

Pashto Language Development Planning and Policy

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ABSTRACT

Pashto language development planning and policy constitutes an important national and academic priority for Afghanistan's linguistic, cultural, educational, and social development. As one of Afghanistan's official languages, Pashto serves as a major medium of identity, cultural expression, historical memory, and intellectual communication for millions of people. Nevertheless, historical, political, administrative, educational, and social factors have constrained its development and limited its effective use in academic, technical, and official domains. This study aims to examine the current state of Pashto language development planning and policy, identify the principal challenges affecting its advancement, and propose academic, educational, legal, administrative, and technological strategies for strengthening the language. The study argues that sustainable language development cannot be achieved through governmental policies and administrative measures alone; rather, it requires sustained and coordinated engagement among government institutions, universities, educational organizations, media, linguists, cultural institutions, and wider society. Key priorities include the standardization of Pashto language teaching and curricula, the expansion of its academic and administrative functions, the development of specialized terminology and scholarly resources, the professional development of teachers and linguists, the expansion of digital resources and electronic content, and the promotion of linguistic equity. The study further demonstrates that effective language planning requires an integrated policy framework supported by appropriate legal and institutional mechanisms, sustained academic engagement, public participation, and the strategic use of emerging technologies. It concludes that systematic and evidence-based language planning can strengthen Pashto as a language of knowledge production and dissemination in science, technology, education, and contemporary scholarship, while simultaneously contributing to cultural vitality, linguistic equity, national cohesion, and sustainable academic development.

KEYWORDS

Pashto; language planning; language policy; language development; language standardization; linguistic equity.

INTRODUCTION

Language is one of the fundamental dimensions of human intellectual, social, and cultural life. Beyond serving as a primary means of communication, it constitutes an essential foundation for the production and transmission of knowledge, the preservation of collective memory, the transmission of civilization, and the construction of social identity. A review of the civilizational histories of societies across the world demonstrates that

language has never functioned merely as a means of interpersonal communication. Rather, it has played a significant role in shaping political legitimacy, cultural influence, economic development, and intellectual production. This multidimensional character has made language an important subject of interdisciplinary inquiry across linguistics, the social sciences, politics, economics, and cultural studies. Contemporary linguistic scholarship therefore approaches language not simply as a system of sounds, vocabulary, and grammatical structures, but also as a social institution through which a community's values, beliefs, social relations, cultural practices, and relations of power are expressed and reproduced.

Throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, globalization, the information revolution, digital technologies, and the expansion of the global economy have fundamentally transformed the contexts in which languages are used and developed. In many traditional societies, the continued existence of a language was largely associated with the presence and intergenerational transmission of its speakers. In the contemporary era, however, the vitality and sustainability of a language are increasingly linked to its presence in digital environments, capacity for knowledge production, legal and institutional recognition, educational use, media visibility, and socioeconomic relevance. Consequently, many countries have developed systematic language policies and long-term language planning strategies to protect and strengthen their national and indigenous languages in response to global transformations and to enhance their capacity to participate in the domains of science, technology, education, and innovation.

Within modern sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, the concepts of language planning and language policy (LPLP) emerged in response to precisely these social and institutional needs. Language planning generally refers to deliberate and organized efforts to influence the status, structure, acquisition, use, and development of a language through academic, legal, administrative, educational, and social measures. Language policy, by contrast, encompasses the principles, decisions, regulations, and institutional frameworks through which governments and other social actors determine the broader direction of language use, recognition, education, and development. Although conceptually distinguishable, language planning and language policy are closely interconnected: policy establishes broad goals and priorities, while planning translates those goals into concrete programs, institutional practices, and implementation mechanisms. The development of many languages around the world illustrates the importance of sustained policy commitment, institutional coordination, and evidence-based planning in strengthening their functions in public life, education, science, and technology.

Contemporary approaches to language planning commonly identify three interrelated dimensions: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning. Status planning concerns the legal, political, and social position and functions assigned to a language within a particular society. Corpus planning focuses on the development and standardization of the linguistic system, including orthography, terminology, vocabulary development, grammar, lexicography, and the creation of resources required for academic and professional communication. Acquisition planning addresses the teaching, learning, transmission, and wider acquisition of a language through curricula, teacher education, instructional materials, educational institutions, and other mechanisms of language transmission across generations. The coordination of these three dimensions is widely regarded as essential to sustainable language development because progress in one domain may remain limited if the others are neglected.

These considerations are particularly relevant to Pashto, whose development as a language of education, administration, scholarship, media, and digital communication

requires systematic and coordinated planning. Although significant efforts have been undertaken at different historical periods to promote Pashto, important challenges remain in expanding its academic, scientific, technological, institutional, and digital functions. Examining these challenges through the framework of language planning and language policy can therefore provide a basis for identifying existing gaps and developing a more coherent and sustainable framework for Pashto language development in Afghanistan.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language planning and language policy have emerged as important fields within sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, and their scope has expanded considerably over the past several decades. Scholars such as Haugen, Jernudd, Rubin, Fishman, Cooper, Wright, and Tollefson have made significant theoretical and empirical contributions to the conceptualization, definition, objectives, and practical dimensions of language planning. Their work demonstrates that language planning is a deliberate and organized process aimed at influencing the status, structure, acquisition, and use of language. It is therefore not merely a linguistic undertaking, but also a social, political, cultural, and institutional process. In the established literature, language planning is commonly discussed in terms of three interrelated dimensions: status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning. Since the 1990s, research on language planning and policy has expanded beyond conventional concerns with language standardization and official language selection to address issues of linguistic diversity, identity, linguistic justice, globalization, multilingualism, and language rights. More recent scholarship has also demonstrated that language policy is not formulated or implemented exclusively by governments and formal state institutions. Schools, universities, media organizations, private institutions, civil society organizations, and local communities may also influence language policy and its implementation. This development has contributed to a shift from predominantly top-down approaches to more participatory and socially embedded perspectives on language planning.

