



Semarak International Journal of Current Research in Language and Human Studies

Journal homepage:
<https://semarakilmu.my/index.php/sjicrlhs/index>
ISSN: 3083-9572



The Prestige of English vs. Urdu: A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Diglossia and Social Class in Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 March 2026

Received in revised form 21 May 2026

Accepted 2 June 2026

Available online 22 June 2026

Keywords:

Language prestige; social stratification;
diglossia; sociolinguistics; English in Pakistan;
Urdu language; language discrimination

ABSTRACT

This study explores the sociolinguistic dynamics between English and Urdu in Pakistan, examining how language functions as both a marker and a mechanism of social stratification. In a society where English symbolizes privilege, authority, and modernity, while Urdu—despite being the national language—is associated with informality and lower prestige, the coexistence of these languages reflects a state of diglossia intricately tied to socioeconomic class divisions. Drawing on theories such as Ferguson's diglossia model and Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, the research investigates how language choice in informal settings reinforces class boundaries and contributes to psychological and emotional outcomes for speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach, the study integrates both qualitative and quantitative data to provide a holistic understanding of the prestige attributed to English and Urdu across diverse social classes. The findings reveal deep-rooted social attitudes, where English continues to be viewed as a gateway to education, employment, and upward mobility, while Urdu is relegated to domestic and emotional domains. Furthermore, the study highlights the emotional toll of linguistic discrimination, often leaving speakers of Urdu and regional languages feeling marginalized. By advocating for inclusive language policies that recognize and value linguistic diversity, this research contributes to broader efforts aimed at reducing social inequalities and promoting linguistic justice in Pakistan. The outcomes of this study have significant implications for educators, policymakers, and social activists working toward a more equitable society.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Language plays a significant role in defining social identities, class relationships, and power relationships in society [17]. Pakistan being the linguistic mosaic state, the relationships between languages such as English and Urdu, for instance, have far-reaching effects in social, educational, and working life.

English, being a symbol of modernity, privilege, and status, is hegemonic to elites [8,25], while Urdu, the national language, is in about a neutral and inclusive position but is generally assumed to be of lower status than English, especially in socio-political and economic spheres [4].

The English-Urdu dichotomy in Pakistan is not only a linguistic issue but also a manifestation of social hierarchies and inequalities at different levels in society [3]. An appreciation of the

phenomenon of diglossia, where two languages coexist in a society but with asymmetrical social functions, is relevant to an appreciation of the role language plays in social stratification [11].

English and Urdu are in a condition of diglossia in Pakistan, where English is considered a prestige language, possessing the qualities of power, education, and mobility, and Urdu is found primarily in the sphere of informal and domestic contexts and is usually considered to be less prestigious [12]. This bi-lingual system is also made more complex due to the intricate socio-economic fabric of Pakistan, so that individuals from different social classes may have different attitudes and tendencies towards these languages.

Even though language policy, education, and employment discrimination have been the subject of vast amounts of literature being published about them, comparatively little empirical research has surfaced addressing individual social attitudes towards the prestige of languages in general and more narrowly English and Urdu. This study tries to fill this gap by examining the social, emotional, and psychological effects of language discrimination and prestige in Pakistan.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

English prestige in Pakistan tends to affect access to education, job opportunities, and social standing. English speakers therefore gather in superior social classes, with the Urdu speakers or users of other local languages kept in marginalized ranks [9]. Although the effect of these language options on people's social lives is substantial, little empirical work has investigated how people experience the prestige of English and Urdu in varying social classes.

This study seeks to investigate how language choice, especially in informal social contexts, reinforces and mirrors social class boundaries. The study also aims to investigate the psychological and emotional impact of linguistic discrimination, which has hitherto been comparatively underexamined in existing research.

