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Constructing the 'New Worker-Self': Discursive Strategies in 'English Works!' Program brochures within the Pakistani Education System

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ABSTRACT

In the context of globalization, the emergence of the "new worker-self" archetype has gained attention, with English proficiency playing a crucial role in Pakistan's socio-economic landscape. This study examines the 'English Works!' program brochures using Foucauldian theory to understand the construction of the "new worker-self" narrative and its alignment with global discourses. Through discursive strategies like student testimonials and skills emphasis, the brochures promote individual agency and market-oriented skills. However, this focus on skills may overlook structural inequalities and broader educational goals, emphasizing the need for a holistic approach to education. The study contributes to understanding the interplay of neoliberal ideologies, skills acquisition, and subjectivities in the global labor market.

1. Introduction

In the contemporary era of globalization, the emergence of the "new worker-self" archetype has garnered significant attention, encompassing traits like adaptability, proficiency, and English language competence, reflecting the changing dynamics of modernization in creating an educated workforce (Urciuoli, 2008). This paradigm shift extends beyond Western societies, finding resonance in diverse contexts, including Pakistan, where English proficiency assumes a pivotal role as a socio-economic marker, exerting a profound influence on employment opportunities and transforming individuals into neoliberal subjects (Holborow, 2015). Within the Pakistani context, the assimilation of global discourses on skills and the "new worker-self" assumes a distinct complexion, influenced by local socio-cultural and economic realities (Rassool & Mansoor, 2007). Understanding the interplay between these global narratives and their implementation within Pakistan is crucial for comprehending the complexities of employment dynamics and socio-economic aspirations within the Pakistani workforce.

This study aims to investigate the 'English Works!' program in Pakistan, strategically designed to enhance English proficiency and communication skills among the educated Pakistani workforce as human capital (Block et al., 2013). Positioned within the framework of entrepreneurial self-management, the program emphasizes the significance of English language and employability skills as integral

components of this narrative. Drawing on the theoretical lens of Foucauldian theory of neoliberal governmentality in relation to language use (Flubacher & Del Percio, 2017; Gao & Park, 2015; Del Percio, 2019; Urla, 2020), this study critically investigates the brochures of the 'English Works!' program, exploring the discursive strategies employed to construct and propagate the desired narrative of the "new worker-self" within the context of English language proficiency and employability skills. Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following research question:

RQ: In the context of the 'English Works!' program, how does the brochure communicate its benefits, and what discursive strategies does it use to appeal to its audience and how does it intertwine global narratives of the "new worker-self"?

This study holds significance from both a Pakistani and global perspective. In Pakistan, where English proficiency serves as a socio-economic marker and passport to potential social powers and privileges (Mahboob, 2002 & 2015; Manan, 2021b), examining the 'English Works!' program's brochures allows for a comprehensive understanding of how the narrative of the "new worker-self" is constructed and promoted, shedding light on employment dynamics and cultural aspirations within the Pakistani educated workforce. Furthermore, this research contributes to the global discourse on the globalization of labour and skills by analyzing the discursive strategies employed in the program's brochures, offering insights into the intersection of neoliberal

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ideologies, skills acquisition, and the promotion of specific sub-activities. By delving into these aspects, this study adds to our understanding of the evolving dynamics of skills and employability in an increasingly interconnected world.

1.1. Context of the study

The Pakistani education system presents a complex tapestry of language policies, structural disparities, and ideological biases (Siddiqui, 2016). To fully grasp the nuances of this educational landscape, it is imperative to delve into the historical context that has profoundly shaped its contours (Abbas et al., 2020). Pakistan, a nation in the throes of development, carries the historical legacy of British colonial rule, which extended to this region as part of India until the pivotal year of 1947 when it gained independence. This historical epoch solidified the English language as a symbol of elite privilege during the colonial era—a status that remarkably endures to this day (Abbas et al., 2021). In the aftermath of decolonization and the partition of India into India and Pakistan, English retained its exalted position, permeating all strata of power, from the bureaucracy and judiciary to the legislative branches of government (Rahman, 2002). It transcends mere linguistic utility; instead, it symbolizes social status, operates as a vehicle for upward social mobility, and functions as a key to success across various dimensions of life (Durga, 2018; Gazzola & Mazzacani, 2019). The significance of the English language in Pakistani society cannot be overstated, as it reverberates within the very foundations of the educational system—an institution considered the linchpin of societal advancement (Parveen & Mehmood, 2013; Abbasi, 2014). This pervasive influence is reflected in the multifaceted factors enumerated by Jang et al. (2015), encompassing attitudes, self-concept, values, interests, self-efficacy, and goals—factors pivotal in motivating students to acquire proficiency in English. Equally crucial is the role of teachers, who occupy a central position in bridging the gap between pedagogical processes and assessment techniques, aligning them with the ever-evolving demands of the job market (Hussain, 2018). The prevalence of English medium schools further underscores the language's pre-eminence (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018). Indeed, the educational apparatus in Pakistan actively promotes English, employing it both as a subject of study and as the medium of instruction at advanced levels of academia (Abbas et al., 2018).

However, this emphasis on English proficiency comes with its own set of complexities and challenges within the Pakistani education system. Urdu, the national language, plays a pivotal role in unifying a linguistically diverse nation (Durrani, 2012). Yet, the historical legacy of British colonialism, with its emphasis on English, has perpetuated the notion that English proficiency is indispensable for academic success and social mobility (Rahman, 2004). Unfortunately, this emphasis has marginalized local languages and indigenous communities, exacerbating linguistic inequalities (Rahman, 2002). External influences, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent "war on terror," have further shaped education policy, promoting English and aligning Pakistani education with international standards (Hathaway, 2005). Consequently, English became deeply embedded in education policy, positioned as a means to attain quality education, and meet international standards (Ali, 2009). However, this emphasis on English proficiency has simultaneously perpetuated the dominance of English-speaking elites while marginalizing those lacking proficiency in the language (Abbas, 1993; Hathaway, 2005). The ramifications of these language policies and external influences extend beyond the classroom. They leave an indelible mark on textbooks and curricula, shaping the ideologies and identities of students (Rahman, 2002). Narratives within subjects such as social studies, history, and languages often promote a cohesive national identity centered around Urdu and Islam, while simultaneously glorifying military history—factors that contribute to a pro-military and militant mindset among students (Rahman, 2002). The trend of privatization within the education system

further exacerbates existing disparities and raises concerns about the influence of the military, consolidating power in the hands of the privileged and impeding civilian supremacy (Durrani, 2012; Hathaway, 2005). To conclude with, the Pakistani education system is shaped by a multifaceted interplay of language policies, structural disparities, and ideological biases, all of which are intricately linked to historical legacies, external actors, and global dynamics. These factors give rise to linguistic inequalities, the marginalization of indigenous communities, and the ideological socialization of students, collectively impacting the overall educational landscape in Pakistan. It is essential to recognize that the contemporary job market in Pakistan, as well as on the global stage, ascribes a premium to proficiency in the English language (Al-Issa, 2014). Numerous research endeavours have probed the intricate relationship between English language proficiency and employability, with each study highlighting the paramount significance of English language competency (Xiong & Yuan, 2018; Doan & Hamid, 2019). The Pakistani job market, as we shall examine, is no exception, thereby prompting this study initiative to explore the English language's pivotal role in securing employment within both domestic and international spheres in our increasingly globalized world.

