

Representation of Students in Punjab Government Education Policy Documents: A Corpus-Based Transitivity Analysis

Zunaira Arshad¹, Ghulam Zahra² & Azhar Ahmad³

¹PhD Scholar Department of Education, Khwaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology (KFUEIT) Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab, Pakistan, Email: zunairaarshad836@gmail.com

²M.Phil Scholar, Department of Education, National College of Business Administration and Economics (NCBAE) Sub-campus Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab Pakistan, Email: zahrajamila2h1@gmail.com

³Research Scholar, English Literature and Linguistics, Lahore Leads University, Punjab, Pakistan, Email: azharscholar313@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: February 07, 2026 Revised: February 24, 2026 Accepted: March 22, 2026 Available: March 30, 2026 Online:	
Keywords: Punjab Government, Education Policy, Documentation, Corpus-Based Transitivity Analysis.	
Corresponding Author: Zunaira Arshad Email: zunairaarshad836@gmail.com	<i>The present study initially analyze the transitivity process types occur most frequently in the selected Punjab education policy documents, furthermore, it analyzes the ways of these process-type frequencies contribute to the representation of students within the policy discourse and lastly, it analyzes the that what educational priorities and meanings are reflected through the transitivity choices used in the policy documents. The research design used in this study was quantitative corpus-based research based on the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach. A corpus was used to identify and measure the frequency of transitivity process types (quantitative approach). The data was taken from the Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) 2019/20 –2023/24 provided by the Government of the Punjab. The texts were chosen using a purposive sampling and the corpus was imported into the UAM Corpus Tool for annotation and analysis. The results indicate that material processes are the most common type of process in the corpus, followed by relational. These two represent over 80% of all coded clauses. Less is seen with mental, verbal, behavioral and existential processes. The emphasis in this pattern is largely on action, implementation and system objectives as targets of the policy discourse. The results showed that educational policy is mainly conveyed in terms of action, institutional responsibility, and educational development.</i>



Research Problem and Research Gap

Pakistan's social development has been a central theme in the field of education policy. Much research has been devoted to educational reforms, policy implementation, enrolments, access and learning outcomes in the country, especially in Punjab, the most-populous province (Malik et al.,

2022; Saleem et al., 2024). Such research has contributed to the knowledge of the education system and its problems in the context of public schools. Most of this research, however, does not concentrate on policy texts as the means by which social reality is built, but on the outcomes of policy and its efficacy.

Little work has been done on the linguistic characteristics of official education policy documents. Policy discourse is not an accurate reflection of reality, rather it creates, emphasizes and focuses upon specific meanings and perspectives (Praminia et al., 2026; Yousaf et al., 2026). Specifically, representation of the students by use of grammatical choices in the policy documents of the Education Department in the Province of Punjab has not received sufficient attention. The framework of Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and transitivity in particular is useful in analyzing the function of language in representing experiences and social actors (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014; Ahmad, Shaheen & Maitlo, 2025). Utilization of corpus-based transitivity analysis in the discourse on the education policy in Punjab, however, has hardly been used.

Hence, there is a definite research gap. There has been a strong focus on educational reforms and implementation of educational policies, but little attention has been paid to the linguistic representations of students in the official education policy documents. The present study fills the gap by performing a quantitative corpus based study on selected documents of Punjab education policy in terms of transitivity analysis. It categorizes the six types of transitivity processes and analyzes their frequencies and the way they bring to life the student and mark in a policy discourse educational priorities.

Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework is the foundational structure that supports and guides a research study (Arshad et al., 2025; Mehmood et al., 2026). It consists of the specific theories, concepts, and models that you use to explain, predict, and understand the phenomenon you are investigating (Fatima et al., 2025; Ahmad Yousaf & Yousaf, 2026., Riaz et al., 2026). The research employs the theoretical framework of M.A.K Halliday's Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). In SFL, language is seen as a social semiotic system through which individuals, who are both speakers and writers of the language, make up and share meaning in particular social situations. SFL does not regard grammar as a collection of rules; instead, it is interested in the role of language. Halliday and Matthiessen (2014) argued that language is also a mark of experience, a reflection of social relations, and a structuring of information. These functions are the ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. The present study is concerned with the ideational metafunction which has to do with the representation of actions, events, experiences and relationships.

