

A COGNITIVE-PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS OF THE EROSION OF MERITOCRACY IN PAKISTANI MEDIA COVERAGE OF SPSC- CCE-2024

Muhammad Ashraf Kaloi*

Assistant professor, University of Sindh Dadu Campus

ashraf.kaloi@usindh.edu.pk

Ms. Amber Naz Panhwar

Teaching Assistant, University of Sindh Dadu Campus

ambbernaz7866@gmail.com

Sadaqat Ali Jatoi

Teaching Assistant, University of Sindh Dadu Campus

alisadaqat.jatoi@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

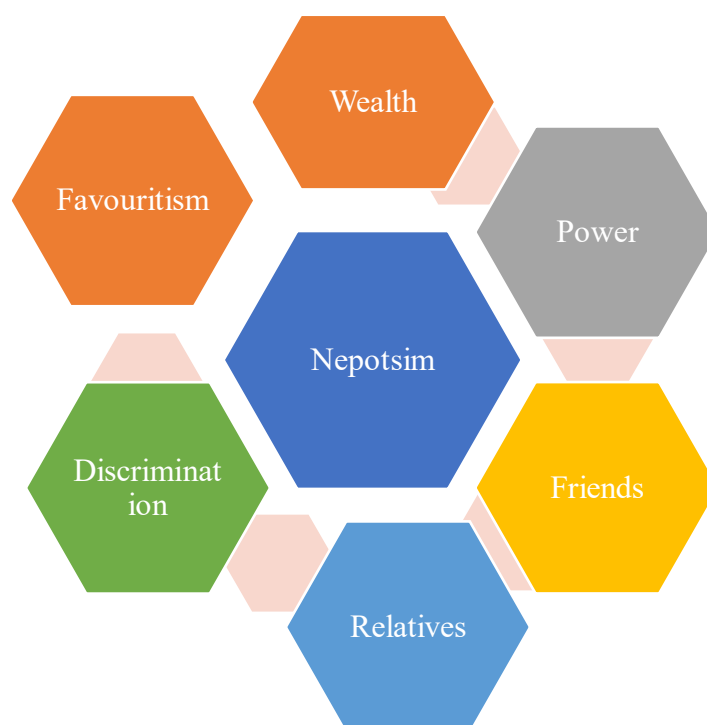
This article reports the findings of a study that analysed the cognitive and pragmatic attributes of the concept of “The Erosion of Meritocracy” as shown in Pakistani media discourse. The authors assert that media discourse analysis should include extralinguistic features, including cognitive and pragmatic concerns. This study employed cognitive linguistics techniques to examine the language utilized by media and journalists, concurrently addressing the pragmatics of the conceptualization process. The authors have examined corruption associated with media texts and evaluated their cognitive and pragmatic attributes. The media functions as a conduit for disseminating information and material to the public. The term “media” includes several communication channels, each possessing distinct value and impact on individuals’ lives. Media has become profoundly embedded in the consciousness and emotions of individuals in contemporary society. The study examines the linguistic tactics utilized to represent the notion of “The Erosion of Meritocracy” in Pakistani media discourse. The authors analyse the linguistic techniques used to illustrate cognitive frameworks related to the notion of “The Erosion of Meritocracy.” The research material comprised media texts published on the websites of Pakistani mass media outlets, including Daily Dawn and The Express Tribune. The research included discourse analysis, semiotic analysis, and lexical definition methods. The study’s findings reveal that the Pakistani media have addressed concerns of favouritism, nepotism, and the erosion of meritocracy. Moreover, the Pakistani media use language techniques to articulate cognitive frameworks of situations.

Keywords: *Cognition, favouritism, pragmatic, meritocracy, nepotism, hiring, promotion.*

INTRODUCTION:

“a system, organization, or society in which people are chosen and moved into positions of success, power, and influence on the basis of their demonstrated abilities and merit.” (Merriam-Webster)

Meritocracy and nepotism represent two contrasting extremes in organizational hiring and promotion practices. Meritocracy emphasizes qualities, talents, and accomplishments as the basis for selection and advancement, while nepotism prioritizes connections and relationships, disregarding any genuine hiring or promotion procedures. Meritocracy fundamentally involves compensating individuals based on their competencies and accomplishments. A meritocratic system ensures justice and equal opportunity for individuals to advance based on performance and credentials (Harrison & Klein, 2007). In meritocratic systems, hiring methods must be transparent and competitive, with selection criteria based on relevant academic credentials, experience, and skills pertinent to the role.



