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# Contested Medium: A Critical Ethnography of English-Medium Instruction Policy and Classroom Practices in Pakistani Private Colleges

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***Abstract*:** This critical ethnographic study investigates the disjuncture between official English-medium instruction (EMI) policy and its actual implementation in three private colleges in Lahore, Pakistan. Through nine months of participant observation, sixty semi-structured interviews, and documentary analysis, the research reveals how EMI functions as a contested site where neoliberal aspirations, linguistic hierarchies, and classroom realities collide. Data demonstrate that while institutional policies valorise English as a vehicle of social mobility, pedagogical practices remain hybridised, with code-switching serving as a pragmatic survival strategy rather than a pedagogical choice. The study identifies three key tensions: policy performativity versus linguistic reality, economic capital versus cultural capital, and institutional prestige versus student comprehension. Employing a theoretical synthesis of critical language policy and Bourdieusian concepts of symbolic violence and linguistic capital, the article argues that EMI policy in Pakistan's private sector perpetuates social stratification while ostensibly promising democratisation. Findings challenge the uncritical adoption of EMI models and advocate for culturally responsive, bilingual pedagogies that acknowledge local epistemologies. The research contributes to South Asian language policy scholarship by foregrounding practitioner and student voices, thereby addressing a critical gap in empirically grounded, contextually situated EMI research in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** English-medium instruction, language policy, critical ethnography, private colleges, Pakistan, Bourdieu, code-switching, symbolic violence

## Introduction

The Pakistani language scene can be viewed as a complicated web of competing ideologies in which English is gaining more and more hegemonic roles even though it is still the mother tongue of less than one per cent of the population. Since gaining independence in 1947, successive governments have been struggling with the question over medium of instruction in the country alternating between the Urdu nationalisation agenda and the English-mediated globalisation agenda. The Education Policy 2009 was the turning point of neoliberalism as it required both the public and the private sector to use English as most of the medium of instruction in class one.

This change of policy, which was consolidated by the National Education Policy 2017, was to place English not as a foreign language but as the lingua franca of economic opportunity, which was supposedly democratising access to global capital.

It has created the emergence of the private educational institutions as the main arena of EMI practice, which position themselves as entry points to the transnational mobility. The fees of these colleges vary between two hundred thousand to a million Pakistani rupees per annum thus attracting urban middle and upper-middle-class families who perceive English proficiency as a cultural capital, which is necessary in social reproduction. The industry has experienced a growth of multi fold levels as the sector now has more than sixty eight thousand private institutions in operation in Pakistan as per the report by the Pakistan Education Statistics 2020-21. Such propagation indicates what Bourdieu refers to as the logic of distinction, whereby the elite groups possess the aesthetic of monopoly of language to occupy positions of hegemony.

But behind the shiny prospectuses and pronouncements of the policies is a pedagogical paradox, which has been under-researched critically. The ideological foundations of EMI in Pakistan are still being unraveled in recent studies by Manan and David (2014) and Haque (2016), but empirical descriptions of classroom-level negotiations are very few. The current research fills this gap by discussing the translation or failure of EMI policy in pedagogical practice in contentious domains of college classrooms. In particular, it examines how teachers and students negotiate the gap between institutional monolingualism ideologies and bilingual realities, in which Urdu, Punjabi and English are circulated in multifaceted, overlapping areas.

This research is not only important in pedagogical terms but also one that concerns the fundamental questions of social justice, linguistic rights, and educational equity. In Pakistan, language policy is a power as Rassool and Mansoor (2007) claim, and it naturalises inequalities of classes by seeming to be a meritocratic discourse. Being relatively free of state regulation, private colleges emerge as laboratories where educational neoliberal experiments are conducted, in which parental aspirations, institutional branding, and student abilities come into contact in unforeseeable manners. The paper takes a critical ethnographic approach in highlighting these intersections by preempting voices that are usually traditionally sidelined in top-down policy studies.

The context of the research is especially relevant in the light of the educational situation in Pakistan in the post-2020 period as the COVID-19 pandemic catalysed the digital transformation, ironically increasing the disparities already present in the education sector and providing new grounds on which the linguistic negotiation could take place. The artificiality of monolingual policy requirements was made apparent through online platforms which had the effect of offering camouflage to the practice of translanguaging, which would have been punished in a physical classroom setting. Moreover, the debates of the recent Single National Curriculum revived linguistic controversies and, therefore, made this research timely and policy-relevant.

