



ENGLISH AS A BARRIER: LINGUISTIC EXCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Syeda Alvina Raza (corresponding author)

M.Phil. Scholar in Linguistics at Department of Linguistics & Literature, Fatima Jinnah
Women University, Rawalpindi, Pakistan

alvinaraza.syed@hotmail.com

Syeda Mehak Zehra

Assistant Professor at College Education Department, Government of Sindh, Pakistan

syedamehakzehra.smz@gmail.com

Sana Tahseen

Assistant Professor at College Education Department, Government of Sindh, Pakistan

wahidsana01@gmail.com

Abstract

In Pakistan, English has assumed a leading role in the higher education system and is the primary language of instruction and is closely linked to academic success and socio-economic opportunities. This superiority, however, brings about linguistic exclusion among the students of less privileged educational and socio-economic backgrounds due to their lack of enough proficiency in the English language. This paper will discuss the role of English as a language barrier in Pakistani higher education and will investigate the effects of English as a linguistic barrier on academic achievement, classroom attendance, socio-economic disparity, and the psychological well-being of students. The proposed study uses a qualitative-dominant secondary research design, which relies on a literature review that is backed by quantitative data of the available empirical studies. The results show that the low level of English proficiency has a strong association with poor academic performance, poor classroom behaviors, increased anxiety, and the replication of socio-economic inequalities. The research also reveals that English is not only a means to an end but also a structural gatekeeping process, which limits fair access to higher education. These results indicate that the linguistic inequality in Pakistan is institutional and not personal. This paper thus suggests a multilingual educational strategy, which is facilitated through bridging courses, teacher training programsteacher training, curriculum reform, and enhanced policy coherence, to minimize marginalization and enhance academic performance.

Keywords: English language proficiency, linguistic exclusion, higher education, socio-economic inequality, multilingual education

1. Introduction

The enduring presence of English as the vehicle of instruction in Pakistani higher education as a result of historical prestige and perceived global opportunities contributes to the perpetuation of high levels of linguistic exclusion, and an increase in socio-economic inequalities (Khan and Nabi, 2021; Suleman et al., 2024). This domination of the English language, especially in the private sector, military schools, and universities, forms a stratified educational environment, where admission is often determined by language proficiency and not academic performance, which excludes students speaking Urdu, Arabic, or regional language mediums (Khan et al., 2021; Tamim, 2021). In turn, this dependence on standardized English language tests, including TOEFL and IELTS, to admissions to universities contributes to the further enhancement of these inequities, virtually excluding many potential students with less privileged backgrounds who have not been exposed to English extensively (Khan et al., 2020; Saqlain, 2023).

This reinforces a top-down multilingual policy that puts English at the forefront at the cost of formulating pedagogical approaches to the public-school teachers and incorporating the local languages (Baig, 2024). Although this policy appears to enhance global competitiveness, in practice, it instills a system where students with lower socioeconomic status, mostly taught in state-run institutions, are at a great disadvantage because of their poor English skills, which results in academic marginalization (Azher et al., 2021; Mahboob, 2017). Not only this

linguistic barrier prevents their academic progression, but it also becomes a serious barrier to their further life paths and socioeconomic mobility (Shier, 2016). In fact, studies have shown that English-Urdu medium gap is a key factor in self-perception among learners and their future career prospects, being a decisive factor in academic and career progress (Shamim and Rashid, 2019).

In addition, the dominance of the English language may bring about social injustice and inequity especially to students in remote regions where they have minimal exposure to English and as such, there is a likelihood that language ability can have a significant impact on future success opportunities (Abdullah and Chaudhry, 2018). This stratification of language contributes to increasing horizontal inequalities, placing institutions of higher education with reduced resources in a subordinate position in the hierarchy, and in many cases compelling students with lower socioeconomic status to pay more to study in English although English proficiency is worse (Huang, 2023).