For experience in the ideational metafunction, the transitivity system is the main tool to use in representing experience (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). There are three main components of transitivity: processes, participants, circumstances. Processes are realised by verbs and involve actions, events or states. These processes involve the involvement of entities called participants, and circumstances give other information like time, place, manner and cause. According to Halliday and Matthiessen, (2014) there are six types of processes in the transitivity system, namely material, mental, relational, verbal, existential and behavioural. The distribution of these process types indicates the construction of experience in discourse. Hence this makes transitivity the right way to analyse the representation of students in the education policy documents of the Punjab.

Research Questions

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- Which transitivity process types occur most frequently in the selected Punjab education policy documents?
- How do these process-type frequencies contribute to the representation of students within the policy discourse?
- What educational priorities and meanings are reflected through the transitivity choices used in the policy documents?

Methodology

Research methodology is the overarching philosophical framework and strategic justification for how a study is conducted (Bakht et al., 2026; Rashid et al., 2026) , while research design is the specific operational blueprint or structural plan used to carry out that study (Nasim et al., 2023; Nisar et al., 2026; Yousaf, Ahmad & Riaz , 2026). The research design used in this study was quantitative corpus-based research based on the systemic functional linguistics (SFL) approach. The present analysis was limited to the ideational metafunction and the transitivity system (Halliday & Matthiessen 2014). The choice of corpus-based method was informed by the need to analyze authentic policy documents, not individual policy parts, in order to achieve the research objectives. A corpus was used to identify and measure the frequency of transitivity process types (quantitative approach). The frequencies found were then analysed to explore the representation of students in educational discourses.

The data was taken from the Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) 2019/20 – 2023/24 provided by the Government of the Punjab. The texts were chosen using a purposive sampling as these texts repeatedly named the pupils, learning, education access, equity, and education development. Once collected, the texts were prepared for cleaning out non-linguistic content, such as page numbers, tables, hyperlinks, and the like. The chosen texts were then concatenated into one plain text corpus. The final corpus comprised of about 5,600 running words.

Experiential meaning is predominantly understood at the clause level (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), and the clause level was thus chosen as the unit of analysis. This corpus was imported into the UAM Corpus Tool for annotation and analysis (O'Donnell 2008). An annotation system was created according to Halliday's framework of transitivity. Six process types, representing material, mental, relational, verbal, behavioral and existential processes were used to code each clause. Frequency distributions of each process type were created using the software. A total of 668 clauses were identified and analyzed, of which 20 contained clauses that did not refer to a process of the process-bearing clauses 20 contained clauses that did not mention a process.

Findings and Analysis

Overall Transitivity Distribution

Table 1 shows the number and percentage of each type of transitivity process in the corpus. The distribution across the six process types is not even. The material processes are the most common category with nearly two-thirds of coded clauses. The second most common type is relational processes. Mere mental, verbal, behavioural and existential processes are less frequent. The results indicate that the material and relational processes are the dominant processes in the corpus. This pattern is indicative of the linguistic focus of the policy document and serves as initial response to Research Question 1.

Table 1. Frequency Distribution of Transitivity Process Types (UAM CorpusTool output)

Process Type	Linguistic Realisation (core meaning)	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Material	Doing / happening (action verbs)	438	65.57%	1

Relational	Being / having / attributing	123	18.41%	2
Mental	Sensing / thinking / feeling	55	8.23%	3
Verbal	Saying / reporting	29	4.34%	4
Behavioural	Physiological / psychological acting	15	2.25%	5
Existential	There-existing	8	1.20%	6
Total	All coded clauses	668	100%	—

Material Processes and Policy Actions

The most common type of process is material processes (438, 65.57%). This is a high frequency, as the policy document is action oriented. Common material verbs are improve, provide, increase, develop, enrol, establish, strengthen, deliver, recruit, train and implement. The verbs listed here are activities carried out by government institutions aimed at enhancing the educational system.

