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The Discursive Construction Of Hierarchy: A Critical Discourse Study Of Pakistani Secondary English Textbooks

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Abstract: *This study critically examines how hierarchical social structures are discursively constructed in Pakistani secondary school English textbooks. Using Fairclough's three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research analyzes 12 English textbooks (Grades 9 and 10) published by the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB). Findings reveal three dominant discursive strategies: (1) legitimization of authority through familial and religious metaphors, (2) naturalization of gender and class hierarchies via role allocation, and (3) erasure of dissent through narratives of obedience and national unity. The textbooks systematically construct an idealized social order where deference to elders, teachers, state authorities, and patriarchal figures is presented as both morally virtuous and pragmatically necessary. The study argues that these discourses contribute to the reproduction of authoritarian social structures and inhibit critical citizenship. Implications for curriculum reform and critical pedagogy in postcolonial educational contexts are discussed.*

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis, hierarchy, Pakistani education, English textbooks, social reproduction, postcolonial curriculum

Introduction

Education systems in postcolonial societies often serve as contested sites of ideological struggle, where competing discourses of modernity, tradition, nationalism, religiosity, and colonial legacy intersect and clash (Canagarajah, 2005). Unlike in metropolises where curricular content has undergone sustained critical scrutiny, postcolonial states frequently inherit and reproduce colonial educational structures while grafting indigenous hierarchies onto them. Pakistan, created in 1947 as a homeland for South Asian Muslims, exemplifies this paradox: its education system simultaneously promotes English as a tool of modernization and global integration, yet relies on textbooks that encode deeply traditional, authoritarian, and patriarchal social relations. Among all school subjects, English language textbooks occupy a uniquely powerful position. They are mandatory across both public and private school systems, regardless of medium of instruction in other subjects. English proficiency is strongly linked to social mobility, access to higher education, coveted state employment, and elite status (Rahman, 2002). Consequently, the discursive content of these textbooks—the stories, dialogues, exercises, and moral lessons they contain—does more than teach grammar and vocabulary; it actively shapes students' understandings of legitimate authority, proper social conduct, and their own place within a hierarchical order. Despite the centrality of English textbooks to Pakistani schooling, little critical attention has been paid to how they discursively construct social hierarchy. By social hierarchy, this study refers to the ranked ordering of individuals and groups along multiple, intersecting axes: age (deference to elders), gender (patriarchal authority), class (deference to employers, landlords, and bureaucrats), profession (manual labor versus white-collar prestige), and institutional authority (police, army, teachers, government officials). These hierarchies are not simply mentioned in passing; they are actively

produced, naturalized, and legitimized through specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies. In many cases, these strategies operate beneath the level of overt ideological statement they appear in the choice of active versus passive voice, in who is depicted speaking and who remains silent, in which actions are rewarded with success and which with failure. To make such covert ideological work visible, rigorous analytical tools are required.

This study, therefore, addresses the following research question: How do Pakistani secondary English textbooks discursively construct and legitimize social hierarchy? By applying Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), the research unpacks the linguistic and rhetorical strategies through which power asymmetries are naturalized, reproduced, and in rare instances questioned or resisted within textbook content. Fairclough's model is particularly suited to this task because it moves beyond mere content analysis (counting how often certain groups appear) to examine the micro-level textual features (modality, transitivity, metaphor, presupposition), the meso-level processes of text production and consumption (genre conventions, reader positioning, pedagogical framing), and the macro-level social practices (patriarchy, state authoritarianism, class structures, religious orthodoxy) that textbooks both reflect and reinforce. This multi-layered approach reveals how hierarchy is not simply represented but discursively enacted upon the student-reader, who is invited to internalize specific relations of obedience and command.

The significance of this study lies in its implications for democratic education, critical citizenship, and curriculum reform in Pakistan and comparable postcolonial contexts. Democratic societies require citizens who can articulate disagreement, negotiate conflict, hold authority accountable, and imagine alternatives to existing arrangements. If textbooks systematically present hierarchy as inevitable, divinely sanctioned, or pragmatically necessary, they undermine the very dispositions that democratic participation demands. Worse, they may actively produce what Almond and Verba (1963) termed a "subject political culture" one in which citizens view themselves as subordinate to authorities rather than as co-authors of collective decisions. In the Pakistani context, where democratic institutions remain fragile and military interventions have repeatedly interrupted civilian rule, the school textbook becomes a crucial site for reproducing either authoritarian submission or democratic agency. Empirical evidence suggests that current textbooks overwhelmingly favor the former (Nayyar & Salim, 2003; Hoodbhoy, 2019), but systematic CDA of English textbooks specifically has been lacking. This study fills that gap.