1.2. English works! program: background

Our study builds upon previous research on language education policy in Pakistan, conducted in 2017 and 2018 through interviews with participants. During these interviews, the English Works! program and its connection to the Regional English Language Office (RELO) Pakistan project, a collaboration between the US embassy and the Higher Education Commission (HEC-RELO, 2021), were mentioned. We further investigated the RELO and HEC webpages, obtained information from colleagues and universities in Karachi, and engaged with the English Works! initiative through social media and LinkedIn. The English Works! program was introduced in Pakistan as part of the educational support extended by the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) following the events of 9/11. It aims to modernize the education system using English as a tool associated with liberalism (Rahman, 2015; Holborow, 2015) in Pakistan and cultivate a skilled workforce, aligning with the United States' counterterrorism efforts (USAID audit report, 2020). The program is financially supported by the United States Department of State under the "RELO" project and implemented collaboratively with the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. English Works! targets socioeconomically disadvantaged youth aged 17–25, providing them with an intensive 240+ hour English and employability skills program. The program aims to enhance their English language proficiency, critical thinking abilities, employability, and soft skills, facilitating their integration as productive members of their community and society. Significantly, as Pakistani researchers based in Finland, we approach this program with an awareness of inherent power imbalances. While our Pakistani background provides valuable insights, our location abroad encourages a potentially less insular perspective. Our diverse academic expertise in education policy, sociolinguistics, and Foucauldian critical theory sharpens our examination of the 'English Works!' program. We are particularly sensitive to how neoliberal ideologies may shape the construction of the "new worker-self" within a globalized labour market. Reflexivity serves as a critical tool, not to disclaim our positionality, but to ensure rigor and expose how the program operates within discourses of language, power, and social mobility. This approach aims to foster a complex analysis of the program and contribute to critical conversations on education and neoliberal governmentality.

2. 21st-Century English training and neoliberalism in Pakistani education: an overview

The current discourse in English language training for the workforce critically underscores a paradigm shift: English is increasingly

integrated with key 21st-century skills rather than being taught in isolation. This shift, as [Trilling and Fadel \(2009\)](#) articulate, aligns with the globalized nature of work where language proficiency intertwines with innovation, technology, and career skills. The necessity for professionals to extend beyond their domain expertise to master transversal competencies, such as communication and collaboration, is emphasized by the OECD (2005) and reflected in the European Union's Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (European Union, 2007). This integrative approach is not merely about linguistic proficiency; it is about harnessing English as a tool for broader skill application in diverse professional contexts. The model proposed by the European Commission, incorporating competencies like digital literacy and social skills, has significantly influenced the reorientation of English language programs across Europe. This holistic model is echoed in the categorization of skills by [Trilling and Fadel \(2009\)](#), where the emphasis is on language-based skills pivotal in various professional settings, not just in English-speaking environments but also globally. The literature also highlights two specific skill areas intricately linked to English proficiency: intercultural communicative competence and e-literacy. The importance of cultural awareness in language education, as discussed by [Byram \(1997\)](#) and [Kramsch \(1993\)](#), and its necessity in international business settings ([Hofstede, 1994](#); [Bennett, 1993](#)) have evolved to be more systematic and integral to language curricula, reflecting the need for professionals to navigate diverse cultural landscapes using English ([Hunter et al., 2006](#); [Grandin & Hedderich, 2009](#)). Moreover, the fusion of language skills with technological capabilities underscores a key development in modern labor markets. This blend is crucial for navigating professional and vocational contexts, requiring a combination of linguistic and digital proficiencies ([Collier, 2007](#); [Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000](#); [Lankshear & Knobel, 2006](#)). Thus, the literature presents a critical argument for a transformative approach in English language training, advocating for an integrative model that combines linguistic proficiency with essential digital, intercultural, and transversal competencies. This approach responds to the demands of a globalized workforce, where English proficiency is not an isolated skill but part of a composite toolkit essential for professional success in the 21st century.

The nexus of the 'new worker-self,' neoliberalism, and the Pakistani educational landscape presents a rich tapestry for academic inquiry. Globally, scholarly efforts have delved into the nuances of how neoliberal ideologies, intertwined with the concept of the 'new worker-self,' influence diverse educational settings, profoundly impacting identity formation and the framework of language education ([Gray, 2010b](#); [Luke et al., 2007](#); [Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2008](#); [Pennycook, 2020](#); [Urciuoli, 2008](#); [Patrick, 2013](#); [Zimmermann & Muth, 2020](#)). Within these educational systems, neoliberalism shapes not only students' understanding of work and language skills but also their sense of self-worth, frequently echoing and reinforcing capitalist ideologies and marginalizing divergent perspectives ([Gray, 2010b](#); [Luke et al., 2007](#)). The commodification of English in these settings is particularly noteworthy, serving corporate interests and upholding hegemonic power dynamics. In Pakistan, pioneering research by [Manan \(2021\)](#) and [Shah et al. \(2023\)](#) has shed light on the deep-rooted influence of neoliberal rationality within English language academies and EFL textbooks. Their findings indicate that English proficiency is increasingly viewed as a critical component of global competitiveness, embedded within prevalent neoliberal discourses.

However, despite this extensive corpus of research, there remains a conspicuous gap in our understanding of how these complex ideologies are communicated and integrated with global narratives in educational program materials, particularly in the Pakistani context. This gap calls for a critical examination of the discursive strategies employed by educational initiatives like the 'English Works!' program. Such an analysis is crucial to unravel how these programs not only engage their audience but also reinforce and perpetuate the notion of the 'new worker-self' ([Urciuoli, 2020](#)). By addressing this gap, our study aims to provide a thorough understanding of how educational programs shape

audience perceptions and the broader implications of these discourses on language education. This includes examining the construction of worker identities within the neoliberal paradigm and the potential for these educational programs to either reinforce or challenge the prevailing neoliberal ideologies. Ultimately, this research contributes to the critical discourse around the role of educational programs in shaping societal and individual perceptions and behaviors, examining their impact on broader socio-cultural structures and personal agency ([Manan, 2021](#); [Rampton, 2016](#); [Shah et al., 2023](#)).

