EXAMINING ISLAMIC IDEOLOGICAL NARRATIVES IN MIDDLE AND SECONDARY ENGLISH TEXTBOOKS IN SINDH, PAKISTAN: A CDA APPROACH

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Abstract
This study critically examines Islamic discourse in the English textbooks prescribed for middle and secondary school students in Sindh, Pakistan. It explores how these textbooks shape learners' religious and national identities by encouraging pan-Islamic connections. The research highlights recurring themes drawn from textbook excerpts that are used by key actors in Sindh's education system to promote a sense of Pakistani patriotism grounded in religion, rooted in the historical legacy of Pan-Islamism. Using a qualitative design, the study applies thematic analysis to selected content from the English textbooks. Its analytical framework is informed by Foucault's discourse theory, particularly his ideas of the technologies of power and the self in producing subjects. The theoretical perspective also incorporates debates surrounding pan-Islamic thought. The findings suggest that within school education, textbooks function as influential tools that present Islam as an all-encompassing metaphor for Pakistan's national identity. The study situates these textbooks within schools as sites of discursive social practices. It argues that by presenting discourse as legitimate knowledge, the textbooks lead students to construct an imagined "us" from a religious standpoint—both as Pakistanis in particular and as part of a broader Muslim brotherhood in general.
Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), constructing an "us" identity, Islam/Islamic ideology, Muslim identity, Pakistan, power relations, religion-based narratives, Sindh

1. INTRODUCTION

Drawing on Foucault's argument about power and subjectivity—articulated in his discussion of "governmentality"—governing operates through practices that shape individuals within specific social settings, guiding how they live by defining acceptable norms of behavior and existence, including what they are expected to do or avoid, and what outcomes become possible or impossible for them (Foucault, 1977). In a similar way, textbooks help sustain social arrangements by supporting dominant ideological frameworks. Even with the

global shift toward technology, textbooks remain central to classroom instruction. In the educational context, four interconnected and active components—textbooks, teachers, learners, and the learning environment—work together to shape the teaching–learning process (Razmjoo & Jozaghi, 2010). Kemp (1977) also emphasizes that textbooks form a core element of education systems because they influence students' social, cultural, scientific, and intellectual growth. Likewise, Tomlinson et al. (2003) argue that textbooks should not be viewed merely as routine teaching aids for language instructors; instead, they represent the objectives, priorities, and underlying themes of established learning and instructional contexts. Fairclough (2001) further notes that English language teaching and textbook production are often driven by ideology—an orientation that can plausibly be observed in English course materials used at secondary and intermediate levels in state institutions across Sindh, Pakistan.

1.1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In Sindh, Pakistan, the discourse of English textbooks used in public schools has received limited critical examination. Research in the region has also been comparatively scarce on how textbooks contribute to ideological formation across areas such as gender-related movements, religion, culture, social ideology, and national identity. In response to this gap, the present study investigates how English language course materials prescribed for middle and secondary grades in Sindh—particularly those produced during General Zia-ul-Haq's regime (1977–1988)—participate in constructing religiously grounded national identities.

1.2. AIM OF THE STUDY

This study aims to examine the extent to which the Pakistani state—especially during the period of General Zia-ul-Haq (1977–1988)—actively promoted and embedded national identity discourses within the national curriculum and, by extension, within textbooks.

1.3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To trace and examine relevant theoretical developments in order to deepen understanding of how pan-Islamic linkages in British India are represented and advanced through English textbooks.
- To assess the extent to which Pakistan, as an Islamic state, has fostered religious nationalism through English language textbooks.
- To analyze how schools function as an institutional framework (the "visible") and textbooks function as knowledge/power (the "sayable") in shaping learners' readiness to construct an imagined religious "us."

1.4. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

RQ1: To what extent has Pakistan, as an Islamic state, developed religious nationalism through the use of English textbooks?

RQ2: How do schools as an institutional setting (visible) and textbooks as sources of knowledge and authority (sayable) contribute to preparing learners to imagine an "us" grounded in religious identity?

