

Revisiting Linguistic Imperialism: A Postcolonial Critique of RELO Programs as Mechanisms of Epistemic Injustice and Neo-Colonial American Hegemony in Pakistan

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Abstract

This study critically examines the role of Regional English Language Office (RELO) programs in Pakistan through the lens of Epistemic Injustice Theory, proposed by Miranda Fricker (2007). Positioned within a postcolonial theoretical framework, the research interrogates how RELO initiatives, under the guise of linguistic development, contribute to epistemic injustice by marginalizing indigenous knowledge systems and reinforcing Western epistemological dominance. These programs claim to empower local educators and learners by enhancing English language proficiency; however, they often function as instruments of soft power, limiting Indigenous agencies in knowledge production and educational policymaking. By critically engaging with firsthand accounts of educators involved in RELO programs, this research unveils the neo-colonial structures embedded within these initiatives, which sustain Western hegemonic influence in Pakistan's educational sphere. The findings highlight the urgent need for a decolonial re-evaluation of language education policies to rectify epistemic injustice and ensure the recognition of local knowledge systems. The study underscores the impact of RELO programs on national identity, pedagogical self-reliance, and the autonomy of indigenous epistemologies, advocating for language policies that promote local agency over Western-centric dominance.

Keywords: Linguistic Imperialism, Neo-Colonial Hegemony, RELO, Epistemic Injustice

Introduction

The entrenchment of English as a global lingua franca has long been tied to historical structures of colonial domination. In postcolonial contexts like Pakistan, linguistic policies and educational interventions often reflect underlying power asymmetries that sustain Western hegemony. The Regional English Language Office (RELO) programs, designed to enhance English language proficiency and pedagogical practices, exemplify this phenomenon. While framed as developmental initiatives, these programs subtly reinforce American ideological dominance, perpetuating linguistic imperialism under the guise of educational advancement and contributing to epistemic injustice. This study critically examines the RELO programs as instruments of soft power that shape educational frameworks and epistemological orientations in Pakistan.

Postcolonial theory provides a critical lens through which to analyze how RELO initiatives contribute to neo-colonial hegemony. The dominance of English, promoted through these programs, fosters dependency on Western knowledge systems, marginalizing indigenous

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languages and local epistemologies and reinforcing epistemic injustice. By prioritizing American pedagogical models, RELO programs reshape national identity and reinforce asymmetrical knowledge production. This study explores the implications of such interventions, questioning their role in sustaining cultural and intellectual subjugation in Pakistan's educational landscape.

Pakistan is a multilingual country with six major languages and over fifty-nine smaller ones, yet English and Urdu dominate the domains of power such as government, media, and education. This dominance has led to the marginalization of indigenous languages, with some on the verge of extinction, while also creating socio-economic divides, as English is often associated with the upper class and sophistication. Proficiency in English is closely linked to better job prospects and higher salaries, with a report by the British Council indicating that English-speaking professionals earn, on average, 30-50% more than their non-English-speaking counterparts. This economic advantage has reinforced the role of English in the country's labor market, where multinational companies and export-driven industries prioritize fluency in the language. Programs initiated by the Regional English Language Office (RELO), the Online Professional English Network (OPEN), and British organizations have played a significant role in expanding English language education in Pakistan. In 2024 alone, initiatives such as Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) and Global Online Courses (GOCs) benefited over 1,500 students and 189 teachers, while the OPEN Cubed Pakistan program trained 326 participants with the support of twenty-two facilitators.

However, the strong emphasis on English in education has led to concerns regarding epistemic injustice and cultural erasure. Many students are pressured to communicate in English at the cost of their linguistic background, which has negatively impacted foundational learning in subjects like Urdu, mathematics, and Islamic studies. The overwhelming focus on English is contributing to the erosion of Urdu and other regional languages, raising concerns about cultural preservation and linguistic diversity. These statistics highlight the complex relationship between English language programs, social inequalities, and the persistence of linguistic imperialism in Pakistan.