Nepotism refers to the preferential treatment given to family or friends in hiring or promotions, disregarding qualifications or suitability for a position. This strategy undermines diversity, diminishes the morale of qualified applicants, and results in overall organizational inefficiencies. The principle of meritocracy, which asserts that individuals should be compensated based on their ability and credentials rather than extraneous factors, sharply contrasts with the realities observed in these organizations.

Nepotism and favouritism, wherein political connections undermine the principle of equitable hiring, have presented issues to the education sector. Research evidence indicates that recruiting processes in the public sector are influenced by political connections. This political meddling undermines the integrity of recruiting processes and calls into doubt the qualifications and ability of individuals in essential academic and administrative roles. These individuals significantly influence the quality of education and the fundamental existence of these institutions. Various facets of the unemployment cycle and the culture of inefficiency resulting from political patronage have been investigated and analysed.

The absence of variety and qualified individuals hinders innovation and equitable academic standards, as those appointed through political patronage lack both essential knowledge and relevant practical experience beneficial to the school. The absence of transparency in recruiting methods undermines faith in institutional leadership, fostering a poisonous environment marked by distrust and resentment.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism undermine fairness by conferring unwarranted advantages to individuals who may not deserve such preferential treatment. In the public domain, favouritism, cronyism, and nepotism detrimentally affect the collective welfare.

Oxford English Dictionary defines meritocracy as “*government by persons selected on the basis of merit in a competitive educational system; a society so governed; a ruling or influential class of educated people*”, (Oxford English Dictionary, 2001, vol. IX)

Merit constitutes a fundamental principle in public management. Dedication to public service and the broader public interest, integrity in executing responsibilities to the

utmost capability, and effectiveness in advancing the agency's goal are closely linked to merit as a value and an ideal (Ingraham, 2006, p. 493). Meritocratic governance necessitates adherence to science, knowledge, evidence, reason, and professionalism by the government and lawmakers (Wang, 2021). A merit-based public administration is essential to alleviate issues stemming from politics.

Arasli and Tumer define favouritism as "the provision of special privilege to friends, colleagues and acquaintances, in areas of employment, career and personnel decisions". (Arasli and Tumer, 2008).

Etymological analyses and dictionary definitions generally depict "meritocracy" as a social system where advancement is contingent upon individual ability and success, social mobility is prioritized, and education is esteemed.

Max Weber's bureaucratic model posits that education and examination are key elements of the recruiting process within a meritocratic and rational bureaucracy (Weber, 1947, p. 333). Weber highlighted the connection between democracy and a meritocratic selection procedure grounded in education and assessment. In a meritocratic society, the allocation of social resources and incentives is based on merit, with educational qualifications serving as a measure of that merit. This approach designates education as the mechanism for categorizing individuals based on merit. Consequently, enhanced access to education and the meritocratic nature of the educational selection process will ascertain the most qualified individuals based on their educational attainment. Education determines an individual's place and rank within society.

In his Working Paper titled "The Merit System and Integrity in the Public Service," Willy McCourt observes that defining 'merit' is more complex than one may assume. Initially, we can define it as "the selection of the most qualified individual for every certain position". In many countries, mass media, such as newspapers, television, and radio, serve as the primary source of information for the public.

MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION

The media serve as essential intermediaries that collect information and distribute it to the public and consumers. Before analysing the impact of media on society, it is essential to precisely define mass communication. Wimmer and Dominick (2013) characterize mass media as "any communication medium employed to simultaneously engage a significant audience, including radio, television, newspapers, magazines, billboards, films, recordings, books, and the internet." This idea encompasses several traditional media forms, such as print, television, and radio, as well as modern media forms, including the internet and intelligent gadgets like tablets, smartphones, and smart TVs.

The media's oversight function can be achieved through the continuous monitoring of governmental performance or by investigating and exposing malfeasance, therefore necessitating a response from decision-makers. The media can provide continuous examination of individuals and institutions, enabling the identification and public denunciation of authorities who misuse their authority to hide corruption or neglect to address evidence of such wrongdoing. Dijk perceives a text as including multiple interconnected structures or levels (van Dijk 1988). He categorizes it into three tiers. Primarily, macrostructure. This signifies the universal significance of a work, discernible through the examination of the subject or theme inside a narrative. Secondly, the superstructure.

This discourse structure pertains to the textual framework of the document, delineating how the text's elements are cohesively arranged within the news format. Van Dijk considers the utilization of terminology, idioms, statements, and rhetorical techniques in media to be fundamental to a journalist's methodology. These linguistic choices serve as both

communicative tools and conduits for political message, influencing public opinion, garnering support, bolstering legitimacy, and marginalizing adversaries.