This scenario highlights the role of English as a linguistic capital, which is also skewed in favor of the elite students in schools since they have more opportunities to learn the English language at the same time disadvantaging the less fortunate students (Haidar and Fang, 2019). This long-standing colonial history of language-in-education policies in Pakistan has entrenched a sense of English synonymous with economic development, so as to devalue the natural multilingualism of the country and reproduce structures that have disempowered local languages (Ali, 2025). This situation generates a self-perpetuating process of English as a barrier to education and further socio-economic growth even though there is little evidence of a direct relationship between prevalence of English proficiency and national economic growth (Channa & Panezai, 2019). This English ideological affiliation, which is frequently fueled by neoliberal ambitions, further enhances social divisions by entrenching a strong elite that can speak and understand English competently and has a disproportionate control over access to higher education and other important social roles (Hopkyns et al., 2024; Khan et al., 2020). Such widespread linguistic discrimination not only slows down academic education and critical understanding, but also restricts effective engagement in society and the general sustainability, because people lack control over the means of their education (Hopkyns et al., 2024). Such a deep-rooted linguistic hierarchy leads to high dropout rates, poor academic performance, and propagation of inequalities in the society (Ndlangamandla et al., 2025).

This introduces the system in which the linguistic capital, as opposed to intellectual merit, is a major factor that determines access and success in the academic domain (Munyaradzi, 2025). This is further complicated by the fact that the promotion of English as a lingua franca is a clash of cultures that, despite being viewed as a global lingua franca, does not pay the necessary attention to the role of nondominant and regional languages in education (Ashraf, 2022). This frequently results in the unravelling of epistemologies of local languages, thus, fostering lingual hierarchies and delegitimizing the language-minoritized individuals in negotiating these polylingual spaces (Phyak, 2021). Not only does this linguistic hegemony discourage local languages but it also influences the cognitive growth and cultural identity of students, creating the environment in which English is considered the only means of academic and professional achievement (Khan et al., 2023).

The resulting systemic heroism of the English language has frequently resulted in an implicit, but widespread, devaluation of native language and language knowledge systems, an implicit promotion of the idea that intellectual rigor and socio-economic progress can only be achieved by those who are proficient in English (Becker, 2023). This relationship therefore creates a huge disparity in classes, with English proficiency being the gateway to social mobility, which strengthens social stratifications instead of promoting inclusive growth (Ferguson, 2025).

The given case is not peculiar to Pakistan; the same issues can be spotted in the rest of the Global South, where the implementation of the English language as the main language of instructions in higher education is closely associated with the neoliberal agenda and the recreation of the colonial relations (Munyaradzi, 2024). This linguistic encapsulation of knowledge in the English language serves to effectively decouple academic literacy with performance in other languages and hence marginalizes learners whose linguistic abilities do not fit the major English paradigm (Ntombela, 2025). **Consequently**, this dynamic engenders. In its turn, this leads to a situation in which non-native speakers of English in tertiary education frequently face significant language barriers, which affect their studies and the educational experience in general (Al-Kahtany and Alhamami, 2022). It may cause considerable psychological trauma and sense of disparagement among students, especially those of South Asian origin, where the fight to master English can overlap with overall identity conflicts and mental health issues (Ali, 2024).

1.2 Problem Statement

A fragmented linguistic landscape in Pakistan is a feature of its education system and a major cause of social stratification and educational exclusion. Although English is a primary language of higher education and white-collar jobs, the languages of primary and secondary education are sharply separated by socioeconomic factors (Akram et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). This presents two basic crises of students with marginalized backgrounds: Students from marginalized backgrounds experience two interconnected crises as a result of this structural imbalance: (1) a linguistic and cognitive crisis and (2) a sociocultural and psychological crisis. This is because a large percentage of students are taught primary and secondary education in Urdu-speaking government schools or religious madrassas, where English is commonly not a medium of instruction, but a separate subject (Khan et al., 2021; Rahman and Shiddike, 2019). As these students enter universities, where the curriculum and pedagogy are entirely in English, they encounter insurmountable cognitive and linguistic challenges (Khan et al., 2020; Rahman and Shiddike, 2019). This change usually leads to the cultural paradox when the students who were previously successful in their native or national language find themselves excluded in an academic setting where their language backgrounds are not considered (Abdullah and Chaudhry, 2018; Khan et al., 2020).

