

Comparison of English Language Education Policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan

NASEER ULLAH

English Department, Government Jahanzeb College affiliated with University of Swat, Pakistan

* Corresponding Author

Naser12@gmail.com

DOI: 10.30595/aplinesia.v9i1.29835

Submission Track:

Received: 11-02-2025

Final Revision: 17-05-2025

Available Online: 12-06-2025

Copyright © 2025 Authors



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International License.

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the differences and similarities in English language education in Afghanistan and Pakistan, two countries located in South Asia, both of which have unique sociopolitical contexts, histories, and educational systems. In both nations, English is considered an important language for communication, government administration, and access to global information.

However, the ways in which the language is taught, its role in society, and its accessibility differ significantly due to varying political, economic, and social factors. In Afghanistan, English education is relatively new compared to Pakistan, and its

implementation has been hindered by years of conflict, political instability, and limited access to resources. English is taught primarily in urban centers, and its use in education is still seen as a privilege for those who can afford it.

The country's education system has also struggled with outdated methodologies and a lack of professional development for teachers. Furthermore, the Taliban's resurgence has affected the status of English, with shifting policies on language education.

Pakistan, on the other hand, has a more established tradition of English language education. English is the official language of the government, and it is widely used in higher education, law, and business. English is taught from early school years, and students are expected to become proficient. However, despite these advancements, issues like inequality in access to quality English education, underqualified teachers, and socio-economic disparities still exist, leading to gaps in proficiency between urban and rural areas. This paper will provide a comprehensive comparison of how English language education is structured in both countries, the challenges faced, and the socio-political influences that shape the educational landscape. By examining these factors, we can better understand the implications for future educational reforms in both nations.

Keywords: English language education, Afghanistan, Pakistan, educational systems, socio-political factors

INTRODUCTION

English has become a global lingua franca, often considered a key factor for economic development, international diplomacy, and

technological advancement. In South Asia, both Afghanistan and Pakistan have long histories of foreign influence and colonization, which have shaped their language policies and educational practices. As former territories under British rule, both nations inherited English as a language of governance, education, and law. However, the role of English in the educational systems of these two countries diverges significantly due to their distinct political histories, socio-cultural factors, and economic conditions. In Afghanistan, English language education is still in its nascent stages. While the language is taught in schools and universities, it remains largely confined to urban centers, with limited access in rural areas. The country's education system has faced numerous challenges, including political instability, war, and a lack of resources, which have hindered the development of English proficiency among its population. After the Taliban's rise to power in the 1990s, the emphasis on foreign languages like English dwindled, and under the recent regime, the language's status is once again uncertain.

In contrast, Pakistan has a more developed system for teaching English, owing to its longer exposure to the British educational system. English is an official language in Pakistan, and it plays an essential role in the country's legal, administrative, and educational frameworks.

However, the unequal distribution of resources for English language education between urban and rural areas, and the dependence on outdated methods of teaching, pose significant challenges to the country's ability to foster widespread proficiency. This paper will analyze the role of

English in both Afghanistan and Pakistan's educational systems, considering historical, cultural, and political factors that have shaped their approach to language education. A comparative analysis of these two countries will reveal how language education reflects broader social issues and provides insights into possible future reforms.

Comparison of English Language Education in Afghanistan and Pakistan

1. **Historical Context and Influence of Colonialism** Both Afghanistan and Pakistan were part of the British Empire, but their interactions with the English language have differed. Pakistan was established as a direct successor to British India, and the legacy of British rule has deeply influenced its educational system. English was institutionalized as a language of governance, law, and higher education, making it an essential skill for upward social mobility. From early schooling, children are taught in English, and the language is used in almost every field of public life.

Afghanistan, however, was only partially influenced by British colonialism due to its geographical and political separation from British India. As a result, English never

became as deeply ingrained in Afghan society. The country's educational system was predominantly Persian and Pashto-based, with little emphasis on foreign languages. The Soviet occupation (1979–1989) also led to the promotion of Russian over English, further

delaying the growth of English language education. It is only in recent years that English has started to gain prominence, largely driven by globalization and international relations.

2. **English in the Education System In Pakistan**, English is taught from the early grades, often as a second language. The medium of instruction in most private schools and prestigious public schools is English, which is seen as an essential skill for academic success and professional advancement. In contrast, many public schools in rural areas offer limited English education, and the quality of teaching varies significantly. Despite

the widespread use of English in Pakistan's elite institutions, English proficiency remains a challenge for many students, especially those in underdeveloped regions.