COGNITION AND PRAGMATIC

Van Dijk asserts that all writings can be analysed through those dimensions. Despite comprising diverse aspects, all these components form a cohesive entity, interrelated and mutually reinforcing. Dijk's discourse encompasses three dimensions: text, social cognition, and social context. Dijk synthesizes the three elements of discourse into a cohesive analysis. The article analyses the use of structural and rhetorical approaches to emphasize a specific point.



Social cognition examines the process of news text induction, which includes individual cognition from journalists (Van Dijk 1988). Cognitive pragmatic and cognitive-semantic research on meaning creation in conversation is currently underrepresented in Conversation Discourse Studies (CDS).

Pragmatic techniques, including presupposition, implicature, innuendo, and allusion, are acknowledged for their significance in argumentation and ideological discourse (Wodak, 2007). H.G. Widdowson, in his examination of linguistic meaning, defined "context" as "the elements of the circumstances surrounding real language use that are deemed pertinent to meaning". He further stated, "In other words, context is a schematic construct... achieving pragmatic meaning requires the alignment of the linguistic components of the code with the schematic elements of the context" (Widdowson 2014, p. 126).

The discourse and its context are intricately linked: the discourse elucidates its context, while the context aids in the interpretation of the assertions inside the discourse. Contextual information is crucial for discourse analysis. Grice's research recognizes that linguistic information frequently lacks completeness, and that pragmatic inference is essential for attaining a thorough understanding (Grice 1975).

In communication, a similar approach for a listener entail emulating the speaker's decision-making process by examining how a network of factors intention, context, and knowledge culminate in speech selection. A listener is urged to replicate the speaker's behaviour by utilizing a rational, goal-directed selection framework. Speakers must assess many phrases to

identify the most effective one for enhancing audience understanding of the intended meaning in a particular context.

METHODOLOGY, DATA AND RESULTS

The data was selected from the English publications The Dawn and the Express Tribune on May 16, 2026. Numerous narratives regarding the decline of meritocracy were prevalent in the extensive coverage of Pakistani media during this period. The foundation of my work is this issue. This data selection is justified as follows:

- a. This study uses a corpus for cognitive and pragmatic analysis. It offers persuasive linguistic examples for pragmatic and cognitive analysis.
- b. It encompasses the requisite facts to evaluate the phenomenon of meritocracy erosion in the specified context.

The study focusses on analysing the cognitive and pragmatic components of discourse, along with potential correlations between these components and the linguistic forms that pragmatically and cognitively convey the concept of meritocracy's disintegration.

This analysis includes headlines from the following notable English-language newspapers in Pakistan:

1. The Daily Dawn
2. The Express Tribune

Given that media discourse profoundly influences the formation of attitudes and ideas in contemporary society, the decline of meritocracy is a compelling subject for scholars across all disciplines. This section analyses nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, and favouritism, emphasizing the presentation styles employed in media discourse and the informational value of these materials. A primary objective of Pakistani media discourse is to depict instances of nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, favouritism, and associated challenges that generate distinct cognitive frameworks impacted by pragmatic reasons.

The dawn an English newspaper of Pakistan writes about erosion of meritocracy as, *The petitioners' counsel contended that their clients had secured high marks in the screening test and had appeared in the written part of the examination and performed well, but under extraneous considerations, the commission declared its "blue-eyed" candidates successful.* [The Dawn]. In the given text the erosion of meritocracy is represented in the text through specific lexical units that contrast earned qualification with corrupt favouritism, one of the journalist's cognitive models (s). This model comprises constituents such as The PARTICIPANT component is represented by the petitioners' counsel contended that their clients and SPSC. The PARTICIPANT'S CHARACTERISTICS (Aspirants and SPSC). The ACTION component is represented by petition. The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *contended-struggled, extraneous- outside, considerations-favours, blue-eyed- favourite*. The linguistic units that signify distinct meaning are referred to as terms. The noun phrase "*high marks*" denotes quantifiable, objective academic achievement and exceptional performance. The verb "*secured*" underscores that the result was definitively attained via personal endeavour. The verb phrase "*performed well*" signifies demonstrated proficiency and superior quality of work during the assessment. The coordinating conjunction "*but*" establishes a stark contrast, immediately opposing earned merit with corruption. The noun phrase "*extraneous consideration*" refers to irrelevant, external, or unapproved considerations, such as bribery, political influences, or familial connections, that supersede official exam scores. The term "*commission*" denotes the formal governing body, indicating that the disintegration is systematic and institutional rather than merely individual. The verb "*declared*" indicating the

improper exercise of governmental authority to coercively enforce an unjust decision. The colloquial adjective phrase “*blue-eyed*” refers to candidates who are favoured or preferred folks. It expressly signifies those chosen based on personal liking or relationships rather than genuine competence.