The historical development of Pashto provides evidence of a long tradition of efforts aimed at strengthening the language. During the period of Bayazid Roshan, important efforts were made in Pashto writing, literary production, and intellectual expression, including developments in the representation of Pashto-specific sounds in writing. Khushal Khan Khattak further contributed to the literary, intellectual, and national development of Pashto and also addressed issues related to its writing system. During the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan, efforts were undertaken to expand the use of Pashto in official, educational, and publishing contexts. Subsequently, Mohammad Gul Khan Momand played a particularly significant role in the standardization, institutionalization, educational use, and official development of Pashto. His activities are therefore important to the history of modern Pashto language planning.

From the 1960s onward, efforts to develop Pashto continued through the activities of the Pashto Society, the Academy of Sciences, universities, and other academic and cultural institutions. The production of dictionaries, grammars, standardized textbooks, scholarly publications, translations, and specialized terminology contributed to the development of Pashto as a language of education and scholarship. More recently, the computerization of Pashto, the adoption of Unicode, the development of digital dictionaries, Pashto Wikipedia, and other electronic resources have created new opportunities for expanding the language's presence in digital environments.

Efforts to strengthen Pashto have also been undertaken in the educational sector through its inclusion in school and university curricula. However, political, administrative, and

sociocultural circumstances have affected the consistency and effectiveness of these initiatives. Similarly, in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and other Pashto-speaking regions, various social and political initiatives have sought to expand the use of Pashto in education, media, and public institutions. At the international level, the translation of Pashto literature, the production of digital content, and the growing body of scholarly research have created additional opportunities for increasing the international visibility of the language.

Despite these historical and contemporary efforts, the existing literature on Pashto has largely focused on specific linguistic, literary, educational, and lexicographical issues, including orthography, literature, language teaching, dictionaries, terminology, and other aspects of linguistic description. A comprehensive and integrated study specifically devoted to Pashto language development planning and policy remains limited. More recently, Professor Dr. Ajmal Khkalay, in his work *Language in Society (Sociolinguistics of Language)*, has devoted substantial discussion to language planning and language policy, providing an important theoretical foundation for examining language planning in the Pashto context. Nevertheless, the work is not specifically designed as a comprehensive development plan and policy for Pashto.

Similarly, a scholarly article by Nasir Ahmad Taid addressing the types and stages of language planning has some thematic relevance to the present study. However, it does not specifically examine the development planning and policy of the Pashto language. Thus, the review of the available literature indicates a clear research gap concerning the formulation of an integrated framework for Pashto language development that simultaneously addresses its status, corpus, acquisition, educational use, official functions, scholarly production, digital development, and institutional policy. The present study seeks to address this gap by developing a comprehensive, systematic, and evidence-informed framework for Pashto language development planning and policy.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employs a descriptive-analytical and qualitative research approach to examine the development planning and policy of the Pashto language. Given the interdisciplinary nature of language development planning, the study draws on perspectives from linguistics, sociolinguistics, education, history, law, and public policy. A descriptive-analytical approach is particularly appropriate for examining language-related issues because it enables the researcher to describe the existing linguistic and institutional context while also analyzing the factors, relationships, and processes that influence language development and policy implementation.

The primary objective of the methodological approach is to describe and critically analyze the existing conditions, policies, institutional practices, and development initiatives related to Pashto, and, on this basis, to identify major challenges and propose academically grounded directions for future language planning and policy. Particular attention is given to the relationship among language policies, governmental measures, the education system, cultural institutions, academic activities, and the broader social environment in which Pashto is used and developed.

The study also adopts a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for investigating social, cultural, linguistic, and institutional phenomena that cannot be adequately understood through numerical measurement alone. Qualitative inquiry seeks to develop an in-depth understanding and interpretation of human experiences, perspectives, beliefs, practices, and social and cultural processes. Accordingly, this study primarily draws on textual and documentary evidence rather than statistical data. Relevant books, scholarly articles, historical and linguistic studies, policy-related documents, institutional

materials, and other available academic sources concerning Pashto and language planning were examined and interpreted.

The collected materials were analyzed thematically, with particular attention to the major dimensions of language planning, including status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning, as well as educational use, official and administrative functions, terminology development, scholarly production, media, and digital language development. Through this approach, the study seeks not only to assess the current state of Pashto language development planning and policy but also to identify existing gaps and formulate an integrated and evidence-informed framework for its future development.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Language

Language is a fundamental human capacity and a central means through which individuals communicate, construct meaning, transmit knowledge, and participate in social and cultural life. *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines language as a system of arbitrary vocal symbols through which members of a social group and participants in a particular culture interact and communicate with one another. This definition highlights the vocal and symbolic dimensions of language, while also emphasizing its social and cultural functions. Although speech constitutes the primary form of human linguistic communication, human beings also employ various non-verbal systems to convey meaning, including gestures, facial expressions, movements of the head and hands, raising the shoulders, eye movements, winking, and other culturally recognizable signs. Such forms of communication may convey particular meanings, but they should be distinguished from language as a systematic and socially shared symbolic system.

