

JYX



This is a self-archived version of an original article. This version may differ from the original in pagination and typographic details.

Author(s): Ali Shah, Waqar

Title: Privileged discourses, teacher agency and alternative subjectivities : Analyzing Janus-faced character of English language pedagogy

Year: 2023

Version: Published version

Copyright: © 2023 the Authors

Rights: CC BY 4.0

Rights url: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Please cite the original version:

Ali Shah, W. (2023). Privileged discourses, teacher agency and alternative subjectivities : Analyzing Janus-faced character of English language pedagogy. *Learning, Culture and Social Interaction*, 43, Article 100772. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2023.100772>



ELSEVIER

Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](https://www.sciencedirect.com)

Learning, Culture and Social Interaction

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/lcsi

Privileged discourses, teacher agency and alternative subjectivities: Analyzing Janus-faced character of English language pedagogy

Waqar Ali Shah *

Center for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland

Center for English Language and Linguistics, Mehran University of Engineering & Technology, Jamshoro, Pakistan

ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Teachers
English language classrooms
Power relations
Resistance
Subjectivity

ABSTRACT

The present study examines English language pedagogy as a Janus-faced phenomenon based on interviews with 40 English language teachers in one province of Pakistan. The study draws on Foucault's writings on power relations and agency. The findings suggest that besides disciplinary techniques of surveillance and examination, states of domination maintained through officially sanctioned discourses and apparatuses, teachers also seem to exercise their agency by engaging in struggles against the institutionalized discourses that underpin the very existential question, e.g., 'who are we?'. Such a question facilitates learning experience of diverse learners in classrooms and help them negotiate their identities. The study has implications for the similar global contexts where state-led ELT education is often studied in terms of the dominant ideologies obscuring the fact that they are also sites of contestation. English classes thus can be viewed as fields of force relations where teachers exist in a strategic relation with textbook content and diversity of learners subject to the states of domination as well as capable of countering such dominations and social hegemonies.

1. Introduction

There is a growing consensus among scholars globally that education is a site of struggle, discipline and control. Ball (2017, p. 30) writes that schooling is not a means of cultivating a rational self, but rather offers conditions and contexts within which individuals are produced. As Foucault explained, the individual subject is a reality fabricated through discipline (Foucault, 1975, p. 194). In the same vein, Bánovčanová and Dana (2014) argue that institutions transform individuals into docile bodies that are conditioned and manipulated. The researchers investigating resistance and/or agency in education, however, offer an alternative explanation of schools as a place for not just control, reproduction, and discipline, but also for resistance (see Apple, 1982; Giroux, 1983). It is also true in the case of English language teaching and learning, which has been overwhelmed with critical studies over the past three decades that demystify language learning as a value-free activity (see McNamara, 2019; Pennycook, 2021). According to Pennycook (1989, p. 590), all education, including language instruction, is political, and all knowledge is 'interested'. This is due to the fact, as he notes, that many decisions about 'what is taught, to whom, how, when, and where' are made at the highest levels of the political hierarchy. In his view, the classroom is a venue for setting and negotiating the agendas and different interests. However, to counter this reproductive

* Center for Applied Language Studies, University of Jyväskylä, Finland.

E-mail addresses: waqar.w.ali-shah@student.jyu.fi, waqar.shah@faculty.muett.edu.pk.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.lcsi.2023.100772>

Received 17 May 2023; Received in revised form 31 August 2023; Accepted 11 October 2023

Available online 20 October 2023

2210-6561/© 2023 The Author.

Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CC BY license

(<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

view of English language classes, some studies suggest English language classrooms are not always places of dominance, but rather spaces of conflict and opposition (Canagarajah, 1993; Kayi-Aydar, 2015, 2017; Weng, Jingyi, & Grace, 2019). As Kayi-Aydar (2015) in her study on teachers' positioning in relation to English language learners (ELLs) suggests, teachers take on various, and often conflicting positional identities in classrooms that shape their agency.

In Pakistan, ELT as a state-directed top-down project has been influenced by national education policies that adhere to the ideology of the country (see Rahman, 1996). It has been shown in studies related to textbooks that this goal is achieved by promoting specific learner consciousness, for example creating docile subjectivities in the classroom (Channa, Daniel, Channa, & Manan, 2017; Mahboob, 2017; Lashari et al., n.d.). However, teachers' perspectives, their experiences, and how they respond to textbooks and learners' multiple identities are understudied. Channa (2020) recently researched how Pakistani primary school teachers learn to teach English and develop their teacher identity without referring to their experiences in relation to the textbook knowledge and learner identities. This article is a part of a larger doctoral study investigating textbook discourses e.g., nation building, competing discourses and gendered subjectivities (see e.g., Shah, forthcoming), and how teachers engage with the ideological content in English language classes in Pakistan as being investigated in the present study. The study focuses on teachers due to their mediating role between policies and classroom practices. Learners' perspectives would also be relevant but are not considered in this study because students are less likely to engage in critical reflection of the textbooks. In this study, I draw on Foucauldian writings on power relations and agency to shed light on how English language teachers in Pakistan engage themselves with the textbook's discourses and learners in relation to their diverse identities. In what follows, I first present a brief account of how ELT classrooms are ideologically shaped spaces influenced by larger socio-political structures, and how resistance emerges. I then explain the methodological sketch for the present study including Foucauldian power relations and how they link to resistance/agency followed by the context, data, and findings and discussion. The study answers the following question: How do English language teachers describe their experiences about engaging with the textbook content in relation to the dominant discourses and diverse identities of learners in classrooms?

2. Language classes: pedagogy, agenda & resistance

With the *critical turn* in Applied Linguistics since the 1980s (e.g., Dijk, 1993; Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979; Pennycook, 2001), language classes, specifically those for teaching English (as L2/FL) came to be redefined as ideological sites that reproduce larger socio-political structures. Scholars have studied how language transforms learners' subjectivities through teaching materials (see Canagarajah, 1999; McNamara, 2019; Bori, 2021; Nizamani and Shah, 2022). According to Auerbach (1995), cited in Pennycook (2001, p. 12), when we look at the classroom through an ideological lens, dynamics of power and inequality are found everywhere, from the physical setting to needs assessments, curriculum development, lesson content, materials, instructional processes, discourse patterns, language use, and evaluation. To overcome this bleak picture, Giroux (1983, p. 12), however, contends that educational theory has been trapped in a dualism that separates the analysis of human agency from structural factors, particularly when discussing hidden curriculum, class and gender reproduction, ideology and culture, schooling, and state. He further argues that both traditional and radical perspectives either suppress the significance of human agency or ignore structural mechanisms that constitute subjectivity. Power and agency are considered to be the attributes of the dominant class. Canagarajah (1999) interprets that Giroux critiques reproductive perspectives on education for deterministically conceiving school as only instilling culture, ideology, and social relations necessary to maintain the status quo.

Many theories about schooling, education, curriculum, and textbooks have influenced how ELT is conceptualized. Kubota (2005) discusses critical pedagogy (CP) in relation to foreign language teaching and suggests that CP "provides teachers and students with an opportunity to challenge all taken-for-granted notions and critically reflect on how unequal power relations are sustained and created" (p. xix–xx). This is further expounded by Crookes (2010) who argues that the critical pedagogies within applied linguistics need people who can run and maintain critical operations in relation to pedagogy, policies and practices. It is likely that they will be required to engage in both more vigorous and more confrontational engagement with existing political systems (see also Crookes, 2013). According to Pennycook (2021, p. 130), TESOL classrooms in research literature have historically been conceptualized in two ways: top-down structures influenced by Marxist-based analysis of pedagogic practices, and bottom-up "agency". Marxist analysis undermines the 'agentive position' of actors, including teachers, students, and administrators. The classroom is seen at the mercy of the school structure, which Althusser calls ideological state apparatus (ISA) (see Althusser, 1971). Recent SLA research has examined pedagogic and learning practices from both a structure/power and agency perspective. As opposed to totalitarian views of classes as controlled spaces, several researchers have examined identity as a dynamic construct and agency, influenced by poststructuralism, critical theory, feminist approaches, narrative inquiry and decolonial debates (see Ahearn, 2001; Block, 2007; Morgan, 2007; Norton, 2013).