The Dawn publish a story about erosion of meritocracy in following way, *The counsel also argued that the SPSC has lost its credibility as the petitioners had filed representations against “managed” results, but neither had any notice been issued nor had any hearing been afforded.* [The Dawn]. In this text, the erosion of meritocracy is represented through lexical units that highlight institutional failure, procedural injustice, and the falsification of competitive outcomes. The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *argued- cited evidence, credibility- trust, managed- controlled*. “SPSC” (Sindh Public Service Commission), A proper term denoting the official institutional arbiter of merit. Its inclusion indicates that the corruption is pervasive and structural. A verb phrase “*lost its credibility*”, signifying a total erosion of public trust, suggesting the institution is no longer perceived as an honest or impartial evaluator. A noun phrase “*Managed results*”, in which the quotation marks and the adjective “*managed*” indicate artificial manipulation. It indicates that examination results were predetermined, dishonest, and contrived rather than achieved by objective performance. A formal noun “*Representations*” denoting official, written grievances. The victims attempted to utilize appropriate legal avenues to assert their validity but were disregarded. A coordinating conjunction “*but*” employed as a structural pivot to juxtapose the citizens’ legal endeavour with the institution’s total inaction. Correlative conjunctions “*Neither... nor*” underscore complete, dual negation. They emphasize the complete lack of administrative justice. Noun phrases “*No notice... no hearing*” denoting essential legal rights. Their rejection “*not issued*”, “*not afforded*” demonstrates that the institution employs secrecy and opacity to undermine accountability and perpetuate favouritism.

The following excerpt of the daily Dawn Pakistan narrates an event of the erosion of meritocracy as, *Recently, the Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan also submitted a resolution in the Sindh Assembly, seeking a debate and forensic audit of the exam results.* [The Dawn]. In the given text the erosion of meritocracy is represented through word combination, *forensic audit of the exam results*, one of the journalist’s cognitive models (s). This model also comprises such constituents as The PARTICIPANT component is represented by *Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan and SPSC*. The CHARACTERISTICS of the PARTICIPANTS (*Political Party and public institute*). The ACTION component is represented by *submitted a resolution in the Sindh Assembly*. The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *submitted a resolution- a written motion, seeking a debate- public discussion, forensic audit- scientific examination, the exam results- outcomes*. The lexical units employed by the journalist, possessing distinct meanings and purposes, are utilized to achieve certain pragmatic objectives. The adverb “*Recently*” transitions the timeline from a historical trend “*for years*” to a contemporary, pressing issue. It imparts journalistic urgency to the writing. By specifically identifying a political organization (“*Muttahida Qaumi Movement-Pakistan*”) and a legislative institution (“*Sindh Assembly*”), the text presents tangible, significant participants. This substitutes the unnamed, agentless forces “*allegations*”, “*criticism*” observed in preceding sections. The term “*forensic audit*” conveys a distinctly technical and investigative implication. A “*forensic*” audit, in contrast to a regular review, suggests an anticipation of revealing concealed fraud or systemic manipulation, so heightening the language stakes. The term “*also*” functions as a significant cohesive element in literature. It frames MQM-P’s legislative action as a component of an

escalating, collective tsunami of opposition. The present participle “seeking” governs a compound object “debate and forensic audit”. By focusing on the specific noun phrase “the exam results”, the text anchors the expansive philosophical discourse on “merit” and “trust” to a concrete, assessable collection of physical papers.

Following excerpt of the daily Dawn gives the details of the erosion of meritocracy situation as, *A large number of candidates who sat various examinations, including the 2024 Combined Competitive Exams (CCE), held a protest sit-in outside the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) headquarters the other day. The demonstrators were protesting what they described as “questionable results”, demanding transparency in the commission’s grading process.* [The Dawn]. In the text the erosion of meritocracy is represented through “questionable results”, one of the journalist’s cognitive model (s). The journalist uses linguistic units having certain purpose and meaning. The expression “A large number of candidates” employs an ambiguous yet significant quantifier “large number”. This affirms safety and credibility in numbers, portraying the protest not as an isolated grievance by a few individuals, but as a widespread, communal movement. Expressions like as “outside the Sindh Public Service Commission (SPSC) headquarters” (locative) and “the other day” (temporal) situate the narrative inside a distinct physical locale and a recent temporal context. This converts the piece from a theoretical critique into a firsthand news story. The application of quote marks around “questionable results” fulfills a significant linguistic purpose. It establishes journalistic detachment. The grammar demonstrates that, although the CCE is the primary catalyst, the underlying issue encompasses several institutional assessments by enclosing the specific exam name (“including the 2024 CCE”) behind parentheses and a subordinate clause. When candidates characterize official outcomes as “questionable results”, it indicates a shared conviction that the system no longer values genuine competence, expertise, or diligence. Meritocracy cannot thrive in obscurity. The call for “transparency in the grading process” indicates that the existing system functions as a “black box”, obscuring the criteria for selections and fostering accusations of bias. A substantial protest sit-in outside a public service commission offices indicates that the principal stakeholders, the candidates, have lost confidence in institutional processes, perceiving public recruitment as defective or manipulated.