Professor Mohammad Rahim Elham conceptualizes language as a symbolic system of human sounds used by members of a linguistic community for communication. From this perspective, speech and writing constitute two distinct but interrelated systems. Speech is primarily based on sounds perceived through the auditory system, whereas writing represents language through graphic symbols perceived visually. Writing therefore provides a means of recording, preserving, and transmitting linguistic expression across time and space (Pamir, 2020, p. 13).

Razeq Palwal offers a broader conceptualization, describing language as a symbolic vocal means of understanding and making oneself understood, through which the development and evolution of humanity have contributed to the advancement of human civilization, while the invention of writing facilitated the transition toward more developed forms of civilization (Palwal, 2005, p. 1). This perspective emphasizes the historical and civilizational significance of language beyond its immediate communicative function.

Khweshki adopts a relatively broad conception of language by emphasizing communication as its central function. From this perspective, communication may occur through signs, gestures, or other symbolic means, suggesting that the broader phenomenon of human communication encompasses multiple semiotic resources (Khweshki, 2014, p. 2). However, from a linguistic perspective, not every communicative system necessarily constitutes a natural human language. Rather, human language is distinguished by its systematic organization, productivity, symbolic nature, and capacity to generate and transmit an essentially unlimited range of meanings.

Mojaver Ahmad Zyar similarly defines language, in its specific sense, as a set of arbitrary verbal and auditory symbols or signs, each of which represents a mental image or concept. These symbolic representations enable human beings to conceptualize objects, events, experiences, and relationships within their physical and social environment and to

communicate those concepts to others (Zyar, 2001). This definition highlights the relationship between linguistic symbols, cognition, and the human environment.

Taken together, these perspectives demonstrate that language cannot be reduced to speech or to a collection of grammatical structures. It is simultaneously a communicative system, a symbolic resource, a repository of collective knowledge, a medium of cultural transmission, and an instrument of social interaction and intellectual development. Consequently, the vitality and development of a language depend not only on the number of its speakers but also on its institutional functions, educational presence, scholarly capacity, technological adaptability, and ability to respond to changing social needs.

Within this broader conceptual framework, Pashto represents an important linguistic, cultural, and historical resource in Afghanistan and the wider region. It is one of Afghanistan's official languages and is used extensively in everyday communication, education, literature, media, cultural expression, and public life. Pashto is also spoken by communities in Pakistan and by Pashto-speaking populations in several other countries. Its geographical distribution and historical significance make its development relevant not only to linguistic scholarship but also to questions of cultural identity, education, social participation, and knowledge production.

Accordingly, the development of Pashto should be understood in broader terms than the preservation of a means of communication. Its sustainable development requires strengthening its capacity to function effectively in education, administration, science, technology, media, digital communication, and scholarly production. This broader understanding provides an essential conceptual basis for examining Pashto language development planning and policy.

Language Planning

Language planning is a fundamental concept in sociolinguistics that examines the dynamic relationship among language, society, and the state. In multilingual societies, language functions not merely as a means of communication but also as an important marker of power, identity, political participation, and social equity (Spolsky, 2004, p. 45). The natural development of languages may be constrained by political, social, economic, and institutional factors. Consequently, deliberate, systematic, and goal-oriented interventions may be required to strengthen a language's functions, expand its domains of use, and address language-related social problems. Such deliberate intervention is broadly understood as language planning (Haugen, 1959).

In contemporary linguistic scholarship, language planning is regarded as an important strategic instrument for maintaining the vitality of languages, expanding their functional domains, and promoting linguistic equity (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997). Rather than being limited to linguistic reform, language planning involves institutional decision-making and practical interventions intended to influence how a language is developed, used, taught, standardized, and transmitted within society.

Einar Haugen is widely regarded as one of the foundational scholars in the field of language planning. His influential model conceptualizes language planning as a four-stage process: selection, codification, elaboration, and acceptance (Haugen, 1959). *Selection* involves choosing a particular language or variety for specific functions; *codification* concerns the development and standardization of its orthography, grammar, vocabulary, and other linguistic norms; *elaboration* involves extending the language's functional capacity to new domains, particularly education, administration, science, and technology; and *acceptance* refers to the social recognition and adoption of the planned language by its users and relevant institutions. Haugen's model demonstrates that legal or governmental

decisions alone cannot ensure the successful development of a language; sustained social acceptance and institutional implementation are equally important.

In the context of Pashto, substantial progress has been made in establishing its official and institutional status, while important challenges remain in the areas of standardization, functional expansion, and broader social and institutional implementation. These challenges suggest that language planning for Pashto must extend beyond formal recognition and address the development of standardized linguistic resources, educational materials, terminology, scholarly production, digital resources, and wider domains of use.

Language planning is also closely related to language policy, although the two concepts are not identical. Spolsky (2004) conceptualizes language policy in terms of three interrelated components: language ideology, language practices, and language management. Language ideology concerns beliefs and values about languages and their social functions; language practices refer to the actual patterns of language use within a community; and language management involves deliberate efforts by individuals, institutions, or authorities to influence language practices. The development challenges facing Pashto can therefore be more adequately understood when these three dimensions are examined together, since formal legal provisions alone cannot guarantee the effective development and use of a language.