Those concerned with critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis (for example, Fairclough, 1989; Fowler, Hodge, Kress, & Trew, 1979) pay attention to ideologies, power relations, and dominance in language classes. In applied linguistics, however, those who follow the poststructuralist tradition define language classes, learner/teacher identities, and language learning in the context of contested identities, perspectives, values, and practices (Canagarajah, 1993; Duff, 2012). Duff (2012, p. 413) points out that agency has become a significant theoretical construct in SLA often paired with identity reflecting the view that learners are not just passive and complicit participants in language learning and use, but can also exert influence, resist and make informed choices. Norton (2013) provides a clear picture of how language and other subject positions develop over time and how identity is a site of struggle.

Similarly, a variety of approaches have been taken to studying teacher identity, agency and docility (see e.g., Bánovčanová & Dana, 2014; Flowerdew & Lindsay, 2008; Kayi-Aydar, 2015, 2017; Teng, 2019; Weng, Jingyi, & Grace, 2019). Varghese et al. (2005, p. 22) argue that teacher is not a neutral player in the classroom. In order to understand how teachers act in their classrooms, one must understand their professional, cultural, political, and individual identities. In this line of thinking, Bánovčanová and Dana (2014)

explain that teacher-student communication in school settings is constrained by discipline given the teachers' conformist attitudes towards dominant discourses. These researchers conceive of schools as places to construct docile bodies. However, [Weng, Jingyi, and Grace \(2019\)](#) note that in Chinese contexts, teachers enact agency through passionate exploration of adaptive teaching and continual engagement in autonomous learning. Several other scholars have pointed out how teachers negotiate and assert their voice in classroom spaces to challenge the privileged discourses. For example, [Motha \(2006\)](#) examined racial identities of ESOL teachers in the US and suggested that teachers also negotiated spaces in which Standard American English was accorded a privilege. They did so by challenging school policies surrounding World English and African American Vernacular English. Recently, [Kayi-Aydar \(2017\)](#) while investigating Hispanic language teachers' professional identities showed that teacher agency and identity are shaped by many factors, including ethnic and racial background, past experiences, and power differentials. Despite a plethora of studies on teachers negotiating their identities, there is a lack of research on English language teachers' responses in relation to textbook content and diversity of learner identities in classrooms. As [Canale \(2021\)](#) writes, textbook research in the past few decades has focused on three elements, including representation, interaction, and learning, with the first leading in terms of representing social, cultural, and political discourses. This study focuses on the *interaction* dimension to examine how teachers interact with teaching materials i.e., textbooks in relation to its dominant representations and diverse learners in classrooms. In Pakistan as the context of the present study, most studies have examined dominant representations in textbooks (see [Mahboob, 2017](#); [Qazi, 2021](#); [Rahman, 1996](#)). To what extent and how teachers exercise agency remains unaddressed. This study, therefore, addresses this gap.

3. Foucauldian power relations and possibility for 'agency'

Foucault's later work¹ is helpful to understand how power operates in relation to knowledge constituting subjects, as well as how alternative subjectivities can be searched through counter discourses that he refers to as 'subordinated discourses' ([Foucault, 1980](#)). According to Foucault (1980), subordinated discourses do not usually disappear entirely, but may rather become dominant discourses over time. Several researchers have accused Foucault of denying agency in his writings because of his pessimistic view of power as omnipresent ([Bartky, 1995](#); [Giddens, 1982](#); [Hoy, 1986](#)). Conversely, I counter this deterministic view of power as proclaimed in Foucault's writings by arguing in line with what [Peltonen \(2004\)](#) calls the reading of Foucault as 'a half man.' Some scholars contend how discursive determinism in Foucault's writings is a problem and rather discuss agency as a possibility (see [Allen, 2002](#); [Caldwell, 2007](#); [Pignatelli, 1993](#)). In a 1984 interview, Foucault argues 'I am sometimes asked: But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom. I answer them if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere ([Rabinow, 1994, p. 292](#)). In fact, Foucault does not speak of power as a structure or institution; instead, he uses power as a shorthand for power relations ([Rabinow, 1994, p. 292](#)). According to [Foucault \(1978, 1982, see also Rabinow, 1994\)](#), humans exist in a strategic relationship in which power can shift between and among individuals and groups. The introductory volume to *History of Sexuality* by Foucault offers a well-developed definition of power. He explains power as ([Foucault, 1978, pp. 92–93](#)):

- 1) the multiplicity of force relations
- 2) the process, which through ceaseless struggles and confrontations transforms, strengthens and reverses them
- 3) the support which these force relations find in one another
- 4) and lastly, as the strategies in which force relations take effect ...in the state apparatus, in the formulation of law, in the various social hegemonies.

Power is not limited to state, class, or elite but comes from everywhere ([Foucault, 1978, p. 93](#)) and consists of several types of struggles and confrontations. As [Foucault \(1982, p. 781\)](#) notes, subjects are engaged in several types of struggles in the field of force relations, such as struggles against privileges of knowledge that impose representations on them. In this view, English language teachers in the present study are not considered merely as reproducing the dominant discourse(s) but engaged in struggle to demystify privileged knowledge in textbooks that serve specific social interest groups. Foucault does not see power as a necessary evil but as a support in the force relations ([Rabinow, 1994, p. 298](#)). In his view, a society without power relations is an illusion. This support comes from what Foucault calls 'tactical polyvalence of discourse' ([Foucault, 1978, p. 100](#)). As he puts it:

Discourses are not once and for all subservient to power or raised against it, any more than silences are. We must make allowances for the complex and unstable processes where discourse can be both as an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance ([Foucault, 1978, p. 101](#)).

Discourses are shaped by power relations and exist in a strategic field where power and resistance are at play simultaneously, implying no one is entirely in control. Discourses are the result of constant struggle in society. Teachers in the present study are seen to use counter discourses to alter what Foucault calls 'power effects' where power functions as 'strategies' to undermine or stabilize some discourses related to social hegemony e.g., dominant discourses in textbooks (see [Foucault, 1978, pp. 92–93](#)). In [Fig. 1](#), I show how Foucault summarizes his analysis of power in a 1984 interview, which can help explain my own data in this study.

In the present study, teachers' strategic relation with textbook knowledge exists in a way they not only negotiate their subject positions as reflexive and agentive individuals but are also subject to the techniques of the government outlined by Foucault as 'how

¹ Here, I specifically refer to Foucault's *Discipline and Punish, history of sexuality* (three volumes), multiple interviews and lectures delivered at Collège de France (see [Rabinow, 1994](#)) and *The Subject and Power* (1982).

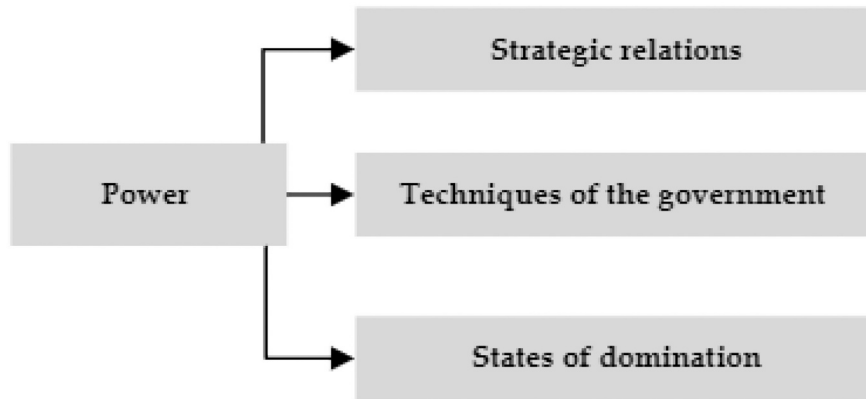


Fig. 1. Foucault's view of power (see Rabinow, 1994).

conduct of individuals may be directed' (Foucault, 1982, p. 789). In my view, Foucault's disciplinary power intervenes at these levels in the figure with a potential to transform subjects into docile bodies. According to Foucault (1975, p. 138), disciplinary power is exerted through institutions, for instance schools, and makes the body more obedient. In enclosed spaces, discipline controls bodily activities and judges according to norms - standards (Foucault, 1975). Thus, in my analysis I discuss how disciplinary power works in schools to control teachers' activities in relation to discourses embedded in textbooks in English language classes. Additionally, I argue their strategic position where they can resist privileged forms of knowledge through counter discourses in order to challenge social hegemonies. Therefore, English language classes are viewed as fields of power relations in which both disciplinarity of bodies and agency are concurrent.

