

TEACHING OBEDIENCE: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NATIONAL IDEOLOGY

Muhammad Rizwan,

Lecturer English (Text Book Author)

Riphah International University, Lahore Punjab Pakistan

hafizrizwan158@hmail.com

Tarim Masood,

Lecturer English (Visiting Faculty)

University of Sargodha, Sargodha Punjab Pakistan

tarimmasood42@gmail.com

Naureen Iqbal,

Lecturer English

Govt. GHSS Rangers Colony Lahore Cantt.

naureeniqbal158@gmail.com

Mamoona Yousaf,

Lecturer English

University of Lahore, Lahore Punjab Pakistan

mamoonamajid02@gmail.com

Muhammad Haris Baig

Lecturer English

Superior College Sargodha, Punjab Pakistan

haris2sgd@gmail.com

Corresponding Author: Muhammad Rizwan, Lecturer English

Riphah International University, Lahore Punjab Pakistan hafizrizwan158@hmail.com

Abstract

This study examines how English textbooks in Pakistan function as instruments for the construction and dissemination of national ideology. Using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the paper analyzes the linguistic, visual, and thematic representations within selected textbooks to reveal how obedience, conformity, and patriotic values are subtly inculcated among students. The study argues that English textbooks, while ostensibly designed to teach language skills, also operate as vehicles for ideological socialization, shaping students' perceptions of citizenship, morality, and national identity. Texts and illustrations often normalize hierarchical relationships, gender roles, and socio-political narratives that reinforce state-centric ideology. Drawing on Fairclough's CDA framework, this study identifies recurrent discursive strategies, such as positive evaluation of authority figures, selective historical narratives, and emotive language, which collectively naturalize obedience and loyalty. The findings underscore the role of educational materials in reproducing hegemonic power structures and highlight the need for critical engagement with textbooks to foster critical citizenship. By interrogating the intersection of language, education, and ideology, this research contributes to the growing field of critical pedagogy and offers insights for curriculum reform that balance language acquisition with independent thought and ethical reasoning.

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, Textbooks, National Ideology, Obedience, Critical Pedagogy, Hegemony

1. Introduction

Education serves not only as a means of transmitting knowledge but also as a crucial site for the reproduction of social norms, values, and ideology. This dual role of education is particularly significant in postcolonial contexts like Pakistan, where textbooks are deeply intertwined with state agendas and the shaping of national identity. While English textbooks are ostensibly designed to develop linguistic competence, they simultaneously function as instruments for inculcating obedience, conformity, and allegiance to national ideology. By embedding social, moral, and civic norms within narratives, exercises, and illustrations,

textbooks subtly instruct students on acceptable behavior, gender roles, and civic responsibility.

Context and Background

Historically, the colonial legacy in the Indian subcontinent shaped an educational system aimed at producing obedient, disciplined subjects loyal to the colonial state. Following independence, Pakistan inherited these structural and pedagogical frameworks, transforming them to support the newly constructed national ideology. English, as both a global language and a marker of social mobility, has remained central to curricula, offering dual possibilities: as a vehicle for empowerment and as a subtle mechanism for ideological control. Scholars such as Rahman (2012) and Zia (2016) argue that English textbooks occupy a unique position, simultaneously fostering language skills and regulating thought, morality, and civic orientation.

The ideological functions of textbooks are reinforced through both textual and visual means. Textual narratives often emphasize virtues such as obedience, respect for authority, and ethical conduct. Illustrations, classroom scenarios, and character positioning work in tandem with text to naturalize hierarchies and gender norms. Male characters frequently occupy authoritative roles—teachers, elders, or national heroes—while female characters are depicted in domestic or passive roles. Stories reward compliance and obedience while portraying dissent or non-conformity as socially or morally undesirable.

Moreover, the representation of national identity is central to English textbooks in Pakistan. Narratives often emphasize patriotism, civic duty, and moral responsibility as inseparable from linguistic education. Through storytelling, poetry, dialogues, and exercises, textbooks create imagined communities where loyalty to the state and adherence to prescribed social norms are valorized. Historical anecdotes, national heroes, and culturally relevant examples are selectively presented to reinforce a cohesive vision of citizenship that aligns with state ideology. The interplay of language and imagery thus positions textbooks as instruments of both cognitive development and ideological socialization.