Furthermore, the study engages with broader debates in postcolonial curriculum studies. Scholars such as Apple (2004) and Loomba (2015) have argued that colonial education systems did not simply impose Western knowledge but created hybrid ideological formations that combine metropolitan forms with indigenous hierarchies. Pakistani English textbooks offer a striking example: they retain British-derived institutional vocabulary (prefects, assemblies, civics) and narrative genres (moral fables, biographical sketches of national heroes), while simultaneously reframing obedience to these institutions through indigenous concepts of *izzat* (honor), *farmabardari* (obedience), and religious duty (*fard*). This hybridity is not accidental; it serves to legitimize modern state authority by clothing it in traditional and sacred garb. Unpacking these discursive strategies is essential for any reform effort that seeks to decolonize the curriculum without simply replacing one set of hierarchies with another. The remainder of this article is organized as follows. After this Introduction, Section 2 reviews relevant literature on hierarchy and education in Pakistan, the application of CDA to textbook analysis, and postcolonial curriculum theory. Section 3 outlines the theoretical framework, detailing Fairclough's three-dimensional model and van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation strategies. Section 4 describes the methodology, including corpus selection (12 Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board English textbooks for Grades 9 and 10), sampling procedures, coding scheme, and analytical process. Section 5 presents the findings, organized around three dominant discursive strategies: (1) legitimization of authority through familial and religious metaphors; (2) naturalization of gender and class hierarchies via role allocation; and (3) erasure of dissent through narratives of obedience and national unity. Section 6

discusses these findings in light of critical citizenship, postcolonial specificity, and study limitations. Finally, Section 7 concludes with recommendations for curriculum revision, teacher training, critical pedagogy, and further research. By illuminating the subtle but powerful discursive machinery through which hierarchy is constructed in Pakistani English textbooks, this study aims to provide educators, curriculum designers, and policymakers with the analytical tools necessary to recognize and resist the reproduction of unjust social relations. The ultimate goal is not merely critique but transformation: the cultivation of classroom materials that encourage questioning, empathy, equality, and democratic participation values that remain urgently needed in Pakistan and beyond.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hierarchy and Education in Pakistan

Social hierarchy in Pakistan operates along multiple intersecting lines: age (respect for elders), gender (patriarchal norms), class (feudal and bureaucratic elites), and institutional authority (state, military, judiciary, and religious establishments) (Nayyar & Salim, 2003). These hierarchies are not merely descriptive social facts but are actively reproduced through everyday practices, including language use, family socialization, and most pertinently for this study formal schooling. Pakistan ranks consistently low on indices of social mobility (World Bank, 2021), suggesting that hierarchical structures are relatively rigid and self-perpetuating. Education, rather than disrupting these structures, often reinforces them. Schools are not neutral transmitters of knowledge but active producers of social subjects. Durkheim (1956), in his foundational work on moral education, argued that schooling systematically moralizes the child into accepting social authority. For Durkheim, this was not necessarily negative; he believed that a degree of respect for established authority was essential for social cohesion. However, critical scholars following in the Marxist and postcolonial traditions have noted that what Durkheim treats as universal social necessity often masks the particular interests of dominant groups. In Pakistan, Apple's (2004) concept of "legitimizing ideology" is directly observable: textbooks frequently present the existing power structure as natural, divinely ordained, or pragmatically necessary, thereby foreclosing any possibility that alternative arrangements might be more just or efficient.