Critical approaches to language policy and planning further emphasize the relationship between language and power. Phillipson (1992), particularly through his analysis of linguistic imperialism, demonstrates how dominant languages can acquire institutional and international advantages while marginalizing less powerful languages. From this perspective, numerical strength does not necessarily translate into institutional or political linguistic power. The situation of Pashto therefore illustrates the importance of examining not only the number of speakers of a language but also its access to education, administration, scientific production, technology, media, and other domains in which linguistic power is exercised.

Recent scholarship in the Pashto context has further elaborated the concept of language planning. Khkalay (2025) notes that although language planning has been defined in different ways, a common element across these definitions is the deliberate attempt to influence or modify the form, functions, or use of a language. Drawing on definitions proposed by scholars such as Winston, Abd al-Karimi, Jernudd, Das Gupta, and Fishman, Khkalay explains language planning as a set of conscious, systematic, and organized activities undertaken over a specific period to address communication-related problems and influence the role and use of language within society. In this sense, language planning involves practical interventions undertaken within a broader language-policy framework, including activities directed toward standardization, terminology development, orthographic reform, and the expansion of a language's functional domains (Khkalay, 2025, p. 140).

Accordingly, language planning can be understood as a systematic and evidence-informed set of deliberate interventions designed to influence the status, form, functions, acquisition, and use of a language in response to the communicative and developmental needs of a society. It may include language selection, standardization, orthographic development, terminology creation, lexicography, corpus development, educational planning, institutionalization, and the extension of a language into scientific, technological, administrative, media, and digital domains. From this perspective, the development of Pashto requires an integrated planning framework that connects status, corpus, acquisition, institutional implementation, and technological development rather than treating these dimensions as separate or isolated activities.

Pashto Language Planning

Pashto language planning refers to a systematic, scientific, and institutionally coordinated process aimed at regulating, developing, and standardizing the status, corpus, and acquisition of the Pashto language. Within the academic framework, the study of Pashto language planning is closely associated with sociolinguistics, linguistics, and language policy. Its primary objective is to strengthen the institutional and functional use of Pashto in government, education, media, judicial institutions, and administrative systems. It encompasses a range of activities, including orthographic and grammatical standardization, terminology development, curriculum design, enhancement of the language's social and institutional status, and protection of linguistic rights. From this perspective, the significance of Pashto language planning lies in guiding the language from relatively uncoordinated traditional practices toward the scientific, administrative, educational, and technological requirements of contemporary society, thereby contributing to national identity, social equity, and sustainable cultural development (Fishman, 2006).

Pashto language planning has emerged as an important area within contemporary linguistic scholarship because it examines the reciprocal relationship between language and society and considers language as an instrument of social transformation, state-building, and cultural continuity. In this process, language policy provides the broader ideological, legal, and institutional framework, whereas language planning represents the practical and operational dimension of that framework. In the case of Pashto, language planning faces a number of challenges arising from multilingual social contexts, political structures, and historical circumstances. These include limitations in institutional implementation, dialectal diversity, disagreements concerning standardization, insufficient production of scientific materials, and the limited development of specialized linguistic resources.

Effective language planning should therefore be based on systematic research, empirical evidence, sociolinguistic data, social needs, and relevant international experiences rather than on purely symbolic or emotionally driven decisions. Such an approach can help identify the actual linguistic needs of speakers and institutions and establish realistic priorities for language development.

The success of Pashto language planning is also closely connected with the educational system. A language can achieve sustainable development when it functions not only as a medium of everyday communication but also as a language of education, research, knowledge production, and professional training. Accordingly, the standardization of textbooks and curricula, professional development of teachers, expansion of university-level research, development of scholarly and specialized terminology, and integration of Pashto into digital technologies constitute essential components of effective language planning. Pashto language planning should therefore be understood as a long-term, multidimensional, and evidence-based process requiring coordinated participation from government institutions, academic and educational organizations, media, linguistic scholars, cultural institutions, and wider society. Without an integrated plan, appropriate legal and institutional support, and sustained implementation, the long-term development of Pashto is unlikely to be achieved.

Types of Language Planning

Language planning can be classified according to different criteria and theoretical approaches. In sociolinguistic and language-planning literature, the major dimensions commonly identified are status planning, corpus planning, and acquisition planning. Some scholars have additionally discussed prestige planning as a related dimension concerned with the social image, cultural value, and public acceptance of a language.

Status planning refers to deliberate efforts to determine or modify the legal, political, administrative, and social position of a language. It concerns the domains in which a language is officially recognized and used, including government, education, administration, the judiciary, and other public institutions.

Corpus planning focuses on the internal development and standardization of a language. It includes orthographic reform, grammatical standardization, terminology development, lexicography, vocabulary expansion, and the development of linguistic resources required for scientific and technical communication.

Acquisition planning concerns the organized teaching and transmission of a language. It includes language education policy, curriculum development, teacher training, textbook production, instructional materials, and mechanisms for intergenerational transmission. In Afghanistan, the expansion of Pashto as a national language during the twentieth century was accompanied by efforts to establish educational institutions and promote its teaching, illustrating the relationship between language status and acquisition planning.