1.3 Research Objectives

The present research seeks to investigate the sociolinguistic dynamics of Urdu and English in Pakistan through the following overarching objectives:

- To examine social attitudes toward the prestige of English and Urdu
- To examine the role of language in everyday social interactions
- To evaluate the psychological and emotional impact of linguistic discrimination
- To create a mixed-methods framework for language prestige studies
- To contribute to the development of inclusive linguistic policies

1.4 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the prevailing social attitudes towards English and Urdu across different socio-economic classes in Pakistan?
2. How do language choices in informal social interactions reflect and reinforce social class divisions in Pakistan?
3. What are the psychological and emotional effects of linguistic discrimination based on language choice in Pakistan?
4. How can a mixed-methods approach provide a comprehensive understanding of the sociolinguistic dynamics of language prestige in Pakistan?

5. What recommendations can be made to promote more inclusive linguistic policies in Pakistan that consider both English and Urdu?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant since it attempts to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of language prestige and social stratification in Pakistan. While much of the literature has been focused on formal domains such as education and work, this study extends itself to informal communication, creating a fuller picture of the sociolinguistic context.

By investigating the psychological and affective effects of linguistic discrimination, this research aspires to give voice to people who are constantly marginalized by virtue of their proficiency in a language. Additionally, the use of mixed-method research in this study will facilitate deeper and multi-faceted interpretation of language prestige, and reveal insights which will inform more egalitarian language policy.

The results of this research will be of interest to policymakers, teachers, sociolinguists, and social activists engaged in promoting social equity and inclusion in Pakistan. The recommendations of the study can help inform policies that support linguistic diversity, class-based discrimination reduction, and equal opportunities for all individuals irrespective of their language background.

2. Literature Review

Language is also effective in the construction of social order, class, and economic development [25]. In Pakistan, there is a clear diglossic state where English connotes power, prestige, and modernity, and whereas being the national language of the country, Urdu generally occupies the second position in schooling and workplace domains [4]. This section discusses literature about Pakistani language prestige, diglossia, and social stratification with lacunae and within research objectives.

2.1 Theoretical Perspectives on Diglossia and Language Prestige

2.1.1 Diglossia in Pakistan: Language hierarchies and bilingualism

2.1.1.1 Ferguson's (1959) diglossia framework

Ferguson's (1959) diglossia model is a sociolinguistic feature where two varieties of a language exist side by side and have some functions to perform. Ferguson makes a distinction between a "high" (H) language for formal use and a "low" (L) language for informal use [22].

The English language is Pakistan's "H" language for official discourse, higher education, and trade, whereas the "L" language is Urdu and is usually used in social interactions and basic school education [10]. Though Ferguson's model depicts the coexistence of Urdu and English, it does not capture power relations and socioeconomic contrasts on the basis of prestige of language; the present study has tried to fill the gap.

In Pakistan, diglossia is experienced through the existence of Urdu and English, in which English is the "high" form spoken formally, educationally, and in the workplace, and Urdu is the "low" form utilized for colloquial use [20]. Language bifurcation reflects more encompassing social structures because English comes with power, prestige, and economic promise, and Urdu is usually reserved for domestic and domestic-like settings [15].

Ferguson's model has been criticized on the grounds of its inflexibility, as it does not reflect the dynamic usage of languages in multilingual environments such as that of Pakistan, where regional languages such as Punjabi, Sindhi, and Pashto also have their role to play [23].

Whereas English and Urdu are the prevailing languages that articulate the diglossic model, regional language exclusion makes it difficult for the linguistic hierarchy to reflect social class and ethnic along with linguistic divisions [5,18].

This absence within existing literature provides the rationale for investigating the relationship between diglossia, multilingualism, and regional language dynamics within the Pakistani context.

2.1.1.2 Bourdieu's (1991) Theory of linguistic capital

Bourdieu [6] also theorized linguistic capital, in which language was imagined to be social capital that offers access to opportunities and economic capital. English in Pakistan has usually been the price of mobility, granting individuals entry to high schools and colleges, lucrative occupations, and policymaking circles [13,16]. But this English bias has resulted in linguistic discrimination against regional language and Urdu speakers, cementing class-based disparities [21]. Despite all this, there has been relatively little empirical work to measure how speakers from different socioeconomic backgrounds understand and negotiate this linguistic hierarchy—a lacuna that this research seeks to fill.