4. The present study

4.1. Context of the study

The study context is the Sindh province of Pakistan, which is the second most populous province with 47.89 million people (see Table 1 for population diversity in Sindh). In 2010, the 18th constitutional amendment bill granted provincial autonomy to all provinces, including Sindh. As a result, curriculum, syllabus, planning, and education policy are provincial responsibilities. Provincial governments decide which content and types of knowledge should be included in instructional materials, recruit teachers, conduct teacher training, and monitor the overall schooling system in their province.

Each province has its own textbook board that writes textbooks for state-mandated schools and colleges. In Sindh province, the School Education and Literacy department of the Government of Sindh, Pakistan looks after educational matters such as textbook design, teacher recruitment, training, and monitoring of schools and colleges (see <http://www.sindheducation.gov.pk/>). In Sindh, English is taught in three sectors: government schools, non-elite private schools, and elitist private schools. In my study, I focused on teachers from government and non-elite schools and colleges because they teach English language textbooks published by the Sindh textbook board (STB), Sindh government of Pakistan except for the grades 1–8 where some other privately published local textbooks are also followed. These textbooks produced by STB orient to several themes, such as construction of national historical narrative,

Table 1
Census, 2017 Bureau Statistics of Pakistan.

Population category		Percentage
Gender	Male	51.98
	Female	48.02
	Transgender	0.01
Religion	Muslims	90.34
	Hindus	6.99
	Scheduled castes	1.74
Language/ethnicity	Sindhi	61.60
	Urdu	18.20
	Pashto	5.46
	Punjabi	5.31
	Saraiki	2.23
	Balochi	2
	Hindko	1.58
	Brahavi	0.73
	Kashmiri	0.15
	Others	2.75

Islam as a dominant religion, specific gendered subjectivities, representation of local and historical archeological sites and cultural events, colonial forms of knowledge embedded largely in poetry written by the Anglophone writers and several others.

4.2. Data and the informants

The data was gathered from 10 cities in the Sindh province of Pakistan in 2022 (see Table 2 for participants' demographic information). Teachers were selected from both government and non-elite private schools who used English language textbooks in their teaching published by the Sindh textbook board (STB), Jamshoro, under the direction of the Government of Sindh, Pakistan. Purposive sampling was used to select study participants. Purposive sampling is used when respondents meet the specific criteria for the study, which may include the motivation and capacity required for research participation (Oliver and Jupp, 2006). In my study I selected the teachers who had at least three years of teaching experience in teaching English language textbooks under scrutiny in my doctoral dissertation were better at reflecting on textbook content and classroom environment and learners as compared to novice teachers. Teachers' experience ranged from 3 to 22 years in the selected sample.

It was difficult to categorize teachers based on the grades since each of them taught multiple grades/classes. There were teachers in the study who taught English for grades 1–5, others for grades 6–8, and some others for grades 6–10. College teachers teach both grades 11 and 12. Prior to interviews, participants signed a consent form that contained study objectives and interview questions. A consent form was prepared according to the guidelines proposed by the ethics committee at the University of Jyväskylä, Finland, and approved by the university. The participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality at all stages of study including, transcribing, interpreting and presentation of the data. I have therefore used social categories e.g., gender, religion, and/or sect where appropriate in excerpts to prevent identifying participants by excluding any other indirect identifications.

4.3. Interview procedure & analysis

A semi-structured face-to-face interview was conducted with teachers in different cities of Sindh province. As Bryman (2012) argues, interviewing provides rich insights into qualitative research. Similarly, Turner (2010) asserts that interviews provide valuable information about participants' experiences. The study used interviews as the only data collection method since they were considered helpful for understanding English teachers' experiences in English language classes, and how they engaged themselves with the textbooks in relation to the existing content and multiplicity of learners. Interviews were conducted in English since teachers taught English for a long time and were proficient at speaking English. When necessary, they switched back to their native languages. Interviews in the present study ranged from 25 to 35 min. Interview questions were prepared about teachers' teaching experiences, teaching choices/practices, interaction with textbooks, and involvement in textbook development (see Appendix 1). A reflexive thematic analysis approach was used to analyze interviews, which Braun and Clark call the Big 'Q' qualitative approach, instead of a small 'q' approach that follows coding reliability in the positivistic sense (see Braun & Clarke, 2019). Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) emphasizes the researcher's role in knowledge production. Braun and Clarke (2019, p. 594) note themes do not emerge passively from data but rather at the intersection of researchers' theoretical knowledge, their analytical resources, and the data.

As part of a reflexive TA, I analyzed the interview data using Foucault's writings on power relations and agency, as well as my own contextual situatedness as a researcher. Foucault (in Rabinow, 1994) discusses three features in his conceptualization of power: strategic relations, techniques of the government and states of domination that shows people in any society are not merely subject to the discipline and control but also capable of negotiating their subject positions in relation to the dominant discourses. In this case, teachers in the present study are in a strategic position in a field of power relations where they not only can resist and demystify privileged forms of knowledge through counter discourses but also seem to internalize such discourses that transform their identities into docile bodies via disciplinary power working through English classrooms in Pakistan. By using theory and data simultaneously, I came up with themes like pedagogical freedom, obligation, neutrality, creation of moral subjects, critical voice, surveillance and others that helped me understand teachers' conflicting subject positions in relation to discourses of textbooks and multiplicity of learners in

Table 2
Interview participants' demographic information.

		Number	Percentage
Number of participants		40	
School type	Government	20	50
	Private	20	50
Teachers' qualification	Bachelors	14	35
	Masters	26	65
Gender	Male	24	60
	Female	16	40
Ethnicity	Sindhi Muslims	23	57.5
	Sindhi Hindus	6	15
	Urdu-speaking Muslims	6	15
	Punjabis	4	10
	Baloch	1	2.5
Religion	Muslims	34	85
	Hindus	6	15

their classrooms. For example, as found in the data, some teachers shared their experiences as transferring the content given in the textbooks: 'I do what instructions are — I just transfer the content knowledge to the learners' (TEACHER). Instructions given to the teachers, in the Foucauldian sense, refer to the disciplinary power working through institutions that tend to control teachers' activities. Similarly, instances in the data, such as 'textbook knowledge is exaggerated (TEACHER)', 'I create content that is inclusive' (TEACHER) and 'textbooks should consider what learners need in the contemporary world' (TEACHER) reveal how teachers confront the privileged meanings in textbook discourses and look for alternative subjectivities for learners in English classes.

4.4. Researcher positionality

Researchers' positionality refers to their relationship with participants. A researcher's position determines how the whole research process will proceed (Greene, 2014; Holmes, 2020). According to Chavez (2015), researchers can hold two kinds of positions: insiders and outsiders. In the former case, the participants interact with participants with shared identities, whereas in the latter case, they have no prior relationship with each other. Further, Chavez (ibid, p. 475) differentiates partial and total insider research positions. Having a total insider position means sharing multiple identities (e.g., race, ethnicity, class, religion) and some profound experiences (e.g., family, membership). In contrast, partial insider positionality refers to sharing one or a few identities. The author assumed total insider positionality in the study primarily due to the fact the researcher shared multiple identities e.g., faith, ethnicity, language, geographical location and profession with the participants except for 6 participants out of 40 who were religious minorities i.e., Hindus. In this case, the researcher and participants shared several characteristics in common, including living in the same region (Sindh), speaking similar languages (Sindhi and Urdu), and having a shared country of origin (Pakistan). However, faith differences (e.g., Muslim vs. Hindus) created a gap between the researcher and the participants. Consequently, the participants perceived fear, largely of blasphemy, given the country's sociopolitical and religious context. Having a partial insider positionality due to faith differences made it hard for the researcher to have access to more participants from religious minorities teaching English (see Shah and Lashari, 2023).

5. Findings and discussion

Study findings are presented in two sections. In the first section, dominant and/or privileged discourses are examined as revealed in teachers' experiences and views about their teaching English in Pakistan. These dominant discourses can be understood in Foucauldian power relations, where power relations, instead of being mobile, allowing various participants to modify them, remain static and blocked. In the second section, attention is drawn to how teachers resist such dominant discourses by negotiating with power and bringing their own counter discourses to alter social hegemony. The excerpts used in both sections are representative of dominant discourses and counter discourses respectively.