According to Khkalay (2025), language planning may also be classified according to its temporal scope and geographical or institutional scale. From a temporal perspective, language planning can be categorized as short-term, medium-term, and long-term planning. In terms of scale, Fishman distinguishes between smaller-scale and larger-scale language planning. Small-scale planning may address linguistic changes within a particular city, locality, school, institution, or other limited social setting, whereas large-scale planning may encompass an entire country and its population. These dimensions can also overlap, meaning that a national language policy may simultaneously include short-, medium-, and long-term planning components (Khkalay, 2025).

A particularly important distinction in the literature is between status planning and corpus planning. As discussed by Khkalay (2025), drawing on earlier scholarship, language planning involves conscious intervention in the natural development of language in ways that may affect either its status, its linguistic form, or both. Changes in the social and institutional position of a language constitute status planning, whereas interventions directed toward the internal structure and linguistic resources of a language constitute corpus planning. Acquisition planning was subsequently incorporated into this framework to address the systematic teaching and dissemination of languages (Khkalay, 2025).

For Pashto, these dimensions should not be regarded as independent processes. Status planning without effective corpus development may result in formal recognition without sufficient linguistic capacity for modern domains. Corpus planning without acquisition planning may produce linguistic resources that are not effectively transmitted to new generations. Similarly, both may remain limited in their social impact if the language lacks sufficient institutional support and social prestige. Consequently, a comprehensive framework for Pashto language development should integrate status, corpus, acquisition, prestige, temporal planning, institutional implementation, and digital development within a coherent and sustainable language policy.

Status Planning

Historical evidence indicates that the development of Pashto status planning has proceeded through several important stages. Initiatives undertaken during the reign of Amir Sher Ali Khan, reforms associated with King Amanullah Khan, and, particularly, the institutional and administrative activities of Mohammad Gul Khan Momand played significant roles in expanding the public and official functions of Pashto. These initiatives contributed to the gradual strengthening of Pashto in governmental, educational, and public domains. More recent scholarship likewise indicates that twentieth-century efforts to standardize and

institutionalize Pashto included initiatives related to orthography, terminology development, lexicography, and the establishment of institutions concerned with the development and promotion of the language (Khkalay&Wahdat, 2023).

The status of a language does not emerge naturally or independently; rather, it develops in response to political, social, economic, and cultural conditions. Consequently, many countries have adopted language-policy and language-planning programs to protect, develop, institutionalize, and promote their languages. One of the principal dimensions of language planning is status planning, which concerns deliberate efforts to determine or modify the social, political, administrative, and official position of a language. In the case of Pashto, status planning involves not only its formal recognition but also the effective expansion of its use in education, public administration, government institutions, media, and other domains of public life.

Corpus Planning

Corpus planning constitutes another fundamental dimension of language planning and focuses primarily on the internal development and functional elaboration of a language. It encompasses the development and standardization of orthography, vocabulary, grammar, terminology, writing conventions, and stylistic norms in order to equip a language to meet educational, scientific, administrative, and technological requirements. In the classical language-planning framework, corpus planning is considered alongside status planning and acquisition planning as one of the principal dimensions of systematic language development.

Corpus planning generally begins with the identification of linguistic problems that may constrain a language's effective use, including orthographic variation, dialectal differences, insufficient scientific and technical terminology, lexical gaps, and inconsistencies in grammatical usage. Following the identification of such challenges, linguistic norms and standards are developed or revised to provide greater consistency in written and institutional communication. This process is typically undertaken by linguists, academic institutions, language academies, educational organizations, and other relevant bodies, with the broader objective of strengthening the standard and functional capacity of the language.

In the context of Pashto, the development of a relatively consistent orthographic system, creation of scientific and technical terminology, compilation of dictionaries and specialized lexicons, and systematic description and codification of grammatical rules represent important components of corpus planning. The objective of corpus planning, however, extends beyond linguistic correction or standardization. It also involves linguistic elaboration, through which a language develops the lexical and structural resources necessary for emerging domains such as science, technology, economics, law, medicine, higher education, and international communication. Accordingly, the continuous creation of new terminology and expansion of the lexical resources of Pashto are essential for extending its functional capacity in contemporary society (Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997).

A further stage of corpus planning involves the consolidation and elaboration of linguistic standards. At this stage, formal principles of orthography are established, grammatical guidelines are developed, and specialized terminology is created for fields such as higher education, law, medicine, science, and technology. At the same time, distinctions among different functional styles—including formal, literary, academic, and technical styles—may be established to enable the language to respond appropriately to different communicative contexts.

Another important dimension of corpus planning is the development of a shared standard across dialectal varieties. Many languages contain substantial regional and social

variation, yet the establishment of a widely accepted standard can facilitate communication across dialect communities and contribute to greater consistency in education, media, publishing, and administration. This issue is particularly relevant to Pashto because of its considerable geographical and dialectal diversity. Corpus planning can therefore contribute to the development of shared linguistic norms while recognizing and preserving legitimate dialectal variation.

Lexicography is likewise an important component of corpus planning. Dictionaries and specialized lexicons provide reference resources for standardizing vocabulary, documenting linguistic usage, and supporting education and professional communication. However, language standardization should be gradual, evidence-based, and socially responsive. As Haugen (1966) emphasizes, successful standardization depends not only on the formulation of linguistic norms but also on their wider social acceptance and institutional adoption. A standard imposed without sufficient consideration of language users and actual patterns of usage may encounter resistance and consequently limit the effectiveness of language-planning interventions.