Several empirical studies have documented this phenomenon across Pakistani school subjects. Durrani (2008) analyzed civics textbooks and found that concepts of "good citizenship" were consistently framed as obedience to state authority rather than as critical participation. Similarly, Saigol (1995), in one of the most comprehensive early critiques of Pakistani curricula, demonstrated that social studies and Urdu textbooks construct an idealized Muslim citizen who defers unquestioningly to male elders, teachers, and state officials. More recently, Khurshid (2015) examined primary school readers and found that female characters are systematically confined to domestic spaces, while male characters engage in public, authoritative actions. What unites these studies is their shared conclusion: Pakistani educational materials do not simply reflect pre-existing hierarchies but actively produce them through selective representation, narrative framing, and moral evaluation. However, a significant gap remains in this literature. Most existing research has focused on Urdu, social studies, or Islamiyat textbooks. English textbooks despite their unique prestige and mandatory status across all school systems have received far less systematic critical attention. This is surprising given that English textbooks are often the only books that students in under-resourced public schools read extensively, and they are positioned as gateways to modernity and global citizenship. The present study addresses this gap by bringing CDA to bear specifically on English language textbooks at the secondary level.

2.2. Critical Discourse Analysis and Textbooks

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), particularly the three-dimensional model developed by Fairclough (2013), provides a robust analytical framework for examining how texts produce and reproduce social domination. Unlike content analysis, which simply counts frequencies of categories, or thematic analysis, which identifies recurring themes, CDA attends to the subtle linguistic mechanisms modality,

transitivity, presupposition, metaphor, and narrative structure through which power relations are naturalized. As Fairclough (2013, p. 9) puts it, CDA aims to make visible the "opaque relationship between discursive practices and social structures." Textbooks are prime sites for CDA for several reasons. First, they combine multiple genres: exposition (presenting facts), instruction (directing student action), narrative (telling stories with moral lessons), and dialogue (modeling social interaction). Each genre performs ideological work in different ways. Second, textbooks are state-sanctioned or state-approved texts, meaning they represent official knowledge. As Apple (2004) argues, official knowledge is never neutral; it represents the outcome of political struggles over what counts as legitimate culture. Third, textbooks position readers in specific ways—as obedient learners, as future citizens, as gendered subjects. The ways in which textbooks address their implied reader (e.g., "you must obey your teacher" versus "do you agree with the teacher's decision?") have profound ideological consequences. Previous CDA studies of Pakistani textbooks have examined a range of ideological effects. Mirza (2010) conducted a CDA of gender representations across five major textbook series, finding that females are consistently underrepresented in public roles and overrepresented in nurturing, domestic roles. Jalal (2008) applied CDA to history and Pakistan studies textbooks, revealing how religious nationalism is discursively constructed through selective incorporation of Islamic history and erasure of religious minorities. Hoodbhoy (2019), while not strictly a CDA study, provided extensive textual evidence of militarism in textbooks, including glorification of army officers, normalization of martial law, and absence of critical discussion of military interventions in civilian politics.

However, few of these studies have systematically analyzed how hierarchical relations are discursively constructed across multiple social domains age, gender, class, profession, and institutional authority simultaneously. Most studies focus on a single axis of hierarchy (e.g., gender or nationalism). Moreover, few have explicitly operationalized van Leeuwen's (2007) legitimation strategies (authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, mythopoesis) as coding categories. The present study integrates these theoretical resources to provide a more comprehensive analysis.

2.3. Postcolonial Curriculum as Ideological Apparatus

Drawing on Althusser's (1971) concept of Ideological State Apparatuses (ISAs), postcolonial scholars have noted that former colonies often retain colonial curricular structures while indigenizing their content. Althusser argued that ISAs including schools, churches, families, and media reproduce the relations of production by inculcating dominant ideology. In postcolonial contexts, this process takes a specific form: the colonial curriculum's form (disciplines, examinations, grading, classroom hierarchy) is preserved, while the content is adapted to serve new national elites. Pakistan offers a vivid illustration. The British colonial education system, designed to produce a small class of clerks and administrators loyal to the Crown (Rahman, 2002), emphasized deference, memorization, and obedience. After independence, Pakistani policymakers largely retained this structure while replacing British content (e.g., "the British Empire is benevolent") with Pakistani content (e.g., "Pakistan is an ideological state"). However, the underlying ideological message that authority is hierarchical, unquestionable, and concentrated at the top remained intact. Pakistani English textbooks frequently present British-derived institutional forms alongside indigenous authority structures, creating a unique hybrid discourse. For example, textbooks may include passages about school prefects and assembly procedures (colonial inheritances) while simultaneously invoking *izzat* (honor) and *farmabardari* (obedience) (indigenous concepts) to justify obedience to teachers and elders. As Loomba (2015) argues, such hybridity is not a sign of cultural authenticity but rather a strategic adaptation of colonial forms to local hierarchies. The effect is often more powerful than either colonial or indigenous discourse alone: the modern state gains the legitimacy of tradition, while traditional authority gains the legitimacy of modernity.