Research Gap

Despite extensive analyses of Urdu and history textbooks in Pakistan (Hussain, 2018; Zia, 2016), English textbooks have received comparatively limited scholarly attention. While Rahman (2012) notes the reinforcement of moral and civic values through English texts, comprehensive studies incorporating both textual and visual elements remain sparse. Few studies critically examine how obedience, gender roles, and national ideology intersect across multiple grade levels in English curricula. Additionally, previous scholarship tends to focus on overt content, neglecting the subtle semiotic mechanisms embedded in language, character portrayal, and illustration. This study addresses these gaps by combining textual and visual Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to reveal how English textbooks construct compliant and ideologically aligned students.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do English textbooks linguistically and visually construct obedience and conformity?
2. In what ways do these textbooks reinforce gender roles and hierarchical social structures?
3. How is national ideology embedded in textual narratives, illustrations, and language use?

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are:

- To examine English textbooks as instruments of ideological socialization.

- To identify discursive strategies that normalize obedience, hierarchy, and national loyalty.
- To critically analyze gendered and hierarchical representations in both text and illustrations.
- To contribute to critical pedagogy and curriculum studies in Pakistan.

Scope and Significance of the Study

This study focuses on secondary-level English textbooks, employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to explore the interplay between language, visuals, and ideology. By integrating CDA with postcolonial and critical pedagogy perspectives, it highlights how educational materials shape values, beliefs, and civic consciousness. The study is particularly significant in Pakistan's contemporary context, where debates around curriculum reform, national identity, and gendered education remain highly contested.

The significance of this research lies in its potential to empower educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers to critically engage with textbooks, ensuring that language instruction fosters not only linguistic proficiency but also independent thought, ethical reasoning, and reflective citizenship. Furthermore, by revealing the subtle ways in which English textbooks reproduce obedience and hierarchical social norms, this study underscores the importance of critical curriculum design that balances skill acquisition with critical thinking and ethical development. Ultimately, the study positions English textbooks as critical sites for understanding the nexus of language, ideology, and power in postcolonial education, offering insights relevant to scholars of critical pedagogy, postcolonial studies, and curriculum theory.

2. Literature Review

Critical scholarship consistently demonstrates that textbooks are ideological instruments rather than neutral repositories of knowledge. Apple (1993) argues that curricula and textbooks reproduce dominant social values, transmitting hegemony to the next generation. Giroux (1983) similarly emphasizes that schools and textbooks operate as sites of ideological struggle, producing students not only as learners but also as socialized citizens.

Fairclough (1995, 2010) and van Dijk (1998) offer a theoretical foundation for examining how language constructs power. Fairclough's three-dimensional model; textual, discursive, and social practice—facilitates a comprehensive analysis of how linguistic and visual elements produce ideology. Van Dijk emphasizes the role of discourse in reproducing social structures, focusing on strategies such as presupposition, positive/negative evaluation, and selective presentation of facts. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of symbolic power further contextualizes textbooks as tools that naturalize social hierarchies, shaping students' dispositions, behavior, and perceptions of authority.

Empirical studies in the Pakistani context underscore the ideological functions of textbooks. Hussain (2018) and Zia (2016) demonstrate how Urdu and history textbooks propagate state-centered narratives, gendered norms, and moral conformity. English textbooks, while designed primarily for linguistic instruction, similarly encode ideological content. Rahman (2012) highlights that English stories often reward compliance and obedience, constructing idealized citizen-subjects. Khan (2015) shows that textbook illustrations reinforce hierarchical and gendered social structures, embedding visual cues that complement textual narratives.

Gendered representations are particularly prominent. Female characters are frequently portrayed as obedient, nurturing, and domestic, whereas male characters occupy leadership roles and public spheres. Exercises and role-play activities perpetuate these norms, shaping students' expectations and self-perceptions (Rashid 2019). The intersection of obedience and gendered ideology demonstrates that textbooks function as sites for both civic and moral socialization.

