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## 'Are we equal citizens?': a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of language textbooks and minority faith learners' insights in Pakistan

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# 'Are we equal citizens?': a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of language textbooks and minority faith learners' insights in Pakistan

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## ABSTRACT

Language textbooks are discourse-led documents that contain official knowledge and construct specific learner subjectivities. Official knowledge embodies a worldview that serves the interests of dominant social group. In Pakistan, studies suggest that textbooks in general tend to distort the historical facts in favour of the national narrative. Using six language textbooks (Sindhi, Urdu, and English) taught at government-run schools in Sindh province of Pakistan, this study aims to understand how language is used to construct "Muslim identity". Moreover, the study also considers minority faith language learners' perspectives in order to understand their experiences and reactions. The analysis is informed by Fairclough's (2001, 2003) writings on critical discourse analysis (CDA). The findings reveal that Muslim identity is constructed through a variety of discourses related to Islam. Furthermore, minority faith language learners perceive language learning spaces to be ideologically motivated, promoting a dominant religious identity narrative while disregarding diversity. The study recommends that the process of textbooks design should consider minority faiths to a considerable extent in the interest of inclusive and a sustainable society. The study has implications for wider global contexts, including Asia Pacific where language textbooks promote biases based on religion, gender, ethnicity, and language.

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## Introduction

Language textbooks are generally assumed to be socially and politically neutral. The studies, however, show that they rather serve as ideological tools in the socialization process of students, moulding their subjectivities in a particular way (McNamara, 2019; Curdt-Christiansen, 2017; Chun, 2009). As Apple (2006) argues, it is naïve to regard classroom knowledge as impartial. In most countries, national education is mandated by the state; national education policies influence curriculum design, teaching, training, and material development to construct national identities (see Adeney & Lall, 2005; Edenser, 2002; Miller, 1997; Qazi, 2020). Consequently, critical discourse scholars contend that the text has an ideological

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effect (see e.g., Fairclough, 2001; Fowler et al., 1979) and further demonstrate a connection between identity and discourse by examining the ideological nature of textbooks (see Young, 2009; Gao, 2021).

Studies show that national identity construction and promotion of religion is a major concern in education and language teaching in different parts of the world, including Asia Pacific (see, for example, Durrani et al., 2020, Fujiwara, 2006, Roy et al., 2020, Sharma & Oommen, 2000). In the context of Pakistan, textbooks are used to impart knowledge about social realities, and cultural and political heritage of the country. As Khokhar (2021) writes that the textbooks in Pakistan are an important tool to build a state-mandated narrative and image in the mind of learners. One of the agendas of the curriculum designers and textbook writers is to construct national identity through an officially sanctioned discourse (see Nayyar and Ahmad, 2005, Rahman, 2002a). The ultimate goal is to influence children throughout the country to have a unified identity which in this case means to be good Muslims and Patriotic citizens of Pakistan (see Aziz, 2010). Further, Qazi (2020) notes that the textbooks in Pakistan construct militaristic national identity by portraying India as an existential threat to Pakistan, thus, producing a sense of insecurity among school children. This was also argued by Nayyar and Salim (2005, p. 5) who outlined some of the most important problems that textbooks include, such as insensitivity to the existing religious diversity of the nation and incitement to militancy and violence that encourage *Jihad* and *Shahadat*. Therefore, fundamental features of national identity are to possess a common ideology, common identity, common historic memories, a common culture and religious beliefs in which a nation must possess similarities within its body politic. Arguably, national education policies in Pakistan as influenced by the dominant national ideology since 1947 have influenced the way not only other subjects/courses are being taught in the country but also how language education has been conceptualized in terms of content creation (see Rahman, 2002, Qazi, 2020).

There is a large body of literature about how language textbooks promote ideologies and build narratives in language classes worldwide. For instance, language textbook scholars have examined how ideologies of local/global languages and cultures (Curdts-Christiansen, 2015, Thompson, 2013), neoliberal subjectivities (Bori, 2018; Gray, 2012; Author, XX) as well as intercultural awareness and (global) citizenship (Vinnall & Shin, 2019) are reflected in English language textbooks written both locally and globally. Others have examined resurgent nationalistic identities (e.g., Hamid & Ali, 2023) and how gender biases manifest in language textbooks (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022). The present study contributes to the growing body of scholarly knowledge on language textbook research by examining Muslim identity in Pakistani languages textbooks, including English, Urdu, and Sindhi. The study contributes to a broader scholarly understanding of English language textbooks as well as those written in local languages as objects that construct and reinforce dominant national identities.

Moreover, the voice of the learners, more specifically those from the minority faiths who are direct recipient of such content further help shed light on how language learning and textbooks can be understood in relation to power and dominant meanings that serve the interests of a national narrative while paying a little or no heed to the minorities. In Canale's (2021) words, language textbook research has mostly focused on *representations* of discourses with a little attention paid to how teachers and learners *learn* and *interact* with the content of the language textbooks. As such, the study also contributes to this call for studies on interaction and learning dimensions of language textbooks while focusing its attention on learners.

The present study is informed by Fairclough's (2003, 2010) "dialectical-relational approach (DRA)". According to Fairclough (2003, pp. 40–41), there are three themes in the social research a) social difference which relates to salience of particular social identities, be it those of women, of lesbians, of ethnic groups and so forth b) the universal and the particular, i.e., how particular identities, interests and representations come under certain conditions to be claimed as universal c) ideology i.e., ideological significance of the

assumptions in texts. Thus, the study is situated within these themes and addresses the following questions:

- (1) How is Muslim identity constructed in language textbooks (Sindhi, Urdu & English) in government schools in Sindh province of Pakistan?
- (2) What are the language learners' (from minority faiths) experiences and reactions in relation to the language textbooks and their contents?

In the following sections, we first explore the notion of ideology in textbooks and the way it is reflected in Pakistani textbooks. We then outline our methodology highlighting the research site, textbooks selected for the study and description of the interview participants followed by the findings and discussion. We conclude our study by discussing its implications.