Acquisition Planning

Acquisition planning is a major component of language planning concerned with the systematic development and expansion of opportunities for language learning and teaching. It addresses how a language should be taught, acquired, and promoted across different levels of society. In practice, acquisition planning is implemented through educational programs, curriculum development, teacher training, and the production of appropriate instructional materials. Its primary objective is to expand the number and proficiency of language users and to strengthen the language in formal, educational, and institutional domains. Accordingly, language-planning scholars regard acquisition planning as an essential factor in maintaining the vitality, continuity, and long-term development of a language.

Acquisition planning is particularly important in multilingual societies, where governments and educational institutions must determine which languages should be taught in schools and how language learning can be made more accessible and effective. Curriculum design, the development of textbooks and other instructional resources, and the establishment of language-learning programs constitute important elements of acquisition planning. Such planning may also determine the appropriate stage at which a language should be introduced into the education system, including the grade level at which formal instruction should begin. In addition, teacher preparation, professional development, and the selection of appropriate pedagogical approaches are integral components of acquisition planning.

Acquisition planning is closely interconnected with other dimensions of language planning, particularly status planning and corpus planning. When the official or institutional status of a language is strengthened, the need to ensure that members of society acquire and use that language also increases. Similarly, the standardization of a language's vocabulary, grammar, orthography, and terminology creates the necessary conditions for more systematic and effective instruction. Acquisition planning therefore serves as a critical mechanism for translating language policy into educational practice and contributes to the overall implementation of a comprehensive language-planning framework.

Acquisition planning may employ a range of strategies, including the development of language curricula, the teaching of a language as a second or additional language, adult language-learning programs, teacher-training initiatives, and the use of digital language-

learning resources. In the contemporary era, technological innovations have become increasingly important to this process. Mobile applications, online courses, electronic dictionaries, digital learning platforms, and other technology-mediated resources can facilitate language acquisition and expand access to language education beyond traditional classroom settings.

For Pashto, acquisition planning is of particular significance. The provision of standardized curricula, adequately trained teachers, and contemporary instructional materials can substantially improve the quality and accessibility of Pashto language education. Strengthening Pashto instruction at both school and university levels can further contribute to its academic and institutional development. An effective acquisition-planning framework can therefore help expand the use of Pashto in educational, administrative, and scholarly domains and establish the language as a stronger medium of knowledge transmission and academic communication.

More broadly, acquisition planning refers to systematic efforts aimed at expanding the teaching and learning of a language. It establishes strategies for language acquisition and identifies appropriate methods through which learners can develop effective linguistic competence. Language acquisition begins as a natural process during early childhood and develops through continuous social interaction. Research indicates that by approximately three or four years of age, children acquire thousands of words and develop the fundamental grammatical system of their first language (Sarbakhti&Sitomorang, 2017, p. 152). This natural process of acquisition, however, can be complemented and strengthened through formal education and institutional planning, particularly when the objective is to expand the social and functional domains of a language.

Pashto Language Development

Pashto language development refers to a systematic and sustained process aimed at strengthening the language's academic, literary, cultural, social, and official status, expanding its functional domains, and ensuring its preservation and continued development for future generations. Language development is not limited to increasing the number of speakers; rather, it encompasses language learning and teaching, linguistic research, standardization, terminology development, the production of scholarly and literary works, the expansion of the language's presence in technological domains, and sustained governmental support. A language can achieve meaningful and sustainable development when it is widely used across educational, administrative, media, economic, and digital environments.

Pashto is one of the historically established and culturally significant languages of the region and serves as a major means of communication, thought, and cultural expression for millions of people. Although Pashto possesses a rich literary tradition, particularly in poetry, oral heritage, and cultural expression, it continues to require further development in areas such as scholarly production, standardized terminology, contemporary educational materials, digital resources, and comprehensive language policy. Accordingly, the development of Pashto needs to be pursued within a coherent national and scholarly strategy in which the major dimensions of language development are coordinated and mutually reinforced.

Molajan Taniwal argues in *Language and Society* that genuine progress in Pashto requires writers, scholars, and researchers to produce their academic and intellectual works in Pashto and make their contributions available to society through the language. He further emphasizes that one of the most effective approaches to expanding and developing

Pashto is to establish it as a language of education, higher learning, and administration throughout society (Taniwal, 2015, p. 141).

The major components of Pashto language development include linguistic standardization, strengthening educational curricula, professional development of teachers, the production of scholarly and research-based literature, expansion of translation activities, effective use of traditional and social media, development of Pashto-language software and digital resources, and the establishment of appropriate legal and administrative support for the use of the language. In addition, collaboration among universities, research institutions, cultural organizations, and media outlets is essential for sustaining the language-development process.

Research on language policy and language planning at the international level indicates that sustainable language development is most likely to occur when governmental support, community participation, effective education, continuous evaluation, and scholarly research operate in coordination. Therefore, the development of Pashto cannot be regarded solely as the responsibility of linguists or government institutions; rather, it constitutes a shared responsibility involving members of society, teachers, writers, researchers, media organizations, and educational institutions.

Recent research on indigenous languages has emphasized that language policy, educational support, and community-based initiatives are important for maintaining and revitalizing languages that face pressure from more dominant languages (Hadi, 2025). This perspective is relevant to Pashto, particularly in strengthening its position in education, administration, media, and other formal domains.