3. Research design

3.1. Data collection

The data for this study is selected from the official brochures of the English Works! program, which are pivotal in disseminating its core information. The selection of these brochures was guided by specific criteria aimed at ensuring a comprehensive representation of the program's communication strategies. We focused on brochures that were publicly accessible and widely circulated, ensuring that our analysis reflected the material most likely to be encountered by prospective participants and stakeholders. Additionally, we prioritized brochures that were current and relevant to the program's most recent iterations, thus providing insights into the latest discursive strategies employed by the organization. The academic value of examining such brochures is manifold. Primarily, brochures serve as critical promotional materials used by organizations to convey specific messages and influence target audiences. As a condensed manifestation of an organization's ethos, offerings, or services, brochures strategically utilize linguistic and visual techniques to construct meanings, ideologies, and identities ([Amorati, 2018](#); [Veltos, 2009](#)). Analyzing these brochures offers a window into the underlying ideologies and power dynamics at play, revealing the persuasive tactics employed to shape perceptions and influence behavior ([Picard et al., 2014](#)). This analytical approach enables a critical interrogation of the ways these materials not only inform but also guide audience understanding and attitudes. Furthermore, the study of brochures facilitates an exploration into the role of language as a tool for constructing reality, disseminating values, and shaping social behavior ([Scarles, 2004](#)). Investigating the brochures' use of persuasive language, selective framing, visual cues, and rhetorical strategies, we can uncover the broader social, cultural, and ideological contexts within which these materials function. Such an examination is crucial in understanding how these brochures, as instruments of communication, reflect and reinforce the prevalent discourses of neoliberalism, particularly in the context of language education. Thus, the analysis of brochures selected for this study not only provides valuable insights into the promotional discursive strategies employed by the English Works! program but also unravels the deeper implications of how the program aligns with the broader discourses of the new worker-self and skills development. This exploration is significant in revealing how language education is intricately woven into neoliberal frameworks characterized by individualism, marketization, and self-improvement. Ultimately, this critical analysis illuminates the complex interplay between language education, neoliberal ideologies, and the construction of the worker-self within the Pakistani education system, underscoring the profound implications for individuals and the broader socio-economic structures.

3.2. Analytical framework

This study critically interrogates the English Works! program brochure through the lens of Foucauldian governmentality, dissecting its embedded discursive strategies within the broader context of neoliberalism. Drawing on the insights of [Harvey \(2005\)](#) and [Treanor and Treanor \(2020\)](#), it becomes apparent that neoliberalism, with its market-centric rationality, effectively reshapes individuals into entrepreneurial entities. This transformation is not merely about economic

behavior but extends to encompassing all aspects of knowledge, choices, and actions. Gray's (2010a, 2010b) observations further underscore this phenomenon, highlighting how such a framework facilitates the consolidation of power among economic elites, primarily through mechanisms like capital accumulation and market deregulation.

In this analytical pursuit, Foucault's conceptualization of governmentality (1991 & 2008) provides a crucial theoretical backbone. It enables an in-depth understanding of educational dynamics, where notions of self-governance and market orientation are not just encouraged but institutionalized. This study specifically leverages Foucault's (1991) framework to decipher how the 'new worker-self' is constructed within the brochures, a concept embodying market adaptability and skill commodification, in line with the evolving demands of the labour market as suggested by Urciuoli (2008). This critical examination ventures beyond mere surface-level analysis, unveiling the ways in which the English Works! program brochure intricately weaves global narratives of 'new worker-self,' advocating skill acquisition, adaptability, and entrepreneurialism. Moreover, this analysis delves into the program's alignment with neoliberal principles and its profound implications on individual subjectivities and labour dynamics within the Pakistani socio-cultural context. The interplay of Foucault's governmentality framework with the program's discourse elucidates a complex web of power, neoliberalism, and discursive formation of the 'new worker-self' in Pakistan's educational landscape. By scrutinizing the brochure through this analytical prism, the study endeavours to uncover the subtle discursive mechanisms employed to convey its benefits, interrogating its consonance with neoliberal doctrines. This includes an exploration of how the program reinforces market logics and promotes the 'new worker-self' concept. This inquiry, thus, potentially contributes to our understanding of the pervasive influence of neoliberalism on educational programs and its broader socio-cultural ramifications. It resonates with and extends the discussions presented by scholars like Manan (2021), Rampton (2016), Rojo & Del Percio (2020), and Urciuoli (2020), providing a nuanced perspective on the interconnections between educational discourse, neoliberal ideology, and individual identity formation.

This study is crucial as it addresses a significant gap in the current understanding of how neoliberal rationality permeates educational program materials in the Pakistani context. While existing literature, as illuminated by Harvey (2005) and Treanor and Treanor (2020), has explored the transformative impact of neoliberalism on individual behavior and societal structures, there remains a dearth of focused analysis on its infiltration into educational discourse within Pakistan. This study, therefore, is not just an academic exercise but a critical inquiry into the subtle yet profound ways in which neoliberal ideology is embedded and propagated through educational materials like the English Works! program brochures. By applying Foucault's (1991 & 2008) governmentality framework, this study moves beyond superficial assessments, examining how these brochures craft and promote the 'new worker-self' – a construct reflective of market adaptability and skill commodification. This exploration is crucial in contextualizing the English Works! program within the broader narrative of neoliberalism and its specific manifestation in Pakistan's educational sector. It seeks to disentangle how such programs, ostensibly aimed at skill development, simultaneously serve as conduits for neoliberal thought, shaping individual subjectivities and labour dynamics in ways that resonate deeply with the socio-cultural fabric of Pakistan.