A qualitative approach, incorporating policy analysis and firsthand accounts from educators, reveals how RELO programs operate as strategic tools of American soft power. These initiatives do not merely facilitate language acquisition but also function as vehicles for ideological dissemination. By embedding Western-centric perspectives within Pakistan's academic and professional spaces, RELO programs undermine the autonomy of local educators, restricting the development of independent, context-driven pedagogical frameworks and perpetuating epistemic injustice in knowledge production. This research highlights the urgent need for a decolonial re-evaluation of language policies in Pakistan. By challenging the dominance of Western epistemologies in English language education, the study advocates for policies that promote linguistic plurality, pedagogical self-reliance, and epistemic sovereignty. Addressing these concerns is essential to fostering an education system that prioritizes local agency over Western hegemonic influence, ensuring that language serves as a tool for empowerment rather than subjugation while actively resisting epistemic injustice.

The proliferation of Regional English Language Office (RELO) programs in Pakistan illustrates how linguistic imperialism is embedded within seemingly benevolent educational initiatives. These programs, under the pretext of language development, introduce pedagogical frameworks that privilege Western epistemologies, subtly eroding indigenous linguistic and intellectual traditions. By positioning English as the primary medium of academic and professional advancement, RELO interventions create an implicit hierarchy where local languages are relegated to the periphery. This dynamic perpetuates epistemic injustice by devaluing indigenous knowledge systems, forcing educators and students into a paradigm that prioritizes Western linguistic and cultural norms over local pedagogical needs. As a result, the

structural influence of RELO programs extends beyond language instruction, fostering a cognitive dependency that aligns Pakistan's educational aspirations with American ideological interests rather than fostering independent intellectual growth.

The intersection of linguistic imperialism and neo-colonial hegemony within RELO initiatives reveals the strategic deployment of English as an instrument of soft power. Through extensive teacher training programs, curriculum design, and standardized assessments, these interventions shape not only language proficiency but also cognitive and ideological orientations. The adoption of Western-centric pedagogical methodologies marginalizes alternative ways of knowing and teaching, reinforcing an epistemic hierarchy that systematically excludes non-Western perspectives. This process not only weakens local academic autonomy but also embeds a long-term reliance on Western educational models, limiting the scope for decolonial resistance. A critical reassessment of RELO's role is essential to disrupt this cycle, advocating for an educational framework that fosters linguistic and epistemic diversity, allowing Pakistan to reclaim authority over its knowledge production and pedagogical strategies.

Statement of the Problem

The RELO programs in Pakistan, presented as educational initiatives, subtly reinforce American ideological dominance and linguistic imperialism. This study critically examines their role in sustaining neo-colonial influence, perpetuating epistemic injustice, and marginalizing indigenous languages.

Research Objectives

1. To examine how RELO programs in Pakistan reinforce linguistic imperialism, perpetuate epistemic injustice, and sustain neo-colonial hegemony.
2. To analyze the impact of RELO programs in Pakistan on indigenous languages and epistemic sovereignty.

Research Questions

1. How do RELO programs in Pakistan contribute to linguistic imperialism, perpetuate epistemic injustice, and reinforce neo-colonial hegemony?
2. What is the impact of RELO programs in Pakistan on indigenous languages and epistemic sovereignty?

Significance of the Study

This study is crucial in unveiling the neo-colonial dimensions of RELO programs in Pakistan, highlighting their role in reinforcing linguistic imperialism and Western ideological dominance. By critically examining how these programs shape educational policies, marginalize indigenous languages, and sustain epistemic dependency and epistemic injustice, the research contributes to postcolonial discourse on language and power. It provides valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and scholars seeking to decolonize language education and promote linguistic plurality. Ultimately, this study advocates for a re-evaluation of language policies that prioritize local agency, cultural identity, and epistemic sovereignty over Western-centric linguistic dominance.

Literature Review

Linguistic imperialism, a concept popularized by Phillipson (1992), refers to the systematic dominance of one language over others, often resulting in cultural and epistemic subjugation. In the context of Pakistan, English continues to wield considerable influence, serving as the medium of instruction in elite institutions, the language of government proceedings, and the

primary means of upward social mobility. This linguistic hierarchy, inherited from British colonial rule, remains firmly entrenched in Pakistan's socio-political landscape. Scholars argue that the preferential treatment given to English marginalizes indigenous languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, and Pashto, reinforcing structures of inequality (Dawn, 2013). The privileging of English not only determines access to economic and educational opportunities but also perpetuates colonial ideologies that undermine indigenous linguistic and cultural identities. Consequently, the dominance of English in Pakistan represents an extension of colonial linguistic policies, thereby sustaining linguistic imperialism and contributing to epistemic injustice.