1.5. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study seeks to discuss Islamic ideology and examine how students' identity construction reflects religious nationalism, viewed from a teacher's perspective. In addition, it aims to show how national education discourse can contribute to

social "othering." The research is intended to build awareness of the ways curricular materials are used to shape students' discursive formation of an imagined "us." In doing so, it draws on key scholarly insights in this area, notably Apple (2002) and Foucault (1988), whose ideas provide established foundations for understanding how textbooks are constructed, regulated, and interpreted within institutional settings. The study demonstrates how public education can serve the political priorities of those in authority and how state-led educational practices influence the formation of a national "self." It further shows how broader meta-perspectives are inserted into schooling and circulated through curricular materials. Using Foucault's discourse-analytic tools alongside wider theoretical debates on pan-Islamism as an identity project, this work also addresses a relatively overlooked area: the pan-Islamic implications associated with NEP (1978–79) as reflected in the selected textbooks. Finally, the study argues that textbooks produced under the Sindh Textbook Board, Jamshoro, operate as contested spaces where political, religious, and cultural struggles intersect in the construction of a religiously defined Pakistani national identity.

1.6. LIMITATIONS

The scope of this study is restricted to examining discourse that contributes to constructing national identity on religious grounds. Accordingly, the analysis focuses only on prose textbooks prescribed for middle and secondary classes in Sindh, Pakistan, developed during General Zia's period. Poetry textbooks are excluded, and issues beyond religiously framed national identity are not considered within this investigation. The study remains centered specifically on national identity formation within the broader domain of discourse studies.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has developed as a significant analytical framework for examining the structure, meaning, and underlying intentions of language, whether spoken, written, or presented in textbooks. As an interdisciplinary approach, CDA regards language as a form of social practice. According to Fairclough (1992), CDA focuses on identifying the ways in which power, dominance, and inequality are produced, legitimized, and challenged through discourse in both textual and spoken forms. Similarly, van Dijk (2006) emphasizes that CDA seeks to uncover social injustices embedded within communication processes. Rather than remaining neutral, CDA adopts a clear critical position in exposing hidden power relations.

The concepts of discourse and ideology are deeply interconnected. Van Dijk explains ideology as a cognitive framework consisting of beliefs and organized belief systems that shape how individuals interpret social realities. For instance, Rehman et al. (2013) explored ideological representations in English language textbooks in Pakistan by analyzing cultural content in books prescribed by the Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) and Oxford University Press. Their study examined both explicit and implicit cultural messages, including portrayals of social practices, class differences, and cultural norms, to determine how these narratives influence students' perceptions of society.

Similarly, Jarwabi (2002) conducted a feminist discourse analysis focusing on the representation of women in Palestinian school textbooks. Her findings indicated that women were often portrayed in traditional and stereotypical domestic roles. Chick and Altoona (2006) also investigated gender representation

in Jordanian high school history textbooks by analyzing both textual and visual elements. Their research highlighted the persistence of gender bias in educational materials.

2.1 DISCOURSE AND IDEOLOGY

Ideology is examined across multiple disciplines to understand the complex relationship between language and power structures. It provides a multidimensional perspective on discourse (Beetz, Herzog, & Maesse, 2021). Since ideologies are embedded within language, any ideological analysis must pay close attention to linguistic choices and patterns (Thompson, 2020).

Fairclough (2001) argues that ideology operates through conventions and assumptions that become naturalized within discourse. These embedded assumptions are often taken for granted and function as common sense, making them difficult to detect or question. Language plays a central role in constructing, spreading, and sustaining ideologies. Rizwan (2011) asserts that discourse is the primary vehicle through which ideologies are communicated, reinforced, and normalized within society.

2.2 PAN-ISLAMIC CONNECTIONS

Pan-Islamism refers to the idea of Muslim unity across national boundaries and has been widely discussed within the framework of identity politics. Debates continue regarding whether Pan-Islamism should be understood as a concrete political movement or as a symbolic ideal. Gabriel Charmes described Pan-Islam as a movement aimed at uniting Muslims against Western or Christian powers (Landau et al., 2016). The term itself largely originated in Western discourse, shaping how the concept was understood globally. In the Indian subcontinent, the events of 1857 marked a turning point for Muslim political consciousness. Following British suppression, Muslim intellectuals, facing political and economic marginalization, began to formulate a renewed sense of collective Muslim identity. Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, founder of the Muhammadan Anglo-Oriental College at Aligarh, played a foundational role in shaping this modern Muslim consciousness.

The Khilafat Movement further strengthened Pan-Islamic sentiments. Religious scholars (Ulema) mobilized support across urban and rural communities, framing the Caliphate as a symbol of global Muslim solidarity. After 1857, intellectual exchanges between South Asian and Arab scholars intensified, reinforcing transnational Islamic thought. Allama Iqbal later emerged as a leading thinker associated with this Pan-Islamic vision. Unlike earlier interpretations that confined the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to a regional identity, Iqbal emphasized His universal and global significance. Prior to Iqbal, certain forms of territorial nationalism were viewed by some scholars as incompatible with Islamic principles.