3.3. Data analysis

In the data analysis phase, each brochure underwent a thorough reading to gain a comprehensive understanding of its content and purpose. During this initial pass, preliminary codes were assigned to segments of text and visual elements that seemed to communicate key themes or messages. Following this, we developed a formal coding scheme. This scheme encompassed categories which were chosen based

on their prevalence in the initial coding phase and their relevance to our research questions. As the coding progressed, we continuously refined this scheme for clarity and consistency, revisiting previously coded brochures to ensure uniformity throughout the analysis. Once all the brochures were coded, we reviewed the accumulated codes to identify patterns and overarching themes. This involved grouping similar codes and determining the broader themes that captured the essence of the coded data. Each identified theme was then subjected to a critical analysis. For example, in examining the use of logos, we delved into aspects such as design, placement, and the connotations they carried. Similarly, for student testimonials, we scrutinized the language and narratives used, contemplating their potential influence on reader perceptions. The final step involved contextualizing these themes within our theoretical framework. We interpreted our findings in light of Foucauldian theory (1991 & 2008) and the broader discourse on neoliberalism in language education. This was particularly evident in our analysis of how the brochures targeted teachers and students, reflecting on the construction of the 'new worker-self' in a neoliberal educational paradigm. Throughout this process, our coding methodology was iterative and reflexive, enabling a deep engagement with the data. This thorough analysis allowed us to uncover the nuanced ways in which the 'English Works!' program is represented and marketed through its brochures. As a result, the categorization revealed four predominant themes:

- (1) The Utilization of Logos
- (2) Student Testimonials as Promotional Tools
- (3) Brochures Targeting Teachers
- (4) Brochures Targeting Students:

Each category not only provided insights into the distinct target audiences and their perceived needs but also allowed us to explore the broader implications of these promotional strategies. Our analysis was underpinned by the notion that these brochures are not mere informational tools but are imbued with ideological undercurrents that serve to propagate specific narratives about language education, employability, and personal development within the neoliberal paradigm.

(1) Utilization of Logos

The presence of logos, including those of the English Works! Program, RELO, the US Department of State, US Mission Pakistan, and Evolution, on the program brochure serves as a discursive strategy that aligns with the principles of neoliberal governmentality, the narratives of the "new worker-self," and the implications of US imperialism within the political economy of English.

These strategically placed logos in the 'English Works!' program brochure, as depicted in Fig. 1, play a significant role in shaping the perception and reception of the program. Incorporating logos from reputable institutions and authorities, the brochure seeks to establish trust and credibility among its audience. This strategic use of logos aligns with the overarching neoliberal agenda that values market-oriented logics, individual success, and economic mobility (Urciuoli, 2008). Such tactics are prevalent in neoliberal contexts and reflect a trend where educational systems are influenced by neoliberal ideologies, impacting not only students' understanding of work and language skills but also their sense of self-worth, often echoing and reinforcing capitalist ideologies and marginalizing divergent perspectives (Gray, 2010b; Luke et al., 2007). The inclusion of logos affiliated with the United States, such as the US Department of State and US Mission Pakistan, carries distinct implications within the framework of neoliberal governmentality. The presence of the US flag, contrasted with the absence of the Pakistani flag, is notable and raises critical questions about power dynamics and cultural influence embedded in neoliberal educational initiatives. Associating the English Works! program with the United States, a global superpower symbolizing authority, prestige, and economic success, enhances its credibility and legitimacy. This alignment reinforces the neoliberal discourse of the "new worker-self," which



Fig. 1. Logos used in brochures.

emphasizes the centrality of the United States in shaping global economic and educational paradigms, a concept that has been explored in-depth in various studies (Manan, 2021; Shah et al., 2023).

The presence of US-affiliated logos positions the English Works! program as a beneficiary of US support and validation, potentially attracting participants who perceive the United States as a symbol of educational excellence and professional achievement. However, this association also raises concerns about the influence of US imperialism within the political economy of English language education in Pakistan. It prompts critical inquiries about the extent to which the Pakistani education system is shaped by external agendas, particularly in the aftermath of the 9/11 events and the subsequent "war on terror." Such influences may impact the goals, content, and priorities of education in Pakistan, potentially undermining local agency, and autonomy, and reflect the deep-rooted influence of neoliberal rationality within English language academies and EFL textbooks in Pakistan (Ali, 2009; Kornstadt, 2011; Shah et al., 2023). The absence of the Pakistani flag further exacerbates these concerns, signifying a potential prioritization of Western values, aspirations, and cultural identities over local or national ones. This reflects the perpetuation of cultural imperialism, where the values and aspirations associated with the Western neoliberal paradigm take precedence over indigenous cultural identities and aspirations. It reinforces the unequal global relations inherent in neoliberal ideologies and suggests a potential alignment with US imperialism that impacts the education system in Pakistan (Ali, 2009). In essence, the prominence of US-affiliated logos in the English Works! program brochure underscores the dominance of Western neoliberal ideologies and practices within the global education landscape (Urciuoli, 2008). It symbolizes the influence of US imperialism, which extends beyond political and economic spheres to shape educational policies, language learning priorities, and cultural identities. By prominently displaying the US flag, the program reinforces the neoliberal notion that English proficiency is essential for economic advancement and individual success. This positioning perpetuates the hegemony of English as a global lingua franca and reinforces the program's alignment with neoliberal logics, values, and the concept of the "new worker-self" (Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2008; Pennycook, 2020; Urciuoli, 2008; Zimmermann & Muth, 2020) The critical evaluation of these logos and their underlying motivations highlights the complex power dynamics and cultural implications involved in the promotion of the English Works! program and its potential impact on the Pakistani education system.

(2) Student Testimonials as Promotional Tools in the Brochure

The English Works program strategically utilizes students' testimonials in their brochures to promote language proficiency and "essential 21st-century skills." This discursive strategy aims to establish credibility and appeal by presenting first-hand accounts of success and reinforcing the program's claims through social proof. The emphasis on "essential 21st-century skills" aligns with neoliberal discourse, focusing on individual agency, self-improvement, and market-oriented logics. However, a critical evaluation is necessary to avoid oversimplification, neglecting diversity, and potentially commodifying experiences, while ensuring a balance with critical thinking and cultural awareness (Rojo, 2019). This phenomenon is exemplified by means of the subsequent brochure (1):



The English Works program brochure strategically employs testimonial narratives, particularly featuring a female student's account, to serve dual functions of emotional resonance and social proof. Such narratives aim to foster learner identities and establish the program's credibility by appealing to potential participants' emotions and experiences (Block et al., 2013; Dornyei, 2005; Norton, 2013). Within a neoliberal framework, testimonials further align with individual responsibility and self-improvement by emphasizing personal transformation and success (Gray, 2010b). These accounts implicitly encourage investment in marketable skills—viewed as 'human capital' in a neoliberal context—which promises higher economic returns (Ward, 2012). Therefore, testimonials not only enhance the program's appeal but also reinforce neoliberal tenets of individual agency and the commodification of skills.