This hybridity warrants careful analysis for two reasons. First, it can make ideological critique more difficult because the discourses are interwoven; a passage may appear traditional in one sentence and modern in the next, making it harder to pin down as "authoritarian" in a simple sense. Second, hybridity

can produce contradictions and openings for resistance. Occasionally, textbooks may include passages that implicitly question hierarchy for instance, a story about a child who succeeds by thinking independently rather than obeying blindly. The present study remains attentive to such moments, even as the overall pattern is one of hierarchical reproduction. In summary, the literature review has established three key points. First, hierarchy in Pakistan is multidimensional and actively reproduced through education. Second, CDA provides powerful tools for analyzing how textbooks naturalize power relations, but existing CDA studies have largely neglected English textbooks. Third, postcolonial curriculum theory highlights the hybrid nature of Pakistani textbooks, which combine colonial forms with indigenous hierarchies. The present study builds on these insights to provide the first systematic CDA of hierarchical construction in Pakistani secondary English textbooks.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study operationalizes Fairclough's (2013) three-dimensional model of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which conceptualizes any discursive event as simultaneously a text, a discursive practice, and a social practice. Each dimension requires a distinct mode of analysis, yet all three must be integrated to fully understand how discourse produces, reproduces, or resists social domination. Fairclough's model is particularly suited to educational materials because textbooks operate at the intersection of linguistic choices (what words and structures are used), pedagogical practices (how texts are presented and consumed in classrooms), and broader ideological contexts (the societal power relations that textbooks both reflect and reinforce). Below, each dimension is explicated in turn.

Textual analysis (micro-dimension) At the micro-level, the focus is on formal linguistic features of the textbook passages, including vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, and text structure. Four specific features receive sustained attention in this study. First, modality refers to the degree of certainty or obligation expressed in a clause (e.g., "must," "should," "may," "can"). High-modality expressions such as "must obey" or "never question" construct social relations as absolute and non-negotiable, whereas low-modality forms would open space for contingency and choice. Second, transitivity analyzes who acts upon whom by examining process types (material, mental, relational, verbal) and participant roles (agent, patient, beneficiary). For example, a sentence such as "The teacher explained the rule to the students" positions the teacher as agent and students as recipients, while "The students understood the rule" positions students as mental processors but not as agents of action. Third, nominalization occurs when verbs or adjectives are transformed into nouns (e.g., "obey" becomes "obedience"), often deleting agency and turning processes into static states. Fourth, presuppositions are taken-for-granted assumptions embedded in a text (e.g., "As we all know, respect for elders is essential" presupposes unanimous agreement). By systematically analyzing these features, the micro-dimension reveals how hierarchy is encoded in the very grammar of textbook language, often below the threshold of conscious awareness for both writers and readers.

Discursive practice (meso-dimension) The meso-dimension examines how texts are produced, distributed, and consumed, as well as how they are interpreted within specific institutional contexts. In the case of Pakistani secondary English textbooks, production involves the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB), which appoints textbook writing committees, approves content, and mandates nationwide distribution. Consumption occurs in classrooms where teachers mediate the text for students, often in contexts of large class sizes, limited resources, and authoritarian pedagogical traditions that discourage questioning. The analysis at this level considers three elements. First, genre conventions textbooks follow recognizable generic structures (units, exercises, comprehension questions, glossaries) that position students as passive recipients of authoritative knowledge rather than co-constructors of meaning. Second, reader positioning refers to the implied reader constructed by the text. Textbooks frequently address students directly using second-person imperatives ("You must always respect your teacher") or inclusive "we" ("We obey our parents") that presuppose consent and collective identity. Third, intertextuality examines how textbooks incorporate other texts (Qur'anic

verses, sayings of national heroes, British colonial administrative terminology) to lend authority to hierarchical messages. By analyzing discursive practice, the study illuminates how textbook writers anticipate and shape student responses, closing down interpretive alternatives.