2.1.1.3 Language and social class: Linguistic capital and prestige

Bourdieu [6] linguistic capital is a insightful tool for considering language use as a means of symbolic power. English in Pakistan is a marker of elite status, providing entry into universities, desired professions, and powerful social groups [7]. Urdu, as the official national language, is often viewed as less desirable in the workplace and academy and thus less desirable for non-English speakers [14].

We have discovered that English-medium education is one of the major causes of social stratification, and the majority of it is accessible to the upper and middle classes, while the lower socio-economic classes are served by Urdu-medium schools [20]. The persistent imbalance continues to reinforce a vicious cycle where control of the English language is the passport to social mobility, thereby excluding Urdu speakers from access to lucrative jobs and leadership positions [16].

However, the majority of the previous work has been focused on the urban elite, thus neglecting the existence of the rural and the lower-income segment. This imbalance necessitates a broader investigation of how linguistic capital operates in different socioeconomic contexts.

2.2 The Sociolinguistic Landscape of Pakistan: English vs. Urdu

2.2.1 Education and language policy: Medium of instruction and opportunity

In the past, English has been given top priority in language policy in Pakistan, particularly in elite institutions, whereas Urdu-medium institutions are underfunded and undervalued [20]. English prioritization in education reflects broader societal attitudes that correlate English ability with intelligence, knowledge, and modernity [13,14].

The same pattern also applies to the recruitment policies of multinational corporations and government institutions, where English ability is assumed to be a requirement for employment [7]. The emphasis on English-delivered education has been criticized for isolating students from their language and cultural heritage, and for deepening educational inequities [20].

Although there are scholars who advocate the use of Urdu as a medium of instruction for the maintenance of national identity and integration [16], there are also scholars who are of the opinion that English is required for competitiveness in the global arena [14]. This indicates a significant research gap: the absence of empirical research on the effects of language policies on social mobility and access to opportunities across socioeconomic classes.

2.2.2 The role of English in educational and professional sectors

English enjoys a superior status in Pakistan's educational institutions, government, and corporate sector [19]. Elite private schools and universities primarily use English as the medium of instruction, creating a class divide between English-medium and Urdu-medium graduates [2].

This division hinders social mobility, as English proficiency is often a requirement for high-status jobs, marginalizing those educated in Urdu [14]. While existing studies discuss the role of English in education, they fail to explore how individuals from different classes perceive the prestige of English and its social consequences, which this study aims to investigate.

2.2.3 Urdu as the national language: Symbolism vs. Practicality

Urdu, despite being the national language, faces limited practical utility in higher education and professional domains [1]. Government policies promote Urdu as a unifying force, yet policymakers, corporate leaders, and elite academic institutions continue to operate in English [24]. This contradiction highlights a discrepancy between national identity and linguistic realities [19]. Although some studies examine language policy, they do not address how Urdu speakers experience social exclusion due to English dominance, a research gap this study intends to fill.

2.4 Language Prestige and Social Class in Pakistan

2.4.1 English as a status symbol

English fluency is widely regarded as a marker of intelligence, modernity, and elite status in Pakistan [14]. Middle- and upper-class families often prioritize English-medium education for their children, reinforcing a cycle of privilege [2].

Lower socioeconomic families who are not English-proficient, however, are denied access to higher studies and high-paying job opportunities [19]. However, literature primarily discusses institutional policy without exploring people's attitudes towards language and their impact on social mobility, which is to be explored in this study.