The existing school system recreates a national situation of no English, no future, in which the ability to speak English is used as a key linguistic asset (Akram et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2021). Elite students have a smooth transition to universities and other international socio-political spaces through their socialization in English-medium environments since a young age, as they attend high-cost schools of the so-called Cambridge System (Khan et al., 2020; Rahman and Shiddike, 2019). Conversely, non-elite socioeconomically disadvantaged students do not often receive such opportunities because of the inability to get a good English course and the prohibitive price of a standardized language test (Saqlain, 2023). This dependence on English as a gatekeeping mechanism makes certain that language policies of the state remain the reflection of marginalization that was observed during the colonial era and effectively seals most of the population off of the high-status socioeconomic layers of society (Khan et al., 2021; Suleman et al., 2024).

1.3 Research Objectives:

- To critically analyse how English functions as a structural and institutional barrier in higher education, influencing access, participation, and academic success.
- To examine the socio-economic, academic, and psychological impacts of English proficiency on students from diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds.
- To evaluate the effectiveness of existing language-in-education policies in addressing or perpetuating linguistic inequality and exclusion.

1.4 Research Questions:

1. In what ways does English operate as a mechanism of exclusion within higher education institutions?
2. How does English proficiency influence student performance, classroom participation, and overall academic experience?
3. To what extent do current educational policies reinforce or mitigate linguistic inequality in higher education?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study has considerable theoretical and practical implications in the context of the linguistic inequality in higher education in Pakistan. Theoretically, it contributes to the sociolinguistic research by strengthening the concept of English as a version of linguistic capital in a post-colonial environment by showing how language serves as a tool of identity, power, and social positioning negotiation (A. Khan et al., 2020; I. U. Khan et al., 2021). This way, it will critically analyze the functioning of the dominance of English as a kind of symbolic power that supports the existing social stratifications, thus adding to the wider scholarly discussions of linguistic imperialism, educational inequality, and reproduction of privilege in postcolonial education systems (Akram et al., 2020; Khan et al., 2020). In practice, the research offers a solid evidence-based basis to policymakers, curriculum developers, and university administrators to critically reevaluate the current policies on Medium of Instruction and their consequences on fair access to higher education (Suleman et al., 2024). The research also shows the immediate necessity of more inclusive pedagogical methods, such as creating supportive learning tools, organized bridge programs, and instructional changes, as well as the promotion of educational equity and social justice, rather than linguistic gatekeeping, by identifying the particular barriers that students with limited English proficiency experience (Abdullah and Chaudhry, 2018; Saqlain, 2023). Finally, interventions are necessary to make higher education a process of social mobility and not a mechanism of marginalization and exclusion (Abdullah and Chaudhry, 2018).

2. Theoretical Framework

This study applies a multidimensional theoretical perspective in the analysis of systemic obstacles that are created by English in Pakistani higher education. This framework integrates the sociological ideas about Pierre Bourdieu with the concepts of linguistic imperialism and postcolonial critiques to discuss the use of language as a form of exclusion.

2.1 Linguistic Capital

In his theory of practice, Bourdieu describes language as not just a communication instrument, but a kind of a lingual capital that can be converted into social and economic benefits (Munyaradzi, 2025). English as a symbolic capital is relevant in the situation with Pakistan, as the level of proficiency is linked to modernity, intelligence, and high social status (Haidar and Fang, 2019; Khan et al., 2020). Such a symbolic authority makes English a gatekeeping tool of the education system, which allows access to prestigious institutions, academic achievement, and high-end professional opportunities, but, at the same time, leaves out non-proficient people (Khan et al., 2020). This linguistic capital is particularly distributed according to the class structures, which supports the presence of pre-existing social inequalities. The elite socio-economic students tend to learn the English language with the help of high-quality private education and favorable conditions and form a so-called habitus, which corresponds to the standards of the English-speaking academic environment (Laursen, 2023). Conversely, students with lower socio-economic status (who are usually taught in Urdu-medium or regional-language state schools) feel a mismatch between their language skills and higher-education requirements (Laursen, 2023). This imbalance turns English into a social label, with the non-proficient people being systematically marginalized, restricted in their academic

mobility, and frequently restricted to low-status positions, which further reinforce and reproduce established social hierarchies (Baig, 2024; Haidar and Fang, 2019; Rind, 2023).