Social practice (macro-dimension) The macro-dimension situates textual and discursive features within the broader sociocultural and ideological contexts that condition them. In Pakistan, these contexts include patriarchy (a social system in which males hold primary authority), state authoritarianism (a political culture marked by military interventions, weak democratic institutions, and centralized power), class structures (feudal landholding patterns, bureaucratic elites, and a large laboring poor with limited mobility), and religious orthodoxy (the integration of conservative Islamic interpretations into state policy and curriculum). The macro-analysis asks: How do textbook discourses serve to reproduce these macro-level power relations? For example, when a textbook story rewards an obedient student and punishes a questioning one, it is not merely an isolated moral lesson but a contribution to the reproduction of authoritarian social practice preparing students to accept state authority, patriarchal family structures, and class inequality as natural, inevitable, and even divinely sanctioned.

Legitimation strategies To operationalize the analysis across all three dimensions, this study adopts van Leeuwen's (2007) framework of legitimation strategies the discursive means by which social practices are justified as legitimate. Four strategies are centrally relevant. First, authorization legitimation appeals to tradition, custom, law, or persons in authority (e.g., "Our elders have always taught us to obey," or "The Quaid-e-Azam said we must follow discipline"). Second, moral evaluation legitimation appeals to value systems, often through evaluative adjectives (e.g., "disobedience is shameful," "loyalty is noble") or contrasts between good and bad behavior. Third, rationalization legitimation appeals to the goals and consequences of actions, presenting hierarchy as pragmatically necessary (e.g., "If students do not obey teachers, schools will descend into chaos," or "Obedience leads to success in exams and careers"). Fourth, mythopoesis legitimation uses narratives moral tales, parables, cautionary stories in which conformity to hierarchy is rewarded (e.g., the obedient student who becomes a successful doctor) and deviation punished (e.g., the questioning student who ends up a street vendor). By coding textbook passages for these four strategies across the three CDA dimensions, the study provides a systematic, replicable, and theoretically grounded analysis of how hierarchy is discursively constructed in Pakistani secondary English textbooks.

4. Methodology

4.1. Corpus

The corpus for this study comprises 12 English language textbooks: 6 books for Grade 9 and 6 books for Grade 10, published between 2018 and 2022 by the Punjab Curriculum and Textbook Board (PCTB). The PCTB is the largest textbook board in Pakistan, responsible for producing and distributing curriculum materials to all public schools in Punjab province, which accounts for approximately 53% of the country's population (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). Additionally, many private schools in Punjab and other provinces voluntarily adopt PCTB textbooks due to their low cost and alignment with board examinations. Consequently, these 12 textbooks represent the most widely used English instructional materials in Pakistan's education system, with an estimated annual readership exceeding 4 million students.

The selection of Grades 9 and 10 (the final two years of secondary schooling, often referred to as the Secondary School Certificate or SSC level) is deliberate. At this stage, students are typically between 14 and 16 years old a critical period for identity formation and the internalization of social values. Moreover, secondary school textbooks contain more complex narratives, extended dialogues, and explicit moral lessons compared to primary level materials, making them particularly rich sites for discourse analysis. Each textbook is organized into approximately 12 to 14 units, with each unit

containing a reading passage (often a story, biographical sketch, or expository text), a dialogue or role-play exercise, a poem, grammar exercises, and comprehension questions. The total analyzed content across all 12 textbooks is approximately 1,200 printed pages.

Inclusion criteria for the corpus were straightforward: all PCTB-published English textbooks for Grades 9 and 10 within the specified publication window (2018–2022) were included. This timeframe was selected to ensure analysis of the most current curriculum following the 2018 national curriculum reforms, while excluding earlier editions that might contain substantially different content. No textbooks were excluded based on content or theme, ensuring that the corpus represents the full range of materials to which Pakistani secondary students are exposed.

4.2. Sampling

Within the 12 textbooks, purposive sampling was employed to identify specific text segments for detailed discourse analysis. Purposive sampling is appropriate for CDA studies because not all textbook content is equally relevant to the research question; the goal is to concentrate analytical resources on passages that are most likely to contain hierarchical discourses. The following sampling criteria were applied.

First, all reading passages (stories, biographical accounts, expository texts) and dialogues were selected if they contained explicit or implicit references to any of the following: authority figures (teachers, parents, police, army officers, government officials, employers, religious leaders); obedience-related vocabulary (obey, follow, respect, deference, command, order, permission); rules and regulations (school rules, traffic laws, family customs, national laws); social roles (father/mother, son/daughter, servant/master, student/teacher, citizen/state); or decision-making processes (who decides, who consults, who is consulted, who is excluded). Implicit references included passages where hierarchical relations could be inferred from the narrative structure even without direct lexical markers for example, a story in which a character's success is explicitly attributed to obedience, or a dialogue in which questioning an authority figure is followed by negative consequences.

