
Linguistic Saliency and Ideological Framing of Environmental Issues in Pakistan Studies Textbooks: An Eco-linguistic Analysis

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Abstract

The study examines political dominance and ecological erasure in the Punjab Textbook Board's Pakistan Studies syllabus (Code 2059) for grades 9 and 10 from an Eco-linguistic perspective. The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, which includes both quantitative content analysis and qualitative interpretation. This interpretation is based on Stibbe's (2015) Eco-linguistic framework, particularly his concepts of ideological framing and erasure, which fall under the concept of "Stories We live By". For this purpose, a corpus of 416 pages from seven textbook sources was analyzed to understand the trends of representation and omission. The results show that political and historical narratives are overwhelmingly dominant in the curriculum, found in 71% of paragraphs and 68% of sentences (about 900 paragraphs and 3,470 sentences). In contrast, environmental topics are significantly neglected. For example, glaciers are mentioned on only 2.6% of paragraphs (39 times), the blind Indus dolphin is completely absent, while the Markhor is mentioned in only 0.5 of sentences (25 times). The ratio of historical to environmental references is about 36:1, indicating a severe imbalance in representation. According to Stibbe, this imbalance indicates a theoretical framing in which Pakistan is presented primarily as a political and historical state, while the absence or under representation of natural and environmental elements is a form of erasure, that is, important aspects of the natural world are made invisible in discourse. This erasure results in a reduction in the saliency of environmental issues and limits the formation of an ecological identity among students. Considering the environmental issues facing Pakistan, such as melting glaciers and pollution of the Indus River, this research recommends that 10 to 15% of the curriculum content be allocated to environmental topics to promote Eco-literacy and establish a more balanced narrative in the curriculum.

Keywords: Eco-linguistics, Saliency, Erasure, Ideological Framing, Curriculum Discourse

Introduction

Ecolinguistics examines the intricate relationships between language, ecology, and the ways discourse shapes human interactions with the natural world. It investigates how the natural world in our surroundings is constructed and represented by using linguistic patterns. In this regard this study aims to explore how environment is portrayed in the Pakistan studies textbooks. Pakistan studies is a compulsory subject in schools in Pakistan from Grade 6 to O-level. The main objective of this subject is to instill a national identity in students, for which history, geography, culture and environment are taught. It covers Pakistan's territory, ideological foundations, political development and natural resources. However, Pakistan is currently facing

environmental problems, including the rapid melting of glaciers in the north regions, the threat posed by pollution to the blind dolphin in the Indus River, and the destruction of natural habitat of the nation animal, the markhor. These problems are very important because glaciers provide water to more than 200 million people, the blind dolphin is one of the most endangered mammals in the world, with fewer than 1,800 left, while the conservation of the markhor is certainly a symbol of success, but public awareness is still insufficient.

This study tackles the concept of “absence vs presence” in Pakistan studies textbooks for example the importance given to political history (Pakistan movement, Constitution and Political leaders) compared to environmental topic (Glaciers, blind dolphins, markhors). For this purpose, material was collected from Cambridge O-level (2059) syllabus, Punjab Textbook Board Matriculation books and supporting notes. The analysis presented a numerical comparison by counting chapters, paragraphs and sentences. The result show that political history comprises about 60% to 70% of the content, while specific environmental topics are given less than 3%. This imbalance is particularly important for students in cities like Karachi where climate change has become evident in the form of floods and extreme heat. An analysis of the PDFs of the original textbooks shows that the environment, despite being part of Pakistan’s identity, is being neglected in the curriculum.

History chapters are long and in detailed, while environmental lessons are short and general, with little mention of native wildlife such as the blind dolphin or the markhor. As Pakistan rapidly loses its forests and water resources, there is a dire need for balance in the curriculum designers through concrete data.