The daily Dawn an English newspaper publishes story about the erosion of meritocracy as, *The protesters primarily challenged the 2024 CCE results, alleging that associates of the sitting Sindh government officials had been favoured in the selection process. They further claimed that SPSC officials systematically “distribute” departmental vacancies amongst themselves whenever positions are advertised.* [The Dawn]. In the excerpt the erosion of meritocracy is represented through word combination, *government officials had been favoured in the selection process, SPSC officials systematically “distribute” departmental vacancies amongst themselves*, one of the journalist’s cognitive models (s). The model also comprises such constituents as The PARTICIPANTS (*The protesters, Sindh government officials, SPSC officials*). The CHARACTERISTICS of The PARTICIPANTS (*aspirants, public office holders*). The ACTION component is represented via challenged, *alleging, claimed*. The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *protesters- unified political force defined entirely by its opposition, challenged- Disputed the truth, alleging- asserting, favoured- given unfair advantages, selection- choosing, distribute- share out a share, vacancies-jobs*. Expressions such as “associates of the incumbent Sindh government officials” delineate a distinct semantic domain of nepotism and political favouritism. It explicitly connects the challenged body (SPSC) to the political class in authority (“the sitting government”). The term “distribute”, enclosed in scare

quotes, serves as the semantic anchor of the sentence. It removes the meritocratic framework from the recruitment process, converting public positions into private commodities or prizes that are allocated in secrecy. The terms “*primarily*” and “*systematically*” characterize the purported corruption not as a collection of random, isolated errors, but as a structured, deliberate, and habitual approach. The factual verb “*challenged*” promptly transfers the burden of proof to a participial clause initiated by “*alleging*”. This syntactically establishes a protective buffer for the author, indicating that the subsequent statement is an unverified assertion made by a particular group. Enclosing the term “*distribute*” in quote marks fulfills two functions. It encapsulates the precise, incisive terminology of the protestors to underscore their indignation, while legally shielding the newspaper from a direct defamation lawsuit by the SPSC executives. The text establishes a clear dichotomy. On one side are the “*protesters*” and “*candidates*” (*the marginalized public*), while on the other are the “*associates*”, “*officials*”, and “*government*” (*the privileged insiders*). The term underscores a total collapse of the social compact between the state and its educated youth. The extract illustrates the decline of meritocracy by revealing the purported substitution of equitable, talent-driven competition with pervasive favouritism and institutional corruption. The assertion that “*associates of the sitting Sindh government officials had been favoured*” suggests that political affiliation and personal relationships had supplanted merit as the basis for selection. Laborious effort, scholarly achievement, and meticulous preparation are rendered entirely inconsequential, excluding competent individuals from the public sector.

The Dawn newspaper is one of the very popular English newspapers in Pakistan publishes story about erosion of meritocracy as, *The students led by Wajahat Hingorjo, Farman Ali, Zabiullah Mastoi and others gathered outside Shamsul Ulema Daudpota Library and then marched up to the SPSC offices to stage the sit-in. The protest continued for over two hours. Representatives of different nationalist groups and parties joined their protest. They demanded removal of SPSC chairman Mohammad Wasim.* [The Dawn]. In the news story the “the erosion of meritocracy” concept is represented via *sit-in, protest, demanded removal of SPSC chairman*. The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *marched up-a walk protest, stage the sit-in- a form of protest*. Personalization of Proper Nouns: By specifically identifying individual student leaders “*Wajahat Hingorjo, Farman Ali, Zabiullah Mastoi*”, the text anchors the protest in authentic human agency. This substitutes the nameless collectives “*protesters*”, “*candidates*” employed in prior chapters, providing the movement with recognizable leaders. The book employs specific local location, including the “*Shamsul Ulema Daudpota Library*” and “*SPSC offices*”. The selection of a library as the initial reference establishes a nuanced semantic connection to education, intellect, and merit, strongly contrasting with the bureaucratic objectives of their protest. Terminology such as “*nationalist groups*,” “*parties*,” and “*sit-in*” situates the event within the distinct context of Sindhi nationalist and student politics, illustrating the transformation of a bureaucratic grievance into a broader political coalition. This compound predicate structure “*gathered... and then marched... to stage...*” employs consecutive verbs to reflect the physical movement of the crowd. The adverbial connective “*then*” emphasizes this sequential historical development. The expression “*for over two hours*” employs a temporal modifier to measure the duration and disruptive effect of the demonstration. The use of the direct word “*demand*” illustrates the resolute and inflexible character of the protestors’ primary political aim. The institutional target is identified for the first time in the text as “*SPSC chairman Mohammad Wasim*”. This alters the dispute linguistically.

