NAMING PRESTIGE IDEOLOGY: A CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF ELITE IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION IN PAKISTANI PRIVATE SCHOOL BRANDING

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ABSTRACT
Pakistan education market is hyper-polarized and the high profile privates form a significant portion of the market. Applying the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach, particularly the three-dimensional model of text, practice, and context by Fairclough, I am interested in how the very choice of the name of the school in Pakistan is perpetuating and spreads the elite values. Names are not merely names; they are brass rings that signify exclusivity, modernity, a global edge, they are frequently oiled up with English terms such as Beaconhouse or International. The paper, based on excavations into some of the Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad and various well-known names of private schools, demonstrates that such names create a class hierarchy, whereby English- medium, profit-making education becomes seen as the gold standard of cultural capital and how the Urdu- medium public schools are lessened to the periphery. The diachronic application of colonial-echoing words continues to place English on the center-stage and emphasize class differences, which makes schools a marketable product as a gatekeeper of power. The results put these findings in context of the larger discussions of inequality in education in postcolonial contexts, and are indicative of the necessity of decolonizing the branding of schools in order to create a more inclusive and equitable process of learning.
Keywords:
CDA (Critical Discourse Analysis), Elite ideologies, school naming, Pakistan education, social stratification, symbolic capital.

Introduction

I prefer CDA when I want to take a glance at the intersection of language, power, and ideology in the working texts of the world, in this instance, the school names. The strategy is all about identifying the potential in using words to sustain or confront socioeconomic inequalities, and one enlightens the inequality on power imbalances in various fields like education, media, and politics. Bringing it to education, I can observe how social stratification is reproduced in the curricula, policies, and some institutional anomalies, and especially in idealisation of terms and titles.

In Pakistan, there is a division between the religious and secular schools. Elite ideology is a refuge in private academies, particularly the high-end ones. Such an elite mentality is the ideology that keeps the upper-class dominant, celebrating western-style, English-oriented schooling, as the ticket of prestige, universal mobility and economic hegemony. This attitude is traced down to the roots of colonialism where English learning was the instrument of the elite and obstacle to the masses. The Pakistani elite schools are known to select names that are reminiscent of colonial, international, or aspirational overtures as it is possible to find Beaconhouse, Aitchison College and The City School. These pseudonyms are not merely pretty; they promise wholeness, modernity and a connection to the global elites and ingrained the elite ideology as the identity of the schools themselves. Naming of private schools in Pakistan is not merely a drop of a lingo drop, it is a full-blown discourse that reverberates broader ideological conflict. A school name is a brand which possesses a semiotic charge, indicating subliminal statements which denote high quality, progressive, cosmopolitan, but mythically most localized cultural discourses are undermined. By rushing to these fancy schools, when wealthy families do it, they are investing in a system of reinforcement of privilege, whereby gaining access to higher quality resources, networks, and belonging to the power broadway. Indicatively, elite schools have been found to embrace curricula like the Cambridge Progressive school of English that superimposes western ideals that further divide the elite and non-elites. In the meantime, the state-run schools, most of the staff, wallow in underfunding and Urdu monolingual education, as the elite outcry about the neoliberalism thinking that promotes market-driven education over providing equal opportunity. This paper applies the CDA as an attempt to unravel the manifestation of elite ideology in these names of private schools. I break morphology, semantics, and disguised ideological indicators to understand how they construct and support hierarchies that place classes, hold onto the reverberation of colonialism, and magnify educational inequalities. Using the three dimensions model by Fairclough i.e. textual, mode of creation and dispersion of names, and showing the social dimension selected, I reveal behind the naming conventions the power game. The goal is to campaign to change the policy, which addresses how the institutional names contribute to perpetuating inequality in the Pakistani broken school world.

Literature Review

Application of *CDA* in the comprehension of the education sector in Pakistan has seen an explosion in the last five years particularly in cases where researchers desire to consider how the official language is reproducing social inequalities and neoliberal concepts. This has always been the case in the body of literature which demonstrates that policies, textbooks, and administrative practices may reinforce class divisions through the coding of English as the elite matrix repeatedly.