Terms such as successive governments have made a series of reforms; 12.4 million boys and girls are enrolled in public schools make concrete actions and measurable outcomes of the work. These clauses are rarely encountered with pupils as Actors. Rather, they tend to be expressed as the Objectives of policy actions. The emphasis on material processes indicates that an emphasis or focus is given to the student as a recipient of the government's actions rather than an active participant in learning processes.

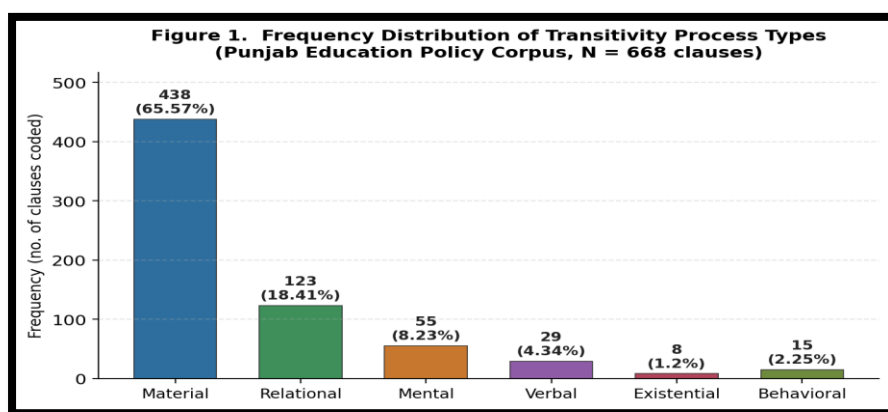


Figure 1: Frequency of transitivity process types in the Punjab education policy corpus (N = 668 clauses).

Relational Processes and System Description

The second most common type is relational processes with 123 cases (18.41%). These processes involve the definition, description and assessment of educational conditions and policy goals. Examples include statements such as “the goal is quality education for all children” and “learning levels are still unsatisfactory.”

Such clauses specify qualities of learning goals, policies and outcomes. The relationships processes provide one way to describe the situation of education and to explain the vision of the policy. In these processes the document shows the evaluative picture of educational reality and points at the areas which need improvement.

Mental Processes and Student Learning

Mental processes account for 55 occurrences (8.23%). They are related to learning, understanding, and feeling, recognizing and thinking. These can include conditions where pupils learn, understand or feel confident in their skills.

A mental process is ill at use but, less common, a attention to learning and to student's experience. They view students as thinkers, learners, and knowers. Their relative low frequency, however, indicates it is more a policy that focuses on actions to be taken in the institution and outcomes in education rather than students' personal experiences and perceptions.

Verbal, Behavioural, and Existential Processes

The corpus has fewer examples of verbal, behavioral and existential processes. There are 4.34% clauses (29) that are expressed in verbal processes. These processes are predominantly seen in references to reports, surveys and official statements. They are in support of the policy using evidence and documented findings.

Behavioral processes represent 15 clauses (2.25%). These are primarily verbal actions by the students, as seen during tests or learning activities.

Existential processes are the least frequent category, with 8 occurrences (1.20%). With these processes, educational issues/challenges are introduced. Examples include statements such as “there are four major reasons for low enrolment.” They are used to draw attention to the issue of a specific educational problem and to bring that problem to the attention of policy makers.

Table 2. Representative Clauses and Participant Structures for each process type

Process	Sample clause from corpus	Participant configuration
Material	“Successive governments have undertaken a series of reforms...”	Actor + Process + Goal
Material	“12.4 million boys and girls are enrolled in 52,470 public schools.”	Goal + Process (passive)
Relational	“The goal... is quality education for all children.”	Carrier + Process + Attribute
Mental	“Students who learn in their mother tongue feel more confident...”	Senser + Process + Phenomenon
Verbal	“Household surveys have reported improvements in the participation rate.”	Sayer + Process + Verbiage
Behavioural	“Students responded correctly to 77% of questions.”	Behaver + Process
Existential	“There are four major reasons for low enrolment...”	There + Process + Existent