2.2 Linguistic Imperialism

Linguistic imperialism describes how structural, cultural and ideological inequalities are created and maintained in order to establish dominance of the English language over others (Khan, 2023). Such a domination in Pakistan is not a coincidence but supported by global discourses of education, international institutions, and neo-colonial structures of development which are still defining national language policies and academic practices (Shier, 2016). English, hence, is a means of domination, whereby it still dominates in the most important areas of higher education, government and even in the workplaces. Even though the English language is viewed as the threat to the local cultural and religious values by the part of the society, especially among the middle and lower socio-economic classes, the significance of English cannot be underestimated in such high-status spheres as law, economics, science, and technology, which only strengthens its hegemonic status (Khan, 2023). This pre-eminence is echoed in a hierarchical language pyramid which defines the postcolonial linguistic hierarchy in Pakistan. Top of this hierarchy is English the language of power, prestige and global connectivity. Urdu is positioned between the national lingua franca and the national level of the indigenous regional languages, which are frequently marginalized in education and the dialogue (Anwar and Ali, 2021). This type of hierarchy not only reinforces the reality of linguistic inequality that is already present in the country but also reinforces the principle that English is the language of progress, modernity, and intellectual power, and the local languages are inferior and less efficient in transmitting knowledge (Ali, 2025; Aslam, 2018). Therefore, linguistic imperialism in Pakistan supports the systemic exclusion and perpetuates colonial power frameworks in modern education systems.

2.3 Postcolonial Theory

The postcolonial theory offers a critical approach to the explanation of how language-in-education policies of Pakistan remain in the reflection and reproduction of the colonial systems of power. The current education system in Pakistan is usually described as a straightforward extension or a pure imitation of the colonial format that was introduced during the British rule, in which English was placed strategically as a language of administration, government and as a means of upward social mobility (Ali, 2025; Rind, 2023). With political independence, the state still enforces top-down language policies, which put English as the primary medium of higher education, thus recreating the colonial goal of reproducing a linguistically privileged administrative cadre (Khan et al., 2021). This stability is then perpetuated by the institutional frameworks usually referred to as a black-cum-white bureaucracy that enhances the predominance of English in order to preserve the socioeconomic privilege and institutional power in the society (Aslam, 2018).

In this postcolonial context, emphasis of English has serious implications on the native and regional languages which are systematically relegated in the formal education system. Institutional dominance of English and, to a smaller extent, Urdu is directly at the cost of the vernacular languages, which are often sidelined in the academic and administrative domains (Khan et al., 2021). This exclusion adds to a wider scope of socioeconomic inequality and may cause identity-related conflicts between the students whose language and culture are not reflected in the official medium of instruction. Consequently, this may lead to the feeling of estrangement towards their native languages and cultural identities by most learners, creating conflict inside and creating negative attitudes towards their linguistic background (Khan et al., 2021). This continuing colonial past also makes sure that any attempts at achieving educational equity and inclusivity are inherently limited since the structural privileging of English will

continue to solidify historical inequalities and restrict the true linguistic diversity in higher education (Ali, 2025).

2.4 Conceptual Link

The integration of these three theories provides a holistic explanation of linguistic exclusion. Postcolonial Theory traces the origins of the present system and how the colonial past has created a parallel system of education, which favors English. Linguistic Imperialism describes the continued pressures on the world and structure to enforce this hierarchy as a means of modern-day hegemony, putting English in the framework of this approach. Lastly, Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu depicts the micro-levels effects of such structures and how individual students feel excluded by the field of their higher education due to their habitus and absence of English capital. Collectively, they unveil that English in Pakistan is not only a medium of instruction, but a systemic obstacle that perpetuated class privilege and marginalized the indigenous linguistic identities (A. Khan et al., 2020; I. U. Khan et al., 2021; Laursen, 2023).

3. Literature Review

The role of English in Higher Education in Pakistan is a hotly discussed academic issue marked by a clash between the global and the local socio-economic environment. This part is a review of the literature that is available on the subject of language policy, educational inequality and the multifaceted effects of English-medium instruction.