### **Ideology in textbooks**

Fairclough (2003, p. 9) defines ideology as representation of aspects of the world, which is used for establishing, maintaining, and changing social relations of power, domination, and exploitation. He further writes that this critical view of ideology as “modality of power” contrasts with the prevailing descriptive views that define it as positions, attitudes, beliefs, perspectives of social groups without any reference to relations of power and domination. Thompson (1984) cited in Fairclough, (2010) labels “ideology” as a meaning in the service of power. And the power uses the ideology realized and obfuscated in language to win the consent of people it controls (Fairclough, 1989; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Hodge and Kress (in Fowler et al., 1979) argue that due to the ideology-driven view of language, textbooks are deemed as socializing tools that form and transform knowledge and inflect realities that serve the interests of particular groups and construct a worldview for the learners. According to Fairclough (2001, p. 185), the textbooks serve an ideological purpose in the interests of certain privileged groups. Apple (1979) argues, the primary function of the schools is to promote and project the ideologies of the dominant and powerful group through curriculum and textbooks. He stresses that one of the consequences of this is the maintenance of the status-quo between the powerful and the weak. He goes to argue that:

Schools do not only control people; they also control meaning. Since they preserve and distribute what is perceived to be “legitimate knowledge”- the knowledge that “we all must have”, schools confer cultural legitimacy of specific groups. But this is not all, for the ability of a group to make its knowledge into “knowledge for all” is related to that group’s power in the larger political and economic arena. (Apple, 1979, p. 63)

Textbook is defined as a pre-selected medium of instruction that educational institutions use to educate students. Schools usually use only these media for teaching and learning. It is the teachers’ responsibility to follow the activities in the textbooks and to assess their students based on the material in the textbooks. As a result, textbooks are considered to be the repository of authentic knowledge in schools. Studies have, however, documented discriminatory content within language textbooks, including sexism, racism, imperialism, and English-centrism (Babaii & Sheikhi, 2018). In Svendsen and Svendsen (2017), textbooks are viewed as an influential source of society’s dominant discourses that propagate certain ideologies. In Pickering’s (2001) view, textbooks are crucial in naturalizing national identity. No matter what the nation-state is, whether it is old or new, democratic or autocratic, schooling promotes national identity (see Durrani & Dunne, 2009, Salih et al. 2017). Arguably, textbook content is guided by the curriculum. As Pinar (2004) notes, the curriculum defines what should be taught to the students in order to address the question “who they are”. In this sense, curriculum and knowledge embedded in textbooks are at the heart of the national identity battle. As a result, curriculum is a battleground for establishing power relations in which the voices of those with the greatest economic, cultural, and social capital are heard loudest (see Bourdieu, 1993, Apple, 2006).

## **Islam in Pakistani textbooks**

Khokhar and Muhammad (2020) examined the traces of Islamic habitus in English language textbooks from grade 4 to 8. They found that the content of the textbooks presented Islam, emphasizing Islamic teachings and national heroes as the most significant part of Pakistani identity while de-emphasizing and ignoring the multiethnic, multireligious, and multicultural aspects of Pakistani society. Zoroastrians and Kalash, for example, have been made to feel like the other. Durrani (2008) examined how state-owned schools addressed and constructed Pakistani identity in social studies textbooks. Study findings show that textbooks inculcate a Pakistani identity with state-sanctioned Islam. Curricula and textbooks, as she further notes, construct the identity of an individual Muslim Pakistani as self and non-Muslims as “others”.

Similarly, Rahman (2010) examined the ideological content of Pakistani textbooks by examining the frequency of ideological items. He concluded that the textbooks in Pakistan, including those related to language, include dominant themes like Islam, Pakistani nationalism, and the military. Another study, conducted by Rahman (2011) to analyse social studies and history textbooks in Punjab province of Pakistan, revealed that the textbooks portray Hindus, Christians, and western people negatively. Also, the textbooks do not accept the different interpretations of Islam as the state portrays nationalist identity through a dominant Sunni ideology. Consequently, it generates animosity among different sects, subsects, and minority faiths. Muhammad (2015) shows that textbooks emphasize more on Islamic teachings and national identity with the goal of directing students to become “good” Muslims and patriotic Pakistanis. In textbooks, Pakistanis and Muslims are taught to create a cohesive national identity so that they can distinguish themselves from other nations. Studies on textbooks and identity construction based on religion in Pakistan confirm that religion is central to textbooks and emphasize cultivating students’ affiliation with Muslims by using emotive words in describing non-Muslims (see Yaqian, 2011, Ghazi et al., 2011).

The content of language textbooks is highly ideologically oriented (Rahman, 1996, Mahboob, 2009). The textbooks promote certain ideologies by using emotive terms in poems, prose, letters, dialogues, and exercises. Ideology-laden emotive words are used in textbooks deliberately. In order to construct a state-mandated national identity, these words refer to martyrdom, holy war, and non-Muslims as Kafirs. Since the first war with India, the state has used emotive language such as *jihad* and *Shaheed* (martyr) to arouse deeply felt religious emotions against India. The national identities of Pakistan and India are opposed to each other, such that in Pakistan it is based on being anti-Indian, while in India it is based on being anti-Pakistani (Lall, 2008). Further, he points out that until the advent of political Hindu nationalism, India was a secular country and minorities were integrated into its education. Muslims particularly were excluded from the new national identity.

## **The current study**

### **Context**

The study was conducted in Sindh, the second largest province in the country with 47.89 million people having a Muslim majority according to a census – 2017 (see Table 1 percentage of population by faith). Among ethnic groups, Sindhis constitute 61.6% of the population, followed by other ethnic groups. Accordingly, Sindhi is the mother tongue of the majority of the population in Sindh province (see Table 2 for the percentage of population by mother tongue) and is taught in government schools along with Urdu and English. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan while English is used as an official language and taught as a compulsory subject across the country, including Sindh province. Urdu is also included as a subject in government schools in Sindh province.