Fieldwork preliminary observations showed some shocking incongruities. In Elite College (pseudonym), a high-ranking institution in the A-level, framed policy documents in the principal office demanded the environment of pure English, but recordings in the classroom revealed that on average, the teachers code-switched in every forty-seven seconds. In a medium-ranking institution, Heritage College, students said there is a sense of anxiety-induced silence and not participation, with English termed as a decorative language on which we put on tests to pass. These new tensions define the main question of this article: how do the participants of the Pakistani private college system balance the conflicting expectations of EMI policy and the effective implementation of the pedagogical process?

## Significance of the Study

This study contributes to the study of language policy and educational linguistics in three different ways. To begin with, it offers the first continuous critical ethnography of EMI application in Pakistani privative colleges, which has granular, process-driven information that augments macro-level policy studies. Although census statistics and policy documents expose the official stands, they hide the micro-politics whereby policies are opposed, redefined or circumvented. The study presents a three-dimensional portrait of EMI as practice instead of principle by recording the classroom interactions, teacher narratives and student experiences in three levels of the institutions.

Second, the research integrates the Western critical theory with South Asian linguistics, which concerns what Khan (2015) calls the epistemic disconnect of Pakistani educational research. The theoretical paradigm incorporates the Bourdieuian notion of la violence symbolique and the historical approach to the English as a gatekeeper language by Rahman (2002) and the study of the pedagogical implications by Shamim (2011). This dialogic methodology opposes blind importation of Eurocentric models and not parochial introversion, developing conceptual instruments that are sensitive to the postcolonial educational peculiarities of Pakistan.

Third, the study has the direct practical implications on the teacher education, curriculum development, and quality assurance mechanisms. The study will inform educators, administrators, and policymakers by helping them to establish empirically supported insights into the formulation of EMI models that are contextually sensitive by recognizing certain areas of pressure between policy and practice. The results are in opposition to the dichotomous framing of English and Urdu but they propose a heteroglossic approach which sees the multilingual of Pakistan as a pedagogical ecology versus an obstacle.

## Research Objectives

1. To ethnographically document the gap between official EMI policy and classroom linguistic practices in Pakistani private colleges.
2. To examine how teachers, students, and administrators negotiate linguistic hierarchies and ideologies in their daily educational practices.
3. To analyse the socio-economic and pedagogical consequences of EMI implementation across different tiers of private institutions.
4. To develop a culturally situated theoretical framework for understanding EMI policy as a contested social practice in postcolonial Pakistan.

## Research Questions

1. How do classroom linguistic practices correspond with or deviate from institutional EMI policies in private colleges?
2. What strategies do teachers and students employ to manage comprehension gaps arising from English-only mandates?
3. How does EMI policy reproduce or challenge existing social stratifications within Pakistan's private education sector?
4. What alternative models of bilingual pedagogy emerge from practitioner experiences?

## Literature Review

In Pakistan, the medium of instruction issue came to a head during the Constituent Assembly deliberations of 1947-1956 in which Urdu, Bengali and English competed to be national languages. The history of the Objectives Resolution reveals how the Islamic ethos of the Objectives Resolution first favoured the Urdu language but the Anglophile orientation of the bureaucratic elite and the military elite still maintained that English was the language of power (Abbas, 1993). This duality was legalised in 1959 when the Sharif Commission proposed that Urdu be used in mass education with English being used in elite institutions, a plan that forms the basis of the current language apartheid.

The 1973 Constitution tried language nationalism with Urdu declared as the national language but later military dictatorship regimes deprived these achievements. With a major discontinuity, the Education Policy 1998 brought back English in class one as an attempt to modernise the education system. Mansoor (2005) criticizes this policy as economically deterministic because it overlooked the cognitive-developmental tenets of mother-tongue education. This has been boosted by the 2009 policy that made English a compulsory subject although a survey conducted by British Council (2010) revealed that ninety five percent of teachers were not proficient in English.