The Regional English Language Office (RELO), operating under the U.S. Department of State, seeks to promote English language education worldwide as part of its broader diplomatic and cultural exchange initiatives. In Pakistan, RELO collaborates with universities, schools, and teacher-training programs to enhance English language instruction through curriculum development, online courses, and professional training programs for educators. While these initiatives are presented as efforts to improve English proficiency and foster global communication, scholars have critiqued RELO's role in advancing American geopolitical interests and reinforcing linguistic hierarchies. Phillipson (2008) argues that the dissemination of English through foreign-sponsored programs often serves as an instrument of cultural hegemony, subtly imposing Western ideologies under the guise of linguistic development. In Pakistan, the increased reliance on RELO programs has led to concerns about the erosion of local pedagogical approaches and the uncritical acceptance of Western educational frameworks.

A critical analysis by Alshahrani (2020) delves into the historical and contemporary dimensions of English linguistic imperialism. The study highlights how ELT policies, from the colonial era to modern globalization, have systematically promoted English, often undermining native languages and cultures. Alshahrani argues that while English proficiency can offer economic and social advantages, it also poses significant challenges to linguistic diversity and cultural identity. This duality underscores the need for ELT approaches that respect and incorporate indigenous linguistic contexts, rather than imposing English in a manner that could lead to cultural erosion. Further expanding on the cultural ramifications, a recent study examines the intersection of linguistic and cultural imperialism, emphasizing how the global dominance of English can lead to neo-imperialism and the hierarchization of languages. The research suggests that this dominance not only affects social and linguistic identities but also perpetuates colonial power dynamics in contemporary settings. To counteract these effects, the study recommends reinforcing language rights and integrating human rights perspectives into language preservation efforts, aiming to foster a more inclusive and equitable linguistic landscape.

The spread of English through RELO programs in Pakistan aligns with broader patterns of neo-colonialism, where former colonial powers maintain control over postcolonial nations through economic, cultural, and linguistic means. Neo-colonial linguistic hegemony is particularly evident in education policies that prioritize English at the expense of local languages. The infusion of Western pedagogical methods, textbooks, and teaching materials, often funded by foreign entities, has contributed to the internalization of Western epistemologies in Pakistani academic institutions. This phenomenon aligns with Thiong'o (1986) argument that linguistic imperialism functions as a tool of cultural domination, leading to the alienation of individuals from their indigenous traditions. As a result, English language programs, particularly those spearheaded by RELO, are seen as extensions of American soft power, subtly reinforcing Western ideological dominance and diminishing the value of indigenous knowledge systems. Neo-colonial hegemony and cultural imperialism are critical frameworks for understanding the subtle mechanisms through which former colonial powers maintain influence over previously

colonized regions. Unlike overt colonialism, neo-colonialism operates through economic, political, and cultural pressures that perpetuate dependency and control. As articulated by Nkrumah (1965), neo-colonialism ensures that newly independent states remain economically and politically subordinate to their former colonizers, often through mechanisms such as foreign aid, investment, and cultural infiltration. This form of dominance is less visible but equally pervasive, embedding itself within the socio-economic structures of the affected nations.

Cultural imperialism, a facet of neo-colonial hegemony, involves the imposition of the dominant culture's values, beliefs, and practices onto subordinate cultures, often leading to cultural homogenization and the erosion of indigenous identities. Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony elucidates how the ruling class can manipulate cultural institutions to maintain power, making their worldview appear natural and inevitable. This process is evident in the global proliferation of Western media, language, and lifestyle, which can marginalize local cultures and create a monocultural global landscape. The pervasive spread of English as a global lingua franca, for instance, has been critiqued as a form of linguistic neo-imperialism that prioritizes Western modes of communication and thought, potentially at the expense of linguistic diversity and local epistemologies (Zhang & Mi, 2023). The contemporary literary landscape reflects a growing resistance to neo-colonial and culturally imperialistic narratives. Authors from previously colonized regions are increasingly "writing back" to the empire, challenging and redefining historical and cultural representations imposed by colonial discourse. This movement seeks to reclaim indigenous narratives, affirm cultural identities, and critique the lingering effects of colonialism. Such literary endeavors not only enrich global literature but also serve as acts of cultural reclamation and resistance against ongoing imperialistic influences (Okri, 2024).