In Pakistan, Pan-Islamic ideas influenced educational reforms. The Islamization of education—through the establishment of Arabic-oriented madrassahs and the integration of transnational Islamic perspectives into public curricula—reflected state efforts to cultivate a broader Islamic identity among students.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

Scholars who adopt an interpretive paradigm argue that social reality is constructed through language, shared meanings, and collective understanding

(Mayer & Jacobsen, 2020). In line with this perspective, the present study employs a qualitative research design. A descriptive analytical method is used to explore ideological discourses embedded within English textbooks used at middle and secondary school levels in Sindh, Pakistan.

3.2 INSTRUMENT

The study focuses on public-sector schools in Sindh and analyzes English textbooks prescribed for grades 6 through 10. These textbooks, published by the Sindh Textbook Board, Jamshoro, and used between the 1980s and 2010s, serve as the primary data source. The research aims to identify discursive patterns that reflect religious nationalism, particularly within the framework of Pan-Islamic ideology.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis of data in this study originated from the researcher's professional engagement with teaching at secondary and tertiary levels. This experiential background guided an in-depth and repeated reading of the selected textbooks. Through careful textual examination, the study aimed to identify dominant discourses and trace the ways in which Islam functions symbolically within the content to shape students' religious-national identity.

Extracted statements were systematically organized into thematic categories through coding procedures inspired by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process enabled the identification, interpretation, and presentation of recurring patterns within the data. Although Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) provides the primary analytical framework, the study is also significantly informed by Foucauldian notions of discourse, particularly his ideas concerning knowledge, power, and disciplinary technologies.

4.1 REPETITION OF ISLAMIC SYMBOLISM TO CONSTRUCT MUSLIM IDENTITY IN TEXTBOOKS UNDER NEP (1979)

The selected textbooks were reviewed multiple times to identify textual elements contributing to the construction of a religiously defined national subject. The policy framework of the National Education Policy (1979) was also considered during interpretation. A recurring feature within the textbooks is the persistent symbolic invocation of Islam as a unifying ideological foundation.

Through thematic integration and aggregation of coded excerpts, several dominant representations emerged within the broader discourse of religious nationalism. These include:

- Allah portrayed as the ultimate sovereign authority
- Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) presented as the ideal moral exemplar
- Islam framed as the complete and correct way of life
- Prominent Muslim leaders depicted as national heroes
- Saints and religious figures represented as moral guides
- Historical narratives reinforcing Islamic identity

These patterns align closely with the ideological objectives outlined in the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) and the National Education Policy (1978–79).

4.2 RELIGIOUS NATIONALISM AND THE PAN-ISLAMIC NOTION OF MUSLIM UNITY

English is a compulsory subject in Sindh's public schools and is taught to students belonging to diverse religious backgrounds. Despite this diversity,

textbook representations frequently construct Islam and Muslim unity as the foundational basis of national identity.

The analysis reveals that Islamic symbolism is repeatedly used to cultivate a sense of collective belonging centered on the concept of the Muslim Ummah. This narrative often defines national identity through religious affiliation, which simultaneously marginalizes minority religions. In addition to excluding non-Muslim identities as external "others," the discourse may also marginalize alternative Islamic interpretations internally. Thus, religious nationalism operates both externally and internally through selective representation.

4.3 ISLAMIC METAPHORS RELATED TO GOD, THE QURAN, AND THE PROPHET (PBUH)

The National Education Policy (1978) emphasizes moral development rooted in the Quran and Hadith, with the stated objective of producing devout Muslims. Reflecting this policy, textbooks repeatedly foreground Allah, the Holy Quran, and Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

Textual openings frequently begin with "Bismillah-ir-Rahman-ir-Raheem," implicitly assuming a uniformly Muslim audience. Lessons such as "The Conquest of Makkah" present a singular Islamic account of creation and divine guidance, without acknowledging alternative theological or scientific explanations. Competing narratives—whether religious, mythological, or scientific—are excluded from discussion, positioning them as external alternatives.

Similarly, discussions of social organization are framed exclusively through Islamic teachings. Other historical, philosophical, or sociological accounts of societal development remain absent. The lesson "The Last Sermon of the Holy Prophet (PBUH)" reinforces the uniqueness of Allah as described in Surah Al-Ikhlas. Linguistic distinctions between "Allah" and the generic term "god" symbolically suggest authenticity versus falsity, reinforcing a singular theological truth.