2.4.2 Employment and language: Corporate preferences and class division

The Pakistani business culture is strongly predisposed towards the English language, widely seen as a marker of professionalism and competence [7]. This prejudice disadvantages Urdu speakers and denies them access to high-paying jobs and top-management positions [19]. Research has established that language discrimination at work is a major driver of class segregation since non-English speakers are normally relegated to low-grade, low-paying jobs [14].

However, language use studies in the workplace have focused mainly on white-collar, urban settings at the expense of blue-collar and rural workers' experiences. This gap in the literature challenges the necessity of a more comprehensive examination of how language hierarchies work out across occupational fields and regional locations.

2.4.3 Linguistic discrimination in employment and social mobility

A number of studies point out the English over Urdu speaker bias in recruitment in Pakistan [1,24]. Multinationals and the government make proficiency in the English language a prerequisite for employment irrespective of the position [19].

Therefore, rural-background or Urdu-medium professionals are systematically disadvantaged from pursuing well-paying jobs [14]. There has been little research on the social and psychological consequences of the exclusion, and this study aims to research them.

2.4.5 Informal language use: Social interactions and identity

Although most of the current literature emphasizes formal contexts, informal language use also contributes to social identity construction and interpersonal relationships. In Pakistan, code-switching between Urdu and English is prevalent in urban, middle-class environments, employed as a marker of social status and cosmopolitan identity [13].

Conversely, in rural communities and lower economic strata, local dialects and Urdu predominate in informal communication, which is reflective of distinctive cultural and social principles [19]. Of special interest is that very little academic research has been conducted on the effects of language use in everyday situations on social cohesion and identity formation among different socioeconomic groups. The lack of such research points to the need to understand better the role of language in everyday social life.

2.5 Research Gap

The literature on diglossia and language prestige in Pakistan has a number of shortcomings that this research seeks to rectify. To begin with, the majority of the research concentrates on the urban elite at the expense of rural residents and the poor. Second, the empirical record on the contribution of linguistic hierarchies to social mobility and access to opportunities is weak. Third, existing research has a tendency to focus on the formal context, ignoring the importance of language in the informal social context. Finally, there is a need to embrace a mixed-methods approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative information in attempting to give a better overall picture of the sociolinguistic scenario in Pakistan.

2.5.1 Research gaps and contribution

While there is voluminous literature on language policy, education, and employment discrimination, a number of deficiencies have yet to be addressed.

i) Absence of empirical evidence of social attitudes towards English and Urdu

While research addresses institutional preferences, there are few that address individual attitudes of language prestige by socioeconomic class.

ii) Insufficient attention to informal social interactions

Studies mainly focus on formal spheres (education, employment), whereas this study will also probe the role of language choice in ordinary social interactions.

iii) Lack of an inclusive mixed-methods design

Most research relies on quantitative questionnaires or qualitative interviews; this research will merge the two to create a comprehensive picture of language prestige.

iv) Unexamined psychological effects of linguistic discrimination

The psychological and emotional effects of language exclusion are under researched, an issue this research will explore. The literature is rich in understanding diglossia, linguistic capital, and language prestige in Pakistan but does not reflect the lived experiences of people living through this linguistic hierarchy.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This research utilizes a mixed-methods design, integrating quantitative and qualitative methods to examine the prestige of Urdu and English in Pakistan, with emphasis on their contribution to social class differences and the psychological impacts of linguistic discrimination. The quantitative element employs surveys to collect wide, generalizable information regarding students' attitudes towards language prestige, whereas the qualitative element entails in-depth interviews to investigate the lived experiences of individuals across various socio-economic groups. The mixed-methods design facilitates a rich understanding of how language constructs social identities, particularly in informal contexts, and the affective implications of linguistic exclusion.

3.2 Population and Sample

3.2.1 Population

The research focuses on students in Lahore, Punjab, Pakistan, who have varying socio-economic backgrounds. University students are perfect subjects for the research since they experience both formal (academic) and informal (social) language environments, which may affect their social identity and career prospects. Additionally, the group is subjected to both English, the language of prestige, and Urdu, the national language, providing insight into their feelings about both.