Epistemic injustice, a concept introduced by Miranda Fricker (2007), refers to the marginalization of certain knowledge systems and the systematic exclusion of non-dominant epistemologies. In the context of Pakistan's education system, the overwhelming preference for English fosters epistemic injustice by devaluing indigenous languages and knowledge traditions. This exclusion is particularly pronounced in academic publishing, where English is the dominant language, limiting the accessibility of research conducted in Urdu and regional languages. Fatima (2023) highlights how this linguistic divide creates barriers for scholars and students who lack proficiency in English, thereby restricting their participation in global academic discourse. Furthermore, the epistemic privileging of English marginalizes alternative ways of knowing and learning, reinforcing the dominance of Western epistemologies while silencing indigenous voices.

Epistemic injustice in language education refers to the systemic marginalization of certain linguistic and cultural groups, leading to the devaluation of their knowledge systems and communicative practices. Fricker (2007) introduced the concept, identifying testimonial injustice—where speakers are discredited due to prejudice—and hermeneutical injustice—where individuals lack the interpretive resources to make sense of their experiences. In educational contexts, these injustices manifest when curricula prioritize dominant languages, thereby undermining the epistemic contributions of minority language speakers. This marginalization not only affects students' academic performance but also their sense of identity and belonging within the educational system. Recent studies have highlighted the prevalence of epistemic injustice in multilingual educational settings. For instance, Gonzales et al. (2023) conducted a systematic literature review exploring the presence of epistemic injustice in U.S. doctoral education, revealing how power dynamics and linguistic biases can marginalize non-native English speakers. Similarly, research in Scandinavian schools indicates that teachers' negative perceptions of students from immigrant backgrounds can lead to epistemic exclusion, where students' knowledge and experiences are undervalued or ignored (Ström et al., 2023).

These findings underscore the need for educators to critically examine their own biases and adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that recognize and validate diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Addressing epistemic injustice in language education requires structural and pedagogical reforms. Medina (2023) emphasizes the importance of transformative learning approaches that challenge existing power structures and promote epistemic justice. This involves creating spaces where marginalized voices are heard and valued, and where diverse linguistic and cultural perspectives are integrated into the curriculum. By fostering an environment of epistemic inclusivity, educators can help mitigate the adverse effects of linguistic imperialism and support the development of a more equitable educational landscape. The widespread implementation of English language programs, including RELO initiatives, has significant implications for linguistic diversity and cultural identity in Pakistan. As English gains precedence in educational and professional settings, indigenous languages are increasingly relegated to informal and domestic spheres. Khan (2024) observes that this linguistic shift not only endangers the survival of local languages but also disrupts the transmission of cultural knowledge across generations. The prioritization of English in schools often leads to linguistic alienation, where students struggle to reconcile their native linguistic identities with the institutionalized dominance of English. This phenomenon results in cultural dislocation, as younger generations become detached from their linguistic heritage and adopt a worldview shaped by Western linguistic and cultural norms.

Linguistic imperialism has profoundly impacted indigenous languages and identities, often leading to language decline and cultural erosion. Historically, colonial powers imposed their languages on native populations, marginalizing indigenous tongues and disrupting traditional knowledge systems. This imposition created a class of individuals proficient in the colonial language, who benefited from colonial structures, while those adhering to native languages faced systemic disadvantages (Liu, 2023). Such practices not only undermined linguistic diversity but also facilitated cultural hegemony, where the dominant language became synonymous with power and progress, relegating indigenous cultures to the periphery. The suppression of indigenous languages has had lasting effects on cultural identities. In many cases, colonial education systems prohibited the use of native languages, leading to generational language loss and identity crises among indigenous communities. For instance, in North Carolina, the Cherokee language was once banned in educational institutions, contributing to its decline. Recognizing this historical injustice, efforts are now underway to revitalize the language. Duke University has introduced Cherokee language classes, acknowledging its past role in cultural suppression and aiming to restore linguistic heritage (The Guardian, 2024). Such initiatives are crucial in reclaiming cultural identity and fostering a sense of belonging among indigenous populations.