5.1. Privileged discourses and disciplined teaching: teachers as intermediaries between the official knowledge and the English language learners

As manifested in Table 3, some themes emerging from the interview data embody certain discourses reproduced by teachers that conform to their dominant/privileged societal and institutionalized discourses. For example, the way they viewed teaching as a 'sacred profession', a 'religious duty', or a 'prophetic profession' as shown in excerpt 1 of the Table 3 reflects their religiously situated conception of teaching. Furthermore, their description of their roles in schools as 'producing national citizens', 'creating moral/religious subjects' and 'knowledge transmission' as illustrated in the excerpts 1, 2 and 9 can be interpreted in Foucault's analysis of power relations as a way to control others' conduct (see Rabinow, 1994). These power relations can be immobile at times. As a result, the dominant discourses constrain how teachers teach English in Pakistan.

In Pakistan, religion plays a significant role in education, including English language textbooks. Thus, teachers' conceptualization of their profession is heavily influenced by institutionalized and cultural discourses on religion embedded in educational curricula and textbooks (see also Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 1996). According to Foucault, this phenomenon is explained by disciplinary power controlling activities through surveillance, examination, and hierarchical arrangements in a closed space, such as barracks or factories (Foucault, 1975, pp. 141–143; Foucault, 1982, p. 792). The school, as an enclosed space, is capable of controlling the bodies of teachers through a variety of means and technologies, thus transforming them into docile individuals. In accordance, in Table 3, teachers describe their practices as being constrained by a number of factors, such as administrative control over teaching materials and student complaints about teachers for being deviant from prescribed textbooks (see, for example, excerpts 4, 5, 6 and 7). As a result, they stick to textbooks and do not critically engage with the content.

Monitoring teachers during lessons shows how head teachers exert power over teachers and examine their pedagogical practices, discursive choices, and behaviors within a school hierarchy. These tactics and other methods of control prevent reversibility in power relations in hierarchical structures (Foucault in Rabinow, 1994, p. 283). Such a situation limits teachers' freedom to manifest agency by limiting their space for resistance. In this way, many teachers conform to school norms and are judged accordingly (Foucault, 1975). It thus follows as revealed in the data, teachers carry forward specific institutionalized and cultural discourses, thus targeting other bodies, i.e., students, using the same techniques of governments. Several factors contribute to this, such as prescribed textbooks, teaching to the test pedagogy, monitoring mechanisms, and administrative control as shown in excerpts 4 and 5. Thus, they conform to dominant ideological discourses by passing on textbook information to learners. The interview participants confirmed that, within these dominant discourses, teachers are excluded from writing textbooks (see excerpt 11). Below are some examples of teachers'

Table 3
Themes related to teachers' conformity to privileged discourses in textbooks.

Theme	Sub-themes	Excerpt instances
Purpose of teaching	<i>Producing national citizens</i> <i>Creating moral subjects</i> <i>Knowledge transmission</i>	[1] Teaching is a sacred/religious profession; its main goal is to produce national (good) citizens. [2] To deliver social as well as ethical knowledge...to give students the right path. [3] To understand the things first and then convey them to the students.
Teaching method	<i>Traditional (e.g., GTM) due to administrative control</i>	[4] School principal or the authorities do continuously monitor what I teach, so I feel no freedom to go off the track.
Teaching material	<i>Pedagogical obligation</i>	[5] Due to time constraints, I stay focused on textbooks prescribed by the government. Students have to pass the exams. [6] If I teach other material, students do complain to the principal and other concerned authorities.
Teaching approach	<i>Passing on the information</i> <i>Shifting roles</i> <i>Ideological fidelity</i> <i>Neutrality</i>	[7] I do what instructions are – I just transfer the content knowledge to the learners. [8] I change my roles depending on what content I teach. [9] I connect reading texts with Islam and the Quranic verses. [10] I try to remain neutral by avoiding comments on politics and religion.
Role in textbooks design	<i>Passive</i>	[11] Like any other teacher, I don't have any role in designing textbooks. We just follow it.

accounts of engaging in classes while conforming to Islam as a dominant discourse embedded in textbooks and classrooms:

[12]

We make our subject [the English class] interesting by giving different examples related to our culture and civilization...being a Muslim, you know, while teaching literature I bring examples of the prophets and history of Islam. I mean literature should be related to religion...it increases your spirituality (Male teacher [grade 11–12]/interview/June 2022)

[13]

I explain my lessons in the light of Islam and the Quran...to show my students the right path in their life (Male Teacher [grade 6–8]/interview/June 2022).

[14]

To me I mean teaching is a noble profession and that needs to be connected with great teaching of Islam so that our students know the truth and be prepared not only for this world but hereafter (Male teacher [grade 1–5]/interview/July 2022).

In these three excerpts, Islam is manifest as a dominant discourse in Pakistani educational spaces. As a result, teachers seem to link English language teaching with Islam by emphasizing their own identity as Muslims. The teachers teach English literature as a part of English language textbooks using their contextual knowledge, such as Islam and the Quran, as a sacred scripture, while further stabilizing these discourses in language classes. In the teacher's response, the 'right path' is illustrated to learners through discursive means, such as teaching and textbooks. Excerpt 14 mentions teaching as a noble profession due to participants' religious backgrounds in which teaching is considered a prophetic task that aims to prepare students not just for the material world, but also for the life hereafter — a belief widely accepted by Muslims. Foucault (1988) discusses two types of technologies of the government — those of power and those of self - to explain how they determine people's behavior. In order to achieve happiness, individuals can perform certain operations on their own bodies, souls, thoughts, conduct by their own means or with the help of others (see Rabinow 1994, p. 225). In this view, both technologies of government have the effect of molding teachers' subjectivities in accordance with the dominant discourse. In one sense, power technologies ensure that dominant discourses are retained in textbooks without any alteration in the sense of what it means to be 'religious' and 'Pakistani'.

Foucault (1982, p. 783) refers to a specific form of power in the western context that he calls pastoral power, distinct from political, legal, or royal power. Pastoral power assures individuals' salvation in the next world and prepares them to sacrifice their lives for others. Likewise, Pakistani society embraces this individualizing power (e.g., pastoral power), which is supported by the family, the school, the media, educational curricula, textbooks, and teachers. This leads to moral as well as pastoral subjects being created. As a result, teachers consider it their moral and religious duty to teach Islam-related content. As a discursive activity in Pakistan, teaching English aims to train the souls and prepare learners for religious spirituality as revealed in data. Studies have shown that curriculum and textbooks are important instruments of power in Pakistan. State-controlled curricula and textbooks produce official knowledge, which in turn produces official truths. Scholars note that it is discourses that construct the conditions and spaces in which teachers, students, managers and so on are formed (see Naseem, 2010; Qazi, 2021). The following excerpt illustrates how a teacher who is influenced by institutionalized knowledge shifts her roles according to the content she teaches.

[15]

Interviewer	What is your approach to teaching the topics that you just told me that refer to Pakistani ideology and national values
Interviewee	I sometimes become <i>more religious</i> . It seems that I become an <i>Islamiat (Islamic Studies) teacher</i> when I teach religious content. When I switch to the texts on struggle for creation of Pakistan, I become a <i>Pakistani nationalist</i> and teach English as a Pakistan Studies teacher (Female teacher [grade 9–10]/interview/May 2022)

The excerpt 15 illustrates that English language textbooks embody discourses related to Islam and Pakistani national narrative.

English language teachers use these textbooks as discursive resources to teach the English language. Consequently, their role shifts from being a language teacher to content-oriented instructor either as an Islamiat or Pakistan studies teachers.² As Foucault argues in a 1983 interview, some discourses are stabilized by institutions in power as a strategic relationship, and mobility in power relations is limited, and strongholds are difficult to suppress (Foucault in [Rabinow, 1994, p. 169](#)). Teachers' shifting roles from English teacher to Islamiat and Pakistani (subjects) teacher demonstrates teachers' difficulty in resisting stabilized discourses. They often switch from teaching language to teaching content instead of countering this narrative. As [Ball \(2017, p. 10\)](#) notes, modern power in institutions uses schools, teachers, and knowledge to control people. From a Foucauldian perspective, schools act as a disciplinary site of power where individuals are constituted as subjects. For Foucault, education is about generating discourses, normalization through discipline, and gaining control over bodies ([Foucault, 1983, p. 67](#)). The pedagogical methods that are practiced by teachers reflect what [Foucault \(1978\)](#) states 'bodies are manipulated and conditioned'.