Historically, Sindh enjoyed regional autonomy during the British colonial era (1843–1947) until Pakistan was established in 1947 with four provinces, including Sindh. Considering Sindh’s historical significance and current autonomous status under the 18th constitution amendment bill passed in 2010, we chose it as a research context. Under the 18th amendment, curriculum, syllabus, textbooks,

**Table 1.** Percentage of population by religion (source: Census, 2017).

Religion	1998				2017			
	All areas	Rural	Urban	Total Number	All areas	Rural	Urban	Total Number
Muslim	91.32	88.13	94.67	27,796,814	90.34	86.46	93.95	43,234,107
Christian	0.97	0.14	1.84	294,885	0.85	0.11	1.55	408,301
Hindu	6.51	9.77	3.08	1,980,534	6.99	10.30	3.92	3,345,424
Ahmadi	0.14	0.12	0.17	43,524	0.05	0.03	0.06	21,661
Scheduled Castes	0.99	1.79	0.14	300,398	1.74	3.08	0.49	831,562
Others	0.08	0.06	0.10	23,828	0.03	0.02	0.04	13,455
Total	100	100	100	30,439,893	100	100	100	47,854,510

**Table 2.** Percentage of population by mother tongue (Source: Census, 2017).

Languages	1998				2017			
	All areas	Rural	Urban	Total Number	All areas	Rural	Urban	Total Number
Urdu	21.05	1.62	41.48	6,408,797	18.20	0.99	34.14	8,707,714
Punjabi	6.99	2.68	11.52	2,128,143	5.31	1.82	8.56	2,542,913
Sindhi	59.73	92.02	25.79	18,181,809	61.60	91.82	33.58	29,476,764
Pushto	4.19	0.61	7.96	1,276,445	5.46	0.97	9.63	2,613,790
Balochi	2.11	1.50	2.74	640,804	2.00	1.53	2.43	956,516
Kashmiri	–	–	–	–	0.15	0.02	0.26	69,836
Saraiki	1.00	0.32	1.70	302,956	2.23	0.82	3.54	1,067,751
Hindko	–	–	–	–	1.58	0.33	2.73	753,736
Brahvi	–	–	–	–	0.73	1.03	0.46	350,014
Others	4.93	1.25	8.80	1,500,939	2.75	0.66	4.69	1,315,476
Total	100	100	100	30,439,893	100	100	100	47,854,510

planning, and policy fall under the purview of the provinces. This means that provinces are free to design and develop textbooks with the autonomy to decide the content and types of knowledge contained in them. Moreover, Sindh province has its independent textbook board that designs textbooks for schools under the instructions of the school education and literacy department of Government of Sindh, Pakistan.

Additionally, the Sindh province has experienced ethnic, linguistic, and religious unrest over the past few decades. As Ayres (2009) points out riots between two ethnic groups: Sindhi and Muhajir in the 1980s and 1990s, owing largely to a language issue which resulted in the death of over two thousand people. And these riots continue until today extending beyond a language issue. For example, the province recently witnessed several incidents of blasphemy allegations against Hindus and Christians. Blasphemy allegations have also been reported in schools (Dawn, 2019b, Dawn, 2019a). Considering such a context, the authors considered examining school language textbooks as a way of understanding how they construct dominant identities and contribute to Otherization of minorities in Pakistan in addition to the experiences of minority faith learners in classrooms as they learn languages through such textbooks.

## Data

The study used six language textbooks (see Table 3) published by the Sindh textbook board (STB), Jamshoro, managed by the Government of Sindh, Pakistan. The textbooks are used in government schools across the province. For our analysis, we selected three grade levels, 8, 9 and 10. The educational system in Sindh province is divided into three phases: a) school (grade 1–5 as primary level, grade 6–8 as elementary level, and grade 9–10 as secondary level), 2) college (grade 11–12 as higher secondary level), and 3) university education (Bachelors, Masters, PhD). Our study aimed to focus primarily on secondary education which is highest school level in the Sindh province of Pakistan. There was, however, one textbook for Sindhi and one textbook for Urdu in grades 9 and 10. This means students studied each subject



**Table 3.** Textbooks for analysis.

Textbook	Grade	Year of publication
Secondary Stage English book 1	9	2020–21
Secondary Stage English book 2	10	2022–23
Sindhi Language textbook	9, 10	2020–21
Sindhi Language textbook	8	2020–21
Urdu Language textbook	9, 10	2020–21
Urdu Language textbook	8	2020–21

through the same book in both grades. Given this fact, we also considered grade 8 in our analysis by choosing one textbook for each language (e.g., Sindhi and Urdu). In the case of English, all grades i.e., 8, 9 and 10 had different textbooks. We focused on secondary level as discussed.

By focusing on the theme of religion in the construction of Muslim identity, analysis was conducted deductively. Accordingly, instances relevant to Islam and how it constituted Muslim identity were identified in textbooks. Deductive thematic analysis allows researchers to approach the data with preconceived themes based on theory or existing knowledge (see Boyatzis, 1998). Hence, we searched for textbook units and sentences that primarily addressed our topic in order to understand construction of Muslim identity in textbooks. Our analysis focused only on linguistic content. Furthermore, in addition to the textbook data, we also conducted interviews with minority faith language learners. To know if the students understood what the current study was about, we conducted a pilot interview with three students enrolled in grades 8, 9 and 10. The pilot interview involved two male students and one female student. We conducted interviews face to face in participants' mother tongue i.e., Sindhi inside the school premises with the consent of the head of the school and the students' parents given their age factor as being under 18. We selected students from grade 8, 9 and 10 who studied the textbooks being analysed in the present study. In a way, textbook and participant grade level was maintained. However, we found that secondary school students were less insightful when answering interview questions. As a result, we had to select minority faith students at the university level enrolled in their first year who had already completed their schooling and were in a better position to respond. The insights they provided were crucial for us to understand how they feel when they are taught using language textbooks, and how they develop their experiences in class when exposed to language teaching materials (mainly textbooks), which contain dominant discourses that do not align with their worldview. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted face to face with the ten students at the university where they studied in their first year. Interviews were conducted by author 3 in the present study. Since they were first-year university students, they were less proficient in the English language. As a result, the interviews were conducted in their mother tongue (Sindhi/Urdu). Approximately 30 to 35 minutes were spent on each interview, which was then transcribed and translated in English language and analysed mutually by the researchers using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2019). As Braun and Clarke (2019) note that in reflexive TA, theoretical assumptions inform researchers' use of thematic analysis as "themes do not emerge passively from the data; they are not in the data waiting to be identified and retrieved by the researcher" (p.594). They go on to argue that themes are creative and interpretive stories that emerge at the intersection of theory and data. Likewise, they further maintain that having more than one researcher helps develop a more nuanced reading of the data rather than seeking a consensus on meaning. Following reflexive TA, the authors mutually read the interview data informed by Fairclough's Dialectical-relational approach and came up with themes, such as religious identity, absence of minority faith content e.g., beliefs and historical figures, Ethics as a substitute subject for all minority learners, Muslim teachers etc. Interview participants' consent was formally taken before the interview. Table 4 shows participants' demographic information who took part in the study.