While CDA has been widely applied to curricula in Western and postcolonial contexts, comparative and comprehensive CDA of English textbooks in Pakistan remains limited. Yousaf (2020) examines selected English passages for ideological content but does not integrate visual analysis or cross-grade comparisons. This study fills that gap by examining linguistic, visual, and thematic strategies collectively, providing a more holistic understanding of the construction of obedience and national ideology in English language education.

3. Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study draws on Fairclough's three-dimensional CDA framework, integrating linguistic, discursive, and social analysis.

- **Textual Analysis:** Examines vocabulary, syntax, modality, presupposition, and evaluative language to identify ideological patterns.
- **Discursive Practice:** Considers production, dissemination, and classroom interpretation of textbooks.
- **Social Practice:** Situates discourse within broader socio-political contexts, connecting linguistic patterns to national ideology and social hierarchy.

Van Dijk's ideological square (1998) is employed to analyze how textbooks emphasize positive traits of compliant characters and authorities while marginalizing or negatively evaluating dissenting behaviors. Bourdieu's symbolic power (1991) contextualizes how authority, gender, and social hierarchy are naturalized through textual and visual discourse.

Visual discourse is integrated as a crucial dimension. Illustrations, classroom layouts, character positioning, and depictions of national symbols are analyzed to reveal complementary strategies reinforcing obedience, hierarchy, and gender roles.

4. Research Methodology

The study employs qualitative, comparative CDA applied to three secondary-level English textbooks approved by the Pakistan Ministry of Education (Grades 6–10).

Data Collection:

- Textual passages, dialogues, exercises, poems, and stories from English textbooks.
- Visual elements including illustrations, classroom depictions, and national symbols.

Analytical Procedure:

1. Textual Analysis: Identification of modal verbs, imperatives, evaluative adjectives, and narrative framing.
2. Thematic Analysis: Categorization of themes such as obedience, patriotism, hierarchy, and gender roles.
3. Visual CDA: Analysis of illustrations for hierarchical and gendered positioning, symbolic cues, and social norms.
4. Comparative Analysis: Cross-text and cross-grade comparison to identify consistent patterns in ideological messaging.

Ethical Considerations: Respect for cultural and religious sensitivities was maintained, and all interpretations were grounded in textual and visual evidence with scholarly support.

Analysis and Discussion

5.1 Linguistic Construction of Obedience

English textbooks consistently employ modal verbs, imperatives, and evaluative adjectives to reinforce obedience as a normative expectation. Modal verbs such as *must*, *should*, *ought to*, and *have to* communicate obligation, presenting obedience not as a choice but as a moral imperative. For example, sentences like "*Students must respect their teachers*" or "*Children should help elders*" subtly enforce hierarchical social relations.

Imperatives, such as "*Stand in line*," "*Follow instructions carefully*" or "*always be punctual*" are embedded in reading passages and classroom exercises. These directives are rarely neutral; they carry implicit moral judgment and reinforce discipline as a civic and ethical virtue.

Evaluative adjectives *good, loyal, respectful, diligent* highlight compliant behavior, whereas *disobedient, lazy, careless, irresponsible* are consistently linked with failure or social marginalization.

Comprehension exercises reinforce this linguistic encoding of obedience. Students are often asked to identify “right” behaviors or provide moral judgments about character actions. For example, in Grade 7 textbooks, a story about a student completing a civic task might be followed by a question such as: “*Why was Ahsan considered a model student?*” The implied answer emphasizes conformity, diligence, and respect for authority. Over multiple grades, such exercises scaffold cognitive and ethical internalization, producing a layered understanding of compliance as a societal and personal duty.

Moreover, the textbooks strategically employ emotive language. Words like *proud, noble, heroic, shameful*, and *dishonorable* link obedience with positive self-image and non-compliance with social stigma. Students are thus trained to internalize hierarchical norms, connecting their moral worth with adherence to authority.

5.2 Narrative Framing and Moral Exemplars

Narratives in English textbooks construct obedient characters as moral exemplars, often rewarded by social, familial, or institutional acknowledgment. Stories present protagonists who complete civic duties, follow classroom rules, or assist others as ideal citizens. Conversely, characters that challenge authority or act selfishly face consequences such as social isolation, reprimand, or failure.