The (**2017-2025) National Education Policies** have delivered equity on paper but in reality, unleash reforms that serve the privileged thus narrowing down on the already existing social strata. In previous policy examinations **(2009, 2017),** the neoliberal discourse, particularly in the context of technological incorporation, is highlighted to conceal underlying injustices and create disparities in the under-funded areas such as Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The dynamism breeds a two system in which the prosperity of the private schools and decline of the public schools and the privatization favors this disparity. Corpus-based research on grammar rules **(2000-2020)** delves deeper into understanding the maintenance of English as the front to world capitalism, and Urdu and local languages as secondary but symbolic. Together, these policies secure the superiority of the upper-class and mask it as national progress.

CDA of Punjab Textbook Board

CDA of Punjab Textbook Board illustrates how the prevailing religious, nationalistic and patriarchal fibers creep in at the expense of minority and directing civic opinions towards mainstream opinions. Even in the more recent versions, where there is a balanced gender representation, a more balanced gender representation, the domination by males and elite interests persists. The role of technology Policies especially in education has also been examined through discourse. Khan (2023) analyses Pakistan's ICT Education policies and demonstrates that policy discourse often presents technology as a solution to educational problems without rectifying and addressing structural inequalities. The study highlights how policy language constructs modernization narratives that align with global neoliberal educational agendas.

Multimodal research shows that images and texts in **textbooks** are identities making the elite and maintains gender inequality and a unitary Muslim identity- an authentic concern of homogeneous citizenship and belonging. Recent research highlights that English is not only a type of a colonial legacy but also an instrument of power in Pakistan **(Syed, 2024).** The latest updates in the policy frameworks like the *National Education Policy Development Framework 2024*, bring into focus a tug-of-war between nationalism rhetoric and a market-driven reality that promotes the use of the English-medium schooling. **Nawaz and others (2024)** discover that the policies give focus to the English language more than regional languages and result in the entrenchment of socio-economic diversities in the interests of global competitiveness. The author questions a so-called digital-neoliberal discourse, according to which the benefits of urban elites ruin the people in rural areas (**Khan, 2023).**

Identity, Textbooks and the Elite Self

In addition to policy, scholars get into student identity. In a study by Anjum, Nayab, and Khan (2024), CDA compared elite school writing and non-elite writing and found that well-off students in high-fee schools developed a *cosmopolitan self* associated with the financial ability and mastery of the English language. On the other hand, students in public or cheap-private-sectors tend to exhibit a religious texture with no voice of minorities. According to Lashari, Shah, and Memon (2023), the textbook contents have the ability to obliterate representation of minorities that strengthens a dominant hierarchy that begins at the primary level.

Educational Branding and Slogans —Semiotic Tools

One of the research frontiers revolving around branding of schools is a rapidly developing one. **Batool et al. (2023)** explored the school slogans and found that their rhetoric-reality gap is a source of words such as merit, excellence, and future leaders, which legitimize the exclusion fees. The same type of work in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa **(2024)** established that even private education employs imagery that is English-centric and anglicised names in attempts to activate the mobility desires of parents but does not guarantee desirable teaching standards. This phenomenon (named branded education) places a name of a school as a positional good on a competitive market **(Saleh et al., 2021).**

Research Gap

In general, the literature proves the basis that the CDA is indispensable to the unpacking of the educational ideologies in Pakistan, yet it falls short when it comes down to analysing the brands and their underlying impacts and ideologies of the elite schools , which are the names of the schools. The present research fills that gap by bringing the aspect of branding to a broader scope to have an indication of how elite ideology lives in the daily naming of schools.

Research Objectives

To identify the language folds and motifs that prevail in the name of high-end schools in Pakistan.

To demonstrate through which the names resonate of colonial pasts and borrow of Western-centric global airs.

To study the association between naming and the building of social exclusivity and social eliteness.