**Table 4.** Participants' demographic information.

	Religion	Gender	Location	Major
Participant 1	Hindu	Male	Hyderabad, Sindh	Sociology
Participant 2	Hindu	Male	Hyderabad, Sindh	Economics
Participant 3	Hindu	Female	Jamshoro, Sindh	Urdu Literature
Participant 4	Hindu	Male	Hala City	Applied Linguistics
Participant 5	Hindu	Female	Hala City	Political Science
Participant 6	Christian	Female	Jamshoro, Sindh	Sociology
Participant 7	Christian	Male	Kotri, Sindh	Applied Linguistics
Participant 8	Christian	Female	Kotri, Sindh	Urdu Literature
Participant 9	Sikh	Male	Hala City	Social Work
Participant 10	Sikh	Male	Hala City	Gender Studies

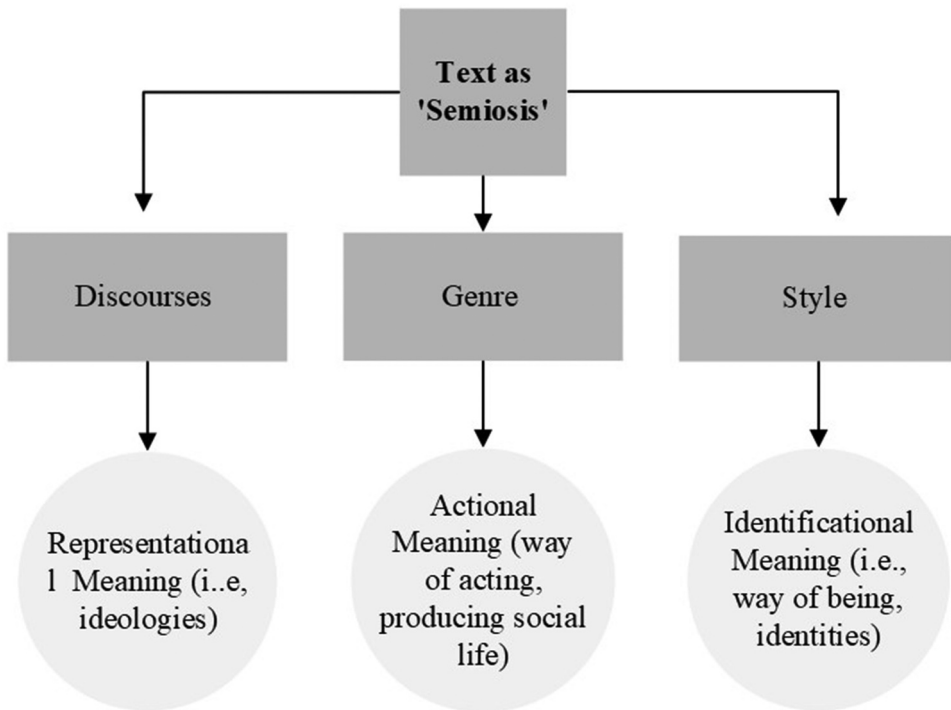
### **Researcher positionality**

Researcher positionality refers to the researcher's relationship to the participants. As Chavez (2008) notes, researchers have two types of positions: insiders and outsiders. The former refers to their interactions with participants with shared identities, whereas the latter refers to their lack of familiarity with each other. Moreover, Chavez (ibid, p. 475) distinguishes between total and partial insider positionality. In total insider positionality, we share many identities (such as race, ethnicity, class, religion) and have profound experiences (such as family, membership). The partial insider positionality, on the other hand, refers to the sharing of one or a few identities. The researchers in the present study had a partial insider positionality relationship with the participants based on the fact that they lived in the same geographical region, spoke the same language (e.g., Sindhi/Urdu), and had the same ethnicity. However, the researchers and participants in the study differed in their religious beliefs as the former in the study are predominantly Muslims, who explore the religious minority issues in Pakistan.

### **Method of analysis**

The analysis is informed by the writings of Fairclough (2001, 2003, 2010). According to him, text is the interplay of action, representation and identification as shown in Figure 1, and how these three elements are realized in various features of the text (e.g., grammar, vocabularies). Texts are not just the effects of linguistic structures or the orders of discourse, but also the effects of the social structures (Fairclough, 2003, p. 26). This shows that analysing a text does not only focus on the linguistic features, but also the way these linguistic features are related to power structures. Fairclough differentiates between the discourse as an abstract noun, which refers to the linguistic elements and other forms of semiosis, and the discourse as a count noun meaning the particular ways of representing (Fairclough, 1995, p.135). The similar distinction can be seen in Gee's (2015, p.106) differentiation of discourse as big "D" discourses and small "d" discourses. Discourses as representations relates to knowledge, but also the way it controls things; action refers to relations with and on others and power, identification is to do with the relations with oneself, ethics and moral subject (Fairclough, 2003, p. 28).

The study specifically employs "Dialectical-Relational Approach (henceforth, DRA)" to text analysis and the interview data. Angermuller et al. (2014, p.378) note that DRA focuses on social conflict in the Marxian tradition and tries to identify the linguistic manifestations in discourse. DRA envisages semiotic elements as a significant part of a social practice. Fairclough (2003) writes that DRA to text analysis shows how internal relations of text (i.e., semantic, grammatical and lexical) are connected to the external relations (the other elements of social events, practices and structures) through mediation of an interdiscursive analysis of genres, discourses and styles. External relations, according to Fairclough (2003, p. 36), figure in Actions, Identifications and Representations. Dialectical-Relational Analysis is a broader textual analysis approach that includes several elements such as social structure, social practices, social events (actions and their social relations, identification



**Figure 1.** Fairclough's (2003) conceptualization of the text as an interplay of three meanings.

of persons, representation of world), semantics, grammar and vocabulary, phonology and graphology (Fairclough, 2003).