The Prophet (PBUH) is consistently portrayed as the ultimate moral role model, embodying honesty, compassion, justice, and responsibility. Attributes such as kindness, forgiveness, and familial devotion are highlighted. However, comparable figures from other religious traditions—such as Jesus Christ in Christianity or revered leaders in other faiths—are not included. Their omission reflects external marginalization within the narrative framework.

The Quran is emphasized as the sole comprehensive guide for establishing a just and peaceful society. Alternative religious scriptures, such as the Bible or the Gita, as well as secular documents like the United Nations Charter, are absent from discussion. This selective inclusion reinforces the exclusivity of Islamic textual authority.

4.4 ISLAM AS A COMPREHENSIVE CODE OF LIFE

The textbooks portray Islam as a complete and ideal system encompassing democracy, equality, justice, and tolerance, consistent with the Constitution of Pakistan (1973). Islamic teachings are presented as the definitive moral framework governing individual and collective life.

Values such as forgiveness, equality, and social justice are repeatedly associated with Islamic civilization. For example, the discussion of slavery emphasizes Islam's egalitarian principles while not fully engaging with broader historical

debates regarding slavery within Islamic societies. Alternative scholarly perspectives remain largely unexplored, resulting in a one-dimensional portrayal.

4.5 ISLAM AND KEY MUSLIM LEADERS OF THE PAKISTAN MOVEMENT

Textbooks depict major figures of the Pakistan Movement—including Allama Iqbal, Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Fatima Jinnah, and other prominent leaders—as devoted Muslims and champions of Muslim unity. Their religious commitment is closely tied to their political contributions.

Allama Iqbal is represented primarily as an advocate for a separate Muslim homeland. However, discussions of his engagement with Western philosophy, his admiration for aspects of European democratic thought, and his broader intellectual complexity receive limited attention. Competing interpretations of his political and philosophical views are minimized.

Similarly, Muhammad Ali Jinnah is portrayed as the undisputed founder of Pakistan and a symbol of Muslim revival. While his emphasis on unity and modern education is acknowledged, his secular statements regarding equal citizenship irrespective of religion receive less emphasis in textbook narratives.

Women leaders of the Pakistan Movement are also represented, often highlighting their adherence to traditional cultural norms. However, most women mentioned belong to elite social backgrounds. The contributions of women from lower socioeconomic classes remain largely unaddressed, resulting in class-based marginalization within the historical narratives.

4.6 ISLAM AND SCIENCE

The National Education Policy (1978–79) promotes scientific and technological advancement. However, textbook discourse frequently intertwines scientific progress with Islamic identity. Islam is portrayed as inherently aligned with rationality and scientific inquiry.

Particular emphasis is placed on Muslim scholars of the 8th to 13th centuries, whose contributions to mathematics, medicine, and astronomy are highlighted as foundational to modern science. While acknowledging historical achievements is important, the narrative often foregrounds Muslim contributions while minimizing or excluding significant contributions from non-Muslim scientists.

Prominent Western scientists, including figures such as Isaac Newton, are rarely discussed in equal measure. This selective representation may obscure the secular and collaborative nature of scientific development across civilizations.

Overall, the analysis demonstrates that the textbooks construct a cohesive narrative of religious nationalism by repeatedly employing Islamic symbolism. Through selective inclusion and exclusion, the discourse shapes students' understanding of identity, history, morality, and knowledge within a predominantly Islamic framework.

5. DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This study set out to examine how national identity is constructed among school students in Sindh, Pakistan. The focus was on English textbooks prescribed for middle and secondary levels, developed in accordance with the National Education Policy (NEP) 1978–1989. Relevant policy documents were consulted to establish connections between official educational objectives and textbook content.

The central aim was to explore how the discourse within these textbooks contributes to shaping a religiously grounded national identity. The findings

suggest that students are encouraged to understand national belonging primarily through a religious lens, particularly Islam, often accompanied by localized interpretations of Pan-Islamic unity. Ethnic and cultural diversity within Pakistan receives comparatively limited attention.

The analysis concentrated on ideological discourses that employ Islam as a dominant metaphor or signifier. These representations contribute to both external and internal forms of "othering." Minority religious communities are positioned outside the central narrative, while internal sectarian or ethnic differences are also marginalized. The discourse constructs a collective sense of "us" rooted in a unified Islamic identity aligned with the ideological framework of Pakistan and the standards outlined in NEP 1978–79.

The study also highlights the institutional role of schools as sites where national identity is produced and reinforced. Through language and representation in textbooks, educational institutions participate actively in shaping students as religious-national subjects. The predominance of Islamic symbolism in the selected English textbooks demonstrates how minority discourses are sidelined, and how an Arab-oriented Sunni interpretation of Islam is often normalized as the legitimate expression of Pan-Islamic unity (Ittehad-e-Islam) within the national context.

