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Abstract

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Key Words: Critical Discourse Analysis, Paradoxes, National Educational Policy

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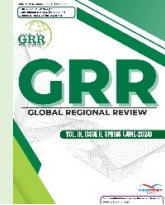
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Title

A Critical Analysis of Paradoxes in National Educational Policy of Pakistan (2017-2025)

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Abstract

This article conducts a critical discourse analysis of paradoxes embedded within Pakistan's National Educational Policy (2017-2025). This study employs Fairclough's 3-D model encompassing textual analysis, discourse practice analysis, and sociocultural practice analysis. This research aims to uncover the complex interplay of language and ideology shaping National Educational Policy. The data analysis shows a vast difference between the provisions made in policy and their actual implementation. This research presents how much educational budget is being set by policymakers. But in reality, it is less than the mentioned numerical value. These findings also provide insight into the discursive techniques used to negotiate and build these paradoxes and the consequences for social change and educational practice.

Keywords: [Critical Discourse Analysis](#), [Paradoxes](#), [National Educational Policy](#)

Introduction

Pakistan has a track record of developing policies and making progress in the field of education (Akram, 2020). Since societal requirements, scientific discoveries, and political agendas change over time, educational policies may also need to be adjusted or revised (Akram & Yang, 2021). A political party or company in government may adopt policies as a means of directing and deciding on actions, choices, and other issues. Educational

Policy is a uniform mental framework that has its general goals, principles, and norms to provide a social philosophy of a specific society (Hayat, 2000) All of the laws and rules that govern the working of school programs must be included in education policy.

The word paradox comes from the combination of the Greek words para and domain. Dokein is a verb meaning "to think," and para- is a prefix meaning "beyond." This concept compels the reader



to consider ideas that go beyond their typical, preconceived notions. To begin with, the widest definition of a "Critical Discourse Analysis" is the analysis of language and the power systems that underlie it. When it comes to a particular field, like education, it looks for underlying power structures and beliefs. "Paradoxes" in this sense refer to apparent discrepancies or contradictions in national education programs. Examining these contradictions closely can reveal more complicated and deep-seated conflicts within the framework of policies. Discourse analysis or critical discourse analysis is a research methodology that studies the language either spoken or written by keeping in view the social environment of the society. Further, language is comprehended in the CDA in light of contextual settings (Luo, 2023).

Thus, the phrase "A Critical Analysis of Paradoxes in National Educational Policy" denotes a careful examination of the underlying linguistic constructions and underlying contradictions within a country's educational policies (Akram et al., 2021).

With respect to educational policy, paradoxes can be categorized into several dimensions, for example, economic paradoxes, political paradoxes, social paradoxes, ethical paradoxes, cultural paradoxes, technological paradoxes (Akram et al., 2021; 2022), and environmental paradoxes. However, the major concern of this research is economic paradoxes. In this case, educational policies try to accomplish specific goals within financial limitations yet run into difficulties doing so effectively. There is another tension between the portrayal of budget in policy and the actual budget in use. Educational investments (such as early childhood education programs or vocational training efforts) do not produce the anticipated long-term economic benefits.

All children between the ages of five and sixteen are entitled to free and compulsory education under the Pakistan National Education Policy 2017–2025. The policy prioritizes four goals: lowering the number of children who drop out of school and raising school completion rates (Akram et al., 2020); maintaining consistency in educational standards; raising the standard of education (Noor et al., 2021); and enhancing access to and applicability of skill development (Aslam et al., 2022).

Furthermore, there are many other salient features of this policy including national and international honor, commitments to education and policy, promoting a culture of research and innovation, increasing investment by up to 4%, expanding ECE (Early Childhood Education), establishing trade schools at district and sub-district level, developing National Curriculum Framework, increasing investment in education and professional finance staff, etc.

The researcher mainly focuses on the economic aspects of policy. Many economic paradoxes in this specific policy highlight the difficulties in creating and implementing educational policies that align theoretical economic principles with real-world situations.

Literature Review

The complication, classification, and evaluation written on the specific topic by the researchers is called a literature review. By analyzing policy documents, the analysis reveals how contradictory narratives and sociocultural contexts contribute to the emergence and perpetuation of paradoxes within them.