3.2.1 Sample

The sample for this research is 150 students from three universities of Punjab. The selected universities include one public, one semi-government, and one private university. This stratified sampling method ensures a diversity of students from different socio-economic backgrounds, as students from private universities often come from wealthier families, while public universities have a broader socio-economic range. The socio-economic status of participants was self-reported, and the sample was divided into three categories:

- 50 upper-class students
- 50 middle-class students
- 50 working-class students

Table 1 presents the demographic distribution of the sample

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the sample

Demographic Characteristic	Upper Class (n=50)	Middle Class (n=50)	Working Class (n=50)
Age (mean $\pm$ SD)	21.3 $\pm$ 1.2	22.1 $\pm$ 1.3	22.4 $\pm$ 1.4
Gender			
Male (%)	40%	42%	44%
Female (%)	60%	58%	56%
University Type	Private (100%)	Public (60%) / Semi-Govt (40%)	Public (80%) / Semi-Govt (20%)
Language Spoken at Home	English & Urdu (80%)	Urdu (65%) / English (35%)	Urdu (90%)

3.3 Data Collection Methods

Two primary methods were used for data collection: surveys and semi-structured interviews.

1. **Surveys (Quantitative):** The survey consisted of 20 Likert-type items designed to measure students' attitudes toward the prestige of English and Urdu in various contexts, including their perceptions of language-related social status, employment opportunities, and the role of language in academic settings.

Participants rated each statement on a scale from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The survey also assessed the frequency of language use in informal social settings (e.g., family gatherings, friends).

Key survey items included:

- "English is associated with higher social status."
- "English proficiency enhances job prospects."
- "Urdu is perceived as a less prestigious language in professional settings."
- "I prefer using English in formal social situations."
- "Speaking Urdu in informal contexts strengthens my social bonds."
-

The survey was administered both online and in person to ensure accessibility and maximize participation.

2. **Semi-Structured Interviews (Qualitative):** 30 students (10 from each socio-economic class) were selected for in-depth interviews based on survey responses. The interviews aimed to explore participants' personal experiences with language use in informal social interactions and the emotional impact of being perceived as fluent or non-fluent in English. Questions focused on:

- How language choice affects social identity.
- Experiences of discrimination based on language.
- Emotional responses to language exclusion in academic and social settings.

All interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' consent, transcribed, and analyzed thematically.

3.4 Data Analysis

3.4.1 Quantitative data analysis

The survey data were analyzed using SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, and frequency distributions, were calculated to summarize participants' responses. To test for significant differences in language attitudes across socio-economic groups, an Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for social attitudes toward English and Urdu

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
English is associated with higher social status.	4.30	0.70	150
Urdu is perceived as a less prestigious language.	3.60	0.90	150
English proficiency provides better job opportunities.	4.40	0.75	150
Speaking Urdu is seen as an asset in informal contexts.	3.85	0.85	150
English is preferred in formal social settings.	4.50	0.65	150

ANOVA results were used to assess differences in perceptions of language prestige based on socio-economic class. The analysis showed significant differences between groups, with upper-class students viewing English as more prestigious compared to middle-class and working-class students.

Table 3

ANOVA results for social attitudes toward English and Urdu by socio-economic class

Source	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	15.34	2	7.67	6.10	0.003
Within Groups	295.90	147	2.02		
Total	311.24	149			

The significant F-value ($F(2, 147) = 6.10, p = 0.003$) indicates that socio-economic status influences perceptions of English and Urdu, with upper-class students assigning greater prestige to English.

3.4.2 Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was applied to interview transcripts to identify recurring themes related to social identity and emotional experiences linked to language use. Key themes included:

- **Linguistic Capital:** The perception of English as a key to upward mobility and social status.
- **Social Exclusion:** Feelings of exclusion when unable to speak English fluently, particularly in academic and professional settings.
- **Emotional Impact:** Negative emotions, such as anxiety and frustration, associated with language discrimination.