In another news report in Pakistan’s English the Dawn publishes story about “the erosion of meritocracy” in following way, *Others who joined in the protest to express*

solidarity with the protesting students included analyst Jami Chandio, Sindh United Party leader Roshan Buriro, Sindh Hari Committee leader Samar Jatoi, PTI's Insaf Wing leader Dr Badar Channa, Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association leader (SPLA) Yaqoob Chandio, Faisal Mughal, Naveed Jarwar, Sindhu Nawaz, Shakir Shar and Abdul Wahab Munshi advocate. [The Dawn]. Whole text represents the institutionalisation and social mainstreaming of the crisis of meritocracy, cognitive model (s). The model also comprises such constituents as The PARTICIPANT (*students, analyst Jami Chandio, Sindh United Party leader Roshan Buriro, Sindh Hari Committee leader Samar Jatoi, PTI's Insaf Wing leader Dr Badar Channa, Sindh Professors and Lecturers Association leader (SPLA) Yaqoob Chandio, Faisal Mughal, Naveed Jarwar, Sindhu Nawaz, Shakir Shar and Abdul Wahab Munshi advocate.*). The PARTICIPANT'S CHARACTERISTICS (Aspirants, civil society, political activists and SPSC). The language units which are used to represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *protest- disapproval, or dissent, solidarity- sympathy*. The recurrence of the term "*protest*" "*joined in the protest*" / "*protesting students*" underscores the principal topic of resistance. It connects the external advocates directly to the affected pupils. The acronym "*(SPLA)*" appears after the title instead of the complete organizational name. The enumeration of notable individuals serves as a cognitive validation method. By referencing esteemed individuals such as a "*analyst*", a "*professor*", and a "*advocate*", the text encourages the reader to perceive the protest not as a marginal student complaint, but as a credible, academically substantiated movement. The text evokes a cognitive framework of solidarity. By integrating many sectors media (analysis), *grassroots agriculture (Hari committee)*, *academia (SPLA)*, *mainstream politics (PTI)*, and *the legal system (advocate)* the reader's cognition interprets the occurrence as an uncommon, extensive social consensus opposing the SPSC. The expression "*participated in the protest to demonstrate solidarity*" alters the reader's cognitive viewpoint. It transforms the physical area outside the SPSC office from a site of individual student discontent to a focal point of unified social opposition.

The Express Tribune is also one of the popular English newspapers in the Pakistan publishes the erosion of meritocracy story as, *Petitioners claimed that deserving candidates were ignored while "blue-eyed" individuals were declared successful. They argued that complaints submitted to the commission regarding the "managed" results were neither acknowledged nor heard.* [The express tribune]. In the text the erosion of meritocracy is represented via "*blue-eyed*" individuals, the "*managed*" results, cognitive model (s). The language units which represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *deserving-able, complaints- resentment*. The phrase "*blue-eyed*" serves as a figurative expression denoting "*favoured individuals*" or "*favourites of those in power*". Although originating in British English, term is profoundly entrenched in South Asian legal and journalistic spheres to signify nepotism, cronyism, and capricious administrative favouritism. As in the preceding chapters, the terms "*blue-eyed*" and "*managed*" are enclosed in quotation marks. This represents a deliberate journalistic decision that indicates to the reader that these terms are integral to the unrefined allegations made by the petitioners, protecting the reporter from libel while maintaining the unfiltered intensity of the complaint. The expression "*neither acknowledged nor heard*" employs a parallel passive verb structure. This generates a progressive semantic impact the commission not only neglected to listen (heard); they also failed to execute the fundamental administrative duty of registering the paperwork (acknowledged). The term "*managed*" serves as a calculated euphemism for "*rigged*", "*manipulated*", or "*fraudulently altered*". By employing a term that conventionally denotes systematic administrative oversight "*management*" inside a corrupt framework, the petitioners

underscore a profound irony: the sole aspect the commission is methodically orchestrating is the fraud itself.