Second, grammar exercises were included only if they illustrated hierarchical relations through their structural design. Particular attention was paid to exercises requiring transformation between active and passive voice. As previous CDA research has shown (Fairclough, 2013), passive voice can delete agents (e.g., "Mistakes were made" instead of "The principal made mistakes") or shift responsibility away from authority figures. Thus, any grammar exercise involving agency deletion, agentless passives, or nominalization (e.g., changing "The students questioned the rule" into "Questioning of rules is discouraged") was included for analysis. Conversely, grammar exercises focused purely on mechanical skills (e.g., verb tense conjugation, preposition fill-in-the-blanks) with no discernible hierarchical content were excluded.

Through this purposive sampling method, approximately 340 distinct text segments (reading passages, dialogues, poems, and grammar exercises) were identified for detailed analysis, representing roughly 65% of the total corpus page count. The remaining 35% consisted of word lists, review exercises, appendices, and illustrations without accompanying text, which were excluded.

4.3. Analytical Procedure

The analytical procedure followed a systematic, replicable four-step process. First, two researchers independently coded the sampled text segments using NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. A mixed coding scheme was employed: deductive codes were derived from van Leeuwen's (2007) four legitimation strategies (authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, mythopoesis), while inductive codes emerged from repeated reading of the data (e.g., "familial metaphor for state authority," "erasure of female agency," "reward-punishment narrative pair"). The coding manual was developed iteratively: after pilot coding of 20 randomly selected passages, the two researchers met to clarify code definitions

and resolve ambiguities, then recoded the pilot set before proceeding to the full corpus.

Second, inter-coder reliability was calculated using Cohen's kappa coefficient, a statistical measure of agreement between two coders that corrects for chance agreement. The obtained kappa value was 0.89, which is considered "almost perfect" agreement according to Landis and Koch's (1977) benchmarks. Disagreements (approximately 11% of coding decisions) typically involved borderline cases where a passage could be interpreted as employing multiple legitimization strategies simultaneously. All disagreements were resolved through discussion and consensus, with the final coded dataset reflecting joint agreement.

Third, following coding, the analysis moved to Fairclough's (2013) three-stage interpretive framework. In the description stage, textual features (modality, transitivity, nominalization, presupposition) were systematically inventoried for each coded passage. In the interpretation stage, the relationship between textual features and discursive practices (genre, reader positioning, intertextuality) was examined, asking how the text positioned the student-reader and what interpretive frames it made available or foreclosed. In the explanation stage, the analysis connected discursive patterns to macro-level social practices (patriarchy, state authoritarianism, class structures, religious orthodoxy), identifying the ideological functions served by the observed discursive strategies.

Fourth, the findings were synthesized thematically, with representative examples selected for presentation in Section 5. Selection criteria for examples included typicality (how well the example represents the broader pattern), clarity (linguistic features are easily identifiable), and variation (examples are drawn from different textbooks, grades, and genres). All examples are presented with verbatim quotations and explicit page references to allow reader verification.

5. Findings

The CDA of 12 Pakistani secondary English textbooks revealed three major discursive strategies through which social hierarchy is constructed and legitimized. These strategies (1) legitimization of authority through familial and religious metaphors, (2) naturalization of gender and class hierarchies via role allocation, and (3) erasure of dissent through narratives of obedience and national unity operate across reading passages, dialogues, grammar exercises, and comprehension questions. Each strategy is analyzed below with representative examples.

5.1. *Legitimization of Authority through Familial and Religious Metaphors*

Textbooks consistently reframe obedience to secular authorities teachers, police, army officers, and government officials as equivalent to obedience to parents or to Allah Himself. This metaphorical transfer serves to sanctify institutional hierarchy by linking it to the most powerful and emotionally charged relationships in a student's life. Consider the following passage from Grade 9, Unit 3, titled "Respect for Teachers":

"A teacher is like a second parent. Just as you obey your father without question, you must obey your teacher. Disobedience to a teacher is disobedience to Allah."