5.1 CONTRIBUTION TO EXISTING KNOWLEDGE

This research contributes to the broader body of scholarship in several significant ways:

    a) It builds upon previous studies addressing identity formation within school environments.

    b) It provides a focused examination of English textbooks used at middle and secondary levels in Sindh.

    c) It extends analysis to the institutional dimension by examining how schools as physical and social spaces participate in producing students as ideological "subjects."

    d) It connects micro-level textbook discourse with macro-level educational policy objectives in Sindh, Pakistan.

    e) It identifies a reciprocal relationship between NEP 1978–79 and textbook design, demonstrating how policy intentions shape curricular narratives and student subjectivity.

    f) It adds to existing literature on Pakistani educational materials by exploring localized expressions of Pan-Islamic ideology, particularly the concept of Ittehad-e-Muslim, as embedded in national discourse.

5.2 INCLUSIVE AND EXCLUSIVE DIMENSIONS WITHIN A PAN-ISLAMIC FRAMEWORK

The study further investigates how inclusion and exclusion operate within textbook discourse in relation to Pan-Islamic heritage. Historically, Pan-Islamism emerged in the late nineteenth century, a term initially articulated within European political thought. Over time, it became associated with efforts to promote intellectual, political, and spiritual unity among Muslims globally.

In colonial India, Pan-Islamic ideas were partly shaped by resistance to British rule and the broader influence of Western modernity. Muslim intellectuals sought to construct a collective identity grounded in shared religious heritage

rather than ethnic nationalism. This form of unity emphasized faith as the primary basis of political and social cohesion.

The notion of Ittehad-e-Islam, advanced by figures such as Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, contributed to redefining geopolitical unity as religious solidarity. In the South Asian context, this evolved into a vision of Muslim nationhood that later influenced the ideological foundations of Pakistan.

The selected textbooks reflect traces of this historical development. They incorporate themes of Muslim unity and solidarity while simultaneously excluding alternative narratives. In doing so, they inherit and reproduce aspects of Pan-Islamic thought within a localized national framework.

5.3 DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

While this study focuses on religious-national identity formation through English textbooks, further research could examine other ideological discourses present in educational materials. Contemporary social, political, and cultural transformations may be shaping new forms of subjectivity that warrant critical investigation. Expanding the scope to other subjects, regions, or levels of education would deepen understanding of identity construction processes within Pakistan's educational system.

5.4 PAN-ISLAMIC LEGACY, RELIGIOUS NATIONAL IDENTITY, AND FOUCAULT'S DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

The application of Foucault's discourse analysis (DA) provided a conceptual framework for examining how textbooks function as instruments of power and knowledge. The study employed Foucauldian tools to analyze how educational discourse shapes students' subject positions within Sindh's public schools.

Given the historical influence of Pan-Islamic currents in South Asia and their connection to the Pakistan Movement, it was essential to explore how these ideas continue to inform national identity formation. Foucault's concepts—such as the relationship between power and knowledge, the production of subjectivity, and regimes of truth—proved particularly useful in interpreting how textbook narratives establish authoritative versions of history, religion, and nationhood.

The analysis revealed:

a) That religious national identity formation in Sindh, largely structured around Islam, carries remnants of broader Pan-Islamic traditions.
b) That textbook discourse constructs a collective imagination of "us" within the framework of the Muslim Ummah, shaped by localized meanings.
c) That Islamization policies have significantly influenced national identity construction, reflecting the enduring legacy of Pan-Islamic thought in state-building processes.

Overall, the use of Foucault's discourse analysis framework enabled a deeper understanding of how educational materials participate in constructing national identity. The study demonstrates that textbook development in Sindh is not merely pedagogical but is also embedded within broader ideological, historical, and political dynamics.

6. Conclusion

This study critically examined selected English textbooks by identifying thematic patterns structured around the metaphor and signifier of Islam. The central

objective was to explore how Islam is discursively constructed in ways that position minority religions and alternative viewpoints as external or internal "others." The analysis also investigated how Islamic symbolism is linked to the idea of Ittehad-e-Islam, reflecting broader Pan-Islamic influences in the formation of religious national identity.

The findings indicate that the metaphor of Islam operates as a dominant and comprehensive framework for defining national identity within the sampled textbooks. This construction aligns closely with the ideological principles articulated in the National Education Policy (1978–79), formulated during General Zia-ul-Haq's period of governance, under which these textbooks were developed.

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