In conclusion, the development of Pashto represents an important requirement for scholarly, cultural, and national advancement. If effective language policies, adequate financial and administrative resources, quality language education, systematic research, and contemporary technologies are integrated into a coherent development framework, Pashto can further strengthen its capacity to respond to national and international demands and establish itself more firmly as a language of knowledge, innovation, and social development.

The Role of Media in Pashto Language Development

Media constitute one of the most important instruments for the development, expansion, and wider dissemination of a language. In the contemporary world, the vitality and development of a language are increasingly associated with its presence in the media, its use within information and communication technologies, and the volume and quality of cultural production available in that language. Media not only provide opportunities for everyday language use but also serve as important mechanisms for disseminating standardized forms of a language, introducing and popularizing new terminology, strengthening reading and writing practices, preserving national identity, and transmitting cultural values. Consequently, media should occupy a central position in any comprehensive language-development policy and planning framework.

Media are among the fundamental social institutions that play an important and indispensable role in sustaining, expanding, standardizing, and strengthening the social influence of a language. Within linguistic and language-policy research, media are viewed not merely as channels for the transmission of information, but also as influential environments for language use, public legitimacy, standardization, lexical innovation, and the reinforcement of linguistic identity. For languages such as Pashto, which require broader development in official, academic, and international domains, media can accelerate, systematize, and sustain the process of language development. In the

contemporary era, the expansion of television, radio, print media, online journalism, social networking platforms, podcasts, and digital publishing has transformed patterns of language use and created new opportunities for linguistic development.

Digital Media and Pashto Language Development

The emergence of digital linguistics represents a significant transformation in the study of language, particularly in understanding how people communicate through technology within distributed and digitally mediated environments. Traditionally, linguistic research focused primarily on spoken interaction and printed texts—forms of communication that were relatively linear and closely associated with specific textual and contextual settings. However, the rapid expansion of the Internet, particularly social networking platforms, has challenged conventional assumptions about what language is and how it is used.

Within this emerging digital ecology, platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, Reddit, Facebook, and TikTok have become active environments for linguistic experimentation and innovation. These platforms are not merely channels of communication; they also function as important agents of linguistic change, development, and transformation. The integration of multimedia elements, including videos, animated images (GIFs), emojis, hashtags, and hyperlinks, has contributed to new forms of linguistic expression that are more flexible, visual, interactive, and multimodal than many traditional forms of communication.

This profound transformation has created a need to reconsider some of the fundamental assumptions of linguistic theory. Language today is not only spoken or written; it is also typed, visually represented, connected through hyperlinks, and increasingly selected, recommended, and filtered through algorithmic systems (Parashari, 2012)

University students today participate in an increasingly continuous digital environment that shapes and reshapes their language acquisition and communicative competencies. The emergence of social networking platforms, digital devices, and technology-mediated educational environments exposes students to diverse forms of language, each of which may influence their spoken and written communication. Consequently, digital media play an increasingly significant role in language development by creating both opportunities and challenges.

The influence of digital media on language acquisition begins with the broad range of linguistic input to which learners are exposed. Platforms such as Facebook, X, TikTok, and Instagram, although predominantly informal in nature, are highly engaging and can provide learners with interactive environments in which they practice language and participate in collaborative communication. Within such interactions, slang, abbreviations such as *LOL* and *BRB*, and emojis have become important components of many learners' everyday online communication. These forms of interaction contribute to the emergence of new cultural and communicative conventions and illustrate the dynamic nature of language development. On social media, students are frequently exposed to informal expressions alongside formal and academic language, which may result in the simultaneous use and negotiation of different linguistic registers.

At the same time, educational resources such as online research platforms, Google Scholar, and academic journals expose students to specialized, formal, and academic language. Such resources help learners become familiar with concepts and terminology associated with particular academic disciplines and can consequently support the development and maintenance of formal language competencies. Digital platforms designed for academic purposes continuously provide structured scholarly writing and

complex academic discourse, which can contribute to students' intellectual and academic development (Hashem & Mahdi, 2025).

CONCLUSION

Language development is widely recognized as a fundamental component of a nation's cultural identity, historical memory, scientific advancement, and social cohesion. Language is not merely a means of communication; it is also a principal medium through which a society transmits its ideas, values, experiences, and intellectual and cultural heritage across generations. Consequently, the preservation, standardization, intellectualization, and expansion of a language should not be regarded solely as literary concerns. Rather, they constitute interconnected social, political, cultural, educational, technological, and economic processes. This study focused on Pashto Language Development Planning and Policy and examined the major dimensions of Pashto language development through theoretical perspectives on language planning, historical experiences, social and educational needs, media opportunities, technological developments, and relevant international experiences.

The findings derived from the theoretical discussion, review of previous studies, documentary evidence, field-based observations, and analytical assessment indicate that Pashto possesses substantial historical, cultural, literary, and social resources. Nevertheless, its sustained development in response to contemporary scientific, technological, educational, and global linguistic changes requires a coherent, comprehensive, and evidence-based language development plan. The central conclusion of the study is that the development of Pashto should not depend primarily on isolated or short-term initiatives. Rather, it requires a long-term, systematic, and multidimensional framework supported by clearly defined institutional responsibilities, measurable objectives, implementation mechanisms, and continuous evaluation.