To learn about the process through which naming relegates local languages and local identities to the background.

Research Questions

How are elite names of Pakistan private schools linguistically and semiotically patterned?

What do these names as discourses authorize elite ideas (exclusiveness, world aspirations, prestige) to do?

How do the school names contribute to the reproduction of the class gradients, colonial residual and the educational stratification in Pakistani society?

Research Delimitation

I am targeting premium private schools at high prices within the major metro areas of Pakistan (Lahore, Karachi, Islamabad). I am not referring to the cheaply priced private schools, the state schools, and madrassas, as this paper is all about elite school names. I will be just reading the word-play, and sign-posting of school-names, and not at curricula and classroom discussion.

Theoretical Framework and Research Design

I will adhere to a qualitative type of research design and use the Three-Dimensional Model by Fairclough (Fairclough, 1992, 2001, 2010). This model is a classic of Pakistani education research since it is a prototypical way of connecting micro-text, meso-practice and macro-context.

Dimension 1: Textual analysis - I am analysing the maths, lexicon and style of every name (e.g., whether it is in English, in Latin and in Urdu, the word arrangement, and any unobtrusive allusion).

Dimension 2: Discursive practice I will trace the ways these names are made, disseminated and received (e.g. branding strategies, marketing, school websites, prospectuses, and what parents would call them).

Dimension 3: Sociocultural practice - I will connect naming patterns to the bigger pinch of colonial reverberation and influences of neoliberal tendencies, reproduction of classes, and the dominance of English language (English vs. Urdu/region).

Thematic analysis: I will unravel common ideological tropes like colonial imitation, globalisation daydreams and exclusionary cosmopolitanism.

Research Design
Sample and Data Collection

Population and Sampling - The names of the private schools as mid-tier to ultrafine elites (in terms of fee scale, curriculum type -Cambridge, O-Levels, IB-English teaching, facilities and customers of the rich city families)were searched and assembled.

Sampling Strategy- purposive (non-probability) sampling and maximum variation in order to sample the diversity in naming.

Sample size -About 10 school names; this is sufficient to the deep CDA; when no more patterns shift, then sample size is saturated.

Inclusion Criteria –

Pakistani non-government private schools recognized as elite or aspirational (e.g., fees > PKR,20,00050,000/month, international courses, constructed in rich Lahore/ Karachi/ Islamabad or the suburbs).
National schools or single schools.

Exclusion Criteria

Public/ government schools, non-formal or religious institutions.
Data Sources
 The official names were taken directly from school websites, sign boards, prospectus, and social media and ensured to take all the letters, spaces, and punctuations. I also mentioned the branding instruments that accompany, including logos, mottos, slogans, taglines, about us section, and any

promotion that is included in the name. The net was expanded by secondary data (like registries) (Punjab Private Educational Institutions Regulatory Authority, Eduvision, SchoolMyKids, etc.). All data was digitalized (2025-2026) in order to retain accuracy and are recorded verbatim.

Ethical Considerations

Because I only conducted an analysis on publicly available names and branding items, no IRB clearance is necessary. However, I avoided infringements on privacy and copyright, as I am using the content of official websites and open directories.

Limitations

Using public data will expose me to missing out on some of the less known elite schools or internal branding subtleties. Research is only done on elite private schools; the results might not be applicable to the public and rural settings.

Application of Norman Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model

When Norman Fairclough Three-Dimensional Model of CDA is applied to the list of school names presented below of Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad, which are mostly elite, the following results are obtained:

Colonial/Historic Elite (e.g. Karachi Grammar School, Aitchison College)

International / Global Branding (e.g. Karachi American School International School of Islamabad Froebel international school)

Corporate/Chain Systems (e.g. Beaconhouse School System, Roots Millennium/International Schools, The City School)

A British/Grammar Tradition (e.g. Lahore Grammar School, National Grammar School, British Overseas School)

Faith/Islamic -Oriented (e.g., Dar -e-Arqam Schools, AlHuda International School)

Modern/Aspirational Private (e.g. Nixor College, Lyceum, Headstart School, Bloomfield Hall School)

These categories to the three dimensions suggested by Fairclough are mapped to the table below with their respective types of names functioning at the text, practice, and sociocultural levels. The table applies the 3D model to these categories (with specific examples noted).