In the language learning context, the language textbooks taught in schools in Sindh province of Pakistan act as a discourse and represent a particular worldview that serves the interests of the dominant social group and exercises power over the learners' identities through particular genres (i.e., poems, biographies and other prosaic texts). Thus, representational meanings are enacted in genres (actional meanings) whereas inculcated in styles (identificational meanings, i.e., the way the participants' identities are shaped in the language textbooks). Likewise, actions and identities (genres and styles) – the particular ways of acting and being are represented in the discourses. That is why, Fairclough (2003, p. 29) calls this relation as "dialectics of discourse" meaning that three types of meaning in the text – representational, actional and identificational are dialectically related i.e., there is a sense in which each internalizes the other cited in (Fairclough, 2001). These language textbooks inculcate discourses through specific genres that shape the particular identities of the learners. The interview data will reveal how these participants' (minority faith language learners) identities are shaped via inculcation of dominant discourses in the textbooks.

## Findings and discussion

Findings show that six language textbooks being examined have a considerable number of units i.e., 36 out of 206 associated with the construction of Muslim identity (see Table 5). Data reveal instances that manifest Islamic identity shared by both the Sunni and Shia Muslims. For example, all Muslims irrespective of their sectarian affiliation believe in monotheism and the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as a final messenger of God with their only contestation over caliphs of Islam whose instances are also revealed in the present

**Table 5.** Frequency of units associated with Islam.

Textbook	Total units (f)	Units (f) associated with Muslim identity
Secondary Stage English book 1 (Grade 9)	50	5
Secondary Stage English book 2 (Grade 10)	48	3
Sindhi Language textbook (Grade 8)	25	5
Sindhi Language textbook (Grade 9–10)	26	9
Urdu Language textbook (Grade 8)	23	6
Urdu Language textbook (Grade 9–10)	34	8

study. As a result, a partial Sunni ideology is foregrounded. As an example, unit 2 in grade 8 (p.7) of Sindhi language textbook discusses Omar bin Khattab as a companion to the prophet and notes a conversation between the two. Historically, there has been an ongoing ideological conflict over the status of caliphs of prophet. For example, in Sunni Islam, caliphs such as Abu Bakar, Omar, Usman and Ali are revered as faithful companions of the prophet that also justifies their political rule respectively, while Shi'ite school of thought considers Ali as *imam* (leader) after the prophet as well as his successor. Textbooks in this case promotes the former.

In order to gain a deeper understanding of Muslim identity, we present some examples from textbooks as representative of language relating to the constitution of Muslim identity followed by minority faith learners' experiences.

### **Discourses of Muslim identity in language textbooks**

Several units in textbooks begin with the statement "In the name of Allah – the most gracious and beneficent", which shows Muslims begin their work in the name of God (Allah). In this section, findings are presented along the lines of the construction of Muslim identity, one of the most important aspects of Pakistan's national identity. Islam has played a major role in establishing Pakistan's collective national identity since its creation in 1947. This factor of religion is also utilized as a socializing agent in language textbooks. The findings of study, for example, show that textbooks largely enact the genres of poems relating to monotheistic beliefs and biographies of the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who is considered to be the last prophet in Islam, life histories of Muslim kings and caliphs, as well as religious practices deemed obligatory in Islamic moral philosophy. The following sentences relate to the Muslim belief and show how Muslim identity is constructed:

[1] الله تعالیٰ انسان جي هدايت لاءِ ڪيترا ئي پيغمبر سڳورا موڪليا. [2] انهن انسان کي حق سچ جو رستو ڏيکاريو.

English Translation of the above Sindhi text follows as

[1] Allah sent many prophets for the guidance of mankind. [2] They showed the right path to humans. (Source: Sindhi Language Textbook, grade 8, p.3)

According to Fairclough (2003, p. 92), some words as "Allah" in the case of the instance given above are ideologically contested since they carry different experiential, referential and expressive values. Experiential values embedded in the formal features of the text, such as words are cues and a trace to the way in which the text producer's experience of the natural or social world is represented. Thus, the representational meaning enacted in the text inculcates the discourse related to "Allah" (God) as a specific entity as viewed in Islam as a religion i.e., one God who sent prophets on the earth for the guidance of humanity. Thus, the relational and expressive values of the word, i.e., the way people establish their relations with the world and shape their identities through religious discourse is established while constructing a discourse of "monotheism" which is central to Muslim's fundamental beliefs (i.e., both Sunni and Shia Muslims). Likewise, another discourse emerges in relation to the "prophet" through sentences, such as:

[3] Our holy prophet is the last of the prophets. (Source: English Language Textbook, grade 9, p.2)

One of the causal effects of the texts is its ideological effect (Fairclough et al., 2014, p.383) which is expressed through language. Text (3) refers to prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) believed to be the last prophet of Allah within the Islamic teachings. The presence of the content about the prophet of Islam is recurrent in all language textbooks, which is an essential constituent of Muslim identity in general. The relation between the presence of dominant meaning and how it constitutes the identities of learners is dialectical since these discourses shape the identities which are reproduced in social spaces. The textbooks contain several other instances on how Muslim identity is built through biographical notes on the prophet of Islam in the following examples:

حضور اکرم جن سچي دنيا لاء نيڪيءَ ۽ پلانيءَ جا سرچشما آهن. پاڻ سڳورن جي سچائيءَ ۽  
ديانتداريءَ جو اعتراف سندن دشمنن به ڪيو آهي

Translated as

[4] Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) is an epitome of benevolence and righteousness. Even enemies admitted about his truthfulness and honesty. (Sindhi Language Textbook, grade 9/10, p.1)

Another excerpt from an English language textbook follows as:

[5] Holy prophet would never ask anyone to do anything which he himself would not do. He loved doing work for himself and for others. (Source: English Language Textbook, grade 9, p.29)

Likewise, in an Urdu language textbook, the similar instance is found as

آپ ﷺ نے فرمایا ہے کہ صفائی ایمان کا ایک حصہ ہے اور قرآن پاک میں ہے کہ اللہ تعالیٰ صاف پاک رہنے  
والوں سے محبت کرتا ہے (ص - ۵۱)

Translated as:

[6] The Holy Prophet (P.B.U.H) said, Cleanliness is part of our faith, and the Quran says, "Allah loves those who maintain cleanliness".(Source: Urdu Language Textbook, grade 9/10, p.51)