The Express Tribune newspaper in the Pakistan publishes the erosion of meritocracy story as, *The court has now restrained the authorities from proceeding further until the next hearing. Competitive examinations are meant to represent merit and transparency. Once doubts emerge over fairness, the entire system begins to lose legitimacy in the eyes of candidates who spend years preparing for these examinations.* [The express tribune]. In the given text “the erosion of meritocracy” concept is represented through *Competitive examinations are meant to represent merit and transparency. Once doubts emerge over fairness, the entire system begins to lose legitimacy*, cognitive model (s). The language units which represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *restrained- control, authorities- administrative power and control, proceeding- actions moving forward, transparency- transparent, doubts- uncertainty, fairness- without favouritism, legitimacy- valid.* The expression “*court has now restrained the authorities*” evokes a mental image of an unequivocal impediment. It indicates to the reader that the government’s progress has been abruptly halted by a higher moral and legal authority, underscoring the gravity of the crisis. The statement “*Competitive examinations are intended to embody merit and transparency*” provides a definitive, unambiguous standard in the reader’s perception. It serves as a benchmark for what ought to be, rendering the ensuing reality of “*doubts*” a stark and unsettling breach of a revered societal norm. Referencing candidates who “*invest years in preparation*” elicits profound empathy via an effort-reward paradigm. The reader’s mind assesses the substantial cognitive, financial, and emotional involvement of these pupils, amplifying the sorrow of the system’s loss of legitimacy. The “*entire system starts to lose legitimacy*” serves as a practical warning to the state. The journalist suggests that the threat extends beyond merely dissatisfied applicants to a total collapse of the state’s power.

The following excerpt of the Express Tribune, which publishes the erosion of meritocracy story as, *Social media criticism and protests by unsuccessful candidates reflected a growing distrust that has followed the SPSC for years. Allegations of delays and questionable recruitment practices have repeatedly surfaced against the commission, weakening confidence in one of Sindh’s most important institutions. Public recruitment bodies cannot function effectively if candidates believe outcomes are influenced.* [The express tribune]. In the given text “the erosion of meritocracy” concept is represented through *Followed the SPSC for years, Public recruitment bodies cannot function effectively if candidates believe outcomes are influenced*, cognitive model (s). The language units which represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *criticism- disapproval, reflected- shown, delays- slowed down or late, questionable- Doubtful, recruitment- hiring, surfaced- became apparent or known, weakening- collapse.*

Words, like *criticism, protests, unsuccessful, distrust, allegations, delays, questionable,* and *weakening* create a dense semantic field of institutional failure and crisis. Terms like *candidates, SPSC, recruitment practices, commission, institutions,* and *public recruitment bodies* frame the issue within public administration and governance. The journalist uses evaluative nouns and adjectives *questionable, growing, important, effectively* rather than concrete details. This makes the statement an analytical commentary rather than a raw news report. The subject is a long noun phrase “*Social media criticism and protests by unsuccessful candidates*”. By making the actions “*criticism and protests*” the subject of the sentence rather than the people acting, the author distances the prose from personal emotion, making the analysis feel more objective. The relative clause “*that has followed the SPSC for years*” grounds a current event in a historical trend. The phrase “*have repeatedly surfaced*” uses an

intransitive verb structure. It leaves the “agent” anonymous it does not state *who* raised the allegations. The sentence ends with a participial clause “*weakening confidence...*”, which naturally links the unproven allegations directly to a definitive consequence (the loss of trust). This sentence shifts into the simple present tense to state a universal rule or maxim. It uses a conditional framework “*cannot... if...*”. By broadening the scope from “SPSC” to “*public recruitment bodies*” in general, the author elevates the argument from a local grievance to an established principle of political science. The phrase “*a growing distrust that has followed the SPSC for years*” presupposes that the distrust is real and historical, taking it as a given fact rather than an item up for debate. In the final sentence, the actual existence of corruption is bypassed; the writer focuses entirely on *perception* “*if candidates believe outcomes are influenced*”. The use of the modal verb “*cannot*” in the final line adds absolute rhetorical certainty to the conclusion, leaving no room for alternative outcomes.