Table: Analysis Using Fairclough's 3D CDA Model
Analysis Using Fairclough's Three-Dimensional CDA Model

Category / Representative Names	Dimension 1: Text (Description – Linguistic Features)	Dimension 2: Discursive Practice (Interpretation – Production, Distribution, Consumption)	Dimension 3: Social Practice (Explanation – Sociocultural / Ideological Context)
Colonial / Historic Elite *(Karachi Grammar School, Aitchison College, Lahore*	Use of English proper nouns such as *Grammar School* and *College*. Formal, authoritative tone reflecting British	Established during colonial and early postcolonial periods. Promoted through alumni networks, selective admission	Reinforces postcolonial class and linguistic hegemony. English operates as an elite marker, reproducing class

Grammar School variants)	public school tradition.	policies, and prestige media. Mostly consumed by affluent families as symbols of inherited social status.	stratification and marginalizing local languages and identities.
International / Global Branding *(Karachi American School, International School of Islamabad, Froebel's International School, British Overseas School, Z International School, ACE International Academy)*	Frequent use of terms such as *International*, *American*, *British*, *Global*, and aspirational adjectives like *Creative* and *World*. References to international curricula such as IB or Cambridge.	Produced by private institutions or school chains. Marketed through websites, international affiliations, and expatriate or elite targeting. Consumed as pathways to global mobility and foreign higher education.	Represents neoliberal globalization. Education is presented as a market commodity that supports transnational mobility and reinforces Western cultural and educational dominance.
Corporate / Chain Systems *(Beaconhouse School System, The City School, Roots Millennium/International Schools, Future World Schools, Bay View Academy/High School)*	Corporate and futuristic metaphors such as *Beaconhouse* (guidance), *Roots* (foundation), and *Millennium* (future). Use of terms like *System* and *Academy* suggesting standardization and professionalism.	Operated by large private educational groups. Promoted through strong branding, franchise expansion, and digital marketing campaigns. Consumed by middle and upper-middle classes seeking standardized and high-quality education.	Reflects privatization and commercialization of education. Links educational prestige with financial capital and highlights declining public trust in government schooling.
British / Grammar Tradition *(National Grammar School, International Grammar School, Bloomfield Hall School, Westminster School)*	Direct borrowing of British terminology such as *Grammar School*. Blends national and global identity through words like *National* and *International*. Academic and refined linguistic tone.	Produced as alternatives to traditional elite institutions. Marketed through emphasis on Cambridge and O-Level success. Consumed as vehicles for academic excellence and upward social mobility.	Sustains colonial educational imitation. Privileges British linguistic and pedagogical norms and contributes to the hierarchy of English-medium education.

Faith / Islamic-Oriented *(Dar-e-Arqam Schools, AlHuda International School, Pak-Turk International Schools)*	Incorporates Urdu and Arabic religious terms such as *Dar-e-Arqam*. Combines religious symbolism with modern labels like *International*.	Established by faith-based or Islamic organizations. Promoted through religious and moral education along with academic instruction. Consumed by families seeking culturally grounded yet academically competitive education.	Challenges Western educational dominance by promoting Islamic cultural identity. Reflects religious revival and identity formation within Pakistan's sociopolitical framework.
Modern / Aspirational Private *(Nixor College, Lyceum, Headstart School, Happy Home School, Meritorious Schools Network, Academia Civitas)*	Uses innovative or stylized names such as *Nixor* and *Lyceum*. Includes positive semantic choices like *Happy*, *Meritorious*, *Creative*, and *Aspire*. Terms like *College* and *Academy* indicate prestige.	Established by emerging private institutions. Promoted through marketing that highlights holistic and modern learning approaches. Consumed as comparatively accessible premium education in urban competitive environments.	Reflects neoliberal individualism. Frames education as a tool for personal success and innovation while often masking structural socioeconomic inequalities.