Fairclough (2001) maintains that the discourse should be investigated at three levels of social organization: the societal level, the institutional level and the situational level since any discourse is shaped by societal power relations and contributes to institutional and societal struggles. In this context, the underlined words in the texts (4), (5) and (6), such as "Allah", "Prophet" and "Quran" as observed in the textbooks show the learners' institutional ideological position inculcated discursively and situate language learners within a specified identity. It then at societal level conflicts ideologically with the groups of people e.g., non-Muslims such as Hindus, Christians, Sikhs and others who are in the constant struggle for self-identity and inclusion in educational discourses in Pakistan (see e.g., Author(s), forthcoming). The overwording such as "Allah", "Prophet" and "Quran" throughout textbooks shows the textbook producers' preoccupation with a specific representation of the world (Fairclough, 2003, p. 96) i.e., the world dominated by Islamic beliefs. The grammatical constructs such as "Allah loves those who maintain cleanliness" (Urdu Language Textbook, grade 9/10, p.51) with their experiential value reflect the textbook producers' own view of the reality dominantly located in religious ontology. The use of nominalization, such as "cleanliness" is employed here to establish a relation with Islam that emphasizes cleanliness and purity to be maintained by Muslims. It is established in text (6) that "Allah loves those who maintain cleanliness", thus making it a part of Muslim faith. In Pakistan, the successive governments in the last 73 years have employed the national education policies and curriculum to shape the students' specific identities. And religion plays a significant role in building national identity in the country (see Qazi 2020, Qazi and Shah 2019a, Durrani & Dunne, 2009). There are several other instances in the text pertaining to the "Muslim (religious) Identity" as follows:

انسان جو سڀ کان اهم گڻ اهو آهي ته هو پنهنجي خالق کي سچائي (ص - 3)

Translated as

[7] The foremost attribute of a human being is to know his creator. (Source: Sindhi Language Textbook, grade 8, p.3)

وٽين مسلمان توڙي ڪافر مهمان تي ايندا هئا.

Translated as

[8] Muslims as well as Kafirs (disbelievers) used to come as a guest to the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him). (Source: Sindhi Language Textbook, grade 9/10, p.3)

ڏٺي سڳورو انسان تي ماءُ پيءُ کان به وڌيڪ مهربان ۽ شفيق آهي. ان جا اسان تي ان ڳڻيا احسان آهن. (ص - 3)

Translated as:

[9] The Blessed Creator (Allah) is more benevolent and kinder than parents towards humans. Allah has bestowed countless favors on us. (Source: Sindhi Language Textbook, grade 8, p.3)

اڄ انسان هڪ پاسي چنڊ تي پهچي چڪو آهي ته ٻئي پاسي اخلاقي طور تي پسنين ۾ ڪري رهيو آهي. اهڙي صورتحال ۾ نبي جن جا اخلاق سموري انسانيت لاءِ واٽ جي لاءِ آهن. انهيءَ لاءِ جو شعاع اعليٰ اخلاقي قدرن جي وڃايل ماڳ تي رسائڻ لاءِ اڄ به اسان جو سونهون بڻجي سگهي ٿو.

Translated as:

[10] On one hand humans have reached the moon, and on other hand they have declined morally. In such a dismal condition, the conduct of the Holy Prophet (peace be upon him) is a great example for the entire humanity. Following His footsteps can take us to heights of good morals. (Source: Sindhi language textbook, grade 9/10, p.46)

[11] O People! A Muslim is another Muslim's brother, and all Muslims are brothers among themselves. (Source: English language textbook, grade 9, p.3)

In examples (7), (8), (9) and (10), the use of declarative *mode* establishes the relation of authority among the learners and the modes establish the subject positions differently (Fairclough, 2003, p. 106). All instances in the excerpts show a reference to Islamic beliefs and teachings. For example, texts (7) and (9) explain the belief in God and emphasizes knowing the creator who is kind and more loving than human parents, while the text 8 manifests the mercy of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) who used to be attended by both the Muslims and non-Muslims. Moreover, the connectors i.e., "On one hand" and "on the other hand" in example (10) attach the expressive value to sentences while establishing a link between human moral decline and their detachment from religion i.e., Islam. Fairclough (2001) argues that the way connectors are used has an ideological character. Excerpt (11) explicitly shapes the Muslim ideology using discourse of brotherhood based on Islam. The relational value associated with the grammatical construction places a constraint over subjects (Fairclough, 2001), that is, to portray them as Muslims in textbook discourse. Similarly, the sentence taken from the Urdu textbook of grade 9–10 e.g., Health and Cleanliness (see Text 12) also foregrounds religious (Islamic) teachings and knowledge and teaches learners how to appreciate Islam as a religion as shown in the title of the unit i.e., love for Islam. The lessons of health and cleanliness are overtly taught with the reference to Islam.

مسلمانن کي نماز کان پھلے وضو ڪا حڪم ڏيا ويا آهن، جنس سڄي ماڻھو اور پير اچھي طرح سڄي ڏھل جاتے ھيں.

Translated as:

[12] Muslims are instructed to observe ablution before prayers, through which face, hands and feet are cleaned properly. (Source: Urdu language textbook, grade 9/10, p.50)

Biographies are the dominant genres as ways of acting in the language textbooks that offer learners the knowledge about the heroic past. In addition to the prophet, the following excerpt shows how Omar bin Abdul Aziz – one of the caliphs in the Islamic caliphate has been depicted in relation to the religious identity of the Muslims.

اے مسلمانوں کے سردار! آپ ناکام نہیں۔ اللہ کا فرمان ہے کہ جس نے اپنے رب کا نام لیا اور نماز پڑھی وہ کامیاب ہے

Translated as

[13] O leader of Muslims! You have not failed, Allah says, those who remember his Lord and offer prayer are successful. (Source: Urdu language textbook, grade 9, p.17)

Fairclough (2001, p. 3) notes that language is the locus of ideology and the latter being the primary means of manufacturing consent. The use of linguistic unit, i.e., *O' leaders of Muslims* constitute Muslim identity while referring to Islamic rulers/caliphs. The caliph Omar bin Abdul Aziz has been portrayed as a leader of the Muslims. As an Islamic ruler, one has to remember Allah by offering Namaz i.e., prayer which is obligatory for all Muslims five times a day. In some other instances, the textbook shows how sticking to religion is important to safeguard the country:

ہمارے لینے یہ ضروری ہے کہ ہم اپنے وطن کی بقا اور سلامتی کے لینے اپنے دین کی رسی کو مضبوطی سے پکڑے رکھیں