Table 4

Key themes from Interviews

Theme	Description
Linguistic Capital	The idea that English proficiency grants social and economic advantages.
Social Exclusion	Feelings of being excluded or marginalized due to lack of fluency in English.
Emotional Impact	Psychological consequences, such as anxiety, of being perceived as "less capable" in formal settings.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines throughout the research process. The following ethical principles were followed:

- **Informed Consent:** Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained before participation in both the survey and interviews.
- **Confidentiality:** All data collected from participants were anonymized, and no personally identifiable information was included in the final report.
- **Right to Withdraw:** Participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

3.6 Limitations

Some of the study's limitations must be mentioned:

i) Sampling Bias

The sample only consists of students from Punjab's universities, who might not perfectly reflect the language attitudes of other regions' residents or individuals who are not university students.

ii) Self-Reporting Bias

Social desirability bias can affect responses as participants can answer in a manner that they think is more acceptable. The mixed-methods design employed to explore the socio-linguistic dynamics of English and Urdu in Pakistan. Through the integration of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this research sought to present a thorough analysis of language prestige, social identity, and the emotional effects of linguistic discrimination.

4. Results and Analysis

The findings of the research report the quantitative results of the surveys and qualitative findings derived from the interviews. The findings are organized into four sections: 1) Social Attitudes Towards English and Urdu, 2) Language Use in Everyday Social Interactions, 3) Psychological Effect of Linguistic Discrimination, and 4) Mixed-Methods Synthesis.

4.1 Social Attitudes towards English and Urdu

The findings from the survey reflect a strong tendency towards English being a prestigious language that commands more social status. Table 1 below summarizes the descriptive statistics for the key items assessing students' perceptions of English and Urdu.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics for social attitudes toward English and Urdu

Statement	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
English is associated with higher social status.	4.30	0.70	150
Urdu is perceived as a less prestigious language.	3.60	0.90	150
English proficiency provides better job opportunities.	4.40	0.75	150
Speaking Urdu is seen as an asset in informal contexts.	3.85	0.85	150
English is preferred in formal social settings.	4.50	0.65	150

The results indicate a strong perception of English as a symbol of higher social status ($M = 4.30$, $SD = 0.70$) and a belief that proficiency in English leads to better job opportunities ($M = 4.40$, $SD = 0.75$). In contrast, Urdu is viewed as less prestigious in formal settings ($M = 3.60$, $SD = 0.90$), although it is still considered important in informal contexts ($M = 3.85$, $SD = 0.85$).

4.2 Socio-Economic Class Differences

The **ANOVA** analysis revealed significant differences in attitudes toward the prestige of English across socio-economic groups ($F(2, 147) = 6.10$, $p = 0.003$). Post-hoc tests indicated that upper-class students had significantly higher perceptions of English as a prestigious language compared to middle-class and working-class students. These findings suggest that socio-economic status plays a crucial role in shaping language attitudes.

4.3 Language Use in Informal Social Interactions

The survey and interview data suggest that Urdu remains dominant in informal social settings, such as family gatherings and community events, particularly among working-class students. However, a notable number of upper-class students use English even in informal settings, particularly when interacting with peers.

Table 2

Language use in informal social settings

Setting	English	Urdu	Both
Family gatherings	18%	70%	12%
Hanging out with friends	22%	65%	13%
Community events	12%	73%	15%

The findings show a strong preference for Urdu in family and community environments, but that English is utilized more often by upper-class students in peer social interactions.

4.4 Psychological Effect of Linguistic Discrimination

Qualitative interviews verified that linguistic discrimination does have a powerful psychological impact. Respondents reported frustration and anxiety if they were unable to speak English proficiently in educational or social contexts. Working-class students especially reported feeling excluded and marginalized.