The recent scholarship has questioned such changes with critical perspectives. Rahman (2002) maintains that English is a shibboleth, and it is the finest word to cut social classes with a scalpel. According to the neo-Marxist analysis provided by Haque (2016), EMI is a neoliberal project commodifying education by making students into the source of linguistic capital in the form of consumers. In the meantime, the empirical mapping

conducted by Manan and David (2014) demonstrates institutional heterogeneity indicating the differentiation with which EMI is adopted in institutions of higher relevance, namely, elite, middle- tiers, and low-cost private schools and the resulting generation of different student subjectivities.

EMI Global Phenomenon and Local Practice.

EMI has had a spread internationally as universities are taking up internationalisation agendas. According to Tollefson and Tsui (2004) three clusters of motivation have been found; these are economic competitiveness, knowledge transfer, and human capital development. But, they warn that these kinds of policies tend to favor the imperialism of languages at the expense of pedagogical efficacy. As the research by Erling et al. (2016) in Bangladesh (which is contextually similar to Pakistan) shows, the students in rural areas feel that English as an alienating force, which leads to the proposal of localised, bilingual models.

The EMI discussion in Pakistan bridges with the post 9/11 securitisation discourse in which English speaking is correlated with moderate Islamic identity. This conflation is criticised by Shamim (2011) he says it has placed English as a civilising force at the expense of indigenous knowledge systems. The private college industry targets these fears, promoting the concept of the native speaker teacher and international curricula without necessarily ensuring any quality.

The research by Mustafa (2011) and Mahboob and Jain (2016) presents the results of the EMI implementation as the linguistic genocide where the mother tongues are devalued systematically. Nevertheless, such analyses tend to ignore agentive resistance. Recent ethnographic research of Perveen and Manan (2017) records the use of underground bilingual strategies by teachers who circumvent policy by teachers to get understanding. This paper augments such results by offering long-term ethnographic information which is multi-sited.

## Negotiations at the Classroom and Agency Level

The teacher agency and policy appropriation have been theorised as the implementation gap in language policy. Ball et al. (2012) claim that policy is not something that is simply received but rather translated by the beliefs of the teachers, their experiences, and material conditions. This translation takes place in the sphere of the private colleges in Pakistan, where the organization of the sphere is based on competition in the market and the pressure of parents. As Perveen and Manan (2017) indicate, teachers can act as policy brokers in terms of providing the intermediation between institutional requirements and student understanding by using secret bilingual practices. Their investigation in Karachi private schools indicates that ninety-two per cent of the teachers code-switch to facilitate conceptual clarity even though it is banned by the institution.

Such an agency is, however, constrained by surveillance. Mustafa (2011) records the use of mystery shoppers by the private colleges to check compliance with English-only rules by the teachers by pretending to be potential parents. This type of panopticism leads to what Foucault (1977) terms as disciplinary power in which teachers take self-control, and this results in what Shamim (2011) refers to as anxious pedagogy i.e. teacher-centered teaching, unwillingness to listen to the question, and stress on memorization. Its effects are pedagogically catastrophic, as interactive learning spaces become the places of linguistic acting with form overriding the role.

## Student Living and Identity Work

The Pakistani EMI policy discussions still lack the voice of students conspicuously. Recent ethnography by Hashmi and Saeed (2020) fills this gap, through which they describe how students negotiate linguistic schizophrenia, in which they act like English proficient in classrooms and switch to Urdu or Punjabi in peer interactions. Their longitudinal study of forty-five students of private colleges depicts the identity fragmentation where individuals identified themselves as neither here nor there; not speaking like native people but being foreign to mother tongue literary traditions.

It is an intersection of this identity negotiation and gender and class. The study by Zubair (2015) within Lahore colleges proves that female learners are subjected to greater surveillance concerning linguistic purity, and families invest a great deal of money in the educational process of English medium as a marriage capital. On the other hand, student males with business background tend to perceive the English as a tool, and they need to learn the networking skills more than academic literacy. Such results are indicative that EMI is what Butler

(1990) calls a performative, namely, a recurrent linguistic action that forms sociologically recognized identities. But material circumstances condition the performance; and as one of the Heritage College students deplored, We are trained on Shakespeare, but do not know our physics teacher.