Translated as

[14] It is important for us to follow the religion for the sake of survival and sovereignty of our country. (Source: Urdu language textbook, grade 9/10, p.14)

Religion in example (14) refers to Islam. Similarly, another excerpt from Urdu language textbook shows the heroic Muslim personality and how it relates to progress of Muslims as a religious community:

بہادر یار جنگ نے مختلف ریاستوں میں رہنے والے مسلمانوں کو ایک مرکز پر جمع کیا۔ وہ ارادے کے پکے، حوصلے کے مضبوط اور سچے مسلمان تھے۔ وہ ساری زندگی مسلمانوں کی ترقی کے لینے کوشش کرتے رہے۔

Translated as

[15] Bahadur Yar Jang gathered the Muslims living in different states. He was a determined, brave, and true Muslim. He worked his entire life for the welfare of Muslims. (Source: Urdu language textbook, grade 9, p.33)

The text (15) related to *Bahadur Yar Jang* talks about his contribution as a politician in the Muslim League in the subcontinent India. The text portrays him as a brave leader of the Muslim league. The selected line emphasizes the struggles of Bahadur Yar Jang for Muslims. Nayyar (2020) highlights that Muslim and Pakistani identities were equated in the curriculum during Islamization of the curriculum. He further adds that National Early Childhood Education included an objective in their curriculum to nurture in children a sense of Islamic identity and pride in being Pakistani. This practice of ideological inculcation can still be seen in the successive developments in education policy and curriculum. Given the diversity of learners in terms of religion, the promotion of the specific religion and presenting it dominantly to the extent that it becomes a major identity marker is against the very constitution of Pakistan, article 22(1) which ensures the fundamental rights to the citizens stating that:

No person attending any educational institution shall be required to receive religious instruction, or take part in any religious ceremony, or attend religious worship, if such instruction, ceremony of worship relates to a religion other than his own.

Paul (2014) notes that it is sad that National Education Policy (2009), National Curriculum (2006) and the textbooks which have been published with the approval of the government in 2013–14 by the national book foundation, Islamabad and textbook boards of four provinces have violated the Article 22(1) of the constitution of Pakistan that ensures religious freedom. On the contrary, an ideological *inculcation* (Fairclough, 1989) through Islam as a dominant religion as a marker of collective national identity excludes the minorities from the educational scenario. The use of language in the textbooks is inclined towards certain ideological goal. This goal can be visualized in a report published by USCIRF (2016) which shows that Pakistani textbooks are filled with discrimination against Christians, Hindus, and Ahmadis. There is a strong relationship between language identity, ideology, power,

and culture. Therefore, language textbooks do not only teach linguistic forms, but go further and construct identities. Curdt-Christiansen and Weninger (2015) provide a comprehensive review of how foreign-language textbooks are sociocultural materials, institutionally sanctioned and ideologically embedded, with texts that are closely related to identity politics (Wang and Gritter 2016), while referring to case of China, also argues that language textbooks contribute actively to constructing national identities without considering the fact that they may not serve the interests of international language learners. As in other studies of language textbooks, various ideologies are identified, including neoliberalism (Gray, 2012, Bori, 2018), gender bias in representations (Ismael & Mohammadzadeh, 2022, Ullah and Skelton, 2013), westernization (Author, xx), localization of English and its discourses (Mahboob, 2009), and how these textbooks create docile subjectivities (Channa et al., 2017). As such, our findings also contribute to broadening our understanding of language textbooks as value-laden official documents that embody a dominant worldview e.g., Islam in the case of the present study. From a representational perspective, this demonstrates how such a formation in language textbooks results in the exclusion of other voices and identities co-existing in a particular country. The following section discusses the reactions and responses of minority faith learners to textbook discourses.

### ***Minority faith language learners' insights about the textbooks***

In this study, all students interviewed had studied English, Urdu, and Sindhi languages for 12 years from grade 1 to grade 12, and now they are studying at public sector universities in Sindh province. In presenting their responses, we have used pseudonyms for ethical considerations. The students showed concerns about how the language textbooks are designed and taught in the classes which are diverse in terms of ethnicity, languages and religion, no matter the other groups existed in minority. It can be seen from a comment: "our cultural and religious content has been kept at arm's length. It has not been considered the least. And even when we are supposed to learn our religious stuff, then Islamiyat is replaced with ethics rather than the knowledge related to our religion i.e., Hinduism" (Interview, Dileep, 25/2/2022). Students interviewed in the study think that most of the content included in the textbooks relates to Islam, and there are hardly any lessons on other religions, specifically minority faiths. Reena – a female participant explains this situation:

In my entire phase of learning languages through prescribed textbooks, I have hardly come across any text on Hinduism except for "Diwali" I had read in these language textbooks. (Interview, 22/2/2022)

Likewise, a Christian student remarked: "though Islam and Christianity have some commonality, yet they are differently situated in their basic tenets and practices. It is, therefore, difficult for us to understand the content presented in the classrooms" (Interview, Zoe, 20/02/2022). These comments imply that the minority students in Sindh province of Pakistan feel as other while being exposed to the language textbooks. In the interview, one of the participants had an interesting comment regarding ethics as a subject being taught as a substitute for other religions as follows:

Teaching Islam as a religion implies that the majority faith students need their religion as a sense of belonging; however, teaching ethics to the minority faith learners builds an impression that we lack ethical values and thus require ethical and moral training. (Interview, Anaya, 28/02/2022)

This comment reflects the ideological dilemma in Pakistani society, which ensures the freedom and equality of all citizens as echoed in the words of Quaid-e-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah – the founder of the country who stated in his speech at the first constitutional assembly:

You are free; you are free to go to your temples. You are free to go to your mosques or to any other places of worship in this State of Pakistan. You may belong to any religion, caste or creed – that has nothing to do with the business of the state (Speech, 11th August 1947)



In the light of this statement, national curriculum and the textbooks designed and taught currently in the Sindh province of Pakistan stand in contradiction. Moreover, even the recent single national curriculum (SNC) designed by the previous PTI-led government of Pakistan now called National Curriculum of Pakistan is criticized for its overtly religious (Islamic) content (see Husain and Saigol, 2020). Fairclough (2001, 2003) notes that what goes in the text is true for what is happening in the social world order. From a discursive viewpoint, school as an order of discourse shapes and reproduces the prevailing social practices. In the words of Fairclough (2003, p. 210), the social problem needs to be seen from the perspective of whose interests are served as a result of textual representation enacted and inculcated in the different genres, discourses and styles. Considering this argument, scholars contend that overemphasis on religious ideology in curriculum and textbooks has its roots in the Islamization project of Zia-ul-Haq – the military ruler in the 1980s that has resulted in radicalization of society at large, including educational spaces (See also Hoodbhoy, 2020, Nayyar, 2020). In response to the questions about how teachers engage with their students while teaching the content in the language textbooks, the following conversation shows how the situation comes about:

Researcher: How do teachers engage with you while teaching specific content from language textbooks?