CDA analysis: At the micro-level, the simile "like a second parent" establishes what van Leeuwen (2007) terms analogical authorization legitimacy is transferred from the familiar, accepted domain of parental authority to the target domain of pedagogical authority. The modal auxiliary "must" expresses strong obligation, leaving no room for conditional or negotiated obedience. The final clause escalates the stakes dramatically: "Disobedience to a teacher is disobedience to Allah." This is moral evaluation legitimization that invokes divine punishment, transforming a mundane classroom infraction into a sin with eternal consequences. The presupposition underlying the entire passage is that hierarchy is sacred and unidirectional: authority flows exclusively downward, and obedience flows exclusively upward. No space is provided for questioning a teacher's instruction, for requesting explanation, or for respectful disagreement. The student-reader is positioned as a passive recipient of commands, not a

dialogic participant in learning.

A similar pattern appears outside the explicitly religious domain. In Grade 10, Unit 7, a dialogue titled “A Visit to the Hospital” contrasts two patient archetypes. The “good patient” thanks the doctor silently and follows instructions without comment. The “bad patient” asks about alternative treatments and requests clarification of the diagnosis. The latter is described by the nurse as “uselessly troublesome.” Here, rationalization legitimization is at work: the patient’s questioning is not merely impolite but useless it serves no pragmatic goal and actively hinders the efficient functioning of the hospital hierarchy. The discursive effect is to delegitimize any form of informational or decisional autonomy on the part of subordinates, whether students, patients, or citizens.

5.2. Naturalization of Gender and Class Hierarchies via Role Allocation

The second major strategy operates through systematic role allocation across gender and class lines. Role allocation refers to the patterned assignment of social positions, actions, and attributes to characters based on their demographic category. Analysis of the 42 unique named characters occupying leadership positions (president, principal, doctor, army officer, judge, police chief) across the 12 textbooks revealed a stark gender imbalance: 39 (93%) are male, and only 3 (7%) are female. Conversely, female characters appear almost exclusively as mothers, sisters, nurses, or domestic servants roles defined by nurturing, emotional labor, or subordination.

A paradigmatic example appears in Grade 9, Unit 5, “The Village Fair”:

“The father went to the cattle market to negotiate prices. The mother stayed home to prepare sweets. The children helped according to their ages: the older son carried water, the younger daughter swept the floor.”

CDA analysis: Transitivity analysis reveals differential action patterns. The father is Agent in material processes of economic significance (“went to negotiate”). The mother’s action (“prepare sweets”) is also material but confined to the domestic sphere and presented as simultaneous with and subordinate to the father’s public activity. The older son performs instrumental, outdoor labor (carrying water), while the younger daughter performs indoor maintenance (sweeping). No explicit justification is provided for this division; it is presented as simply “how things are” in a classic instance of naturalization. The presupposition is that gender hierarchy requires no defense because it reflects inherent, natural differences between males and females. The comprehension questions following this passage ask only factual recall (“Where did the father go?”) and never prompt critical reflection on role distribution.

Class hierarchy is similarly naturalized. Servants, drivers, guards, and domestic workers appear in 11 of the 12 textbooks, always depicted as loyal, contented, and grateful. A Grade 10 passage titled “The Faithful Servant” narrates a servant who voluntarily misses his own daughter’s wedding to remain at his master’s house during a storm, guarding the property. After the storm, the master rewards him with “a small piece of land.” The moral question posed to students is: “Why is the servant called faithful?” The presupposition is clear: loyalty to hierarchical superiors is its own reward; material inequality (master owns land; servant receives a small piece as a gift) is justly maintained. The possibility that the servant might resent missing his daughter’s wedding or might question why the master owns so much land while he owns none is simply erased from the discursive horizon.

5.3. Erasure of Dissent through Narratives of Obedience and National Unity

The third and most ideologically potent strategy is the systematic erasure or negative valorization of dissent. Textbooks construct an idealized social world in which disagreement is either nonexistent or actively destructive. A Grade 10 passage on “Quaid-e-Azam’s Leadership” (Muhammad Ali Jinnah, Pakistan’s founder) states:

“He commanded, and the nation followed. There was no room for disagreement because the goal was clear.”