Contemporary efforts to combat the effects of linguistic imperialism involve leveraging technology and media to preserve and promote indigenous languages. In New Zealand, Te Hiku Media has developed an automatic speech recognition model for Te Reo Māori, achieving significant success in transcription accuracy. This technological advancement not only aids in language preservation but also ensures that the control and dissemination of linguistic resources remain within the indigenous community, maintaining cultural sovereignty (Time, 2024). Similarly, collaborations with media giants have led to the production of popular films dubbed in indigenous languages, enhancing visibility and normalization of these tongues in mainstream culture (Polygon, 2024). These endeavors highlight the resilience of indigenous communities and the importance of adaptive strategies in preserving linguistic and cultural identities. While RELO programs aim to enhance English language proficiency, critical perspectives argue that these initiatives function as mechanisms of soft power, reinforcing Western ideological hegemony. Phillipson (2008) asserts that the global spread of English is rarely a neutral

process; rather, it is deeply intertwined with economic and political agendas that seek to maintain Western dominance. In Pakistan, RELO-sponsored teacher training programs and English language resources often propagate Western-centric pedagogies that prioritize communicative competence in English over the preservation of indigenous linguistic traditions. This uncritical adoption of Western models raises concerns about the erosion of local educational autonomy and the reinforcement of linguistic dependencies that mirror historical colonial relationships.

Regional English Language Office (RELO) initiatives aim to enhance English language proficiency and teaching methodologies across various regions. While these programs offer significant benefits, critical perspectives have emerged regarding their potential implications on local languages and cultures. One concern centers on the risk of linguistic imperialism, where the promotion of English may inadvertently marginalize indigenous languages, leading to their erosion and the loss of cultural identity. This phenomenon can result in epistemic injustice, as it devalues the knowledge systems embedded within native languages and prioritizes Western epistemologies. To mitigate these effects, scholars advocate for the integration of local languages and cultural contexts into English Language Teaching (ELT) programs, fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment (López Henao & Velasquez Hoyos, 2024). Another critical perspective highlights the challenges of contextual relevance in RELO initiatives. Standardized English teaching materials and methodologies, often developed in Western contexts, may not align with the socio-cultural realities of diverse regions. This misalignment can hinder effective learning, as students may find the content disconnected from their lived experiences. For instance, in multilingual educational settings, the exclusive focus on English can lead to epistemic (in)justice, where students' linguistic backgrounds are overlooked, and their voices marginalized (Ström, Pihl, & Beach, 2023). To address this issue, it is essential for RELO programs to collaborate closely with local educators, developing contextually appropriate resources and pedagogical strategies that resonate with the unique needs of the communities they serve.

Power dynamics inherent in RELO programs also warrant critical examination. The dissemination of English is often associated with the propagation of Western cultural norms and values, which can perpetuate existing global inequalities and cultural hegemony. This dynamic raises concerns about the potential reinforcement of dominant cultural narratives at the expense of local identities. To counteract this, educators are encouraged to adopt critical pedagogical approaches that empower students to question and challenge dominant ideologies. By promoting bilingual or multilingual education models, RELO initiatives can support learners in navigating multiple linguistic and cultural spheres, thereby fostering a more equitable and inclusive educational landscape (Herrera Pineda & Ortiz Ruiz, 2018). In response to the challenges posed by linguistic imperialism, scholars advocate for the decolonization of language education in Pakistan. Decolonization in this context involves recognizing and integrating indigenous languages into mainstream educational frameworks while resisting the uncritical adoption of foreign linguistic policies. Sah (2023) argues that decolonizing English language instruction requires a shift towards multilingual education policies that empower local communities to engage with multiple languages without privileging one over the other. Such an approach would involve curriculum reforms that incorporate indigenous knowledge, promote linguistic inclusivity, and challenge the epistemic injustices perpetuated by monolingual English instruction. By fostering a more equitable linguistic landscape, Pakistan can mitigate the long-term effects of linguistic imperialism while preserving its rich linguistic heritage.