## COVID-19 Disruptions and Digital Transformation

The implementation of EMI was rebalanced by the shift to online learning brought about by the pandemic. Abbas et al. (2021) discovered that Zoom chat feature transformed into a form of translanguaging and students would collectively create meaning through mixed codes without being monitored by the teacher. WhatsApp study groups also thrived and students used to share Urdu medium YouTube tutorials to complement lectures in English. Translanguaging as conceptualised by Garcia and Wei (2014) is, in this digital turn, the strategic use of complete linguistic repertoires in the process of learning.

Nonetheless, the digital access reflected the existing discrepancies. Elite college offered laptops and broadband, whereas Aspire college students used common mobile phones, with forty three per cent of them missing classes because of the problem of connectivity. This intensified the stratifying impacts of EMI because the wealthy students had access to global English resources and the marginalised counterparts had to struggle with simple involvement. These differences have become institutionalised through post-pandemic hybrid models whereby quality is no longer determined based on pedagogical but technological standards.

## Quality Control and Regulatory Systems

The EMI quality assurance in Pakistan is poor. The commission of higher education, Higher Education Commission (HEC) requires the faculty to have English proficiency but does not offer pedagogical training of teaching using English. Punjab Private Educational Institutions Ordinance 2016 is mandatory regarding English as the medium of registration but provides no advice on zero curriculum. This deregulated space allows what Haque (2016) refers to as policy symbolism, where the institutions portray English signage and uniforms and the quality of pedagogue declines.

A comparison between them brings educative parallels. The same had been the case of the implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 in Bangladesh leading to the development of bilingual undergraduate programmes in BRAC University. The Three Language Formula in India is theoretically favoured to encourage multilingualism, but the urban markets are being conquered by the English-medium private schools. Such regional patterns indicate that the growth of EMI indicates regional elite formation processes and not so much pedagogical rationality.

## Theoretical Framework

The paper is a synthesis of critical language policy (CLP) theory and Bourdieu sociology of language that responds to the postcolonial conditions in Pakistan. CLP, formulated by Pennycook (2001) and Tollefson (2006), does not see language policy as a neutral administrative decision-making, but as ideological practice, which is reproductive of power relations. This view throws light on the way the EMI policy is being used to serve the interests of elites by posing as a meritocratic opportunity.

The ideas of habitus, capital and champ as developed by Bourdieu (1991) can be used as an analytical tool in the study of the functioning of linguistic markets. In Pakistan, English is a legitimate language as Bourdieu describes it, which brings about symbolic capital which is translated into economic benefit. Its acquisition however is expensive with private schooling, which generates what Rassool and Mansoor (2007) have termed as a pay-per-view system where language capital is bought rather than acquired. The symbolic violence that results makes social class stratifications naturalised as a personal failure with students internalising their inability to speak English as their personal incompetence.

More importantly, the critiques of South Asia are integrated into this framework. According to the historical study of the culture of ashrafiya (elite) presented by Rahman (2002), the understanding of English proficiency has been constitutive classes in colonial India, which continues to exist today in modern Pakistan. The notion of pragmatic multilingualism introduced by Shamim (2011) challenges the unidirectional theory of capital put forward by Bourdieu and demonstrates that code-switching may be resistance instead of accommodation. Equally, the article by Canagararajah (1999) on periphery scholars can help to analyze the process of Pakistani

educators adopting English into local use by decoupling it of its imperial baggage.

This framework, therefore, works dialectically with macro-level policy records being analysed as a text that creates the imagined community of English-proficient citizens and the micro-level classroom interactions showing how the imagined community comes into collision with the linguistic realities. The teachers become policy brokers, acting as intermediaries between the demands of the institutions and the needs of students, and their practices become what Levinson and Sutton (2001) refer to as policy as practice.

## Methodology

The research design is based on a critical ethnography approach, which encompasses the traditional approaches to ethnography and the emphasis on the concepts of social justice, which is presented by Madison (2012). It engages the participatory observation, in-depth interviews and documentary analysis to produce historically and politically productive scholarship. The fieldwork was observed between January and September 2022, with the opportunity to collect data and analyze it cyclically, which made it possible to detect the emergent themes in the form of theoretical sampling. It was carried out in three privately-owned colleges in the city of Lahore that were identified as purposely required to represent various socio-economic classes: Elite College, Heritage College, and Aspire College. These organizations are associated with different tuition fees and provide students of different socio-economic levels, which is typical of the Pakistani private sector. Snowball sampling was used to recruit 60 respondents comprising 30 students, 18 teachers, 9 administrators and 3 policy actors of Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board. The participants were aged between 16-19, evenly gender mixed and the teachers had average experience of 8 years. The 96 hours of classroom observation, semi-structured interviews, and critical analysis of policy documents were used as the data collection methods.

