs and Attitudes

3.1 Findings and Discussion

This section addresses the research questions through the screened papers regarding teachers' agency towards the English-only language policy in higher education in Pakistan. Considering two research questions, the study identified two main themes such as pedagogical adaptation and influencing factors. The former theme represents the first research question which has three lower-order themes such as Teachers as transformative agents, Celebratory or guilty multilingualism, and Flexibility in Assessment while the latter theme represents the second research question which has six lower-order themes such as Institutional Support, Resource limitation, Policy constraints, Professional Development, Student Language Proficiency, and Personal Beliefs and Attitudes (See Table 1).

RQ1: What is the nature and the extent of teachers' agency in response to the English-only Education policy in HE Pakistan published in journals between 2011 and 2024?

3.1.1 Pedagogical adaptation

Viewing RQ1, pedagogical adaptation is the central theme that describes the nature and extent of the teacher's agency. Pedagogical adaptation refers to the teaching techniques to benefit the overall teaching and learning process in general and students in particular.

3.1.1.1 Teachers as Transformative Agents

Referring to teachers as transformative agents, the review found two types of teacher agencies. On the one hand, the studies emphasised that the teachers' agency should be used to assist, motivate, and engage learners in studies through translanguaging practices, so that they may develop their linguistic competencies in diverse languages to challenge monoglossic ideologies. On the other hand, teachers use only the target language to sustain the hegemony of English-only education in the EFL classroom (Cummins, 2008; Cummins et al., 2011; Manan et al., 2022; Syed, 2022, 2024).

Considering the above scholarly studies, the former studies promote translanguaging practices exercised to assist local languages, while the latter source promotes monoglossic ideology to restrict English as the only means of instruction at the university level. However, teachers' agency showcases "to see themselves as agents who have the power to transform practices and not merely as recipients of already decided upon norms" (Hornberger, 2003, p. 40). In such a scenario, where students are motivated to be instructed in English rather than in Urdu or vernacular languages, the teacher's agency could show the worth of vernacular languages in the EFL context, like Pakistan.

3.1.1.2 Celebratory or Guilty Multilingualism

Referring to celebratory or guilty multilingualism, Manan et al. (2022) carried out a significant study concerning teachers' agency in the multilingual setting of Pakistan to depict how university-level teachers deal with the official/institutional restraints imposed in the implementation of EMI in higher education. The study drew 13 semi-structured interviews

from EMI practitioners. This paper mainly discusses the dichotomy between guilty multilingualism and celebratory multilingualism. Likewise, referring to the two groups of teachers, Manan et al. (2023, p. 540) identified, "One group apparently celebrates the local linguistic diversity, values it, and thus utilises it as a useful pedagogic tool, whereas the other group suppresses local languages, devalues them, and maintains guilty feelings about their use."

Pursuing a monoglossic environment set by the dominant class, guilty multilingualism describes teachers who feel inferior while using students' L1 in the classroom; conversely, celebratory multilingualism describes teachers who challenge the hegemony of EMI in the multilingual classroom of the students, so they switch to students' L1 to make effective comprehension of the students. The study also underpins that policymakers are not implementers of EMI in the multilingual classroom, so the target language instructors should exercise their agency to advocate for vernacular languages.

Similarly, Manan & Tul-Kubra (2022) examined the folk theories regarding monolingual idealism and guilty multilingualism in the Pakistani context. Having class observations and interviews of 18 English practitioners, the results showcased that most of the participants prioritised English-only teaching and had orthodox views towards TESOL/SLA, while they were found to have an inferiority syndrome regarding the worth of L1/vernacular languages in the ESL/EFL classroom. Resisting such monolingual idealism, the study suggests 'to soften teachers' hard-core orthodox belief (p. 346),' towards English by creating multilingual spaces for the mother tongues of ESL learners. Having this in view, the teacher's agency is significant in bringing out ESL/EFL learners from native or vernacular language(s) inferiority in the classroom of multilingual students, as a monolingual native English classroom differs from the multilingual speakers.

Additionally, Syed (2024) proposes that the term-democratizing English education clarifies that students should be allowed to choose whether they desire to be instructed in English or local language(s) in the multilingual classroom in higher studies. By providing such freedom, ESL learners will be allowed to enjoy the learning process.

3.1.1.3 Flexibility in Assessment

Considering Flexibility in assessment, Syed (2024) evaluated various language-in-education policies of Pakistan, curriculum and language proficiency in assessment; thus, he (ibid.) proposes a translingual paradigm that allows the usage of Indigenous languages in the classrooms. Likewise, challenging the monolingual models in multilingual countries, 'the normative ascendancy of monolingualism underpinning the study of language acquisition and use and related educational and assessment practices' (May, 2013, p. 2). Accordingly, the teachers should exercise their agency by allowing students to respond in their L1 to facilitate learners' comprehension and analytical thinking.