In examining the complexities of national educational policies, scholars have increasingly turned to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to uncover the underlying paradoxes embedded within these frameworks. Khan et al. (2017) highlighted the ideological discursivity. Ramzan and Khan (2019) discussed the stereotyped ideological construction and Bhutto and Ramzan (2021) elucidated the gender issues and feminine injustice in Pakistan. Ramzan et al (2020) have explained that speech act theory is useful for ideological purposes. Nawaz et al. (2021) have discussed the ideological representation in speech acts. Ramzan et al. (2023) align the link between social media usage and academic achievements and performance. Ramzan et al (2023) used the power of social media and collaborative strategies of influencers to enhance ESL learning. Ramzan et al. (2023) checked ESL learner motivation internal structures and classroom environment. Chen and Ramzan (2024) used social media to promote English learning. Language challenges are trouble for new students along that student interaction affects (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023; Javaid et al., 2024).

Ramzan and Alahmadi (2024) discussed syntax instructions.

The basic concept of Critical Discourse Analysis lies in the idea of how people use language to be powerful by using the discursive options of text for an underlying conscious agenda. Research studies standing in the domain of CDA focus on ideological assumptions, reliability, and qualitative rigor.

As Fairclough (2013) posits, CDA offers a lens through which to deconstruct the language and power structures inherent in policy discourse, revealing contradictions and tensions that shape educational agendas.

Discourse is known as the social and cultural aspects of language that propagate an underdeveloped agenda in language as said by Bell (1997) and explained by Nawaz et al. (2021). It is an equivocal agenda where different concepts are decorated for various purposes. The patterns and structures are discussed in discourse analysis and the whole process of social interactions is produced, maintained, and resisted in discourse (Nawaz et al. 2021). Fowler (1991) has said that language is a social practice that creates reality. The language is shaped as a dialogic historically, and intertextual-based potential (Nawaz et al. 2021). Language is a neutral phenomenon that does not belong to any individual property. It is a shaped cultural and social identity that exists in the attitude of the people and power is attributed to it (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022; Bhutto and Ramzan, 2021). Language skills improve write-up and communication affecting emotions (Javaid et al., 2023; Li & Akram, 2023).

Nudzor (2013) states that there are two facets to the policy implementation paradox. For a long time, these two points of view have important arguments within the field of policy studies. However, the exploration of physically visible disjuncture between policy views and outcomes in practice is also significant.

The government has created an excellent education program, to raise the nation's literacy rate and develop the education sector within five years. The government has established goals and specified the course of action to be taken. The implementation procedure is the main issue facing the government. The government has created good policies, but their implementation falls short of expectations, and the primary cause lack of institutions. The government's ineffective

implementation process also renders its policies ineffective and prevents the desired outcomes from being realized. Although the strategy is well-designed, it won't work until it is carried out exactly as intended.

Qutoshi (2015) elaborates on the paradoxes in Higher Education Policy such as inequity and inequality. He says:

The notion of Jinnah's speech though highlights the importance of education to some extent but the implementation part of how to do, it seems missing in almost all educational policies. The outcome of Educational politics in Pakistan can be seen in the form of many disparities among different geographical and ethnic groups. There is a long history of poor policies and practices which has created a space for policymakers to bring reforms in education in the country (12).

At another point, Muzaffar illustrates the focus of reforms in education. He thinks that policy implementers are only trying to improve education as a business good rather than a public good. It is only a donor-driven approach. But "education is both a public and private good".

A popular subject of study within this field is the conflict between quality and justice in creating educational policies. Luke (2004) argues that whereas policies frequently promote inclusivity and equal opportunity, their implementation tactics may unintentionally reinforce existing disparities, leading to what Apple (2004) refers to as "the reproduction of privilege." This paradox emphasizes the need for sophisticated research by highlighting the gap between governmental rhetoric and actual conditions.

This approach has contributed to the great validity in highlighting the politics of discourse in the domain of policy to see the relationships between text and their political, cultural, historical, and social context.

Overall, a critical discourse analysis of paradoxes in national educational policy illuminates the intricate power dynamics and competing ideologies that underpin policy formulation and implementation. By interrogating the discursive construction of educational agendas, scholars can contribute to more informed and equitable policy dialogues, ultimately striving towards the realization of inclusive and transformative educational systems.