Addressing the implications of RELO programs and linguistic imperialism in Pakistan requires a comprehensive reassessment of language-in-education policies. Policymakers must recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and take proactive steps to ensure that

indigenous languages receive adequate institutional support. This could involve implementing bilingual education models, enhancing the status of local languages in academic and professional settings, and promoting research in indigenous linguistic traditions. Furthermore, international collaborations in language education should be critically evaluated to ensure that they align with local linguistic and educational priorities rather than perpetuating Western linguistic hegemony. Fatima (2023) emphasizes the need for greater investment in indigenous language resources, teacher training, and curriculum development that reflects Pakistan's linguistic and cultural realities.

The role of English as a global *lingua franca* has significantly influenced national language policies, often reinforcing linguistic imperialism in postcolonial states. Research suggests that English language instruction, particularly through foreign-sponsored programs, can perpetuate socio-economic inequalities by prioritizing English-speaking elites while marginalizing indigenous linguistic communities (Pennycook, 2021). In Pakistan, this dynamic is evident in educational disparities, where access to quality education and lucrative employment opportunities is often contingent upon English proficiency. The widespread emphasis on English as a marker of intelligence and progress further entrenches linguistic hierarchies, limiting the space for indigenous languages in formal and institutional settings. This linguistic stratification contributes to the erosion of local knowledge systems, as students and scholars are compelled to engage primarily with English-language academic discourse, thereby reinforcing epistemic dependence on Western knowledge structures.

In the realm of digital education, the proliferation of English-dominated online learning platforms has exacerbated linguistic imperialism by shaping global pedagogical practices around Western epistemologies. Recent studies indicate that massive open online courses (MOOCs) and digital language learning resources, largely developed in English-speaking countries, impose Western-centric educational paradigms on non-native English speakers, often disregarding their linguistic and cultural contexts (Coleman, 2023). In Pakistan, the increasing integration of digital education tools, particularly those affiliated with international organizations, has raised concerns about the displacement of indigenous pedagogical frameworks. The reliance on English-medium digital resources not only marginalizes non-English-speaking learners but also influences cognitive and cultural orientations, fostering an internalized preference for Western knowledge systems over local intellectual traditions. To counter these effects, scholars advocate for the development of multilingual digital platforms that incorporate indigenous languages and pedagogies, ensuring a more inclusive and context-sensitive approach to language education.

A critical examination of RELO programs in Pakistan within the framework of epistemic injustice and neo-colonial hegemony reveals their complex role in shaping linguistic and educational hierarchies. While these initiatives are positioned as mechanisms for enhancing English proficiency and pedagogical standards, their deep entrenchment in Western ideological paradigms raises concerns regarding the marginalization of indigenous linguistic and epistemic traditions. By privileging English over local languages, such programs contribute to enduring colonial legacies, reinforcing socio-economic stratification and limiting access to knowledge on equitable terms. However, a significant research gap persists in understanding the localized impact of RELO initiatives within Pakistan's distinct postcolonial and multilingual landscape. Existing scholarship predominantly addresses linguistic imperialism in broad terms, with limited attention to how these programs operate as instruments of epistemic domination, shaping knowledge production and access within specific socio-political contexts. Addressing this gap is essential to advancing decolonial approaches that promote linguistic pluralism, empower indigenous knowledge systems, and resist the homogenizing forces of neo-colonial language policies. Without such a critical intervention, RELO programs risk perpetuating epistemic inequalities under the guise of linguistic and educational development.

Theoretical Framework

The current study is anchored in Epistemic Injustice Theory, proposed by Miranda Fricker (2007), which examines how systemic power imbalances marginalize certain knowledge systems. Fricker identifies testimonial injustice, where individuals from subordinated groups are denied credibility due to entrenched biases. In the context of RELO programs in Pakistan, this framework highlights how the privileging of English reinforces linguistic hierarchies, devaluing indigenous knowledge systems, and contributing to linguistic imperialism. By imposing Western pedagogical paradigms, these initiatives function as instruments of neo-colonial epistemic hegemony, restricting local agency in educational policymaking. Applying Epistemic Injustice Theory, this study critically examines how RELO programs perpetuate knowledge asymmetries, reinforcing American cultural and ideological dominance under the guise of linguistic and educational development.