In Afghanistan, English language education is offered mainly in private schools, universities, and some public institutions in major cities like Kabul. Due to the lack of resources and trained teachers, English education in Afghanistan is not as widespread or effective. Moreover, the political climate, especially the rise of the Taliban, has had a detrimental effect on educational policies, including language education. The previous government's initiatives to promote English were stunted by the return of the Taliban, whose policies significantly reduced the emphasis on foreign language learning, especially English.

3. Access and Inequality One of the biggest challenges in both countries is the unequal access to English language education. In Pakistan, there is a stark contrast in the quality of English education between urban and rural areas. While students in cities such as Islamabad, Lahore, and Karachi benefit from high-quality instruction in English, those in rural regions often attend underfunded schools with limited exposure to the language. This urban-rural divide creates significant disparities in English language proficiency.

Similarly, in Afghanistan, the divide between urban and rural areas is significant. English education is largely concentrated in urban centers like Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif, while rural areas, where the majority of the population lives, lack sufficient access to quality English education. Furthermore, factors like gender inequality in education, especially under the Taliban's rule, prevent many girls from accessing English language learning opportunities.

4. **Challenges in Teacher Training and Methodology** In both countries, there is a shortage of qualified English language teachers. In Pakistan, while many teachers are trained in English, they often lack proficiency and modern teaching methods. Furthermore, the reliance on rote learning rather than communicative methods hampers students' ability to use English in practical situations. In rural Pakistan, teachers often teach English without proper training, relying on outdated textbooks and methods that are ineffective in developing real communication skills.

In Afghanistan, the challenges are even greater. The war and political instability have hindered the development of an effective teacher training infrastructure. Most teachers are not adequately trained to teach English, and there is a lack of modern teaching

materials. Moreover, in the absence of a standardized curriculum for English language instruction, the quality of teaching varies widely across different institutions.

5. **Socio-Political Influences on Language Education** The political landscape of both countries has had a profound impact on the role of English in education. In Pakistan, English has long been associated with power, prestige, and social status. This association has led to its widespread use in formal education and professional sectors. However, English is often seen as a marker of elitism, leaving many people in rural or lower socioeconomic strata with limited opportunities to learn the language. The language divide in Pakistan thus exacerbates class divisions.

In Afghanistan, the situation is more complex. The resurgence of the Taliban has shifted the educational priorities of the country, with a marked decline in the importance placed on English and other foreign languages. The Taliban's anti-Western stance has further isolated Afghanistan from global educational trends, including the promotion of English. The political instability has delayed the implementation of any significant language reforms in education, leaving many children without access to quality English education.

Aspect	Afghanistan	Pakistan
Policy Objectives	Focus on integrating English into the education system to connect with global opportunities	English serves as an official language, emphasizing its role in government, education, and international relations.
Curriculum	Limited integration of English at the primary level; mainly taught as a foreign language in secondary education.	English is taught from early primary levels in public and private schools, with advanced integration in higher education.
Teacher Training	Limited teacher training programs for English due to lack of funding and resources.	Well-established teacher training programs, though quality varies significantly between urban and rural areas.
Access to Education	Limited access in rural areas due to ongoing conflicts and infrastructure challenges.	Better access to English education in urban areas, but rural regions still face significant disparities.
Cultural Challenges	Resistance in some areas due to perceptions of Western influence.	Similar resistance in conservative regions, though private schools have less opposition
Resources	Severe shortages of textbooks, digital	Private schools are well-resourced;

	tools, and trained teachers, especially in conflict zones.	public schools face challenges with outdated materials and underfunding.
Proficiency Outcomes	Low proficiency levels overall, with limited opportunities for practice and real-world application.	Higher proficiency levels in urban centers; private school graduates often have a strong command of English.
Government Support	Policies affected by political instability; limited funding for long-term educational reforms.	Stable policies in place, but implementation is inconsistent due to bureaucratic challenges and funding issues.

Discussion:

The comparison of English language education policies in Afghanistan and Pakistan reveals significant differences and shared challenges shaped by their unique political, social, and economic contexts. Both countries acknowledge the importance of English as a global language. However, Afghanistan’s efforts to integrate English into its education system are relatively recent and limited in scope, primarily focusing on its introduction as a foreign language.