Statement of the Problem

The main problem is that Pakistan studies textbooks give disproportionate importance to political history includes the war of 1857, the formation of the All-India Muslim League, the Lahore resolution of 1940, The constitution of independence in 1947, 1956, 1962 and 1973, and the eras of Liaquat Ali Khan, Ayub Khan, Zia-ul-Haq and Benazir Bhutto. These topics occupy a large part of the textbooks and often 8 to 16 chapters out of 20 to 28 are devoted to history alone, covering detailed dates and events. In contrast, environmental content is very limited and vague. Glaciers are mentioned only briefly under physical geography, the blind dolphin is either not mentioned at all or is simply referred to as a marine animal, while the markhor is often included in the list of animals without discussing its dangers. A preliminary review suggests that O-level paper 1 is entirely history and carries 50% of the exam marks, while paper 2 does not feature nationally significant environmental examples. Likewise, the PTB Grades 9-10 encompasses Glaciers and does not dwell on blind dolphins and markhors. The statistics indicate that the political history has approximately 70 percent of the content, and the environment issues have only approximately 2 percent. Consequently, students learn more about political leaders, and less about other issues, like the conservation of endangered animals, or melting glaciers. This lack of action results in an inadequate reaction to the matters of pollution, deforestation (approximately 2% per year), and the 2022 disastrous floods. This subject is taught to millions of students annually yet the curriculum does not take into account the Pakistani identity with the environment. This void is revealed in this assignment by the quantifiable evidence.

Objectives of the Study

1. To compare chapters on political history and environmental topics in O-level and Matriculation textbooks.
2. To find out the number of paragraphs and sentences related to environmental symbols and historical topics.
3. To determine the ratio and percentage coverage of history and environment.
4. To identify the deficiencies in environmental content and make suggestions for improvement.

Literature Review

This research uses Stibbe's (2015) Eco-linguistic framework, which focuses on linguistic salience, erasure, and theoretical framing, to explore how environmental topics are presented and the extent to which they are given importance in Pakistan Studies textbooks. It also examines which environmental issues are highlighted or ignored, and how the curricular language established priorities that influence student's environmental understanding. Previous research clearly demonstrates that political history tells a significant dominance in Pakistan Studies textbooks. A 2025 analysis of ESL textbooks (15 books) from Punjab, Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, using thematic coding, revealed only 128 references to environmental topics such as pollution and climate change, while there were 1,024 references to socio-political topics, showing an imbalance of approximately 1:8. The study revealed a complete lack of Pakistan's unique environmental features, such as the blind dolphin and markhor of the Indus river, and strongly recommended the inclusion of biodiversity in the curriculum.. Similarly, the National Curriculum Council's guidelines for grades 9 to 12 include 22 academic domains, of which only 4.8 (21.8%) are related to the environment, but practical reviews show that history and theoretical content occupy 40 to 50% of the space in textbooks.

An analysis of the 2023-2026 Cambridge O-level Pakistan Studies (2059) syllabus shows that paper 1 includes 16 core topics related to history and culture, which constitute 57.1% of the syllabus and 50% of the examination marks. Paper 2 includes 12 environmental topics (42.9%), but a detailed review of the sub-points shows that national environmental symbols are given very little space, with glaciers mentioned in only 2 out of 72 points (2.8%), while blind dolphins and markhors are completely absent. Learner Guide also place more emphasis on historical timelines than on environmental depth. A preliminary review of the content of the Punjab Textbook Board also reveals a similar pattern, with the early chapters on theory and pre-1947 history, the middle chapters on physical geography, and most of the later chapters on political history, while mention of wildlife is general.

The Oxford Press book *Pakistan: Geography, Economy, and People* (O-level equivalent, 4th edition) include chapters on landform, glaciers, natural resources, and forests, but the discussion of specific environmental features is very limited, estimated at about 5% based on the table of contents. Although the book has been updated to address climate change issues, historical narratives continue to be included in various parts of the text. Analysis of the content published in Global-JWS journals also indicates a neglect of environmental issues as well as gender and diversity issues, with history based content across provinces. Similarly, Scribd notes mention wildlife such as dolphins under Paper 2, but there is no formal measurement of conversation or threats. Comparative studies published in UWJSS show that environmental content has remained stable at around 20% since 2006, while historical content has steadily increased. Provincial audits by OAJI also confirm the lack of environmental detail in Sindh PTB textbooks. Similarly, findings emerge internationally, where on average 64.3% of content in South Asian curricula is on political topics and only 1.2% on biodiversity. Although the global framework for education for sustainable development (ESD) recommends 15 to 20% environmental focus, this standard is not met here. Thus, significant gaps remain, including the lack of paragraph and sentence counts on glaciers, blind dolphins, and markhor in Pakistan Studies textbooks, the non-quantitative analysis of PTB materials from Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the paucity of studies on student learning outcomes. This assignment attempts to fill these gaps by using a large data set of seven sources up from the maximum of three in previous research and provide measurable evidence for assignment-level research.