Research Methodology

This research is based on a qualitative study of the developed National Educational Policy (2017-2025) of Pakistan. Orientational research serves as the specific methodological approach. It mainly focuses on ideologies. It is also sometimes called Critical Theory Research.

Fairclough's 3D model is a framework used in critical discourse analysis to analyze the relationship between discourse, power, and ideology. Fairclough (1995) illustrates in his book *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* that discourse is a practice and its orders of discourse and intertextual analysis have a crucial mediating role in the framework. These are mediated tools in the relationship between text on the one hand and nontextual part e.g. society and culture on the other hand.

CDA is a consolidated framework having a three-dimensional model (Fairclough, 1989) where three distinct modes of analysis are mapped out as instances of sociocultural practice. It analyzes the discursive events, analysis of discursive practices, and analysis of spoken or written discourse in spoken or written text of any language.

Text dimension involves a detailed analysis of the linguistic features of the discourse, such as grammar, vocabulary, syntax, and rhetorical devices. It seeks to uncover how these linguistic choices contribute to the construction of meaning and representation within the discourse.

Traditionally, a text has been thought of as a written piece of language. Within discourse analysis, a broader understanding has gained commonality, according to which a text can be written or spoken discourse—for instance, words used in a discussion can be considered texts. Textual elements such as language, metaphors, syntax, general structure, and style are all considered ideological.

Textual analysis encompasses an examination of the structure, form, and texture of texts rather than merely offering commentary on their content while ignoring texture. Textual analysis frequently provides valuable insights about what is present in a text, but what is lacking from a text is frequently just as significant from the standpoints of sociocultural analysis. insights about what is present in a text, but what is lacking from a text is

frequently just as significant from the standpoint of sociocultural analysis. This kind of analysis pays close attention to the phonological, grammatical, and lexical levels of textual form, structure, and organization.

The 3-D analytical framework's discourse practice dimension expresses how interpreters and producers use socially recognized sources for making up the orders of discourse. It looks at how social identities, relationships, and behaviors are constructed and negotiated through language. Investigation of how language is used to place people and groups within specific social hierarchies, ideologies, and power systems is part of this. It also looks into how language affects people's perceptions, beliefs, and actions in society. Some Critical Discourse Analysis methodologies downplay or ignore intertextuality and the discourse practice dimension. It also addresses the creation, use, and dissemination of literature (Fairclough, 1995).

Socio-political and cultural circumstances of discourse are the main emphasis of the sociocultural practice dimension. The goal of the analysis is to reveal the underlying power structures, social injustices, and ideological frameworks that both influence and are influenced by discourse. This entails examining the ways in which language is employed to advance particular goals, maintain or challenge prevailing ideologies, and legitimate or undermine established power structures. In addition, it looks at how language influences institutions, policies, and social practices in addition to its function which is preserving or modifying social structures and relationships.

The framework blends a Gramscian theory of hegemony (in the study of sociocultural practice) with a Bakhtinian theory of genre (in the analysis of discourse practice). The hegemony theory draws attention to the creativity and productivity of discourse practice as it is expressed in texts.

Data Analysis

This section presents an analysis of the National Educational Policy (2017-2025) of Pakistan. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities inherent in educational policy discourse and highlights the importance of critical engagement in addressing paradoxical tensions within it.

This text appears to be intended for both instructors and the general public. Its hybrid genre combines parts of the policy genre with political party and promotional material of the political party.

Policy highlights the agenda of article insertion 25(a) in the constitution under the 18th amendment that free and compulsory education of all children aged 5-16 became a basic right and the responsibility of the state.

The text dimension of Fairclough's 3-D model operates on the choice of words. The use of past tense represents that this stance of free and compulsory education has already been discussed in the National Educational Policy (2009-2017). On the other hand, the discourse practice dimension leads the researcher toward the power relationship between the government and the common people. As the government is a dominant power, it also has a responsibility to give educational rights to all children aged 5-16 (up to matriculation). It needs the necessary resources, infrastructure, and support systems to facilitate children with quality education.