In addition to Islam and Pakistani national narrative, discourse of colonialism appears to be another dominant discourse in teachers' responses as shown in the following excerpt:

[16]

Let me first tell you that English is the language of the great Shakespeare. I like English literature and its great writers. I tell my students their work. Our [English] textbooks talk about the seven ages of man by William Shakespeare and other great English writers like Keats, Shelley and Alexander Pope...great poets I have ever read. I feel a great joy in teaching English [literature] (Female teacher [grade 9–12]/interview/May 2022)

Teachers seem to admire English writers, such as Shakespeare and others, and express their joy in teaching them in their English language classes. Due to Pakistan's colonial roots in British colonialism in the subcontinent, national curricula, textbooks, and pedagogical practices are heavily influenced by colonialism (see e.g., [Mahboob, 2019](#); [Shah, 2021](#)). This results in English language textbooks including mostly Anglo-phone poems, plays and stories. In the Foucauldian sense, this colonial structure transforms teachers' subjective experiences through discourses of colonialism and makes them see the world through colonial lenses (see also [Manan & Tul-Kubra, 2022](#)). These discourses are also countered simultaneously by several teachers (see next section). Two noticeable factors are revealed in data in relation to how teacher subjectivities are shaped, specifically institutional control (e.g., school principal, section heads, and coordinators) as discussed above and fear of the public. The following excerpt shows this vividly in teachers' references to both factors:

[17]

To be very honest, we [teachers] just transfer the content...we ask the students to follow what is given in the textbooks. If teachers talk openly or question the content, there will be problems. Schools have restriction. They control teachers. Teachers are not safe even from their own students (Female teacher [grade 9–10]/interview/July 2022)

The fear of the public³ (e.g., reactions from ethnic, religious, sectarian, or political groups) is deeply rooted in Pakistani society as evidenced in teachers' interviews as shown in the excerpt 17 that indicates fear of the public i.e., students as social subjects. The students in the classroom bring their own political, religious, and cultural beliefs that they use to argue against teachers who teach specific content in the textbooks and explain it based on their knowledge and beliefs. Teachers are more likely to face challenging situations if what they teach does not conform to the given content in textbooks and the students' religious and political beliefs and their cultural assumptions. According to one teacher, he spoke against Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto, the former prime minister of Pakistan and founder of the Pakistan People's Party - the current ruling party in Sindh province. There was a conflict in the classroom as one of the students supported the said political party and the very next day, he brought his father to school to threaten the teacher not to speak against their political leader next time. In Pakistan, in addition to judges and military rulers, some political leaders cannot be criticized. They turn into iconic symbols beyond public criticism.

[Foucault \(1978, p. 92\)](#) notes that power must be understood as the multiplicity of force relations and the process of ceaseless struggles and confrontations. The teachers' experiences must be interpreted within Pakistan's broader socio-political contexts, as religious, ethnic, and political groups exist as a composite force relationship, which poses a threat to teachers in classroom environments because of internal societal tensions (see [Ayres, 2009](#)). Power relations have been progressively governmentalized, i.e., elaborated, rationalized, and centralized ([Foucault, 1982, p. 792](#)). As an institution, school obligates teachers to adhere to dominant discourses. This radical transformation of society, as scholars note, started with the Islamisation project launched by the military ruler Zia-ul-Haq in the 1980s across the country through a variety of institutions, including schools (see [Hoodbhoy, 1998](#); [Nayyar & Salim, 2005](#)). In the wake of current situations, Hindu teachers who form a minority in the country remarked that:

[18]

² In Sindh province of Pakistan, school curricula include two separate subjects i.e., Islamiat (Islamic Studies) and Pakistan Studies from early classes to higher secondary level (grades 1–12). However, some content from these subjects also recur in English language textbooks.

³ In recent times, this fear has increased due to several incidents of the mob lynching of Mashal Khan — a Pashtun Muslim student at the university in Pakistan on 13 April 2017 and blasphemy allegations of teachers in schools and colleges across the country. In 2019, an English teacher (head of the department) in Punjab province of Pakistan was stabbed to death by his student over gender mix in the college that the student thought as 'un-Islamic'. A recent incident of a Hindu physics teacher at a government college in Sindh province of Pakistan is a notable example who was sentenced to life imprisonment on February 8, 2022, based on the student's accusation of his derogatory remarks about the prophet of Islam.

In my class, my [Hindu] students ask, ‘miss why there are only Muslim names, Muslim places and Muslim personalities, Islam... where are our people?’. I tell them that we live in Pakistan. Islam is the main religion. We have to accept it. Female students also ask me about why only Muslim women are shown in the textbooks. They question if we [the Hindu women] don't ever contribute to Pakistan (Female Teacher [grade 6–8]/Interview/July 2022)

[19]

Our [Hindu] students know Islam more than their religion [Hinduism] due to its dominant presence of certain values in textbooks (Male Teacher [grade 6–8]/Interview/July 2022)

As a result of privileged institutionalized discourses in schools, Hindu teachers seem to conform to them even if their own identities contradict them. For instance, a female teacher in excerpt 18 suppresses a learner's questions regarding the presence of only Muslim women in textbooks in the interest of Pakistan and Islam. Thus, according to the teacher as the excerpt 19 indicates, Hindu students know more about Islam than Hinduism. Foucault argues that it is not that we are made subjects, but subjects also make themselves by occupying different subject positions (Foucault in Rabinow, 1994, p. 290). It is through truth games that subjects are historically constituted. Several Hindu female teachers take on specific subject positions in class because their courses are grounded in the broader socio-cultural realities of Pakistan, which is dominated by nationalist, religious and patriarchal regimes. Women in Pakistan are subordinated by complex systems of oppression including ethnic, religious, and class marginalization, according to Naseem (2010). However, the following section discusses how counter discourses emerge in teachers' responses that question how English language classes are ideologically constructed.

5.2. Counter discourses, resistance, and teacher agency: reclaiming alternative subjectivities

There were several references in data to counter discourses that teachers engaged in while teaching English to diverse learners. Counter discourses reflected teachers' partial deviation from normative teaching, which adheres to textbooks, pedagogical instructions, and school administration's control over classrooms. Some teachers (n = 14) were aware of what happened in the classrooms, what textbook knowledge represented, and how it affected learners' identities. According to Foucault (1982, p. 781), we engage in different kinds of struggle. As people attempt to discover who they are, they reject abstractions, ideological state repression, and mystified representations (knowledges) imposed on them by institutions. As a result, he questions the power that subjugates humans. Considering this, Table 4 presents participants' responses thematically presented that counter the privileged representations in English language classes that illustrates their struggle against ideological discourses.

Table 4 shows that some teachers view teaching as a pedagogical activity aimed at developing students' socio-psychological and cognitive abilities and enabling them to communicate through language rather than socializing them (see excerpts 20, 21 and 22). Some teachers exercise their pedagogical liberty by challenging official forms of knowledge, that is, the dominant discourse(s) in the classroom as shown in excerpts 24, 26 and 27 in Table 4. According to them, ‘student needs and interests’ and ‘life skills’ are more important than teaching content from textbooks that they find problematic. For example, they problematize discourses on colonialism and Arab culture embedded in English language textbooks. Instead, they offer a critical voice for the Other, namely, students who come from diverse backgrounds and are excluded from the textual world. Sindh province of Pakistan, for example, has a majority Sindhi-speaking population (61.60 %), followed by Urdu (18.20 %), Pashto (5.46), and others (see Census, 2017: p. 68). Teachers in such

Table 4

Themes and some responses related to teacher agency.