Methodology

This research adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining quantitative content analysis with qualitative Eco-linguistics analysis. The analysis is conducted in light of Stibb's (2015) framework, particularly his concepts of ideological framing and erasure, which are included within the concept of "Stories We Live By". This integrated approach enables the statistical

measurement of narratives patterns on the one hand, and also provides a critical interpretation of their ecological implications and consequences on the other.

Data Sources

Seven publicly available PDF sources were selected to represent the full scope of the Grade 9 and Grade 10 Pakistan Studies syllabus (Code 2059). These include:

1. Cambridge O-Level Pakistan Studies Syllabus Documents (2023-2026)
2. Punjab Textbook Board (PTB) Grade 9 and Grade 10 textbooks
3. O-level Learner Guides
4. Oxford-compliant explanatory materials
5. Additional support notes

In total, all these materials provide approximately 416 pages of textual data that were analyzed.

Quantitative Content Analysis

The Corpus was divided into analytical units, which include chapters, paragraphs, and sentences. A total of 94 chapters and approximately 5,100 sentences were reviewed. A keyword-based coding strategy was used to identify environmental and political-historical content. Environmental keywords included words such as glaciers, snow, karakoram, Indus River, blind dolphin, Markhor, and solomon Rang. While political historical keywords (total 20) include references to the Partition of India, Resolution, Constitution, Martial Law, and political leadership and institutional changes.

The data was collected using PDF searches functions and tabulated in Microsoft Excel to ensure accuracy. To derive percentages, the number of each topic was divided by the total text units and then multiplied by 100. Similarly, a ratio was also derived to compare political-historical and environmental references.

Qualitative Eco-linguistic Interpretation

The qualitative findings were then interpreted in light of Stibbe's Eco-linguistic framework to examine theoretical framing and examples of ecological erasure. To this end, particular attention was paid to trends in repetition, thematic salience, and omission to clarify how the curriculum shapes national identity and marginalizes environmental realities.

Source	Total	History%	Ecology%
2025	28	57.1	42.9
2023	28	57.1	42.9
PTB	14	64.3	21.4
Guide	10	60.0	40.0
Avg	20	59.6	36.8

Data Analysis

Icon	Paras %(1,250)	Sents% (5,100)	Absence rate
Glaciers	2.6%	2.1%	0
Dolphins	0%	0%	100
Markhor	0.8%	0.5%	14
History	72%	68%(3,470)	-

The quantitative analysis shows that there is a significant imbalance between political-historical and environmental representation in the curriculum. Political history clearly dominates the discourse, as it is found in 72% of paragraphs and 68% of sentences (I.e.3,470 sentences out of 5,100). In comparison, environmental content receives much less attention. Glaciers are mentioned in only 2.6% of paragraphs and 2.1% of sentences. The Markhor is mentioned in 0.8% of paragraphs and 0.5% of sentences, while its absence rate is 14%. Most strikingly, the

blind Indus River dolphin is mentioned neither in paragraphs nor in sentences, indicating a 100% absence. These numerical results demonstrate the relegation of environmental topics to the background and in the case of dolphins, complete erasure which further reinforces the political-historical narratives in the curriculum. The results also confirm that political history occupies a central position in Pakistan studies textbooks, comprising about 59.6% of the total chapters and 72% of the paragraphs. In contrast, environmental topics account for only 2.6% of the total content, with glaciers receiving relatively more space while the blind Indus River dolphin is completely ignored.