However, the paradox arises when there is a gap between the rhetoric of rights and responsibilities and the reality of implementation. There is a tension between declaring education as a fundamental right and a state responsibility, yet not fully ensuring its implementation or addressing underlying barriers to access and quality. Addressing this paradox requires not only legislative and policy commitments but also comprehensive strategies to overcome structural barriers, promote inclusivity, and ensure meaningful access to quality education for all children.

National Policy of Education has claimed the "Allocation of 25% of National budget for education sector". The term "national" refers to the overall budget of the nation which is Pakistan. This sentence is directive in structure. However controversy emerges here that in 2024, the education budget of Pakistan is not more than 10%. It has observed 7.5% in 2023.

In Chapter Four, the provisions aimed at the provision of adequate facilities, services, and infrastructures for early childhood education classes and the allocation of separate budgets for early childhood education.

According to the text dimension, the repetition of the word "provision" ensures the importance of ECE. The word "separate" indicates something that

is different from others and it should be treated consciously. It also points out the potential systemic inequalities within the education system, where early education may not receive adequate funding within the general education budget. This reflects broader societal priorities and resource allocation decisions. But still, there is no separate budget confined to ECE.

In another place, the policy provisions also state the allocation of 45 to 50 percent of the education budget for primary education as a whole and thirty percent of the primary education budget for improving the quality of primary education is another major policy provision.

The decision to allocate 40-45% of the education budget shows the significance of basic education for the people of Pakistan. 30% of this budget will be used for improving the standard of education provided. But in reality, only 20% of the education budget is allocated for primary education. There is a big difference between the actual value and the numerical value presented in the text. Quality improvement encompasses a wide range of factors, including teacher training, curriculum development, classroom resources, and pedagogical approaches. With a relatively smaller allocation for this purpose, there can be limitations in fulfilling the target.

In the seventh chapter of the policy, there is a discussion about the targets of the development of secondary education including the upgradation of fifty percent of primary schools to the middle, forty percent of middle schools to secondary, and twenty percent of existing secondary schools to higher secondary school levels and the increase gross participation rate at the middle education level to eighty-five percent and secondary up to seventy percent

The use of percentages or numerical values in hierarchical order as 50%, 40%, and 20%, indicate a quantitative approach to measure progress. They have also presented the levels of school in an order like primary, secondary, and higher secondary. This way of exploring things suggests a bureaucratic society. Words like "upgradation, gross participation rate" are used in a specific jargon related to the educational field.

There may be concerns about the quality of education provided in these upgraded and newly established schools. On the other hand, according to

a CM House spokesman, the education minister told the meeting that there were 36,234 primary schools and 4,730 middle and high schools, which resulted in a 54pc drop-out rate for children at the post-primary level (2024). It shows the unfulfillment of the goals. Gross Intake to the last grade of Primary is 65%. Gross Intake to the last grade of Middle is 47%. ICT (82%) (2021-2022).

Moreover, the main policy provisions enunciated include "expanding access to special need children; allocation of 5% of the education budget for Special Education" (p. 08).

As this language is directive and policy-oriented. It also indicates equal rights and opportunities for disabled students. This statement prioritizes special education within the broader educational sector. But the paradox occurs here that the government of Pakistan only provides 755 million for special education from the whole educational budget which is 175 billion PKR. This is not more than 1% even.

In the second chapter of policy, there is a discussion about "increasing investment in education to 4 % of GDP".

According to Fairclough's textual dimension, "increased investment" shows the specific change in the previous policy of education. This statement lacks explicit details including allocation specifics, implementation strategy, funding sources, impact assessment, stakeholder engagement, and long-term sustainability. It also reveals the transformative power of educational policy. GDP is an abbreviation of Gross Domestic Product. But the paradox arises when the Economic Survey of Pakistan (2021-22) pointed out that only 1.77 percent of the GDP was spent on the education sector. This level of investment is low when compared to the international norm of a 4 percent minimum.

In Chapter 22, there is a decision about the "allocation of at least 25% of the provincial educational budget for quality improvement projects and programs" (p. 18).

This piece of writing shows a declarative and specific structure presenting a proposed allocation for financial resources. Words like "quality improvement projects" denote the positive intention of the government towards the Educational department. "At least" depicts the perspective that the budget should not be less than this numerical value. On the contrary, Sindh has allocated 20% of

its total budget and Punjab has allocated 19% for education.