3.1 Language Policy in Pakistan: Evolution and Contradictions

The language-in-education policy in Pakistan has been characterized as a reproduction of colonial structures which have remained in place since independence (Ali, 2025; Rind, 2023). In the past, the state has been oscillating between encouraging the use of Urdu as the language of national identity and English as the tongue of the elite and formal business (Ali, 2025). Today, existing policies tend to use a politics of distraction, as the state offers the masses English-medium education as a means to achieve social mobility, but fails to offer the resources to make it work in publicly-run schools (Baig, 2024). This establishes a dual system of education that involves the medium of instruction as a gatekeeping system that serves the interests of the socio-economically advantaged (Shier, 2016).

3.2 English as Medium of Instruction: Benefits vs. Challenges

Although English is believed to be a prestigious and dominant global language, as well as an important prerequisite to engage in worldwide scholarly and professional activities, the use of English as the medium of instruction (EMI) in Pakistan poses both prospects and major challenges (Haidar and Fang, 2019). On the one hand, the knowledge of English is closely linked to better career opportunities, more access to international research and study materials, and more social mobility and prestige both locally and globally (Haidar and Fang, 2019; Khan et al., 2020). These perceived benefits affirm the need to have English-medium education and its perpetuation in higher institutions of learning.

Nonetheless, the problems that come with EMI are equally enormous and, in most cases,, they overwhelm the advantages of the same to a large percentage of learners. English can be a barrier to success, rather than an enabling factor, to many learners, especially those of non-English-speaking or under-resourced learning backgrounds (Haidar and Fang, 2019). The abrupt shift to English-based teaching on the university level poses considerable academic challenges, such as issues with comprehending lectures, interacting with coursework content, and being able to communicate knowledge in a manner that would be assessed effectively. Such a sudden change often leads to a higher rate of failures, poorer academic outcomes, and lack of interest in the learning process (Khan et al., 2020). Therefore, even as English is a beacon of opportunity, it

is also in the process of cementing inequalities in education and restricting all people to have equal access to academic achievement because it is the medium of instruction

3.3 Linguistic Inequality: Elite vs. Public-Sector Divide

The basis of linguistic apartheid in Pakistan lies in the gap between the elite privately-run schools and the low-priced state or regionally-language schools (Rind, 2023; Shier, 2016). Elite students enter university with an impressive amount of linguistic capital since they were surrounded by English since childhood (Rind, 2023). On the other hand, low socio-economic status students tend to study English as a subject in a school with poor English as a medium, and they will not be ready to face the demands of the English-only environment of university life (Baig, 2024; Shier, 2016). This gap keeps the so-called hegemony of English at the advantage of a limited group of people at the expense of the majority (Anwar and Ali, 2021).

3.4 Academic Challenges: Comprehension and Writing

The lack of sufficient knowledge of the English language is a common pedagogical obstacle experienced by university students in Pakistan and it has a direct impact on their skills in dealing with academic material (Khan et al., 2020). The issue of understanding is among the biggest issues since most of the students have problems with grasping the complex theoretical information in case it is presented in English. This challenge frequently results in memorization-based or so-called rote learning instead of meaningful processing, critical thinking, and analytical processing of the subject matter (A. Khan et al., 2020; I. U. Khan et al., 2021). This makes the learning process superficial thereby restricted intellectual growth and performance by the students.

Besides comprehension problems, another challenge that is more challenging and usually more serious among students is academic writing. Most learners do not have the required academic vocabulary, grammatical correctness and structural competency to write good essays, research papers and thesis work. These gaps do not only make them less competent in their ability to articulate ideas but also affect their performance in exams and overall Grade Point Average (GPA) adversely (Haidar and Fang, 2019). The challenges of writing, therefore, add to the problem of low academic confidence, anxiety, and a feeling of inadequacy of students in English-medium instruction in higher education.

3.5 Psychological Impacts: Anxiety and Confidence

There is a psychological impact of dominance of English to Pakistani learners. Non-fluent people may have a feeling of intellectual inferiority as a result of the impact of English language imperialism (Khan, 2023). Students can have a lot of language anxiety in the classroom where they are supposed to be speaking English, resulting in no one talking and having no sense of self-confidence (Khan, 2023). Moreover, the enforcement of English might lead to so-called identity crisis when students are put under pressure to reject their native linguistic and cultural identities in order to be viewed as civilized or modern (Ali, 2025; Khan et al., 2021).