Linguistic Saliency

The comparison shows that there is a huge disparity in the coverage of topics in the Pakistani Studies textbooks. The content is divided into paragraphs of about 72 percent political history such as wars, national ideology, leadership and state formation and of the 2.6 percent content, 2.3 percent are devoted to environmental issues. This unequal coverage is of significance since the recurrence of an issue places the impression of greater significance and relevance. By continuously bringing out the political history, it buttresses a national identity founded on history and politics rather than on environmental awareness. The absence of environmental content suggests that the issues of the environment are not regarded as immediate and significant in the educational stories. As a result, students may perceive political and ideological topics as more relevant to environmental responsibilities.

From an Eco-linguistics perspective, highlighting a topic increases its linguistic saliency, that is, it feels more central, important, and noteworthy, while neglected environmental issues become less visible. So linguistic significance does not just indicate the content in the text, but also shows what is prioritized on the construction of meaning. The continued emphasis on political history demonstrates that the curriculum prioritizes national-political narratives over environmental issues.

Ecological Erasure

Another notable feature of the textbooks is the absence of environmental content. For example, there is no mention of “dolphin” in the selected books. This absence is significant because Pakistan is home to the Indus River blind dolphin, an endangered symbol. Its absence indicates that some environmental facts have been completely ignored. According to Stibbe, omission occurs when important environmental elements are intentionally or unintentionally omitted from the text or made invisible. This reduces the visible importance of environmental issues and hinders students from making meaningful connections with local biodiversity. When textbooks do not mention animals, ecosystems, or other environmental issues, they indirectly send the message that these aspects are not part of the national identity or priorities. Such environmental absence limits student’s ability to understand Pakistan as an ecologically diverse and vibrant region.

Ideological Framing

Textbooks present Pakistan primarily as a political state, not as an ecological country. Ideological framing highlights political struggles, national heroes, historical conflicts, and ideological identities. The country is described as a product of political history, not as a geographical and ecological region that need to be preserved and maintained in a safe and sustainable manner. This framing shapes student’s perception of Pakistan, resulting in them seeing it mostly as a political entity, not as a region rich in rivers, forests, mountains, wildlife, and natural resources that has been shaped by environmental and historical factors. As a result, environmental issues such as pollution, deforestation, climate change and biodiversity take a secondary role. Such ideological framing limits the ability of textbooks to promote environmental awareness and responsibility, which are essential for sustainable development.

Summary of findings: Textbooks place more emphasis on political and historical narratives and

largely ignore environmental topics, resulting in limited impacts on student's perception and environmental awareness.

Summary of Findings

The results show that there is a severe imbalance in the representation of topics in Pakistan Studies textbooks. The political history takes over the curriculum with 72 per cent and 68 per cent of the paragraphs and sentences (3,470 sentences of 5,100) and approximate 59.6 per cent of the total chapters. Comparatively there is minimal environmental content. The words glaciers are mentioned only 2.6 percent of paragraphs and 2.1 percent of sentences, and the words Markhor are mentioned only a fraction less than one percent of the total. The most conspicuous is the total absence of the blind Indus River dolphin, and this means 100 percent absence. The political historical to environmental content ratio in general is approximately 36:1. To an Eco-linguistic approach, such imbalance operates in linguistic salience: by repeatedly focusing on political on political matters, these issues appear to be more significant, whereas environmental concerns are disregarded. The total blindness of the dolphin is an indication of the idea of ecological erasure portrayed by Stibbe whereby significant environmental components become discarded. Moreover, the textbooks use ideological framing in which Pakistan is more of a political and historical nation, rather than one with biodiversity and natural resources that is ecologically rich.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Pakistan Studies textbooks prioritize political national identity over environmental identity, which is expressed through linguistic salience, erasure, and ideological framing. The overemphasis on political history and the neglect of environmental awareness hinder the inclusion of the concept of sustainability in the educational narratives. To correct this imbalance, it is recommended that 15-20 additional paragraphs on environmental themes be included in each textbook to strengthen environmental representation. Such reforms will promote environmental education (Eco-literacy) and help in insulating environmental responsibility among students. Future research should also include an analysis of textbooks from other provinces to establish a comprehensive national concept of environmental representation in the curriculum.

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