The Express Tribune newspaper narrates the erosion of meritocracy story as, *The situation also highlights the absence of credible accountability mechanisms within recruitment institutions. If candidates feel compelled to seek judicial intervention simply to have their grievances heard, it points to a failure of internal oversight.* [The express tribune]. In the given text “the erosion of meritocracy” concept is represented through the *absence of credible accountability mechanisms within recruitment institutions*, cognitive model (s). The language units which represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *situation- circumstance, highlights-pointing out, credible- convincing, intervention-interference, grievances- complaints*. Terms such as absence, accountability, intervention, grievances, and failure transform intricate behaviours into fixed, indisputable notions. This redirects attention from individual malefactors to systemic, structural deficiencies. Employing adjectives such as credible and internal sets a standard for acceptable governance. The text suggests that systems described as lacking “*credibility*” may exist theoretically yet be practically ineffective. The expression “*feel compelled*” signifies a psychological aspect of obligation. It characterizes the legal action undertaken by candidates not as a voluntary decision, but as a compelled recourse dictated by the system. The grammatical subject is an abstract phrase “*The situation*” that functions as an active agent emphasizing a fault. This rhetorical strategy renders the result appear inevitable. The dependent sentence “*If candidates feel...*” delineates a measurable symptom. The independent clause “*it points to...*” conveys the diagnostic. The adverb diminishes the candidates’ requests, highlighting the simplicity of their wants *merely to be heard* and amplifying the institutional failure to provide them. The verb phrase serves as a rhetorical marker. This indicates that the relationship between judicial intervention and internal failure is an objective, observable reality that the author is simply noting, rather than a conclusion they are deducing.

The Express Tribune newspaper publishes an story about the erosion of meritocracy as, *The provincial government must recognise that restoring confidence in the SPSC requires more than defending procedures. Transparent evaluation systems and independent oversight have become essential. The court will determine the legality of the CCE-2024 results. However, the larger issue remains the steady erosion of public trust in institutions that are supposed to safeguard merit.* [The express tribune]. In the above text the “the erosion of meritocracy” concept is represented through word combination, *the larger issue remains the steady erosion of public trust in institutions that are supposed to safeguard merit*, cognitive model (s). The language units which represent the situational cognitive model have the following semantic peculiarities: *Transparent- easily understood or detected, evaluation- a pre-existing set of criteria, legality- in accordance with the law, erosion- destruction or wearing away, safeguard- protection*. When you use the verb phrase “*must recognize*”, you

are under a clear moral and legal duty. By using “*must*” instead of “*should*” or “*ought to*”, the author takes on the role of general authority over the provincial government and tells it what it needs to do to stay alive. The phrase “*have become essential*” moves into the realm of the present moment. The infinitive phrase “*restoring confidence*” is put right next to the phrase “*defending procedures*” in terms of syntax. The use of the future tense auxiliary verb “*will*” show that the speaker is absolutely sure about the legal authority. The contrastive conjunction “*however*” is what holds the last line together. This marking is very important for negotiating text. The term “*steady erosion of public trust*” refers to the way rocks break down over time. The word “*erosion*” suggests a long-lasting, damaging process that is hard to stop. It moves the blame from a single bad test to a long-term, systemic failure of government. The phrase “*institutions that are supposed to protect merit*” sets the tone for the argument. The word “*are supposed to*” adds a grammatical distance that shows a big difference between what the organization is supposed to do (protect merit) and what it does.

CONCLUSION

Pakistani newspapers illustrate nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, and favouritism by documenting instances of these practices, hence portraying a detrimental image of the implicated institutions and individuals. Newspapers utilize phrases like nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, favouritism, and abuse of power to report on misconduct. The activities component of the cognitive models is represented by idiomatic expressions, verbs, and nouns that illustrate the actions of a PARTICIPANT, encumbered by their own transgressions, controlled outcomes, innocent, allocated, clear assessment, and accusation. Nonetheless, the publications portray SPSC officials as corrupt, power-abusing individuals involved in unethical and illegal activities. The use of personal pronouns related to the PARTICIPANTS element of the cognitive model demonstrates a disregard for SPSC and officials who violate the institute's code of conduct.

This study illustrates that newspapers depict nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, and favouritism as detrimental to the youth and emerging talents in the Sindh region. The journalist's objective is to convey the pertinent aspects of the topic to educate and inform readers about nepotism, the decline of meritocracy, and malpractice.

Cognitive models, together pragmatic and discourse analysis, have facilitated the creation of a framework that provides a coherent and logical elucidation of nepotism and the decline of meritocracy, as depicted in newspaper headlines. Verbal modes enable the development of a clear understanding of nepotism and the decline of meritocracy through cognitive tools. The majority of the chosen news items concentrate on the linguistic depictions of cognitive frameworks. The investigation underscores the considerable persuasive and rhetorical effectiveness of these cognitive capacities in conveying messages and influencing readers.

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