3.6 Epistemic Inequality: Limited Access to Knowledge

Epistemic inequality is the inability of a particular group to generate and/or access knowledge due to language (Anwar and Ali, 2021). In Pakistan, even the teaching of high-level courses such as International Relations or Economics is nearly only in English, thus the students who have lower proficiency cannot bring their own local insights to such disciplines (Aslam, 2018). This hegemony makes sure that the production of knowledge is Westernized, which is in many cases at the cost of the intellectual traditions of indigenous peoples (Anwar and Ali, 2021). It is also enhanced by the increase in higher education reforms following 9/11, which have placed a greater emphasis on international standards based on the English language, instead of local linguistic diversity (Aslam, 2018).

3.7 Global Perspective: Comparison with Other Developing Countries

The struggle that Pakistan is going through is reflected in other post-colonial settings. Indicatively, the same case applies to undergraduate students in South Africa whose views on English-medium policies are complex because English is viewed as a tool that is needed and must be used globally, but as a filter that excludes individuals with multilingual backgrounds (Munyaradzi, 2025). Just like in Pakistan, the symbolic power of English in South Africa establishes a hierarchy that tends to undermine the achievements of students speaking languages of the marginalized groups (Khan et al., 2020; Munyaradzi, 2025). Such international similarities imply that language marginalization is an institutional characteristic of post-colonial education reforms across the globe.

3.8 Research Gap

Although there is a plethora of literature on English as a Dominating Media of Instruction (EMI) dominance in Pakistan, there are still some significant gaps in the literature. The majority of the existing literature is mostly concerned with top-down policy criticism and the colonial past of English (Ali, 2025; Channa & Panezai, 2019), but has not paid sufficient attention to how students and educators in resource-constrained public universities actively negotiate such language constraints through bottom-up coping mechanisms, including informal peer-to-peer translanguaging and language adaptation practices within the classroom. In the same way, compared to the well-defined academic issues related to the English proficiency (Khan et al., 2020), there is a lack of comparative studies on the fact that linguistic exclusion varies across disciplines, especially in the context of generating indigenous knowledge in disciplines like Economics and International Relations, where English dominance can serve to strengthen epistemic dependency (Khan and Nabi, 2021). Moreover, although the concept of the English-Urdu divide has been demonstrated to affect the identity of learners and their ambitions (Shamim and Rashid, 2019), most of the studies have been based on cross-sectional perceptions instead of life-course analysis to determine how the initial barriers to linguistic access in higher education affect the long-term socio-economic mobility and career trajectories of low-SES students. Moreover, despite the fact that researchers have emphasized the role of English as a type of linguistic capital that empowers elite groups (Haidar and Fang, 2019; Postcolonial Critiques on Globalization and Privatization of Education in Pakistan, n.d.), to date there is a critical lack of empirical studies that test practical, scalable pedagogical interventions, specifically, multilingual and translanguaging. The present study thus seeks to fill these gaps by adopting a mixed-methodology to explore the language realities of EMI settings on a daily basis and its consequences to academic equity and social mobility in Pakistan.

4. Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods explanatory sequential research design to develop a comprehensive understanding of English as a linguistic barrier in Pakistani higher education (Al-Kahtany and Alhamami, 2022; Saleem et al., 2023). The combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches allows supporting and interpreting statistical patterns of linguistic exclusion in terms of specific personal experiences, which makes the method especially applicable to the complex educational setting (Al-Kahtany and Alhamami, 2022). Data is collected using the structured questionnaires which are distributed to the members of the university population to determine the level of linguistic barriers, and its impact on academic performance as well as semi-structured interviews with students and instructors to gain a more in-depth experience of language anxiety, classroom engagement, and pedagogical issues (Khan et al., 2020; Saleem et al., 2023). The stratified random sampling method will be employed to guarantee the representation of urban and rural students along with the representation of public and private institutions so that one can perform a comparison of institutional and socioeconomic inequality (Rehan et al., 2023). Descriptive statistical techniques are used to analyze quantitative data to determine the general patterns, whereas thematic analysis is applied

to analyze qualitative data with the assistance of the Atlas.ti software to identify the common themes in association with the language power, class inequality, and barriers to education (Saleem et al., 2023). The researchers note that their study has several weaknesses including a small sample size, a potential non-response bias, and the use of self-reported data, and that their study may fail to capture inequalities in education experiences during earlier years, which can influence language outcomes (Al-Kahtany and Alhamami, 2022; Shier, 2016).