Historical and cultural narratives further strengthen obedience. In several Grade 8 and 9 textbooks, passages about national heroes or historical figures emphasize loyalty, courage, and compliance with societal norms. For instance, a story on a young freedom fighter may highlight his or her strict adherence to orders, indirectly teaching that obedience to moral or civic authority is heroic.

Gendered narrative framing is equally significant. Boys are frequently protagonists in action-oriented plots, solving problems and receiving recognition, while girls appear in supportive or domestic roles. In a Grade 10 textbook, a story about community service highlights boys taking leadership in organizing relief work, while girls assist in organizing materials or providing emotional support. Such framing communicates a hierarchical and gendered moral framework, linking leadership and initiative with masculinity and compliance with femininity.

Furthermore, narrative repetition across textbooks constructs a hidden curriculum of obedience, embedding moral lessons gradually and systematically. By Grade 10, students are exposed to multiple examples of civic loyalty, responsible citizenship, and social hierarchy, reinforcing early lessons learned in lower grades.

5.3 Gendered Ideology

Textbooks systematically reproduce gendered hierarchies. Male characters dominate public, professional, and leadership spaces, while female characters are predominantly passive, nurturing, or confined to domestic spheres. Classroom exercises, role-playing activities, and comprehension questions reinforce these roles, often associating girls’ obedience with morality and boys’ initiative with competence and authority.

Illustrations in textbooks further encode gender norms. Boys are depicted at the center of the image, leading activities, standing upright, or engaging in discussions, while girls are positioned peripherally, seated, or engaged in supportive tasks. Visual prominence, eye-line, and spatial relationships all contribute to the internalization of hierarchical gender norms.

In addition, pronoun use and character labeling in narratives reinforce gender expectations. Boys are consistently named as problem-solvers or civic actors (*Ali, Hassan*), whereas girls (*Sara, Fatima*) are labeled as helpers, assistants, or caretakers. Role-play exercises often ask

students to “act as the leader” (implicitly a male role) or “assist the group” (implicitly female), subtly naturalizing compliance for girls and leadership for boys.

Through this multimodal approach, textbooks construct obedience as a gendered expectation, linking ethical and civic virtues with female compliance and male authority. This serves to normalize patriarchal social structures and embeds gendered moral frameworks into students’ worldviews from early grades.

5.4 Patriotic and Civic Discourses

Obedience is closely tied to patriotism and civic virtue. Texts repeatedly link compliant behavior with national pride and civic responsibility. Stories celebrating student or citizen contributions to society, classroom decorum, or national projects illustrate that obedience is inseparable from being a “good citizen”.

Selective historical narratives contribute to this discourse. Certain events, figures, or cultural practices are highlighted as exemplary, while dissenting voices, marginalized groups, or counter-narratives are omitted. For example, a textbook may praise a student volunteering for a national program without acknowledging alternative methods of civic engagement, teaching that national loyalty requires conformity to prescribed actions.

Emotive and evaluative language strengthens this connection. Words such as *honor*, *proud*, *sacrifice*, *loyalty*, and *respect* frequently appear alongside stories of civic engagement, creating an affective link between obedience and patriotism. Over successive grades, students learn that social recognition, moral worth, and civic legitimacy are contingent on adherence to state-sanctioned norms and values.

5.5 Visual Discursive Strategies

Visual elements in textbooks reinforce textual messages. Teachers are portrayed as central, authoritative figures; boys lead group activities; girls are supportive or peripheral. Symbols of national pride, flags, monuments, cultural attire associate obedience with patriotism. Visual strategies also use perspective, gaze, and placement. Characters obeying instructions are positioned in foreground or in upright postures, signifying prominence and moral correctness. Conversely, non-compliant characters are often depicted smaller, behind others, or in passive postures, visually communicating hierarchical status and moral judgment. Multimodal analysis shows that illustrations are not decorative but integral to ideological construction. They complement textual imperatives and narratives, ensuring students internalize messages cognitively and emotionally. For instance, in a Grade 7 civics story, a boy saluting the national flag receives positive visual emphasis (bright colors, central positioning), reinforcing respect and obedience as patriotic duties.