Moreover, the brochure conspicuously foregrounds specific skill sets, framing them as indispensable for both personal and professional advancement. These skills—encompassing management, leadership, and communication—are situated as valuable forms of "linguistic capital" (Bourdieu, 1991). Such an orientation resonates with the neoliberal ethos that privileges a skills-based, market-oriented education (Park, Joseph Sung-Yul, 2010) and commodifies language (Heller, 2006; Fairclough, 2013). From a neoliberal vantage point, the brochure's focus serves dual purposes. Firstly, it echoes the market logic advocating for a diversified skill portfolio as a requisite for employability in a competitive labor landscape. Secondly, it amplifies the neoliberal ideology that privileges an entrepreneurial self (Block, et al., 2012; Heller, 2006; Urciuoli, 2008), encouraging individuals to adopt a proactive approach to career management. Critically, this emphasis on marketable skills

reflects the neoliberal agenda's predilection for individual competitiveness, potentially at the expense of broader educational imperatives such as critical thinking and social awareness. Thus, while the brochure aligns with neoliberal priorities, it risks marginalizing facets of education integral for a more comprehensive societal development.

Furthermore, the brochure's strategic mention of digital platforms Fiverr and LinkedIn aims to situate the English Works program within the contours of the gig economy and digital transformation. This tactic implicitly endorses the neoliberal focus on individual entrepreneurship and self-reliance in a knowledge-based economy. Digital platforms such as Fiverr and LinkedIn, which function as hubs for freelancing and self-employment, become emblematic of entrepreneurial self-realization (Rogers, 2018). By aligning the program with these platforms, the brochure suggests that it equips participants with the requisite social capital and digital literacy necessary for navigating modern work environments. This alignment advances the neoliberal paradigm of individual responsibility for career development and market competitiveness, emphasizing self-promotion as a form of professional valorization. However, this association raises critical questions regarding the neoliberalization of education. While these platforms may offer avenues for individual attainment, they concurrently perpetuate systemic inequalities and job insecurity, compromising collective well-being for the sake of individualistic goals. Thus, the brochure's emphasis on personal branding and individual success may inadvertently eclipse the broader, more collective imperatives of social justice and labour protections.

Additionally, the brochure incorporates a rating system, symbolized by the student's 4/5 stars. This strategy of including a rating system aligns with the neoliberal logic of individual competition and performance evaluation, where quantification and measurement serve as discursive tools to assess and rank individuals' achievements and capabilities (Haroutunian et al., 2005). The inclusion of a rating system in the brochure serves multiple purposes within the neoliberal framework. Firstly, it aims to provide a sense of objectivity and credibility to the program. By utilizing a quantifiable measure, such as the star rating, the brochure suggests that the program's effectiveness and value can be evaluated and ranked based on participants' experiences and outcomes. This appeals to the neoliberal emphasis on efficiency and accountability, as individuals are encouraged to make informed choices based on quantifiable data. Furthermore, the rating system serves as a persuasive tool by creating a sense of competition and performance evaluation. Neoliberalism promotes a culture of individualism and self-improvement, where individuals are encouraged to continuously strive for higher performance and success (Haroutunian et al., 2005). By incorporating a rating system, the brochure taps into this neoliberal logic by positioning the English Works program as a platform for individuals to showcase their achievements and measure their progress against predefined standards. However, it is important to critically evaluate the implications of including a rating system in the brochure. While ratings and rankings can provide a sense of objectivity, they also oversimplify the complexity of individuals' experiences and the diverse outcomes they may achieve. By reducing the program's evaluation to a numerical rating, the brochure may overlook the multifaceted nature of language learning and personal development. Moreover, the emphasis on individual competition and performance evaluation may perpetuate a narrow understanding of success and neglect the importance of collaboration, collective well-being, and social justice within the educational context. In the broader landscape of brochures, the inclusion of a rating system is not uncommon, especially in market-oriented and consumer-driven environments. Neoliberalism fosters a culture of rating and ranking, where individuals are encouraged to make choices based on others' evaluations and to constantly strive for higher rankings and success. This culture of evaluation and measurement permeates various spheres of life, including education, employment, and consumer behavior.

Lastly, the brochure also makes use of the *thanksgiving words* which

serve as a discursive strategy to establish credibility and legitimacy. By expressing gratitude towards RELO Pakistan, Evolution, and the English Works program, the brochure associates itself with recognized entities, institutions, and initiatives. More importantly, expressing gratitude and acknowledging the program's affiliated entities can potentially help individuals build social capital within the neoliberal paradigm (Urciuoli, 2008). By aligning themselves with recognized organizations and initiatives, participants may seek to enhance their social standing and reputation within professional networks. The inclusion of thanksgiving words can serve as a strategic technique to cultivate positive relationships and connections, potentially leading to future opportunities and collaborations. Likewise, thanksgiving words can be seen as a marketing tool to enhance the program's reputation and attract potential participants. By expressing gratitude, the brochure aims to create a positive perception of the program. This can influence individuals' decision-making processes and encourage them to enroll in the program, perceiving it as a reputable and valuable opportunity for personal and professional development.

(3) Brochures targeting teachers

The English Works program commonly employs a type of brochure that serves as an invitation for applications from both prospective students and teachers. These brochures are designed to attract individuals who are interested in participating in the program as learners or instructors. The aim of these brochures is to generate interest, encourage enrollment, and engage with potential participants by providing detailed information about the program's objectives, offerings, and application procedures. This is exemplified in the following teacher's brochure (2):

Brochure (2): For Teachers

NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

English Works

U.S. MISSION PAKISTAN

REGIONAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE OFFICE

ENGLISH WORKS! PROGRAM NUML 2022

ATTENTION TEACHERS!

Applications are invited from highly motivated and qualified English Teachers from Islamabad, Rawalpindi and adjacent areas to join the instructional team of the 6-months intensive after-school EWI Program 2022. Salary ranging from 60,000 to 80,000 for 20 working hours per week. Females are encouraged to apply.

ABOUT THE EW PROGRAM

The English Works! program is an intensive 240-hour English and employability skills development for unemployed and underemployed youth from 17-25 years old Pakistanis. This six-month program is tailored to Pakistan's vocational landscape. More than 4,000 deserving youth from underprivileged areas have graduated from this program. This program improves learners' English language skills through after-school English teaching and learning enabling learners to build professional entrepreneurial skills that equip our youth to compete in the 21st century job market.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

BS English or Equivalent 16 years Degree
(At least 2-3 years of Post Qualification Experience)