5. Results / Findings

Table 5.1: English Proficiency Levels among Pakistani Students

Indicator	Value
A1–A2 (Basic Users)	88%
B1 Level	12%
Global Ranking	48th out of 72 (“Very Low”)
Mean Speaking Score	16.34 / 60 (27%)

The data indicates critically low English proficiency among Pakistani students. A large majority (88%) fall within basic competency levels, while only a small proportion (12%) achieve intermediate proficiency. Additionally, Pakistan’s global ranking reflects a “very low” proficiency category. Speaking ability is particularly weak, with average performance at only 27%, highlighting severe limitations in communicative competence.

5.2 Academic Performance

Table 5.2: Relationship between English Proficiency and Academic Performance

Measure	Value	Interpretation
Pearson Correlation (r)	0.488	Moderate positive relationship
Variance Explained (R ²)	44.1%	Strong predictive influence
English Passing Rate	42.38%	Low academic achievement

The results indicate that proficiency in English is a big indicator of academic achievement. The correlation between language ability and academic performance is moderately positive ($r = 0.488$) which means that there is a significant correlation between academic performance and language ability. Moreover, the regression analysis indicates that the performance variation is explained by English proficiency (44.1%), which stresses the importance of this factor. The low pass rate also indicates the negative influences of poor language abilities on academic performances.

5.3 Classroom Participation

The results show that language constraints have a great influence on classroom activities. Lack of vocabulary, poor grammar and poor pronunciation cause the students to have difficulty expressing their ideas. These difficulties are some of the causes of communication anxiety which results in less participation and passive learning. There is also fear of mistakes and a lack of preparedness, which exacerbates this problem.

5.4 Socio-Economic Divide

The findings indicate that there is a great socio-economic gap in the English proficiency and academic performance. The poor students have always done poorly than students who have access to the private education system and other resources. English speaking is a type of social capital, which perpetuates the existing class divisions and restricts social mobility.

5.5 Psychological Effects

The lack of English proficiency is related to severe psychological problems. Students often feel anxious and fear evaluation, as well as have decreased self-confidence. This leads to a vicious circle of language constraints that negatively influence not only academic success, but also feelings and self-esteem. The degree of test anxiety is high especially when the English language is utilized as the major tool of testing.

6. Discussion

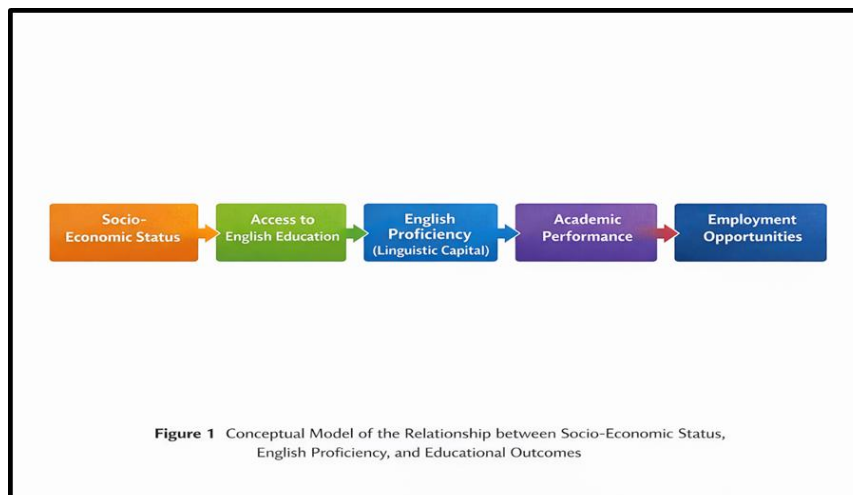
All of these findings point to the fact that English is a strong structural gatekeeping system in higher education in Pakistan, where most students (88 percent) are at A1-A2 levels of proficiency, and a small proportion of students competent enough to achieve B1 proficiency. This is strengthened by the fact that the mean speaking score (27%) is very low, and it indicates that there are very severe restrictions to communicative ability and it indicates that English is more than a medium of instruction, it is more of a filtering device that controls access to participation, assessment and progression.