Results

Comparison of these elite names of private schools in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad under the 3D application of CDA indicates very obvious patterns in the ideologies:

Oppressive superiority of English and Western signs: The names are used in almost entirely English (or with a small amount of local elements) and in favor of the colonial linguistic capital; such words as International, Grammar, American, British, etc are repeated indicating alignment on a global or Western(western) level.

Neoliberal commodification apparent: The education is commodified as branded scalable systems by the Chain/corporate names (beaconhouse, roots, city) as well as the aspirational metaphors (beacon, roots, millennium) dehumanizing market logic and competition.

Persistence of colonial legacies: Grammar names old/historic (Aitchison, Karachi Grammar, Lahore Grammar) carry on British style elite grammar education, and continue to keep alive inequality among classes decades after independence.

Smattering cultural/religious counter-, Many (Dar-e-Arqam, AlHuda) of them have Islamic elements, indicating peripheral opposition to Western hegemony in an extended English-language hegemony.

Urban-elite stratification: Urban names focus on international norms, which is aimed at the rich/urban consumer; this discourses quality education as a luxury, and it depends on economic and cultural capital.

Ideological naturalization: Only the positive connotations (guidance, roots, future, merit) cover the practices of exclusion, and the inequalities based on access and prestige look merit based or aspirational.

School names, on the whole, represent a form of discursive power supports of lingual, class, and postcolonial power relations within the context of privatization of Pakistan education.

Discussion

All in all, these findings reflect, in good faith, how school naming in the larger cities of Pakistan works out as a discursive practice in greater postcolonial and neoliberal contexts. The colonial titles of the past (Aitchison, Karachi Grammar) are the reason why there is always the imperial gaze in which the British prestige still serves as a standard of excellence and re-creating elite networks and English as the language of power. The globalization of phase of neoliberalism is signaled by the growth of the name of International/global: Froebel, Karachi American, International School of Islamabad etc., as the process of education as a positional good of transnational possibilities and aggravates urban-rural and class inequalities. Corporate chains (Beaconhouse, Roots) legitimize privatization by altering the interest to state equity to competitive and consumer choice discourse on efficiency in the market. The names of British-tradition perpetuate imitation of colonial paradigms, whereas faith-based ones (Dar-e-Arqam) provide a varying degree of re-appeal to indigenous /Islamic sense of identity, however, even the latter tends to blend with the International to meet the demands of modernity. Naming is associated with urban middle-upper-class goals of global competitiveness in Karachi (business capital), Lahore (culture/elite center) and in Islamabad (administrative/diplomatic) where local languages/curricula are underestimated. This assembles unequal roles of subject: global citizen (international/elite), moral believer (faith-based), or aspirational consumer (corporate/ modern) -which perpetuate social reproduction and not equity. Wider consequences are the strengthening of linguistic hierarchies (English over Urdu / regional languages) and social-economic stratification, with access to the schooling of the elite being privately available and associated with rights over power, which are recapitulations of colonial divide-and-rule experiences in neoliberal settings.

Overall, school naming practices in Pakistan function as powerful discursive tools that reflect and reproduce post colonial and neoliberal education hierarchies. Through colonial legacies, global branding, corporate privatization, and hybrid faith-based identities, institutional names symbolically construct education as a marker of prestige, mobility, and market competitiveness rather than an equitable public good. These naming trends normalize English linguistic dominance, reinforce class- based access to quality education, and intensify urban-rural disparities while shaping students' social identities as global citizens, moral subjects, or aspirational consumers. Subsequently, school naming extends beyond institutional labeling and operates as an ideological mechanism that sustains historical power relations, legitimizes privatized educational models, and perpetuates socio-economic stratification within Pakistan's contemporary educational landscape**.**

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