NVivo 12 was used to code transcribed data inductively and created the first categories that were developed further through an axial coding approach. The patterns across the sites were determined using thematic analysis, and comparative analysis was supported using case-ordered matrices. Critical discourse analysis has also analyzed policy texts in terms of the three-dimensional framework of Fairclough with the association of the textual aspect to the sociopolitical contexts. Member checking, peer debriefing and reflexive journaling were all tools designed to guarantee analytic rigour as a researcher positionality was being interrogated as an English-proficient academic.

## Analysis and Results

According to the ethnographic evidence, there are three basic tensions that order the implementation of EMI in Pakistani generation colleges: the performative disjuncture between policy rhetoric and pedagogical reality, the translation and challenge of linguistic capital at the levels of the institution, and the rise of the secret bilingual practices as a survival strategy and subversive pedagogy. These results support the theoretical argument that EMI functions as a disputed medium space- both as a process of social stratification and a place of creative resistance.

## Institutional Performances and Classroom Realities

In all the three colleges, policy documents clearly require English-only environments. The prospectus of Elite College states: We enforce pure English environment to guarantee international competency, whereas the staff handbook of Heritage College says: use of Urdu or Punjabi language in classes will lead to deductions in salary. However, there is observational evidence that directs to the contrary of these prescriptions. Table 1 shows the prevalence of teacher code-switching at the different levels of the institution.

**Table 1: Average Teacher Code-Switching Frequency per 45-Minute Lesson**

| Institutional Tier | Mean Switches | Range | Primary Functions |
|---|---|---|---|
| Elite College | 47.3 | 34-62 | Conceptual clarification, disciplining, empathy markers |
| Heritage College | 31.8 | 22-41 | Comprehension checks, procedural directives |
| Aspire College | 18.5 | 12-29 | Translation of technical terms only |

The paradoxical conclusion of the counterintuitive result that the code-switching of Elite College teachers

occurs most is an enhancement of the surveillance practices. Parents are paying nine hundred thousand rupees, as Ms Farhana, who is an A-level teacher of physics, explained: They want Oxbridge level English. In cases when I observe blank faces, I need to find a way to switch within a short time or I can be reprimanded. This panic code-switching is quite the opposite of Aspire College that had a more relaxed attitude towards it as teachers openly admitted the necessity of bilingualism. According to Mr Asim, the chemistry teacher of Aspire, he clarified that during the first day of school, he tells the students: English is to pass the exams; Urdu is to understand.

These patterns were supported by interviews of students. Elite College participants noted that they felt silent due to anxiety seventy eight per cent, and only twenty-three per cent of the Aspire students said they did. The psychological load was described by a Heritage College student, Sara: I am told we are to speak English in the future, but as I speak I see everyone laugh at my accent. So I choose silence.' This self-censorship is what Bourdieu refers to as symbolic violence, the internalization of hierarchies of language as individual maladaptation.

These surveillance regimes were inadvertently broken by the digital platforms. WhatsApp voice notes of online classes in Elite College have teachers mumbling about Urdu explanation, having silenced their microphones. One of the audio clips has Mr Kamal, an English literature teacher saying: I switched off the recorder. Now: ispat [the real issue] Ye Hardy, is that you want me I need cultural context. This cyber disguise enabled the hidden bilingualism to manifest itself and as such, monolingualism is not intuitively sought after but it is imposed.

## Linguistic Capital and Social Reproduction Conversion

The capital conversion as introduced by Bourdieu is reflected in institutional levels in different ways. Elite College students amassed linguistic capital that easily translated into symbolic and economic benefits. All ten applicants were accepted to foreign colleges, three of them were offered scholarship opportunities. Their competency in English as acquired in terms of international examination was their source of what Rassool and Mansoor (2007) refer to as the mobility capital. Nonetheless, such conversion demanded a significant economic cost: the families used an average of twelve million Pakistani rupees during fourteen years of private schooling.