Nitesh: I was taught language textbooks by teachers who were Muslims, so their ultimate goal was to transfer the given content and focus on the vocabulary and grammar.

Researcher: So, you mean the teacher was least sensitive & thoughtful about what was in the texts?

Nitesh: Yes, in a way we can say that since Islam as a dominant religion is a norm.

Further while commenting on if the teachers' own ideological affiliation affects the learners' identities, the following discussion is illuminating:

Researcher: Do you think that the teachers' own affiliation with a certain faith affects teaching of the content in the language textbooks?

Nitesh: I think "yes". Unfortunately, there are hardly Hindu or Christian teachers teaching the language textbooks in our schools and it affects how the knowledge is transferred.

Researcher: Is it only in the case of language textbooks that there are very few or hardly any teachers to teach, or it is true for other subjects as well?

Nitesh: I am not sure about other schools, but in my case, I was not taught by any minority teacher. For example, you can see there are no school job vacancies for minority teachers who should be teaching Hinduism, Christianity, and other religions. But there are job vacancies for Islamiyat teachers.

The other students also confirmed that the teachers who taught languages in schools were least sensitive about the content in them. Their role was merely to transfer the given knowledge which was taken as fixed and unproblematic. There was only one participant who told that the school had one English teacher from a minority faith, and he engaged with the content like the Muslim teachers did. It is perhaps due to the reason that being critical about the content is a risk. Incidents of this nature have already happened in Pakistan. For example, a Hindu teacher was accused of blasphemy in 2019 in Ghotki – a city in Sindh province of Pakistan by a student of grade 11 which led to the mob attack on Hindu property and "mandir" (the holy place of Hindus). Given that the minority faith people do not enjoy the absolute freedom in Pakistan, we argue that they do suffer in schools in terms of discrimination, marginalization and Otherisation. This can be seen in a remark by one student as follows:

We know more about Islam than our own religion because from grade 1 through 12, we have learnt Islam in almost all textbooks. (Interview, Anaya, 26/02/2022)

The language textbooks overemphasize the teachings of Islam in textbooks. As a result, the voice of minority faith learners is excluded. Sikh student in the interview commented that ‘there is no such thing as Sikhism in the language textbooks we are exposed to; as a result, I feel like I am not Pakistani (Interview, Jasvin, 01/03/2022). This creates a situation of alienation for the students belonging to other faiths in the country. A sense of belonging is built through one’s own culture; if the very culture the learners belong to is missing, they will surely encounter an identity crisis as evidenced in Jasvin’s comment. The following conversation reveals how the students felt when they discussed they were excluded from textual content:

When I came into my senses, I knew some historical facts about our forefathers who played their role in the creation of the country; it is sad that they are not mentioned anywhere. For example, when we are taught the biographies of the people who contributed to the creation of the country, we find only Muslim men and women. (Interview, Analia, 27/02/2022)

In another comment, the same student remarked that it is ironic that the Pakistani flag shows the white colour for minorities, but they are underrepresented in the education. In this case, the students’ reactions to the language textbooks indicate that there are issues of inclusion and representation when it comes to teaching languages in Pakistani context.

## Conclusion

The present study focused on construction of Muslim identity in Urdu, Sindhi, and English language textbooks. The findings reveal that language textbooks heavily emphasize Islam in terms of beliefs, practices and morals that largely constitute a Muslim identity. The existing literature shows a close relationship to the findings of the present study suggesting that language textbooks do not simply contain language lessons helping learners to improve their linguistic knowledge of Sindhi, Urdu and English languages in Pakistan, but also aim at inculcating ideological discourses in language classes that serve the interest of majority group in the country i.e., Muslims. As a result of the ideological emphasis in textbooks analysed in the present study, a majoritarian religious nationalism appears to be constituted. Moreover, the interview findings suggest that minority faith language learners view textbooks as excluding their identities influenced by their religious beliefs. As a result, they simply learn the given content as embedded in language textbooks without critically engaging with it by both the learners and teachers from the minority faith. Language textbooks, according to them, represent a world that is alien to them in terms of religious beliefs.

In light of the findings, the study recommends that the language textbooks should be designed in a way that they also include the minority faiths in their content to a considerable extent as it can contribute to an inclusive and a sustainable society, and learners who are from diverse religious backgrounds in language classes would feel included. In order to address the social imbalance and intolerance in the country, language curricula and textbooks can be vital for transformation and social change. Findings from the study have implications for diverse global contexts where religious minorities are excluded from curriculum and textbooks. Such exclusion implies exclusion from economic, political, and social spheres. We live in a world of inequalities, and language textbooks contribute to these inequalities and social injustices. In Asia Pacific, especially in South Asian countries such as Pakistan, India, and Bangladesh, where religion plays an important role in politics of representation, language textbooks are not neutral (Durrani et al., 2020, Rahman, 2011, Roy et al., 2020). In other Asia-pacific regions, such as Japan, Fujiwara (2006) identifies problems with textbooks’ representations of Shinto in comparison with other religions. In textbooks, for instance, Shinto is rhetorically naturalized, and the indigenous religions of minorities are excluded. “Shinto” is described as the only religious tradition on all Japanese islands.

Language textbooks embody dominant narratives and ideologies that cause social discord (Mahboob, 2009, Qazi, 2020). There are similar biases in language and other textbooks in other parts of the world based on language, gender, religion, ethnicity, and race. In the current study, six language textbooks in Sindh province of Pakistan were examined, two for each language (Sindhi, Urdu and English). To further gain a better understanding of how the textbooks represent minority faith groups and construct a dominant identity of Muslims in Sindh province, an in-depth analysis of all Sindhi, Urdu, and English language textbooks will be necessary in the future besides the interview from other provinces of Pakistan.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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