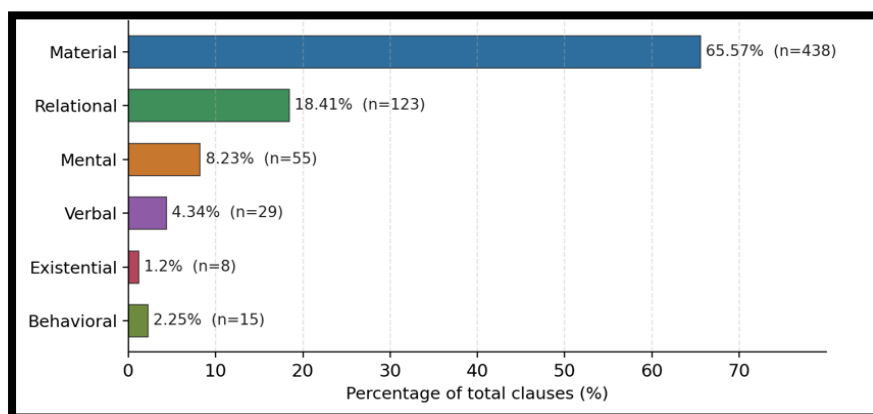


Figure 2: Relative salience of process types (UAM CorpusTool feature-frequency output).

Figure 2 presents the relative salience of the six transitivity process types in the corpus. The category with the highest number of coded clauses is material processes, which represents 65.57%. Mental,

verbal, behavioural and existential processes are less common, as are relational processes. This figure is further proof of the preponderance of action-laden language in the discourse of policy documents of the Punjab education system.

Summary of Findings

The results indicate that material processes are the most common type of process in the corpus, followed by relational. These two represent over 80% of all coded clauses. Less is seen with mental, verbal, behavioural and existential processes. The emphasis in this pattern is largely on action, implementation and system objectives as targets of the policy discourse. The results showed that educational policy is mainly conveyed in terms of action, institutional responsibility, and educational development.

Discussion: Representation of Students and Educational Priorities

The results answer the Research Question 1 in a clear manner. The most common process type found in the corpus is material process type, followed by relational process type. The mental, verbal, behavioural and existential processes occur much less frequently. The above pattern has some significant policy implications regarding the representation of students.

The findings also provide an answer to Research Question 2. Students are typically regarded as the targets of government activities in the corpus, rather than actors. Students are referred to in many of the clauses as Goals of enrolment, Goals of teaching, Goals of assessment, Goals of support etc. The Actors counted as responsible for implementing reforms and delivering educational services are usually depicted in the form of government institutions. The relational processes further support this representation, as it expresses students and the education system in evaluative and descriptive statements. Mental processes are less common and primarily learning, understanding, and educational development.

The results also answer Research Question 3 by offering insights into education priorities in the policy discourse. The high frequency of material processes highlights a strong focus on implementation, access, service delivery, and measurable improvement. There are repeated mentions of enrolment, provision, and educational development suggesting a focus on increasing educational opportunities and system performance. This is complemented by relational processes that establish policies and outline educational situations. Evidence-based quality of the document is raised by verbal processes, such as references to reports, surveys and assessments. Mental and behavioural processes come across as being somewhat less common, which means that learners' personal experiences and feelings are not explored to the same degree as institutional actions and policy outcomes. In general, the linguistic outcomes focus on the role of government, educational development and policy implementation.

Conclusion and Contribution

This study utilized the concept of transitivity, introduced by Halliday, to consider the representation of students in the education policy documents of Punjab. The results indicate that material processes are the predominant process type in the total number of coded clauses, greatly outnumbered by mental processes. Pupils are largely portrayed as the beneficiaries of government rather than participants in the learning process. The policy discourse can thus be seen to have a strong focus on implementation, access, provision, and educational improvement.