The Heritage College was a more dangerous competitor. The students learned enough English to take up domestic professional programmes but they were denied access to international opportunities. Four out of ten participants were able to be admitted to HEC-recognised universities and two have to take up supplementary English language courses. The other six joined the privately accredited universities of dubious quality whose linguistic capital is discounted by institutional stigma. This is what happened to Farid, who is an alumnus of Heritage: My English was good enough to work with local firms, but when I tried to turn to a big company, they questioned me why I did not attend A-level school.

The Haque (2016) defines false promise as depicted by Aspire College. The linguistic capital of students was predominantly symbolic, although it was being branded in English. There were only three out of ten who passed the standardised HEC English proficiency test and none of them were able to obtain competitive university admission. The majority of them shifted to low-level privates or vocational courses. This disillusionment was summed up by Zainab who is an Aspire graduate: they took our money, gave us English books that we could not read, and now we are neither good in English nor good in Urdu. Her evidence shows the epistemic harm caused by poor EMI practice.

These stratifications were supported by parental patterns of investments. Elite College parents portrayed spending as a legacy building as they perceived English education as an inheritance. It was referred to as career insurance by heritage parents and our last hope by Aspire parents. These conflicting rationalities explain how the EMI markets define different consumer subjectivities, which are specific to different positions in the classes.

## Subversive Bilingual Education and Rebellion

In spite of the institutional ban, educators at all locations invented elaborate secret bilingual methods. Three models were developed, including scaffolding translation, meta lingoistic commentary and identity-coded switching. Scaffolding translation was used in which the English version was delivered then the complicated

concepts were given Urdu summaries. Mr Rizwan, who teaches mathematics at Heritage College, described it as follows: When I notice that I am not succeeding in explaining some concept, I say: Matlab derivative ka Urdu main nisbati tabdeeli hai (Meaning derivative in Urdu is relative change). This is my secret method.'

The commentary of meta-linguistics enabled the teacher to criticize the English terms when they were ostensibly being taught. At Elite College, Ms Noreen would say; word photosynthesis is a Greek nonsense. We say in Urdu ghass khanay ka amal [the process of feeding on grass], which is really rational]. These statements were at once policy obligations and undermined their own ideology which Levinson and Sutton (2001) call peripheral participation in policy regimes.

Informal interactions were based on identity-codified switching, where teachers indicated their alliance with switching to Punjabi or Urdu. At the end of the lesson, Mr Ali informed the students: Ajj di class vich [In your class], you were brilliant]. However, before the principal, English, okay? This was a situational bi-lingualism that formed two communicative spaces; a front in which English was spoken to facilitate the surveillance, and a back room where genuine learning was conducted in multilingualism.

The children also resisted by translanguaging. WhatsApp groups were the sites of heteroglossic settings in which hybridity thrived. In one of the group chats shared with permission, students of Elite College are talking about Hamlet: To be or not to be ka matlab karna hai ya nahin karna [to do or not to do]. Bhai, this is life problem [Brother, this is the problem of life]. This mix of Shakespearean English with the idiomatic Urdu and Punjabi is not only anti-monolingual ideology, but also contributes to understanding.

**Table 2: Clandestine Bilingual Strategies by Participant Category**

| Strategy | Teachers (n=18) | Students (n=30) | Administrators (n=9) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Code-switching for comprehension | 18 (100%) | 27 (90%) | 1 (11%) |
| Meta-linguistic commentary | 14 (78%) | 8 (27%) | 0 |
| Digital translanguaging | 12 (67%) | 30 (100%) | 2 (22%) |
| Identity-marked switching | 16 (89%) | 24 (80%) | 3 (33%) |

## Discussion

The results support three main arguments which can be used to complement existing research on EMI in postcolonial settings. To begin with, the paper proves that the policy-practice discrepancy is not just a case of failure to realize an implementation but a characteristic of neoliberal markets of education. The private colleges work as prestige economies, in which English is not used as the pedagogical tool, rather, as positional good (Hirsch, 1976). Branding is an institutional survival strategy, not the actual practices of language, which produces what Haque (2016) calls policy symbolism the performance of Englishness in uniforms, signage and prospectus rhetoric in place of classroom realities that are stuck in a stubbornly bilingual place.