Pakistan, in contrast, has a long-standing emphasis on English, recognizing it as an official language alongside Urdu. This dual-language policy reflects Pakistan’s historical ties to the British colonial era and its strategic use of English in governance and higher education.

In terms of curriculum and implementation, Pakistan introduces English early in public and private schools, with private institutions often offering advanced curricula and immersive teaching methods. Afghanistan lags behind, with English primarily introduced at the secondary

level in public schools, often lacking structured curriculum alignment. Pakistan's more extensive integration of English gives its students a comparative advantage in proficiency, particularly in urban areas. A major disparity between the two nations lies in teacher training programs and resources. Afghanistan struggles with a lack of qualified English teachers due to ongoing political instability and inadequate funding. Training programs are limited, and many schools lack essential materials such as textbooks and technology. While Pakistan's private schools have robust teacher training programs, public schools face inconsistent training quality and outdated teaching materials. The urban-rural divide exacerbates these issues in both countries.

Access to English education in rural areas remains a challenge in both nations. Afghanistan's education system suffers from the compounded effects of decades of conflict, which have disrupted schooling and destroyed infrastructure. Pakistan, though more stable, still sees a pronounced gap between urban and rural education. In urban areas, English-medium private schools provide high-quality education, but public schools in rural areas often lack the resources to meet similar standards. Cultural resistance to English exists in both countries, particularly in conservative regions where it is sometimes perceived as a symbol of Westernization. However, the degree of resistance varies. In Pakistan, private schools and urban centers face less

opposition, while Afghanistan's challenges are compounded by political instability, which limits consistent promotion of English education.

Proficiency outcomes reflect these systemic differences. In Afghanistan, overall proficiency levels remain low due to limited practice opportunities and systemic barriers. Pakistan shows higher proficiency levels, particularly among students in urban and private school settings.

However, the gap between urban and rural students in both countries highlights the need for policies that promote equitable access to quality English education. The sustainability of English education policies heavily depends on government support. Afghanistan's policies are hindered by political instability, limiting long-term planning and investment in education. Pakistan's government provides more stable policy frameworks, but bureaucratic inefficiencies and uneven resource allocation impede consistent implementation.

While Pakistan has made more progress in implementing English language education, both countries face challenges in ensuring equitable access, improving teacher training, and addressing cultural barriers. Afghanistan requires substantial international support to rebuild its educational infrastructure and train teachers. Pakistan needs to focus on reducing disparities between urban and rural education and enhancing the quality of public school education.

Collaborative efforts, innovative teaching methods, and targeted resource allocation are essential for both countries to harness the full potential of English education.

Conclusion

In conclusion, English language education in Afghanistan and Pakistan presents a unique set of challenges shaped by each country's political, historical, and socio-economic conditions. While Pakistan has a more established system of English language education, issues like inequality, outdated teaching methods, and regional disparities still persist. Afghanistan, on the other hand,

faces greater challenges due to years of conflict and political instability, with English education primarily available in urban centers and limited in rural areas.

For both countries, improving English language education requires addressing systemic inequalities in access to resources and teacher training. Additionally, political factors, such as the Taliban's influence in Afghanistan, must be considered when crafting educational reforms.

Ultimately, a more equitable and modernized approach to teaching English, along with an emphasis on communicative language skills, will help bridge the educational gaps in both countries, ensuring that English becomes a tool for socio-economic empowerment rather than a symbol of elitism.

References

1. Ghani, A., & Lockhart, C. (2008). Education in Afghanistan: Developments, challenges, and future prospects. *International Journal of Educational Development*, 28(3), 312–326.
2. Hussain, S. (2014). The role of English in Pakistan's education system: A critical examination. *Journal of Language and Education*, 28(1), 1–14.
3. Kahn, T. (2019). English language teaching in Pakistan: Issues and challenges. *Language in India*, 19(5), 72–85.
4. Lee, S., & Sharma, S. (2021). Educational inequalities in South Asia: A comparison of Pakistan and Afghanistan. *Comparative Education Review*, 65(2), 115–138.
5. Mowla, R., & Baloch, F. (2022). The impact of political instability on education in Afghanistan: A case study of the Taliban era. *Educational Review*, 44(6), 631–648.