Analysis and Discussion

RELO initiatives operate within a framework that reinforces the dominance of English, sidelining indigenous languages and knowledge systems. These programs, often implemented under the pretense of educational development, subtly institutionalize English as the primary language of intellectual discourse. Consequently, they shape the educational and professional landscapes in ways that privilege Western epistemologies while relegating local linguistic and intellectual traditions to secondary status. The far-reaching impact of such programs extends beyond language learning, influencing social mobility, employment opportunities, and cultural identity. By prioritizing English as a superior linguistic medium, these initiatives contribute to a systemic marginalization of indigenous languages. Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, and regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Balochi are often overlooked in educational policies driven by foreign agendas. As a result, native speakers of these languages face challenges in accessing academic and professional opportunities, as English remains the gatekeeper to social and economic advancement. This perpetuates a cycle where English proficiency equates to intellectual authority, reinforcing existing power imbalances.

One of the most significant consequences of linguistic imperialism is the role of English as a gatekeeping mechanism. English proficiency has become an essential criterion for socioeconomic mobility in Pakistan, as access to higher education and lucrative job markets is often contingent on one's ability to communicate in English. RELO-sponsored standardized tests, such as IELTS and TOEFL, further institutionalize linguistic gatekeeping, making English a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Individuals from rural and economically disadvantaged backgrounds, who primarily communicate in indigenous languages, face systemic barriers due to the privileging of English. The imposition of English as the primary medium of instruction in higher education institutions exacerbates these inequalities, disproportionately benefiting the elite class while disenfranchising marginalized communities. Consequently, language becomes a means of social stratification, determining access to knowledge, power, and resources.

The widespread adoption of RELO frameworks aligns with American geopolitical interests, ensuring sustained ideological and cultural influence over Pakistan's educational and intellectual landscape. The introduction of English as the dominant academic language does not merely serve a communicative function but also facilitates an intellectual dependency on Western frameworks of knowledge production. This structured dependence prevents the development of independent, localized knowledge systems, thereby sustaining a form of neo-colonial control. Through targeted funding, academic collaborations, and institutional partnerships, RELO subtly shapes the ideological contours of Pakistan's educational institutions. English-language textbooks and teaching methodologies embedded in these programs propagate Western ideologies, often at the expense of indigenous perspectives. This

form of cultural soft power ensures that educational institutions in Pakistan remain intellectually tethered to Western paradigms, limiting the scope for alternative, locally-driven knowledge production.

Moreover, RELO's presence in Pakistan mirrors historical colonial patterns of control, wherein the imposition of a foreign language functioned as a means of governance and subjugation. By dictating what is taught and how it is taught, RELO plays a crucial role in reinforcing Western hegemonic influence over Pakistan's academic institutions. As a result, the knowledge production process remains skewed in favor of Western epistemologies, systematically erasing indigenous intellectual contributions. Despite the overwhelming influence of RELO and similar programs, a growing resistance movement within Pakistan advocates for the reclamation of linguistic sovereignty through policy reform and curriculum diversification. Scholars, educators, and policymakers are increasingly emphasizing the need to decolonize language education by integrating indigenous epistemologies into academic institutions and promoting multilingual education as a means of resistance.

A significant step towards linguistic decolonization is the integration of indigenous knowledge systems within educational curricula. By embedding local linguistic, literary, and philosophical traditions into academic syllabi, Pakistan can challenge linguistic imperialism and reassert its intellectual autonomy. A shift toward multilingual education, wherein Urdu and regional languages hold equal academic and professional value as English, would empower diverse intellectual traditions and promote inclusivity in knowledge production. To mitigate linguistic dependence, policymakers must critically assess the implications of foreign-funded ELT programs and prioritize the preservation of national linguistic and cultural identities. A crucial intervention would be the establishment of a national language policy that promotes indigenous languages as viable mediums of instruction in higher education and professional sectors. Additionally, investing in local teacher training programs and developing indigenous language resources would reduce reliance on externally imposed pedagogical frameworks.

Furthermore, strengthening institutional autonomy in curriculum development is essential for reclaiming intellectual sovereignty. Universities and educational bodies should have the freedom to design curricula that reflect local epistemological traditions rather than adhering to externally imposed educational models. By fostering a robust academic environment that values linguistic diversity, Pakistan can resist the encroachment of linguistic imperialism and promote a more equitable knowledge production system. RELO programs in Pakistan exemplify a contemporary form of linguistic imperialism that prioritizes English over indigenous languages while imposing Western pedagogical standards. By institutionalizing English as the dominant medium of knowledge and opportunity, these initiatives contribute to the erosion of local linguistic and intellectual traditions. However, through strategic resistance, curriculum reform, and policy-driven interventions, Pakistan can challenge this hegemony and reclaim its linguistic and epistemic sovereignty. The decolonization of language education is not merely a cultural necessity but a crucial step toward intellectual independence and social equity.