Again in chapter 22 of National Educational Policy (2017-2025), "1% of the education budget" is confined "for regular monitoring and evaluation". The text has a simple, straightforward vocabulary. "1% of the education budget" works as a subject of sentence and "for monitoring and evaluation" works as a predicate. This budget percentage is dedicated to checking the effectiveness and outcomes of Educational expenditures.

However the Monitoring and Evaluation budget constitutes 3% to 10% of the overall project or program's budget. Readers can interpret that either the policymakers have no idea about the distribution of the budget or maybe they are behaving as well-wishers of the educational sector with the consent of showing 1% only.

Allocation of forty-five percent of the educational budget is for primary education. For adult literacy and non-formal education, a four percent budget is used. One percent of the budget is nominated for special education. There is a specific category for all sub-sectors of education (p.166). This is another goal of Educational Policy. On the level of implementation, Pakistan's education budget is not being used in this particular pattern. There are major issues behind this failure. Many have been portrayed in this discourse.

At another point, "making education budget, free from all types of cuts, non-lapsable and non-transferable" was a claim set by policymakers. These terms like "free from cuts", "non-lapsable" and "non-transferable" imply permanence and protection of the budget allocated for education. Non-lapsable means that it cannot be surrendered at the end of the financial period. Non-transferable means that it cannot be moved to another purpose. But still, budget allocation for the education sector is uneven and inadequate, especially across the provinces and districts.

There is another consent about the increased access to the higher education department from its current level of 1.4 million students to 5 million in the next five years by opening more universities and degree-awarding institutions.

The text assumes a top-down approach where the decision to expand higher education access is made by those in authority, potentially policymakers or educational leaders. There is a need

for a huge amount of money to fulfill this major task. Now the overall enrollments of students in higher education institutions were recorded as 1.86 million in 2020-It means that there is no more budget for increasing the number of universities and the strength of students. An implementation plan including detailed costing for the implementation of key areas and main policy provisions shall be prepared, implemented monitored, and evaluated. A financial plan for the implementation of various policy provisions for each province and federating unit shall be prepared, implemented, monitored, and evaluated.

The use of terms like "prepared, implemented, monitored, and evaluated" indicates a bureaucratic or managerial approach to policy execution, focusing on accountability and oversight. The mention of provinces and federating units implies a decentralized governance structure. It also emphasizes regional autonomy. The text also reflects a hierarchical power structure where policy is formulated centrally, but it is implemented across provinces and federating bodies. The paradox arises when there is a vast difference between the policy provision and the real implementation of the plan. It is observed that commitments are made at a very high level but unfortunately spending on education remains at a minimum level which indicates there is a very high gap between policy making and policy implementation. The low level of spending indicates several issues such as insufficient allocations by comparing the needs, high administrative expenditure, handicapped legislation, and so on. There is also a lack of transparency and irregularity in our system. There is another issue that deadlines for budget allocations are often ignored consequently causing the long delay in the identification of development projects.

In the concluding section of the policy, there is a description of Pakistan's history of Pakistani

development, and well-groomed and produced educational policy since the day of independence are illustrated. They consider their mistakes here and that they have fallen short of implementing them. But then they praise themselves with the personal pronoun "We" in these lines:

We have repeatedly set goals of free universal education, and quality education, to produce innovative knowledge, skills, and competence, and scholars are committed to ethically doing that (p.09).

Conclusion

In conclusion, two levels of analysis are used for the chosen texts: the language level and the intertextual or discursive level. The first focuses on emphasizing the language and semiotic decisions made during the composition and design of educational policy materials. The identification, highlighting, and documentation of various, conflicting, and marginalized (ideological) discourses in educational policy texts is the primary goal of the intertextual/discourse level of analysis. A critical analysis of paradoxes in the National Educational Policy (2017-2025) of Pakistan reveals the complex interplay of interests, and values shaping the educational landscape. These paradoxes underscore the need for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to engage in educational reform. By recognizing and addressing these paradoxes, policymakers can strive towards more equitable, inclusive, and effective educational systems that uphold the principles of social justice and opportunity for all learners. The researcher has mainly concentrated on the economic paradoxes of this policy. Cultural, political, social, ethical, technological, and environmental paradoxes are also valuable and need to be analyzed to fill the research gap.

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