In addition, Syed (2022) highlighted the tension between monoglossic language ideologies and heteroglossic classroom realities. Further, the study reminds us that English has been used as MoI in Pakistani higher education since 1947 in a plurilingual state. Importantly, he (ibid.) employed an autoethnographic lens to counter the supremacy of English as MoI through translanguaging practices in the classroom. To him, the mandate given to the colonial language shall be countered through translanguaging pedagogy as a teacher agency to assist ESL/EFL teachers and learners in higher studies. In this regard, students should be given leniency to respond in their L1 when they are instructed in the English language.

RQ2: What are the key factors influencing teachers' agency regarding English-only education policy in HE Pakistan published in journals between 2011 and 2024?

Addressing RQ2, the identified central theme is influencing factors that consist of six lower-order themes: Institutional Support, Resource limitation, Policy constraints, Professional Development, Student Language Proficiency, and Personal Beliefs and Attitudes.

3.1.2 Influencing factors

3.1.2.1 Institutional Support and Professional Development

Institutional policy has huge worth, as Manan et al. (2022) stress that the institution plays a crucial role in the implementation of language as MoI. Thus, the local academics and management at the institutional level can create considerable spaces for policy manipulation and reinterpretation. Accordingly, teachers' agency to negotiate creatively organisational/institutional policies to provide spaces to diverse languages/cultures as Manan (2020) claims, "such initiatives also demonstrate that power is not always fixed in the hands of the few; rather critically conscious individuals can generate power to their advantage" (p. 1).

As per the National Education Policy (2017), English would be the MoI in higher education in Pakistan. Having this in view, the higher education institutions in Pakistan are required to comply with English as MoI despite the heteroglossia realities in the classrooms (Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022). Regardless of the constraints in the language policy, Cummins et al. (2011) note that educators can make pedagogical choices to benefit both students and the institution.

It is investigated by Channa et al. (2021) that the effect of EMI using content and language-integrated learning (CLIL) theory in Sindh, Pakistan. The study criticised the bilingual education model, which is not practicable due to the scarcity of resource material and the poor performance of the public education system in Sindh. Moreover, the study suggests a sustainable education policy concerning the role of English in Pakistan in terms of Education for All, UNESCO's Dakar Declaration and the Millennium Development Goals.

3.1.2.2 Policy constraints

Considering the policy constraints in Pakistan, Syed (2024) examined various issues related to language policies, curriculum and language proficiency in assessment. The study emerged with these features to improve ESL/EFL learners, such as: developing English proficiency, endorsing flexibility in assessment, and proposing a translingual paradigm. Similarly, clarify that the Pakistani education policy glorifies the elite teachers who are proficient in oral English, accent and style; however, language in education policy delegitimises indigenous languages (Manan et al., 2023; Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022).

Despite the language policy constraints where English is the sole MoI at the tertiary level, so Manan and Tul-Kubra prescribe to EFL instructors, "theoretical knowledge of bi/multilingualism, bi/multilingual education, and a critical awareness of language policy and planning can be crucial for such practitioners, who teach English in a diverse multilingual/multiethnic environment such as Pakistan" (2022, p. 359). Depicting whether English as MoI is successful in Pakistan, Mahboob (2020) explored that teachers' lack of professional knowledge and English language proficiency cause difficulty in learning English or learning through English. Moreover, the findings of the study underscore that the language in education policy should be revised to benefit students, teachers and adjunct staff.

A doctoral study administered by Sajjad (2018) concerning the perceptions of content teachers and students towards EMI language policy for Higher Education in Pakistan. The data drawn from semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions had ambivalent perceptions regarding EMI policy. On the one hand, participants looked for native-like English competence, while on the other hand, participants looked for native English-like competence

in practice. Thus, the study underpins English language policy, viewing global and dynamic use of English.

Conversely, Jabeen (2023) challenges the status of EMI in multilingual Pakistan and suggests that stakeholders should give recognition to indigenous languages, avoiding the stigma of Urdu as a national language. Another scholarly work by Siddiqui (2022) emphasised that the pedagogical challenges cannot be ignored as students and teachers counter difficulty in the academic acculturation process. In other words, the tension between international demands and local needs not only creates a socio-economic gap but also renders less privilege to local languages in Pakistan. Thus, the language policies remain controversial and unclear regarding the usage of vernacular languages at the university level. Viewing this, the teacher's agency is inevitable, which accommodates vernacular languages inside the classroom, ensuring students' comprehension and giving privilege to local languages.