TIMELINE

LAST DATE TO APPLY
Nov 27, 2022
www.facebook.com/EnglishWorks.NUML

FOLLOW THIS LINK TO APPLY

<https://tinyurl.com/EW-NUML-TeacherApplicationForm>

LOCATION

Islamabad & Rawalpindi

This brochure serves as a targeted invitation to English language teachers, inviting them to participate in the English Works program in collaboration with the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Pakistan. The specific mentioning of "highly motivated and qualified English teachers" illustrates language teachers, as neoliberal workers, subject to control over their profession and their training. On the other hand, it invokes an implicit conversion of language teachers into "consumable and transient knowledge workers as entrepreneurs and consumers (Bernstein et al. 2015). The brochure strategically incorporates logos at the top to enhance its credibility and establish the program's affiliations with reputable institutions. Moreover, the

brochure effectively communicates the criteria and parameters that are deemed suitable for teachers interested in joining the English Works program. From a critical discourse perspective, the mention of the English Works! program as an intensive English and employability skills development opportunity for unemployed and underemployed youth exemplifies the influence of neoliberalism and the new worker skill paradigm in the field of education. As mentioned before, neoliberalism, as an economic and political ideology, emphasizes the market as the primary driver of social and economic progress (Block et al., 2016). In this context, education is often viewed to produce a skilled workforce that meets the demands of the market. With a specific target age group of 17–25-year-old Pakistanis, monetary rewards are tied to the changing concept of "subject" that align with the neoliberal agenda of addressing the transition from education to employment. This phase is considered crucial in terms of developing the skills and competencies necessary for successful employment. The program's focus on equipping individuals with market-oriented skills reflects the neoliberal belief that individuals as a form of subjectivity must possess a set of specific, quantifiable skills to compete in the global economy (Urciuoli, 2008). Moreover, the emphasis on employability skills signifies the influence of new capitalist discourses that prioritize human capital development. In the neoliberal framework, individuals are viewed as bundles of skills and knowledge that can be invested in and utilized to generate economic value. According to this perspective, language education enhances individuals' employability, adaptability, and productivity in the workplace (Rojo & Del Percio, 2019). The program's approach of targeting unemployed and underemployed youth aligns with the neoliberal focus on addressing unemployment and fostering economic growth. By offering an opportunity for skills development to this specific demographic, the program aims to enhance their prospects for finding employment and contributing to the economy. This emphasis on individual employability resonates with the neoliberal concept of the new worker self, where individuals are encouraged to take personal responsibility for their economic success and adapt to changing labor market conditions (Dilts, 2010). Adapting the program to the Pakistani vocational landscape suggests alignment with the current market demands. The neoliberal theory of education linking directly to specific job skills reflects the emphasis placed on vocational relevance in the program. By catering to the local job market, the program aims to address the immediate employment needs of individuals and increase their prospects of finding work. This approach resonates with the neoliberal notion of education as a tool for economic competitiveness, where individuals are encouraged to acquire skills that are directly applicable to the labor market.

However, it is essential to critically evaluate the motivations and implications of this emphasis on vocational relevance. While aligning educational programs with the demands of the job market can be important for addressing immediate employment needs, it may risk overshadowing the broader goals of education. Education should not solely focus on producing a technically skilled workforce, but also foster critical thinking, creativity, and social engagement. Overemphasizing vocational alignment runs the risk of neglecting the development of well-rounded individuals who can contribute to society beyond their immediate responsibilities. Additionally, the emphasis on vocational alignment within the Pakistani context must be examined critically. Neoliberalism has influenced education systems worldwide (Torres, 2008), including in Pakistan, where the shift towards market-oriented education has been significant. While aligning education with the local job market can be beneficial in addressing unemployment and economic growth, it is crucial to consider the broader socioeconomic factors at play. Structural inequalities, limited job opportunities, and the impact of globalization on the local labor market must be considered to ensure that educational initiatives truly empower individuals and contribute to long-term sustainable development.

The emphasis on enabling learners to build professional entrepreneurial skills in the English Works program aligns with the neoliberal agenda of promoting self-employment and individual agency.

Neoliberalism emphasizes the importance of market-oriented logics, where individuals are seen as self-reliant actors responsible for their own success in the competitive economic landscape (Urciuoli, 2008). By highlighting entrepreneurial skills, the program reinforces the notion that individuals must possess the capacity to adapt to changing economic conditions and capitalize on market opportunities. Entrepreneurial skills are often associated with qualities such as innovation, risk-taking, and resourcefulness, which are deemed essential for navigating the uncertainties of the contemporary job market. The promotion of entrepreneurialism aligns with the neoliberal discourse that positions individuals as self-reliant and market-oriented actors instead of relying in support of the state or a community (Dilts, 2010). This discourse places the burden of success or failure on individuals themselves, rather than questioning the structural factors that may influence their opportunities and outcomes. However, it is crucial to critically evaluate the underlying motivations and implications of this emphasis on entrepreneurial skills. While fostering entrepreneurialism can be beneficial for individuals seeking to pursue self-employment or engage in entrepreneurial activities, it is important to recognize that not all individuals have the same access to resources, networks, and opportunities. Neoliberal ideologies often overlook structural inequalities and assume a level playing field, which may disadvantage marginalized individuals and perpetuate existing power imbalances. Moreover, an exclusive focus on entrepreneurial skills may divert attention away from other valuable skills and attributes, such as critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility. By narrowly defining success in terms of entrepreneurial endeavors, the program may neglect the diverse talents and aspirations of individuals and reinforce a one-dimensional perspective on personal and professional development through "technologies of the self" (Foucault, 1988).

The mention of preparing youth to compete in the 21st century job market in the English Works program brochure signifies its alignment with the prevailing discourse of global competitiveness and the demands of a rapidly evolving labor market (Cammack, 2022). The concept of the 21st century job market represents the neoliberal notion that the economy is characterized by constant change, technological advancements, and the need for individuals to possess flexible skills to navigate this dynamic environment. By positioning the program as equipping youth to compete in this market, it implies that success is contingent on individual adaptability, entrepreneurial skills, and English language proficiency. While the English Works program may provide valuable opportunities for language learning and skill development, it is important to critically evaluate the underlying motivations and implications of the emphasis on vocational alignment, entrepreneurial skills, and the 21st century job market. Such an emphasis may prioritize economic outcomes over other dimensions of education, neglecting the importance of critical engagement, social responsibility, and holistic development. The neoliberal discourse that underlies this emphasis promotes the notion of individual responsibility and competition, potentially overlooking the structural factors and inequalities that impact employment opportunities and social mobility. More importantly, the pressure to compete in the 21st century job market can lead to a market-driven approach to education, where skills are valued primarily for their economic utility. This approach may limit the development of well-rounded individuals and disregard the complexities of social, cultural, and environmental challenges that require a multidimensional approach. Furthermore, the emphasis on individual adaptability and English language proficiency can reinforce existing power dynamics and linguistic inequalities. It may prioritize those who already have access to resources and opportunities, while marginalizing individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds. The program's focus on preparing youth for the 21st century job market may overlook the structural barriers and systemic inequalities that hinder equal access to education and employment. In short, the information provided in the English Works program brochure has implications for Pakistani English language teachers. It offers opportunities for professional development and potential employment

with competitive salaries, aligning with vocational needs. However, critical evaluation is necessary to assess the influence of neoliberal ideologies on education, potential limitations of a skills-based approach, and the impact on teaching practices and educational goals.