The dominance of RELO (Regional English Language Office) programs in Pakistan reflects a broader pattern of linguistic imperialism, wherein English is promoted as the superior medium of communication, education, and professional advancement. These programs, under the guise of language development, reinforce neo-colonial dependencies by privileging Western linguistic and epistemic structures over indigenous knowledge systems. By aligning English language proficiency with socioeconomic mobility, RELO initiatives create an educational hierarchy that marginalizes local languages and reinforces an elitist division within society. The systematic promotion of English as the primary language of intellectual discourse leads to the erosion of native linguistic identities and cultural expressions, weakening the role of Urdu and regional languages in academia, governance, and public life. Furthermore, the curriculum

and teaching methodologies promoted by RELO reflect Western pedagogical models, often detached from Pakistan's socio-cultural realities. This imposition not only limits local pedagogical innovations but also conditions learners to internalize Western epistemologies as the benchmark of knowledge production, thereby perpetuating a form of cognitive colonialism. The lack of substantial investment in indigenous linguistic development further exacerbates epistemic injustice, as it restricts the ability of non-English speakers to participate fully in intellectual and policy-making spheres.

To counter the epistemic and linguistic injustices embedded within RELO programs, a postcolonial response necessitates the active decolonization of language policies and educational structures in Pakistan. A more equitable linguistic landscape can be achieved through the institutionalization of multilingual education, where local languages are integrated into academic and professional domains alongside English. Establishing research initiatives that promote indigenous epistemologies can help challenge the prevailing intellectual hegemony, fostering a more autonomous and culturally rooted knowledge system. Additionally, policymakers and educators must recognize the political dimensions of language and resist external linguistic dominance by advocating for curricula that center local histories, narratives, and intellectual traditions. National language policies should prioritize the development of linguistic resources in Urdu and regional languages, ensuring that knowledge production and dissemination are not exclusively confined to English. Moreover, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogues that include linguists, educators, and policymakers can lead to a more inclusive and equitable linguistic framework. By resisting the covert neo-colonial agendas embedded in RELO initiatives, Pakistan can reclaim its linguistic sovereignty and challenge the deeply entrenched structures of Western epistemic dominance.

A critical examination of RELO programs in Pakistan reveals their deep entanglement with neo-colonial power structures, perpetuating epistemic injustice through the systematic privileging of English. This linguistic dominance not only marginalizes indigenous languages but also reinforces an intellectual hierarchy that aligns with Western hegemonic interests. The continued reliance on externally dictated language policies reflects a broader postcolonial struggle for epistemic autonomy, where knowledge production remains tethered to foreign paradigms. Addressing this imbalance requires a conscious effort to reclaim linguistic agency through policy reforms, curriculum restructuring, and the promotion of indigenous intellectual traditions. By fostering a multilingual academic landscape and challenging the hegemony of English, Pakistan can move towards a more equitable and self-sustaining knowledge ecosystem that values its linguistic and cultural heritage without succumbing to neo-colonial influences.

Conclusion

The hegemony of RELO programs in Pakistan perpetuates linguistic imperialism, reinforcing epistemic injustice and a neo-colonial intellectual hierarchy. By institutionalizing English as the dominant medium of instruction and knowledge dissemination, these initiatives undermine indigenous languages and local epistemologies. A shift towards multilingual education, policy-driven linguistic empowerment, and intellectual decolonization can serve as viable countermeasures. Ensuring that local languages and knowledge systems are valued within academic and professional domains is crucial for dismantling neo-colonial structures and reclaiming Pakistan's linguistic and intellectual sovereignty. Strengthening local languages through curriculum reforms and policy support can help dismantle the deeply embedded colonial legacy in education. Moreover, fostering research in indigenous languages can contribute to the development of a more autonomous and contextually relevant knowledge system. Promoting linguistic inclusivity in higher education and scholarly discourse will be essential in resisting the dominance of external linguistic frameworks and reclaiming an authentic intellectual identity.

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