Theme	Sub-themes	Excerpt instances
Purpose of teaching	– <i>Socio-psychological development of learners</i>	[20] To help students develop their socio-psychological and cognitive capabilities
	– <i>Communication</i>	[21] To help them [the students] to develop communication among diverse members of the society
	– <i>Life skills</i>	[22] To train students to live in the society and be capable of managing their life stress and problems
Teaching method	– <i>Students' needs & interests (eclectic)</i>	[23] I am flexible in my method depending on the needs, interests, and mood of the learners
Teaching material	– <i>Pedagogical liberty</i>	[24] Textbook knowledge is exaggerated. I create a balanced content to inform the students about the historical facts
Teaching approach	– <i>Critical voice for the Other</i>	[25] Students from other socio-cultural and the religious and linguistic backgrounds are omitted...we should include everyone
	– <i>Resistance against 'foreign elements' in the textbooks</i>	[26] There are lessons on Arab heroes and colonial writers. We need to free ourselves from such influence and teach global culture.
	– <i>Decolonizing content</i>	[27] There is a text in the book that says, ‘Car across Europe’, but my question is why not ‘Car across Northern Areas of Pakistan?! They are beautiful.

a diverse province do not find textbooks and pedagogical choices relevant for students. As Foucault (1982) notes, modern societies are increasingly concerned with resistance to forms of subjection and submission, thus engaging in struggles against forms of dominance (ethnic, social, and religious) and exploitation. In Pakistan where teaching English is ideology-laden (Channa, Daniel, Channa, & Manan, 2017; Mahboob, 2019), teachers exert agentive voices to rethink classrooms practices and textbooks knowledge as shown in the data. According to Foucault (1980), these subordinated discourses that exist in struggle with the dominant discourses may appear

with more strength over time. Teachers' understanding of teaching as 'communication'⁴ contributes to countering such privileged meanings. The following excerpt illustrates how teachers bring their alternative discourses in the classrooms as opposed to the dominant content.

[28]

Interviewer	What guides your selection of the topics
Interviewee	...sometimes I teach about different scientists and their biographies to inspire my students about science...sometimes I teach current political affairs to inform my students about what is going on in the world. I also teach them the ecological and climate change issues to raise their environmental awareness as we are experiencing very hot weather currently in Pakistan (Male teacher [grade 9–12]/interview/May 2022)

In the classroom, the teacher as shown in excerpt 28 selects topics relating to current and political affairs, biographies of scientists, ecological awareness, and climate change issues that oppose official knowledge which emphasizes religion and nation-building (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 1996). Teachers who practice pedagogical liberty choose materials other than recommended textbooks. A discourse, according to Foucault (1978, p. 101), can also be a hindrance, a stumbling block, a resistance. Also, discourse undermines and exposes power, renders it fragile, and makes it possible to thwart it. Teachers' use of discourses relating to ecology, biographies of scientists, and political issues challenges textbook discourses, demonstrating that they see them as inappropriate and inadequate for students. As a result, they choose materials other than textbooks prescribed in schools. Pignatelli (1993) pointed out that, even though individuals are constituted by discourse, they have the capacity to resist these discourse forms. In the following excerpts, for example, teachers discuss how they view specific ideological orientation as a problem:

[29]

Students develop their fixed identity as proud Muslims. They are taught to be a greater nation.... consequently, their mind is incapable of behaving in a society as to how to deal with the real-life issues.... how to behave with the women.... there are no such lessons [reading texts] ...even there are no lessons on medical emergencies and diseases...there is a lack of reading material on skill development (Female teacher [grade 6–10]/interview/June 2022).

[30]

Textbooks reinforce Muslim identity of the learners regardless of who they are, which religion, ethnicity, or culture they come from (Male teacher [grade 6–8]/interview/June 2022).

Some teachers described English language classes as sites of identity formation in which learners' identities are discursively shaped as Muslims, proud Pakistanis, moral- and ethical subjects who behave according to Islamic teachings. Thus, what students lack according to one teacher in the excerpt 29 are skills and knowledge that will help them in real-life situations, such as medical emergency situations. Essentially, these skills imply 21st century skills which one must possess to succeed in the modern world. Naseem (2010, p. 17) also comments that the official knowledge of Pakistan through its educational curricula and textbooks continually attempt to manipulate individuals into officially desirable thinking and behavior. Moreover, the official knowledge deprivileges other forms of knowledge associated with diverse ethnic, religious and sectarian communities (see Apple, 2006/1993 on official knowledge) as shown in teachers' views.

In relation to the 'fixed' identity as in the case of the excerpts 29 and 30, Foucault writes that our relationships with ourselves are not ones of identity, but ones of differentiation, creation, and innovation (see Rabinow, 1994, p. 166). In poststructuralist thinking, this allows teachers to question fixed and essentialist notions of identity that urge English language learners to adhere to state-centric institutionalized discourses in textbooks while ignoring the question of 'who are we?' in relation to students (Foucault, 1982). According to K. K Aziz, a Pakistani historian, textbooks in Pakistan are replete with historical misinformation, biases, and emotional overtones that transform identities into hostile subjects (Aziz, 2010). These textbook discourses, however, have come to be understood as 'truths' as shown in the following excerpt where teachers discuss how they deal with such situations:

[31]

Interviewer	Considering the diversity in the class, what are your experiences in the English language classrooms in relation to textbooks and learners
Interviewee	When textbooks talk about specific things repeatedly, learners think of it as a reality which cannot be questioned...these learners [in upper grades] hardly tolerate any single sentence against Pakistan and Islam if there is any debate in the classrooms. They do not want to listen to any other perspective or about other religions [minority faiths] ...when the Hindu students sitting in the classroom ever talk about temples & their religious practices, they are ignored and paid no attention (Male teacher [grade 6–8]/interview/June 2022)

As example 31 shows, in some teachers' opinion, the repetitive use of some discourses in textbooks comes to be thought as reality by students as they develop their consciousness around these discourses. Consequently, they do not welcome counter discourses coming from other students who do not share their identities in a significant way. These classroom situations with specific privileged meanings

⁴ Fairclough (1989) argues that 'communication' is a transformational strategy in human interactions that counters inculcation. In this view, teachers' conception of teaching as communication facilitates conditions for a dialogue where students can also engage in discourses and meaning-making processes.

raise concerns among teachers. Foucault (1978, p. 103) notes that discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations. A classroom is to be understood as a field of force relations that can produce conflicting discourses. On the one hand, what teachers describe as repeated truths of textbooks orient students to dominant institutionalized discourses such as Islam and Pakistani nationalism, which govern their conduct, whereas, on the other hand, minority teachers as well as students may offer alternative discourses as shown in data (see also Shah, forthcoming). Extracts 32 and 33 are examples of teachers expressing absence of other beliefs and offering strategies to engage students excluded from textbook knowledge in interviews:

[32]

I don't find any texts on Hindu beliefs or beliefs of other religions...there are no Hindu or Christian historical personalities in our English textbooks (Female teacher [grade 6–8]/interview/June 2022).

[33]

I remember that once there was a festival of Holi [Hindu festival] and implemented that rare text [in the textbook] on Holi in full swing. I assigned one Hindu student to present it in the class. The other students in my class were not aware of Holi or even Easter. There was a Christian student as well, so she was telling other students about it and they were amazed to see, you know, they didn't know about Easter eggs (Female teacher [grade 1–5]/interview/May 2022).

In the excerpts 32 and 33, teachers mention the absence of discourses related to students from diverse backgrounds and how they apply their own pedagogical strategies to include them. For example, a female teacher engages Hindu and Christian English learners to familiarize other students with Hindu and Christian religious beliefs and rituals. As Foucault (1980, p. 194) argues, power operates through institutional apparatuses and techniques, including discursive and non-discursive means. According to this view, discourses in English language classrooms tend to reinforce a particular ideology that teachers may contest. Using textbooks and other means of information, students acquire a narrow world view that has been instilled in them by different sites of meaning (e.g., home, school, society) as noted by Foucault (1990). Channa, Daniel, Channa, and Manan (2017) note that discourses of English in Pakistan tend to make bodies docile rather than allowing people to learn English. It is in such situations that teachers' agency transforms discourses into meaning negotiation processes and engages students in the process. Additionally, a discourse of intra-religious exclusion was also reflected in the data, as articulated by one Shia Muslim teacher:

[34]

There is a Sunni narrative in English language textbooks, for example, a text on Caliph Haroon-ur-Rasheed is contested in Shia history of Islam but presented in the textbook as a wise and great caliph (Female teacher [grade 6–10]/interview/June 2022).