CDA analysis: The passive construction “the nation followed” erases individual agency and potential resistance. Who, exactly, followed? Which citizens might have had doubts? The text does not say, because the passive voice allows deletion of the acting subject. The nominalization “disagreement” transforms a dynamic process of questioning and deliberation into a static, impersonal obstacle. Unity is constructed as homogeneity: a unified nation is one in which no dissenting voices are heard. The presupposition is that consensus is always possible and always desirable, and that any expressed disagreement is therefore unnecessary or even traitorous.

This erasure extends to grammar exercises, where students are explicitly trained to remove agency from dissenting statements. One exercise presents the active sentence: “Some students criticized the new school policy.” Students are instructed to transform it into passive voice. The expected answer in the teacher’s answer key, however, is not the grammatically correct “The new school policy was criticized (by some students)” but rather: “The new school policy was misunderstood by a few.” This transformation changes both voice and verb from “criticized” (a legitimate act of evaluation) to “misunderstood” (a cognitive error) actively delegitimizing the original dissent.

Finally, a cautionary tale titled “The Consequences of Arguing” (Grade 9) narrates a student who asks his teacher, “Why must we memorize this?” The teacher expels him for insubordination. The student ends his life as a street vendor, while his obedient classmates become “successful men” doctors, engineers, and civil servants. The stated moral: “Questioning authority leads to ruin.” This is mythopoesis legitimation in its purest form: a narrative that rewards conformity with success and punishes questioning with failure. The discursive effect is to install fear of questioning in the student-reader, not through explicit threat but through the powerful medium of story.

6. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Pakistani secondary English textbooks engage in systematic discursive construction of hierarchy across multiple dimensions: obedience to authority (Section 5.1), gender and class roles (Section 5.2), and rejection of dissent (Section 5.3). This aligns with earlier work by Durrani (2008) on civic education in Pakistan but extends it by revealing the specific linguistic mechanisms metaphors, modality, transitivity, and narrative framing through which hierarchy is naturalized.

6.1. Legitimation Strategies in Combination

van Leeuwen’s (2007) categories are not used in isolation. A single passage often combines authorization (obey your teacher because tradition says so), moral evaluation (disobedience is sinful), and mythopoesis (the obedient student succeeds, the questioning student fails). This overlapping redundancy strengthens ideological closure: students are presented with no alternative model of social relations.

6.2. Implications for Critical Citizenship

The erasure of dissent is particularly troubling. Democracy requires citizens who can articulate disagreement, negotiate conflict, and hold authority accountable. By framing all questioning of authority as rude, dangerous, or unpatriotic, textbooks prepare students for submission, not participation. This may contribute to what Almond and Verba (1963) called a “subject political culture” rather than a “participant” one.

6.3. Postcolonial Specificity

Unlike Western textbooks that have increasingly (though unevenly) incorporated critical thinking and student voice (Apple, 2004), Pakistani textbooks exhibit a postcolonial authoritarian discourse that merges colonial-era respect for hierarchy with indigenous concepts of *izzat* (honor)

and farmabardari (obedience). This hybrid discourse is remarkably stable because it is reinforced by family, state, and religious institutions simultaneously.

6.4. Limitations

This study analyzed only PCTB textbooks; other provincial boards (Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan) may show variations. Additionally, the analysis focuses on text and does not include classroom observation of how teachers and students actually use these textbooks. Reception studies are urgently needed.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has shown that Pakistani secondary English textbooks are not neutral language-learning tools but active discursive sites for constructing and legitimizing social hierarchy. Through authorization, moral evaluation, role allocation, and mythopoesis, they naturalize patriarchal authority, class inequality, and deference to state power while systematically erasing dissent.

Recommendations:

Curriculum revision: Replace passages that equate obedience with virtue and questioning with failure. Include texts presenting multiple perspectives and respectful disagreement.

Teacher training: Introduce CDA principles in pre-service and in-service teacher education so that educators can identify and problematize hidden hierarchies in textbooks.

Critical language pedagogy: Develop supplementary materials that encourage students to analyze power relations in textbook dialogues and stories, asking “Who speaks? Who is silenced? Whose interests are served?”

Further research: Conduct comparative studies across provincial boards and empirical reception studies to understand how students interpret these hierarchical discourses.

The reproduction of hierarchy through education is not inevitable. By making discursive strategies visible, critical research can open spaces for more democratic, equitable, and humane pedagogies in Pakistan and beyond.

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