3.1.2.3 Instrumental benefits

Employing neoliberal governmentality, Manan (2024) carried out a notable study to examine how students and teachers perceive the role of English proficiency in both academic and professional settings in Pakistan. The researcher conducted an open-ended interview protocol and semi-structured interviews with both students and teachers. The results showed that English makes them competitive in the linguistic market, and becomes instrumental for social change that promises all forms of social, cultural and economic capital. Accordingly, Manan and Tul-Kubra clarify, "the optimal position stands for the purposeful and judicious use of the L1 so that students may benefit optimally" (2022, p. 351).

Viewing this, the teacher's agency is pivotal to adjusting local languages to English, ensuring the academic development of the learners. Likewise, Khan (2013) shared the pragmatic approach that emphasises global language practices to ensure the implementation of English as an MoI at the university level. However, the postgraduate students not only preferred Urdu in the classroom but also teachers lacking proficiency in English were inclined towards Urdu in the classroom to make lectures comprehensible to diverse students. Additionally, the study highlights issues such as speaking anxiety, comprehension issues, and a lack of motivation. Moreover, the study suggests implementing the Pakistani English variety for post-graduate studies.

In addition, Siddiqui (2022) carried out a retrospective analysis of the language policy in Pakistani Higher Education using the ROAD-MAPPING framework. The study identified that the corridor of power, parents, university-level teachers and graduate students gave the mandate to English as MoI and as an official language. Considering this, the teacher's agency is worth taking so the ESL/EFL practitioners have to carry on both English as the need of time and vernacular languages to avoid linguistic divide.

3.1.2.4 Personal Beliefs and Attitudes towards EMI

As reported by Khan (2013), the attitude of the university staff and the postgraduate students towards EMI is positive, referring to a pragmatic approach. Similarly, Ul Haq (2023) proclaims that the teachers and postgraduate students at KUST prefer to use English for formal, official decisions and classroom instructions at the cost of Urdu and other local languages. In such a scenario, where students are motivated to be instructed in English rather than in Urdu or vernacular languages, the teacher's agency could show the worth of vernacular languages in the EFL context, like Pakistan.

Accordingly, Khan (2013, p.195) claims, "language policy can be language anxiety which negatively affects students' attitudes towards the use of English in universities," since the exposure to the target language is largely ignored in schools and colleges. As a result, when

students at the tertiary level are provided instructions in English, it causes anxiety and a negative attitude among them and also curtails critical thinking.

Moreover, many studies (Channa et al., 2021; Hinduja et al., 2023; Jabeen, 2023) have acknowledged that the teaching staff, students and other adjunct staff have a high value of English as MoI even though they have been challenging the survival of their local languages.

3.2 Limitations

This review-based endeavour has some prominent limitations. First of all, the time frame of the retrieved study is extended, but the researcher could not adequately study topics relevant to the research objectives. Secondly, language bias cannot be denied, as the review mainly focused on the articles published in English. Thirdly, database restrictions are another prominent factor as the researcher could include open-access articles using Google Scholar, Francis & Taylor and Semantic Scholar. Fourthly, the study could find only 12 scholarly studies (11 empirical studies and one doctoral study) using the PRISMA flowchart. Sixth, the study could include studies having high impact factors. Finally, the study could include empirical studies conducted in the geography of Pakistan regarding teachers' agency towards monolingual education policy.

4 Conclusion

This study reviewed previous scholarly studies relevant to teachers' agency towards English-only in HE Pakistan. Employing sources like Google Scholar, Semantic Scholar, and Francis & Taylor, the current study retrieved (n=12) the literature review between 2011 and 2024. Through the comprehensive analysis of 11 empirical studies and one doctoral dissertation in the context of language policy in HE Pakistan, the study found that the teacher's agency is pivotal when state policy gives privilege to English as the MoI. Pakistan is a multilingual state where 76 languages are spoken throughout the country, including English as an official language and Urdu as a national language (Rahman, 2006). Pursuing celebratory or guilty multilingualism, neoliberal governmental ideology, and monoglossic and heteroglossic ideologies, the teacher's agency is widely important in the premises of HE institutions. The teacher shall utilise their agency by realising the worth of English as an international language, instrumental benefits, and economic imperatives, so that the state policy, teaching staff, graduate students and non-teaching staff refer to English as an MoI at the tertiary level in Pakistan. Conversely, the multilingual repertoire of the students should be given substantial importance in employing translanguaging pedagogy in the ESL/EFL classroom.

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