The excerpt 34 indicates how teachers understand the existing dominant discourses in English textbook i.e., Sunni version of Islam. This view, however, contrasts with the Shia Muslim students in classrooms as revealed in data. In such situations, how teachers deal with such discourses by emphasizing alternative histories can be seen in the following excerpt:

[35]

Interviewer	How do your students react
Interviewee	If the student from other sectarian group knows something about his own history, he asks questions about it and tells a story different from what is being told in the class.
Interviewer	What is your approach in such cases
Interviewee	I know history is full of stories. I tell the class that there are different possible stories about the same person or an event. But unfortunately, everyone in Pakistan thinks of his story as the truth. So, I have to make a lot of efforts in the class to tell them alternative histories. (Male teacher [grade 6–10]/interview/June 2022)

The excerpt 35 highlights classroom interaction between teachers and students of differing sectarian backgrounds who, when exposed to Sunni Islam, discuss their own interpretation in classrooms that deviate from the dominant version as promoted in textbooks. Nevertheless, given the classroom's diversity in terms of religions and sects, teachers engage in such discussions through their own views on how history is rather pluralized, and each view is regarded as true. As a consequence, such interventions in classrooms demonstrate teachers' active engagement while exercising their agency through counter-discourses. Foucault contends that we are always in struggle with the government and the government is in struggle with us (Rabinow, 1994, p. 167). As a result of this struggle, the latter uses discourse to control activities and govern the conduct of their people, yet there are always ways to change the situation since freedom is always present (Rabinow, 1994, p. 292). The recognition of social hegemonies and the way teachers challenge them through their pedagogical freedom explains a possibility for a change in power relations in classrooms. According to Foucault, power is exercised over free subjects (Rabinow, 1994, p. 292). As such, teachers are free individuals who can play their role in transforming classroom realities.

6. Concluding remarks

The study presented in this article examined Pakistani teachers' perspectives and experiences about English language classes, particularly their views on textbooks and their engagement with learners' multiplicity of identities. These were studied using Foucauldian writings on power relations and agency. Findings establish that English language classes in Pakistan appear to be sites of contestation where teachers are in a strategic relation with the textbook discourses linked with the institutional power as a part of

English language teaching. In this relation, teachers are sometimes controlled to the extent that they find it difficult to challenge the disciplinary and pastoral forms of power exercised in the classrooms. This needs to be seen in light of the national education policies where teachers are acknowledged as the 'backbone' of the educational system (NEP 1998: p. 2). Yet they are deprived of intellectual and academic freedom officially (see NEP 1969: p. 7). In NEP (1979), teachers have been characterized as 'ideological subjects.' Current national curricula documents continue this tradition, but do not explicitly mention teachers' ideological commitment. In the present study, power is combined with knowledge (e.g., NEPs, national curricula, textbooks, teaching practices) that shapes teachers' subjectivities and controls their activities.

However, this strategic relation allows teachers to appear to be 'free subjects' in some cases where they can assert new forms of subjectivities by challenging and questioning privileged forms of knowledge that exclude students from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Thus, in the Foucauldian sense, English classes are not completely controlled sites, but offer possibilities to change the situations. The English language pedagogy hence possesses a Janus-faced character. Teachers in such case play their constructive part by not only engaging at micro- level i.e., classes as found in the present study, but they can also extend the scope of their struggles at meso- i.e., school as well as macro- level i.e., society through their pedagogical choices and practices of freedom. Study findings have implications for similar global contexts where state-led ELT classes have often been investigated through the lens of dominant ideologies, obscuring the fact that they can also be sites of contestation. It is not only that teachers are interpellated as disciplined, docile subjects, but they also confront and counter privileged meanings in textbooks that exclude diverse learners from classrooms. As a result, such findings suggest rethinking pedagogical practices in ELT in terms of agency, resistance, and confrontation. However, given the limitation of the study, which is the use of a mono-method data collection, the author suggests a future direction for researchers and teacher scholars to look into classroom discourses in greater depth by conducting critical classroom ethnographic research focusing on how teachers engage with such discourses and learners in real classroom contexts and how learners receive such content. Moreover, learners' critical classroom ethnographies and multimodal studies will also shed light on how they react to the state-mandated ELT programs in different countries. Further, extending the focus from Pakistan to other geographical, educational and political contexts will also contribute to a more nuanced understanding of state-centric discourses and teachers' conflicting subject positions in foreign/ language teaching.

Funding

I would like to thank the University of Jyväskylä, Finland for open access funding for this article.

Acknowledgement

I thank my supervisors Professor Tarja Nikula-Jäntti and Professor Sari Pöyhönen for their critical and valuable comments on my article. Their guidance through consistent written and verbal feedback in several supervisory meetings is highly appreciated. Moreover, I highly appreciate two anonymous reviewers for their comments to improve the early version of this manuscript.

Appendix 1. Interview Questions for teachers

1. Tell me about your professional background - how did you become an English teacher?
2. How do you understand the purpose of 'teaching'?
3. How do you teach English in your classes? Do you use government textbooks, or do you choose different teaching materials for your students sometimes as well?
 - Sub-Questions:
 - a. If you choose teaching materials other than government textbooks, what guides your selection of the topics? Are there any topics you prefer for your students? If so, why? (Explain)
 - b. When learning English, do your students ever show their preferences for topics in the classrooms?
 - c. How do you feel about choosing the materials by yourself to teach English? what do you think should there be a choice for teachers to select materials?
4. In your opinion, what is the goal of English language textbooks in general? What topics do you typically find in English language textbooks? Can you give examples of any topics you have been teaching to students in the recent past?
 - Sub-Questions
 - a. What is your approach to teaching these topics (specific instances they mention)?
 - b. If you were to teach another topic similar to or different from what you have just mentioned, how would you teach it?
5. In your opinion, do the English language textbooks convey some predominant meanings and values to learners? Could you please specify?
6. How are language learners described in the English textbooks?
7. How do you see the role of language teachers in conveying the meaning of texts? Do they see their task as passing on information, or are they able to comment or reflect on the meanings conveyed?
8. Describe your students. Is their background the same socio-culturally, ethnically, linguistically, and religiously?
 - Sub-Questions
 - a. If not, which ethnic, linguistic, religious (or sectarian) groups do they belong to?

- b. What are your thoughts on the textbook topics considering the diversity of the learners? Do you find topics relevant to all students in the class?
9. How do learners react to the topics you teach in class? Have there ever been discussions in the classes on the topics presented in the textbooks? Or among colleagues in your school/college?
 - Sub-Questions
 - a. Have you ever noticed students expressing discomfort with the topics or contents taught, or stating that the topics do not suit their circumstances?
10. When the content does not suit the students' sociocultural, ethnic, and religious backgrounds, how do you engage the students with it?
11. When it comes to textbook design, what is your role? Do you have any involvement in curriculum development or textbook design?
12. Do you have anything else that you would like to share or the comment regarding your teaching and/or textbooks? Or any questions you that you would like to ask?