(4) Brochures targeting students

The English Works program employs brochures as a strategic tool to target prospective learners, particularly in their main body where they provide a concise description of the program. It is noteworthy that the content of this brochure resembles that of the brochure targeting teachers, albeit with a slight shift in focus towards student-centered language. This discursive strategy aims to appeal to potential learners by highlighting the program's relevance to their needs and aspirations. This is illustrated in the following brochure (3):

Brochure (3): For Students

English Works!
PROGRAM NUML 2022

ATTENTION STUDENTS!

Applications are invited from 17-25 year unemployed and underemployed brilliant youth from Islamabad, Rawalpindi and adjacent areas to participate in the 6-month intensive EWI Program 2022. 200 U.S. Funded EWI Scholarships are available. Gender equality in enrollment will be ensured.

ABOUT THE EW PROGRAM
The English Works! program is an intensive 240-hour English and employability skills development for unemployed and underemployed youth from 17-25 years old Pakistanis. This six-month program is tailored to Pakistan's vocational landscape. More than 4,000 deserving youth from underprivileged areas have graduated from this program. This program improves learners' English language skills through advanced English teaching and learning enabling learners to build professional entrepreneurial skills that equip our youth to compete in the 21st century job market. Free learning materials, field visits and cultural activities will be provided.

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA
Age 17- 25 years old
Degree or above/ Students in 5, 1 and 2 Semester of a University Degree Program

FOLLOW THIS LINK TO APPLY
<https://tinyurl.com/EW-NUML-Student-Application>

TIMELINE
LAST DATE TO APPLY
Nov 27, 2022
www.nu.edu.pk/English@NUML

LOCATION
Islamabad & Rawalpindi

In the first half of the brochure which sets out the eligibility criteria for the prospect students, the age range of 17 to 25 is significant and carries certain implications. This age range corresponds to the transitional period from education to the labor market, where individuals are typically expected to make choices and preparations for their future careers. It is a time when individuals are seen as entering the job market, seeking employment, and acquiring the necessary skills and qualifications to succeed in their chosen fields (Arnett, 2000). Within neoliberalism, there is a strong emphasis on individual responsibility and self-reliance. This age range is considered crucial as it is believed that individuals should be actively engaged in building their human capital and acquiring marketable skills during this period. The neoliberal discourse often portrays this age range as the prime time for individuals to invest in their education, enhance their employability, and secure a favorable position in the job market (Harvey, 2005). Moreover, the individuals within this age range are seen as key actors responsible for their own success or failure in the labor market. They are expected to engage in continuous learning, skill development, and entrepreneurial activities to remain competitive and adapt to the ever-changing demands of the globalized economy. The focus on this age group implies that their actions and choices during this period will have long-lasting consequences for their future employability and economic prospects (Brown et al., 2003). However, it is important to critically examine the implications of this emphasis on the age range of 17 to 25 within the neoliberal context. While it may highlight the importance of early investment in human capital, it can also neglect the diverse pathways individuals may take and the different life circumstances they may face. This narrow focus on a specific age range may overlook the realities of individuals who may require alternative educational or vocational opportunities at different stages of their lives. Furthermore, the emphasis on this age range may reinforce societal expectations and pressures

regarding the timing and trajectory of education and employment. It may create a sense of urgency and competition among individuals, potentially overlooking the importance of personal development, well-being, and the pursuit of diverse interests and aspirations.

The mention of more than 4000 deserving youth from underprivileged areas having graduated from the program suggests a focus on social inclusivity and mobility. By targeting underprivileged areas, the program aims to address educational inequalities and provide opportunities for marginalized youth. This aligns with the neoliberal discourse of social mobility and equal access to education (Sant, 2019; Tamim, 2021). However, it is crucial to examine the program's ability to address structural factors that contribute to educational disparities and ensure sustainable opportunities for upward social mobility beyond the program's duration. These structural factors encompass various dimensions, including socioeconomic inequalities, gender disparities, regional disparities, quality of education, and employability dynamics. In the context of Pakistan, these factors take on an additional significance. For instance, Pakistan experiences substantial socioeconomic inequalities, resulting in limited access to quality education and resources for marginalized communities (Tamim, 2014). The English Works program must tackle these disparities by ensuring equal access and opportunities for learners from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds, challenging the perpetuation of educational inequities. Similarly, gender disparities persist in Pakistani society, constraining educational opportunities for girls and women (Tusińska, 2020). The program should actively address these gender inequalities, providing equal access and empowering girls and women to pursue education and employment opportunities. By challenging societal norms and fostering gender equity, the program can contribute to broader social transformation.

Furthermore, in the context of neoliberalism, the mention of after-school English teaching and learning, along with the provision of free learning materials, field visits, and cultural activities (Nygreen, 2017), should be critically evaluated. While these elements may be seen as positive in enhancing learners' English language skills and providing a holistic learning experience, it is essential to examine the underlying motivations and implications within the neoliberal framework. From a neoliberal perspective, the emphasis on after-school English teaching and learning aligns with the market-oriented approach to education (Mok, 2008). It positions language skills as valuable commodities for employability in the competitive job market. By offering these language learning opportunities outside regular school hours, the program caters to the neoliberal notion of individual responsibility for self-improvement and market-oriented skill acquisition (Park et al., 2021). Likewise, the provision of free learning materials, field visits, and cultural activities can be seen as an attempt to enhance the program's appeal and provide a well-rounded educational experience. The provision of these resources may contribute to the commodification of education, where access to quality resources and experiences becomes contingent on market dynamics and resource availability. This can perpetuate existing inequalities and limit opportunities for those who do not have equal access to such resources. Moreover, the focus on cultural activities and field visits may be viewed as an instrumentalization of culture and experiential learning within the neoliberal framework. Rather than valuing culture and diverse experiences for their intrinsic worth, they are often framed as means to enhance employability and marketability. This instrumentalization may undermine the deeper understanding and appreciation of culture, reducing it to a marketable commodity. Such a disposition has implications for equity and access, and the transformative potential to challenge systemic inequalities and power dynamics within the Pakistani context.