Historically, Pashto has demonstrated many characteristics of a well-established language in terms of its linguistic heritage, literary production, and social presence. However, the absence of a consistently implemented and comprehensive language policy and planning framework remains a significant challenge to its further development. The history of Pashto demonstrates that writers, poets, scholars, and cultural figures have made substantial contributions to the preservation and advancement of the language at different historical periods. Nevertheless, many of these initiatives were undertaken as individual or institution-specific efforts rather than as components of an integrated national language strategy. The findings suggest that languages are more likely to expand their functions in science, technology, education, and public communication when government institutions, academic organizations, and wider society provide coordinated and sustained support.

Language planning is therefore a fundamental requirement for the future development of Pashto. It extends beyond the regulation of grammar, vocabulary, and orthography and encompasses the systematic management of a language's social functions, institutional use, intellectual development, and capacity to respond to emerging societal needs. The findings indicate that the major dimensions of language planning—Status Planning, Corpus Planning, and Acquisition Planning—should be incorporated into an integrated framework for Pashto language development. These dimensions should be complemented by contemporary strategies addressing digitalization, technological adaptation, media development, research, translation, and internationalization.

A further major finding concerns the importance of strengthening the official status of Pashto. Although Pashto has official-language status in Afghanistan, its effective implementation across different domains of public life remains uneven. The findings

indicate that legal recognition alone is insufficient to ensure the functional development of a language. Official status becomes meaningful when the language is systematically used in government institutions, education, administrative and legal procedures, media, and academic institutions. Accordingly, the effective implementation of relevant legal provisions, institutional commitment, administrative capacity, and social acceptance are necessary components of status planning.

With regard to Corpus Planning, standardization, terminology development, lexical expansion, grammatical codification, orthographic consistency, and the production of scholarly linguistic resources constitute essential areas for further development. The findings demonstrate the need to develop standardized terminology for specialized academic and professional fields, compile and update dictionaries, clarify grammatical conventions, and strengthen consistency in orthographic practices. At the same time, the preservation of Pashto's dialectal diversity should be considered compatible with the development of a widely accepted standard variety. Dialects represent an important component of the language's cultural and linguistic richness, whereas a standardized variety provides a common medium for formal education, administration, scientific communication, and mass media.

Acquisition Planning is equally important for the sustainable development of Pashto. The availability of high-quality curricula, instructional materials, professionally trained teachers, and appropriate assessment systems is essential for strengthening the transmission and acquisition of the language. The findings suggest that the quality of Pashto-language education should not be evaluated merely on the basis of whether Pashto is included as a subject in the curriculum. Rather, attention should be given to curriculum content, pedagogical approaches, teacher preparation, instructional resources, learning outcomes, and assessment practices. A coherent and academically grounded curriculum should therefore be developed from primary education through higher education, accompanied by continuous professional development programs for Pashto-language teachers.

Universities and research institutions have a particularly important role in the intellectualization and internationalization of Pashto. Higher education institutions should not function merely as places where Pashto is taught; they should also serve as centers of linguistic research, terminology development, digital-resource creation, scholarly translation, corpus development, and linguistic innovation. Establishing specialized research centers, digital language repositories, electronic corpora, terminology databases, scholarly translation programs, and advanced linguistic studies would contribute substantially to strengthening the academic capacity of Pashto. Such initiatives could also facilitate the production and dissemination of Pashto scholarship within national and international academic communities.

The findings further demonstrate that media and digital technologies offer significant opportunities for the expansion of Pashto. Radio, television, print media, social networking platforms, online publications, podcasts, and other digital communication channels can broaden the functional domains of Pashto and contribute to its visibility, learning, and everyday use. In particular, the digital environment provides opportunities for developing mobile applications, electronic dictionaries, online learning platforms, language-learning resources, Pashto-language software, digital corpora, and artificial-intelligence-based linguistic tools. These technological developments are increasingly important because the vitality of a contemporary language is closely associated not only with its traditional literary and institutional presence but also with its ability to function effectively within emerging digital ecosystems.

Another important conclusion is that Pashto language development cannot be treated as the exclusive responsibility of linguists, writers, or cultural institutions. It requires coordinated participation from government agencies, universities, research institutions, educational organizations, media organizations, the private sector, technology developers, civil society, and language users themselves. Government institutions have a particularly important responsibility to provide an appropriate legal and institutional framework, while universities and research centers should contribute through scholarship and innovation. Media organizations should promote responsible and linguistically informed language use, and technology developers should contribute to expanding Pashto's digital presence. Public participation and positive attitudes toward the language are likewise essential for ensuring the sustainability of these initiatives.

Overall, the study concludes that Pashto Language Development Planning and Policy should be approached as a long-term, evidence-based, and institutionally coordinated process rather than as a collection of isolated linguistic or cultural activities. A successful framework should integrate status, corpus, and acquisition planning while simultaneously addressing education, research, terminology development, translation, media, digital technologies, and institutional capacity. Such a framework should also include clear priorities, implementation stages, responsible institutions, financial mechanisms, monitoring indicators, and periodic evaluation. If these dimensions are addressed through coordinated and sustained efforts, Pashto can further strengthen its capacity to function as a language of education, scholarship, administration, media, technology, and cultural production, thereby contributing to linguistic equity, cultural sustainability, and broader intellectual development.

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