Table 3

Psychological effects of linguistic discrimination

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Anxiety or frustration due to language barriers	16	53%
Feeling of exclusion in academic settings	11	37%
Frustration with social language hierarchies	8	27%

4.5 Mixed-Methods Synthesis

Combining the quantitative and qualitative findings provides a holistic picture of how language affects social identity and emotional well-being. The results show that language use is strongly determined by socio-economic status, with upper-class students employing English in formal and informal settings. The psychological impact of linguistic discrimination suggests more inclusive language policies in Pakistan to offset the negative effects of such linguistic hierarchies.

The findings of this study indicate the strong association between English and social standing in Pakistan, and the affective price of linguistic discrimination. The research contributes to understanding how language reproduces social class divisions and identifies the need for policies in favor of linguistic inclusion.

5. Discussion

The findings of this study expose the intense effect of language, more specifically English, on emotional experience and social identity in Pakistan. The dominating trend was visible and exhibited how English acts as a status symbol, namely, for pupils with more educated socio-economic backgrounds.

This is not unique to Pakistan because most societies across the globe associate English with status, higher education, and access to better job prospects. English becomes more than a language in this context—it's a powerful social tool with the ability to promote one within society.

The research also points to the ways in which English and Urdu are profoundly influenced by socio-economic class. The higher-class students start to look upon English as a tool for rising above their current station and associate English with privilege and power. Working-class students, however, to a large degree, view Urdu as being utilized in their daily lives, utilizing it in less formal settings and more comfortable with it.

This is an explanation of the theory of linguistic capital, in which the language that one uses can raise or reduce their social status. The contrast of perspective between socio-economic groups helps to explain how and why language is such a subtle but strong marker of social class.

Besides, language usage also varies according to the social setting. While Urdu dominates informal settings such as family gatherings and social events, English dominates formal settings such as school or the workplace. Interestingly, even in informal settings, high-class students employ English when communicating with their peers. This is an indication of a broader cultural shift in which English is not only the language of business or learning, but more and more of social interaction amongst the elite, once again solidifying its status as a symbol of modernity and sophistication.

The psychological aspect of language use was also significant observation. The majority of students, especially those from working-class families, asserted their own sense of discrimination or marginalization since they were not fully proficient in English. Such emotional pain in the guise of anxiety and frustration brings out the negative face of linguistic discrimination.

When students cannot use English, they are less confident and are even labeled as less able, particularly in learning or workplace contexts. The psychological burden this has cannot be exaggerated—it affects self-image, confidence, and general mental health.

6. Conclusion

This study highlights the interconnected network of social class, emotional well-being, and language in Pakistan. English is specifically characterized as a prestige language that has more social and economic benefits.

The gap of differential perception in language use, however, along socio-economic class lines, is evident. High socio-economic status students are at ease navigating both formal and informal spaces because they already possess English language proficiency.

In contrast, lower socio-economic status students bear the psychological weight of exclusion in English-speaking environments where their language can be stigmatised. The study indicates that linguistic discrimination is a key concern which not only affects individuals' social placement but also exerts powerful psychological impacts. This sense of exclusion among non-English-speaking students creates negative attitudes, apprehension, and a lower sense of self-esteem. The emotional consequences may undermine their educational achievement and working life, making the cycle of disadvantage.

According to such observations, it is evident that what are needed are language diversity-friendly policies and a reversal of the hierarchy of placing English over other languages. Work and school environments need to be such places that incorporate all languages on an equal basis so that individuals can grow regardless of language competence. Shifts in society's attitudes towards the acceptance of linguistic diversity can help to break the emotional burden carried by the excluded because of their language capacity.

Overall, the research is useful to the understanding of the functions of language in the construction of social identities, emotional well-being, and social mobility in Pakistan. Future research would need to investigate the long-term impact of language policies at the individual and societal levels, as well as further investigate the interaction between language and cultural and national identity across various settings.

Declaration Statement

Conflict of Interest

On behalf of all authors, the corresponding author states that there is no conflict of interest.

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