4. Discussion

The findings from the 'English Works!' program brochure, examined through the lens of Foucault's neoliberal governmentality and the 'new worker-self', suggest a profound alignment with the global narrative of

21st-century skill development. This program, as evidenced in the brochure, exemplifies the integration of English language training with key skills pertinent to the modern workforce, resonating with the paradigm shift articulated by [Trilling and Fadel \(2009\)](#). This shift aligns language proficiency not just with linguistic ability, but as a tool intertwined with innovation, technology, and career skills, mirroring the model proposed by the European Commission and reflected in the European Union's Key Competences for Lifelong Learning ([European Union, 2007](#); [OECD, 2005](#)). The brochure's focus on skills like digital literacy and social skills, critical in the modern labor market, highlights the fusion of language skills with technological capabilities ([Collier, 2007](#); [Shetzer & Warschauer, 2000](#); [Lankshear & Knobel, 2006](#)). It underpins the importance of intercultural communicative competence and e-literacy, essential for navigating diverse cultural landscapes ([Byram, 1997](#); [Kramsch, 1993](#); [Hofstede, 1994](#); [Bennett, 1993](#); [Hunter et al., 2006](#); [Grandin & Hedderich, 2009](#)). The brochure thus reflects a transformative approach in English language training, advocating for an integrative model combining linguistic proficiency with essential digital, intercultural, and transversal competencies - a response to the demands of a globalized workforce. Simultaneously, this study unveils how neoliberal ideologies, merged with the 'new worker-self' concept, profoundly influence educational settings, impacting identity formation and language education framework ([Gray, 2010b](#); [Luke et al., 2007](#); [Chowdhury & Le Ha, 2008](#); [Pennycook, 2020](#); [Urciuoli, 2008](#); [Patrick, 2013](#); [Zimmermann & Muth, 2020](#)). The commodification of English in these settings serves corporate interests, upholding hegemonic power dynamics, a phenomenon further illuminated in the Pakistani context by [Manan \(2021\)](#) and [Shah et al. \(2023\)](#). Their research indicates that English proficiency is increasingly viewed as crucial for global competitiveness, deeply embedded within neoliberal discourses.

In critically examining the 'English Works!' program, it becomes imperative to contrast its structure, goals, methodologies, and outcomes with analogous language and employment training initiatives. While 'English Works!' ostensibly mirrors the global trend of integrating English proficiency with employability skills ([Kubota, 2011](#)), a deeper scrutiny reveals distinct nuances. Unlike certain programs in the Global North, which often privilege a more holistic educational approach ([Nussbaum, 2010](#)), 'English Works!' seems to lean heavily towards a utilitarian, market-driven model. This is evident in its focused emphasis on specific skill sets aligned with immediate market needs, as opposed to a broader liberal arts education that some comparative programs advocate for ([Marginson, 2011](#)). Methodologically, 'English Works!' adopts a direct, skill-centric approach typical of neoliberal educational strategies ([Harvey, 2005](#); [Foucault, 2008](#)), as opposed to more integrative methods seen elsewhere that blend language learning with cultural and societal contexts. The outcomes of this program, therefore, must be critically evaluated not just in terms of immediate employability but also in their capacity to foster long-term, sustainable individual growth and societal development ([Phillipson, 2015](#)). This divergence raises significant questions about the adequacy of such programs in addressing the complex demands of a globalized economy while ensuring holistic educational development. The 'English Works!' initiative, while commendable in its effort to enhance employability, may risk perpetuating a narrow view of education that undervalues the critical, creative, and cultural dimensions crucial for the comprehensive development of individuals in a rapidly evolving world.

In Pakistan, the 'English Works!' program's utilitarian and market-driven focus represents a significant deviation from the more holistic educational models prevalent in the Global North. This emphasis on immediate market needs over a broad-based liberal arts education reflects a larger trend within the Pakistani educational system, where neoliberal educational strategies, as elucidated by [Harvey \(2005\)](#) and [Foucault \(2008\)](#), prioritize individual economic success. This approach suggests a potential overshadowing of other vital educational goals such as critical thinking, creativity, and cultural awareness. The program's emphasis on English proficiency, while aligning with global economic

demands, raises critical questions about the role of language education in perpetuating economic and cultural hegemonies, especially in a post-colonial context like Pakistan. [Phillipson's \(2015\)](#) insights into the implications of language education on societal structures become particularly relevant here, highlighting the complex dynamics between global market needs and local cultural identities.

Furthermore, the narrow focus on skill-centric education may have far-reaching implications for individual and societal development in Pakistan. While it enhances employability in the short term, it could potentially stifle long-term personal growth and limit contributions to broader societal progress. This approach risks perpetuating a narrow view of education, undervaluing the critical, creative, and cultural dimensions crucial for comprehensive development. In essence, the 'English Works!' program, representative of a broader shift in Pakistani education, reflects a challenging balance between meeting global market demands and nurturing diverse educational and cultural landscapes. While the program's alignment with market trends is understandable, it is imperative to critically consider its long-term impact on Pakistan's educational diversity, cultural identity, and societal development. This situation calls for a re-evaluation of educational priorities, advocating for an approach that harmoniously blends market-driven skills with comprehensive, holistic educational goals.

5. Conclusion

This study's critical exploration of the 'English Works!' program brochure within the context of Pakistani education carries significant implications for understanding the pervasive influence of neoliberal ideologies in language education. By examining the program's alignment with the 'new worker-self' narrative and 21st-century skills development is prioritized, often at the expense of broader educational objectives. This focus on marketable skills, while enhancing employability, risks marginalizing the essential elements of critical thinking, creativity, and social responsibility in education. Such a narrow approach may inadvertently perpetuate inequalities, particularly among marginalized communities, by prioritizing a specific set of skills aligned with neoliberal values. Furthermore, the study points to a crucial gap in the current understanding of how neoliberal educational strategies influence societal structures and individual identities. The emphasis on individual agency and market-driven skills within the Pakistani educational system, as reflected in the program, raises concerns about the potential overshadowing of holistic educational development. This situation calls for a critical re-evaluation of educational practices and policies, advocating for a more balanced approach that integrates market-driven skills with comprehensive educational goals.

While this focused analysis sheds light on the nuances of neoliberal influence in language education, it also highlights the need for a broader spectrum of data sources. Incorporating methods such as interviews or classroom observations could deepen the understanding of how these strategies manifest in practical educational settings and impact student experiences. Additionally, this study, grounded in the specific context of the Pakistani educational system, opens avenues for comparative research across diverse socio-cultural settings. Such research could illuminate both the universal and localized manifestations of neoliberal ideologies in education, contributing to a richer, more nuanced global discourse on the subject. In conclusion, this study not only underscores the dynamics of neoliberalism in language education in Pakistan but also serves as a springboard for future research. It invites a comprehensive examination of educational strategies within the global landscape, stressing the need for an educational paradigm that does not merely respond to market demands but fosters a well-rounded, critically engaged, and socially responsible citizenry.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ruksana Ali: Writing – review & editing, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization. **Rauha Salam-Salmaoui:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this article.

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