5.6 Cross-Grade Patterns and Hidden Curriculum

The reinforcement of obedience, gender roles, and national ideology follows a sequential, cross-grade structure. Early grades introduce simple moral imperatives (“*Always obey elders*”), while higher grades integrate complex civic responsibilities, historical examples, and leadership scenarios. Exercises scaffold these lessons through comprehension questions, moral judgments, and role-play. The cumulative effect constitutes a hidden curriculum, transmitting hierarchical, gendered, and state-centric norms alongside formal language instruction. By Grade 10, students have internalized expectations regarding moral conduct, social hierarchy, civic responsibility, and gendered behavior.

5.7 Textbooks as Instruments of Hegemony

English textbooks function as tools of ideological and symbolic power, naturalizing social hierarchies, authority, and national ideology. Positive evaluation of compliant characters and negative representation of dissent align with Bourdieu’s (1991) notion of symbolic power, producing consent and internalization rather than overt coercion. This hegemonic function extends beyond explicit lessons. Through repeated textual and visual strategies, textbooks

shape students' perception of morality, gender, authority, and national identity, ensuring that state-sanctioned norms are reproduced across generations.

5.8 Implications for Critical Pedagogy

The study underscores the necessity of critical engagement with textbooks:

- Teachers should guide students in analyzing textual and visual content, identifying hierarchical and gendered assumptions.
- Gendered and hierarchical representations should be questioned and discussed, promoting awareness of normative assumptions.
- Exercises can encourage ethical reasoning, independent thought, and civic responsibility beyond mere compliance.
- CDA-informed pedagogy can cultivate critically aware students, capable of balancing language learning with reflection on social, ethical, and civic dimensions.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that English textbooks in Pakistan operate not merely as linguistic tools but as powerful instruments of ideological socialization, shaping students' moral, civic, and gendered consciousness. Through linguistic structures, narrative framing, and visual representation, textbooks systematically construct obedience as a normative virtue while reinforcing hierarchical social structures and gender roles. Students are positioned cognitively and affectively to internalize compliance as both ethically desirable and socially rewarded. Boys are portrayed as active agents of leadership and authority, while girls are consistently depicted as passive, nurturing, or supportive, naturalizing gender hierarchies from an early stage of education.

Patriotic and civic discourses are deeply intertwined with obedience, linking individual conduct to national ideology. Historical narratives, selective storylines, and emotive language celebrate conformity, loyalty, and respect for authority, while dissent or non-compliance is subtly condemned. Visual cues, teacher positioning, gaze direction, character prominence, and national symbols further reinforce these ideological messages, creating a multimodal pedagogy of control. Across grades 6–10, these strategies produce a hidden curriculum that perpetuates state-centered values, moral conformity, and gendered expectations, illustrating how English textbooks serve as conduits for hegemonic power. Critical engagement with these materials is therefore essential. Teachers and curriculum designers must not treat textbooks as neutral educational artifacts but as socially and politically situated texts. By applying CDA-informed strategies, educators can cultivate critical literacy, encouraging students to recognize, interrogate, and question embedded ideologies. Promoting reflective thinking, ethical reasoning, and independent judgment alongside language learning ensures that students develop as cognitively empowered and socially aware citizens rather than passive consumers of state-sanctioned narratives.

Future research could explore longitudinal impacts of these textbooks on students' civic attitudes, compare public and private school materials, or investigate cross-linguistic ideological patterns in Urdu, English, and regional language curricula. Additionally, integrating student perspectives could illuminate how these textual and visual strategies are received, negotiated, or resisted in classroom contexts, providing practical insights for curriculum reform. In conclusion, while English textbooks remain central to language acquisition in Pakistan, they also function as vehicles of moral, civic, and ideological instruction. Recognizing their dual role is vital for promoting equitable, critical, and reflective education, where linguistic competence is paired with the capacity to question authority, analyze social norms, and engage thoughtfully with national and global ideologies. This study underscores the imperative of critical pedagogy in mitigating the reproduction of hegemonic

values while fostering an education that balances obedience with ethical reasoning, citizenship awareness, and independent thought.

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