Though English is still a necessity in the international academic and professional circles, its present-day usage is unfairly discriminating as it fails to provide students with equal opportunities to experience quality language learning. Additionally, the findings provide a clear indication that English proficiency is closely related to socio-economic status, thus repeating inequality in the education system, whereby students that have more advantageous backgrounds have better exposure, resources and learning conditions.

The statistically significant correlation between language proficiency and academic performance ($r = 0.488$; $R^2 = 44.1$) confirms that academic achievement is not solely on a case of merit but is highly mediated by the access to linguistic capital, which only reinforces existing social orders and does not provide mobility. Low level of proficiency also limits participation in the classroom where students can find it difficult to express themselves, participate in discussions, and interact with each other leading to a situation where the speakers who are fluent are privileged at the expense of the other students who find themselves in a passive role further limiting learning outcomes and confidence.

Also, the psychological aspect of language barriers can be observed as students often feel anxious, afraid of negative feedback, and lack self-confidence during English-media exchanges, and this phenomenon forms a vicious cycle in which low proficiency causes anxiety, which then further prevents the participation and performance; this is especially true in the assessment situations where language barriers have a direct effect on evaluation results. Combined, the continued low proficiency rates, low average rates of scholastic achievement (42.38%), and the prevalence of psychological difficulties all point to structural and systemic failures, and not individual ones, meaning that existing educational policies do not guarantee equal access to English language learning or even consider the differences in socio-economic status, school performance, and teaching strategies, which further contributes to a system in which English is used not as an accelerant.

7. Conceptual Model



8. Policy Recommendations

Multilingual Education System: In Pakistan, early education must focus on the use of native or regional languages to enhance conceptual knowledge with most of the students having only A1-A2 English proficiency. English is to be taught in phases to prevent cognitive overload and future academic and professional competence.

Bridging Courses in English: Since there is a close relationship between English proficiency and academic performance ($R^2 = 44.1$), designed bridging programs must be applied at the first level of the higher education. Such programs would be based on academic reading, writing, and vocabulary peculiar to the disciplines to facilitate learners whose educational backgrounds are varied into English-medium instruction.

Teacher Training Programs: The fact that communicative competence is low shows a necessity to have better teaching practices. Intensive teacher training must focus on communicative language teaching, interactive classroom teaching, and the means to alleviate language-related anxiety because capacity of the teacher is directly related to language development in students.

Curriculum Reform: The existing curricula are to be reformed to take care of the lack of balance between theoretical knowledge and practical language use. More stress should be put on speaking and listening, reading and writing and evaluation systems should be restructured to assess real communicative competence, and not rote learning.

8.5 Policy Alignment

The uniformity of issues of proficiency, performance, and participation shows that there is no consistency between the design and implementation of the policy.

The process of reform needs to be coordinated at both federal and institutional levels with sufficient funding, monitoring tools, and accountability. In the absence of such alignment, policy efforts will not yield significant and long-lasting change.

9. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the major predictor of academic achievement in Pakistani higher education is English proficiency. The results indicate that a significant proportion of students are at basic levels of proficiency, which greatly restricts their capacity to join, perform, or even advance in academic settings.

The high statistical correlation between English proficiency and academic achievement proves that language proficiency is not peripheral but the cornerstone to academic success. Meanwhile, the lack of equal access to English education solidifies socio-economic inequalities, turning language into an engine of the generation of inequality.

Besides academic constraints, the paper has also noted the psychological cost of low proficiency, which includes feeling anxious, low confidence, and disengagement. These issues only exacerbate the students' problems and lead to long-term educational inequalities.

Finally, the role of English in the Pakistani education system is as an opportunity and a barrier. The solution to this two-fold role is inclusive and well-developed and context-specific language policies that guarantee equal access to language resources. Linguistic inequality will keep hindering academic achievements and hinder social mobility without such reforms.

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