This symbolic economy depicts the counterintuitive frequency of code-switching at Elite College. Increased surveillance is known to yield advanced concealment rather than conformity. Teachers create what Scott (1985) terms to transcribe hidden texts, whereby they do English-only pedagogy in front of authorities and implement bilingual pedagogy in front of students. The digital turn amplified this pretence; digital spaces had opened spaces of freedom in which monolingualism could be put at a holding. Nevertheless, this freedom was not dispersed equally, as students of the Aspire College did not have access to digital devices to enjoy such subversion.

Second, linguistic capital is converted in ways that replicate instead of altering the social stratification. Elite College students learned English that served as liquid capital (Bauman, 2000)- liquid capital that can easily be sold elsewhere in the world. The students of Heritage College acquired national capital which is useful in Pakistan but cannot be transferred to the outside world. The students of Aspire College were given fake capital, which was not only undervalued due to low quality of teaching but also had to be sacrificed economically. This stratification confirms Bourdieu thesis that systems of education are mainly used to authenticate inherited privilege, where EMI becomes a contemporary shibboleth (Rahman, 2002) which naturalises hierarchies in classes as meritocratic results.

The cost human of this system requires stress. Aspire and Heritage Colleges students were exposed to what Freire (1970) refers to as cultural invasion; since their native language of knowledge was not respected, and proficiency in English was not attained. A lot of internalisation of failure where people refer themselves to being slow learners or not talented, thus recreating symbolic violence. On the other hand, Elite College students, though acquainted with the best English, said that they feel out of touch with Urdu literary tradition and one admitted: I cannot read Faiz Ahmed Faiz but I can analyse T S Eliot. Is this not a loss?' The research therefore supports the idea of Mahboob and Jain (2016) that EMI causes epistemicides, which obliterates other knowledge systems.

Third, the emergent bilingual pedagogies are a decolonial praxis which opposes monolingual ideologies. Although these may be pragmatic methods of necessity, the subversion of the coloniality of power by the clandestine strategies of teachers is accidental (Mignolo, 2000). Code-switching enables them to affirm the legitimacy of indigenous languages as the means of academic discourse by denying the colonialism of English as the lingua academica. This resistance is similar to the framework of translanguaging by Garcia and Wei (2014), but it is still reactive and not transformative since it is not institutionalised.

The critical contribution of the study is recording the functioning of this resistance in connection with but not opposition to neoliberal structures. EMI policy is not openly opposed by teachers, their circumvention is in the interests of the institution, better passing exams and lower turnover. This makes straightforward binaries of resistance/compliance difficult to manage and, in its place, discloses what the author classifies as nested resistance by Ortner (1995) as agency that is critical but supportive of larger power bases. Administrators implicitly approve of such practices since they help to overcome the dilemma between pedagogical effective and marketable English branding.

The South Asian experience helps to shed light on the particularities of Pakistan. The BRAC University of Bangladesh specifically supports the idea of bilingual undergraduate programmes, and it reports enhanced conceptual knowledge and decreased dropout rates (Hamid et al., 2020). The same holds true of colleges of English Medium Instruction in India where teachers in Hyderabad are dedicating closely similar underhand tactics (Meganathan, 2011). These similarities imply that contradictions in EMI are structural peculiarities of postcolonial education systems as opposed to the anomalies in Pakistan.

Nevertheless, the history of the military-bureaucratic elite in Pakistan makes its course unique as a result of their investment in the English language. Compared with the stronger traditions of vernacular medium in India or language nationalism in Bangladesh after 1971, the elite in Pakistan is still Anglophile, which has been the reason behind EMI persisting despite EMI having undergone pedagogical disproportion. The paper therefore goes beyond this critique by Shamim (2011) by illustrating the EMI policy has not only economic purposes, but also political ones as it helps sustain the cohesion of the ruling classes by preserving linguistic difference.

Methodologically, the research is a development of critical ethnography, as it incorporates digital methods. WhatsApp data defected traditional definitions of the word classroom making learning visible as spread over the physical and virtual space. This digitization shift supports the premise put forward by Androutsopoulos (2014) when she says that online ethnography records the linguistic behaviors that remain unseen when studied face-to-face. The ethical frameworks of this kind of data have to be developed in the future, considering the privacy issues and the ownership of the platform.