References

- Ahearn, L. M. (2001). Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, 109–137.
- Allen, A. (2002). Power, subjectivity, and agency: Between Arendt and Foucault. *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*, 10(2), 131–149. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09672550210121432>
- Althusser, L. (1971). Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes towards an Investigation). <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/althusser/1970/ideology.htm>.
- Apple, M. W. (1982). *Education and power*. Routledge.
- Apple, M. W. (2006/1993). The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 14(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0159630930140101>
- Ayres, A. (2009). *Speaking like a state: Language and nationalism in Pakistan*. Cambridge: University Press.
- Aziz, K. K. (2010). *The murder of history: A critique of history textbooks in Pakistan*. Lahore: Sang-e-Meel.
- Ball, S. J. (2017). *Foucault as educator*. London: Springer.
- Bánovčanová, Z., & Dana, M. (2014). The docile body-reflecting the school. *Journal of Pedagogy*, 5(2), 251–264. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jped-2014-0012>
- Bartky, S. (1995). Agency: What's the problem? In J. K. Gardiner (Ed.), *Provoking agents: Gender and agency in theory and practice* (pp. 178–193). Chicago: Univ. of Illinois Press.
- Block, D. (2007). The rise of identity in SLA research. Post Firth and Wagner. *Modern Language Journal*, 91, 863–876. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00674.x>
- Bori, P. (2021). Neoliberalism and global textbooks: A critical ethnography of English language classrooms in Serbia. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1797082>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health*, 11(4), 589–597. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806>
- Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4th ed.). Oxford University Press.
- Caldwell, R. (2007). Agency and change: Re-evaluating Foucault's legacy. *Organization*, 14(6), 769–791. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508407082262>
- Canagarajah, S. (1993). Critical ethnography of a Sri Lankan classroom: Ambiguities in student opposition to reproduction through ESOL. *TESOL Quarterly*, 27(4), 601–626. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587398>
- Canagarajah, S. (1999). *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Canale, G. (2021). The language textbook: Representation, interaction and learning. *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 34(2), 113–118. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07908318.2020.1797080>
- Census. (2017). *Pakistan Bureau of Statistics*. Government of Pakistan. <https://www.pbs.gov.pk/content/final-results-census-2017>.
- Channa, L. A. (2020). Agentive apprenticeship of observation and English teacher identity: A Pakistani case of learning to teach English. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 23(1), 117–136.
- Channa, L. A., Daniel, G., Channa, A. R., & Manan, A. S. (2017). Teaching English or producing docility? Foucauldian analysis of Pakistani state-mandated English textbooks. *Cogent Education*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1080/2331186X.2017.1283101>
- Chavez, C. (2015). Conceptualizing from the inside: Advantages, complications, and demands on insider positionality. *The Qualitative Report, Nova Southeastern University*, 13(3), 474–494. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1589>
- Crookes, G. (2010). The practicality and relevance of second language critical pedagogy. *Language Teaching*, 43(3), 333–348. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444809990292>
- Crookes, G. V. (2013). *Critical ELT in action: Foundations, promises, praxis*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Dijk, T. A. V. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 249–283. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0957926593004002006>
- Duff, P. (2012). Identity, agency, and SLA in Mackey, A. and Gass, S. (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 410–426).
- Fairclough, N. (1989). *Language and power*. London: Longman.
- Flowerdew, J., & Lindsay, M. (2008). Social structure and individual agency in second language learning: Evidence from three life histories. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 5(4), 201–224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15427580802286173>
- Foucault, M. (1975). *Discipline & punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage.
- Foucault, M. (1978). *History of sexuality* (Vol. 1). London: Penguin.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1982). The subject and power. *Critical Inquiry*, 8(4), 777–795.
- Foucault, M. (1983). *The hermeneutics of the subject: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1981–1982*. Picador.
- Foucault, M. (1988). Technologies of the self. In *Technologies of the self: A seminar with Michel Foucault*.
- Fowler, R., Hodge, B., Kress, G., & Trew, T. (1979). *Language and control*. London: Routledge.
- Giddens, A. (1982). Hermeneutics and social theory. In *Profiles and critiques in social theory*. London: Palgrave.
- Giroux, H. (1983). Ideology and agency in the process of schooling. *Journal of Education*, 165(1), 12–34. <https://doi.org/10.1177/002205748316500104>
- Greene, M. (2014). 'On the inside looking': methodological insights and challenges in conducting qualitative insider research. In , Vol. 19. *The qualitative report* (pp. 1–13). Nova Southeastern University. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1106>. No. 29.
- Holmes, A. G. D. (2020). *International Journal of Education, Shanlax International Journals*, 8(4), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>

- Hoodbhoy, P. (1998). *Education and the state: Fifty years of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Hoy, D. C. (1986). *Foucault: A critical reader*. Blackwell Publishing.
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2015). Teacher agency, positioning, and English language learners: Voices of pre-service classroom teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 45, 94–103. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2014.09.009>
- Kayi-Aydar, H. (2017). A language teacher's agency in the development of her professional identities: A narrative case study. *Journal of Latinos and Education*, 18(1), 4–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15348431.2017.1406360>
- Kubota, R. (2005). Foreword. In T. A. Osborn (Ed.), *Critical reflections and the foreign language classroom* (pp. xvii–xxi). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.
- Lashari, A., Shah, W.A., & Memon, T. (in print). Are we equal citizens? A critical discourse analysis of language textbooks and minority faith learners' insights in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal*.
- Mahboob, A. (2017). The power of language in textbooks: Shaping futures, shaping identities. *Asian Englishes*, 19(3), 259–272. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13488678.2017.1341080>
- Mahboob, A. (2019). The myth of the post-colonial. May 2019 <https://wemountains.com/05/08/1208/>.
- Manan, S. A., & Tul-Kubra, K. (2022). Reclaiming the indigenous knowledge (s): English curriculum through 'Decoloniality' lens. *Journal of Multicultural Discourses*, 17(1), 78–100. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2022.2085731>
- McNamara, T. (2019). *Language and subjectivity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, B. (2007). Poststructuralism and applied linguistics: Complementary approaches to identity and culture in ELT. In *International handbook of English language teaching* (pp. 1033–1052). Springer.
- Motha, S. (2006). Racializing ESOL teacher identities in US K–12 public schools. *TESOL Quarterly*, 495–518. <https://doi.org/10.2307/40264541>
- Naseem, M. A. (2010). *Education and gendered citizenship in Pakistan*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Nayyar, A. H., & Salim, A. (2005). *The subtle subversion: The state and curricula of Pakistani textbooks*. Sustainable Development Policy Institute.
- NEP. (1969). *The national education policy and implementation programme, 1998*. Ministry of Education.
- NEP. (1979). *The national education policy and implementation programme, 1979*. Ministry of Education.
- NEP. (1998). *The national education policy and implementation programme, 1998*. Ministry of Education.
- Nizamani, A., & Shah, W. A. (2022). Textbooks as 'Neoliberal artifacts': a critical study of knowledge-making in ELT industry. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2022.2160364>
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning. Multilingual matters*. Degruyter.
- Oliver, P., & Jupp, V. (2006). Purposeful sampling. In *The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods* (pp. 244–245). Sage.
- Peltonen, M. (2004). From discourse to "dispositif": Michel Foucault's two histories. *Historical Reflections/Réflexions Historiques*, 30(2), 205–219.
- Pennycook, A. (1989). The concept of method, interested knowledge, and the politics of language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(4), 589–618. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3587534>
- Pennycook, A. (2001). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical introduction*. Routledge.
- Pennycook, A. (2021). *Critical applied linguistics: A critical re-introduction*. London: Routledge.
- Pignatelli, F. (1993). What can I do? Foucault on freedom and the question of teacher agency. *Educational Theory*, 43(4), 411–432.
- Qazi, M. H. (2021). Construction of students' religious national identities in Pakistani state schools and its implications for minorities. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1886053>
- Rabinow, P. (1994). *Ethics: Subjectivity and truth*. (R. Hurley, Trans.) New York.
- Rahman, T. (1996). *Language and politics in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Shah, W.A. (forthcoming). Nation, Alterity and competing discourses: rethinking textbooks as ideological apparatuses. *Linguistics and Education*.
- Shah, S. W. (2021). Decolonizing english language pedagogy: A study of cultural aspects in english language coursebooks and teachers' reflections in Pakistan. *Kieli, koulutus ja yhteiskunta*, 12(6). <https://www.kieliverkosto.fi/fi/journals/kieli-koulutus-ja-yhteiskunta-joulukuu-2021/decolonizing-english-language-pedagogy-a-study-of-cultural-aspects-in-english-language-coursebooks-and-teachers-reflections-in-pakistan>.
- Shah, W. A., & Lashari, A. (2023). Regimes of patriarchy and faith: reflections on challenges in interviewing women and religious minorities in Pakistan. *Qualitative Research Journal*. early view.
- Teng, F. M. (2019). *Autonomy, agency, and identity in teaching and learning English as a foreign language*. Singapore: Springer.
- Turner, D. (2010). Qualitative interview design: A practical guide for novice investigators. *The Qualitative Report*, 15(3), 754–760.
- Varghese, M., Morgan, B., Johnston, B., & Johnson, K. A. (2005). Theorizing language teacher identity: Three perspectives and beyond. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(1), 21–44. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327701jlie0401_2
- Weng, Z., Jingyi, Z., & Grace, J. Y. K. (2019). English language teacher agency in classroom-based empirical studies: A research synthesis. *TESOL International Journal*, 14(1), 37–61.

Waqar Ali Shah is presently a doctoral researcher at the Center for Applied Language Studies (CALS), University of Jyväskylä, Finland. His areas of research interests include language, ideology and textbooks, critical discourse studies and research misconduct. Professionally, he works as a lecturer at the center for English language and literature, Mehran University of Engineering and Technology, Jamshoro Sindh Pakistan. In addition, he has also been a fellow at Georg Eckert Institute (GEI) for International Textbook Research, Braunschweig Germany and also has been a recipient of FORTHEM Alliance mobility funding for University of Valencia (UV), Spain. He has published his work in several well-known journals, including *TESOL Quarterly*, *Critical Discourse Studies* and *Accountability in Research*.