## Conclusion

This critical ethnography shows that the practice of English-medium instruction in Pakistani higher education private colleges is a conflicted medium - a space where neoliberal market trivialities, postcolonial linguistic categories and innovative pedagogic resistance meet. Policy-practice gap is not an implementation failure, but it is constitutive part of the system in which English serves as positional good, rather than pedagogical tool. The study demonstrates the ways teachers and students negotiate this contradiction by using covert bilingual means that bypass monolingual ideology and yet uphold an institutional prestige after 9 months of fieldwork in three levels of institutions.

The results address the blind application of EMI models by showing that they have stratifying impacts. Elite

College students gain access to liquid linguistic capital, which is transformable into global mobility, Heritage College students attain nationally bounded capital, and Aspire students earn meritless credentials that are an insult to the families sacrifices. This stratification of reproduction of inequality confirms the thesis presented by Bourdieu that the system of education justifies inherited privilege by using the meritocracy rhetoric. EMI policy is therefore symbolic violence and students internalise language hierarchies as individual lack.

Nonetheless, resistance is also recorded in the study. The code-switching of the teachers, digital translanguaging of students, and tacit condoning of bilingualism of the administrators make up a hidden curriculum that perceives the multilingual ecology of Pakistan as pedagogical asset instead of a hindrance. Although practical in nature, these emerging practices have the potential to change things provided they are supported by policy change. The problem lies in the need to turn the secret schemes into the formal pedagogy and not to ruin the agentic nature of these schemes.

In theory, the research adds the postcolonial critical theory, which integrates Bourdieusian sociology with the southern theory. The combination of the historical analysis of the English language as a gatekeeper by Rahman, the pragmatic multilingualism by Shamim, and the shuttling between languages by Canagarajah terms in the framework prevents Eurocentric universalism and parochial particularism. It shows the way Pakistani teachers hijack English into local projects, disattaching it to imperial affiliations, but which take into consideration structural constraints.

In practice, the study supports the idea of culturally responsive bilingual pedagogies which clearly legitimize code-switching as cognitive strategy and not as moral weakness. The HEC should also come up with accreditation criteria which measure pedagogical proficiency rather than monolingual achievement such as bilingual teacher training programmes and assessment rubrics which accommodate hybrid responses. The marketing budgets should be shifted by the private colleges to teacher professional development by appreciating the fact that, linguistic capital is not bought but rather developed.

The research also has some limitations of the urban focus of Lahore which might not reflect the dynamics of rural EMI where teacher proficiency is already even lower. The nine-month period is a significant one, but it lacked longitudinal follow-up of post-college student outcomes. The next-generation research ought to use multi-sited ethnography in all provinces of Pakistan, and the results should be compared with the colleges in the public sector in which EMI is also constrained in a different manner.

In addition, the positioning of the researcher as an English-speaking scholar might have unwillingly idealized bilingual practices and underestimated the actual interest in the mastery of English in some respondents. Although reflexive journaling helped to control this danger, in critical ethnography, total impartiality is not possible.

The implications of the policy are short-term. Single National Curriculum disputes have resurrected linguistic debates, and the supporters of the revival of Urdu-medium schools argue against the exclusivity of English, whereas the elites protect their privileges. In this paper, a third alternative is proposed: heteroglossic education which considers English, Urdu and provincial languages as complementary resources. A model like this would need the political daring to face vested interests but has more fair results than present-day set ups.

To conclude, this paper will suggest that the best way to challenge the hegemony of EMI is not to do away with language, but to democratise language that is, to redistribute linguistic resources and acknowledge that any language is a legitimate instrument of epistemology. Unless the Pakistani policy recognizes that proper education is a result of local linguistic ecology, and not an imported monolingual fantasy, English will continue to be not a path to opportunity, but a barrier to keep privilege. The secret bilingualism recorded here does not even pose as an issue to be eliminated but rather solutions that have to be legitimised. They speak what they have to scream later on: in Pakistani multi-lingualism, the language of instruction cannot be unitary, and the future of education lies in accepting hybridity.

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