The study has three contributions. Methodologically, it shows how the corpus-based approach to transitivity analysis can be applied to analyse educational policy discourse. Theoretically, it helps to bring the proposed framework of Halliday to the analysis of the documents of education policies

from Punjab. It illustrates in practice how SFL can reveal the meanings and priorities that lie beneath the surface in institutional texts. The conceptual approach adopted in this study can also be transferred to other policy areas such as health, gender and environmental policy.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

There are certain limitations in this study. The first was the small size of the sample of the corpus which was selected by purposive sampling. Hence findings do not reflect all the education policy discourses in Pakistan and only those policy documents have been selected for the purposes of the study. Second, in the process of transitivity analysis the researcher's interpretation is needed to assign the process type to clauses. Depending on the analyst's judgement, some clauses might be interpreted differently. Multiple coders may be used to increase coding reliability in future studies. Third, the study has centred on the distribution of process types without exploring statistical comparisons with other policy corpora.

Future studies could try to use the same analytical framework with bigger corpora, or to compare policy documents in Punjab with those from other provinces or at the federal level. Other policy discourses, such as health, environmental and gender-related policies, could also be the subject of similar studies.

References

1. Ahmad, A., Shaheen, R., & Maitlo, S. K. (2025). Theories And Practices In Language Learning. *Qualitative Research Journal for Social Studies*, 2(2), 1-47.
2. Ahmad, A., Yousaf, I., & Yousaf, S. (2026). VANISHING VOICES: Causes of Linguistic Erosion in Modern Pakistan. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(1), 67-128.
3. Arshad, Z., Ahmad, A., & Rao, I. S. (2025). Effect Of Emerging Pedagogical Approaches In Civic On Students 'Learning At Intermediate Level.(2025). *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin*, 3(12), 353-361.
4. Bakht, M. I., Riaz, M., Ahmad, A., & Khan, A. (2026). Instructional Leadership Practices and Students' Academic Achievement: A Study of Public Secondary Schools. *Contemporary Journal of Social Science Review*, 4(1), 120-135.
5. Eggins, S. (2004). *An introduction to systemic functional linguistics* (2nd ed.). Continuum.
6. Fairclough, N. (2003). *Analysing discourse: Textual analysis for social research*. Routledge.
7. Fatima, S. N., Sajjad, K., & Ahmad, A. (2025). Generative Artificial Intelligence in English Language Teaching: A Systematic Review of Current Trends, Challenges, and Future Directions. *Journal for Current Sign*, 3(4), 2588-2599.
8. Government of Punjab. (2019). *Punjab Education Sector Plan (PESP) 2019/20–2023/24*. School Education Department, Government of Punjab. [https://schools.punjab.gov.pk/20\(2019-20%20to%202023-24\)](https://schools.punjab.gov.pk/20(2019-20%20to%202023-24)).
9. Halliday, M. A. K., & Matthiessen, C. M. I. M. (2014). *Halliday's introduction to functional grammar* (4th ed.). Routledge.
10. Malik, M. F., Manzoor, H., Manzoor, H., Kumar, H., Channa, S., & Raza, T. (2022). Critical analysis of educational policies of Pakistan. *Journal of Positive School Psychology*, 6(11), 1762-1778.
11. Mehmood, M. S., Shaheen, R., Maitlo, S. K., & Ahmad, A. (2026). A Comparative Study Of Blended And Traditional Learning On Reading Comprehension At The Secondary Level. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(1), 1056-1066.

12. Nasim, F., Bakht, M. I., Riaz, M., Ahmad, A. (2023). School Leadership and Management Practices for Enhancing Student Learning, Staff Development, and Resource Effectiveness. *International Journal of Social Science Archives*, 6(3), 508-517.
13. Nisar, S., Shah, S. H. R., & Ahmad, A. (2026). Impact of AI-Enhanced Social Media Platforms on the English Writing Proficiency of (ESL) Students. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 4(1), 7075-7085.
14. O'Donnell, M. (2008). *The UAM CorpusTool: Software for corpus annotation and exploration*. Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.
15. Praminia, I. G. A. A. R., Triyanti, A. D., Tritintya, N. P. D. E., Sekarpratiwi, R. V., & Priantara, I. K. T. A. D. (2026). A Critical Discourse Analysis of Online Media on the Indonesian Government's Handling of BPJS Kesehatan Fraud. *Jurnal Riset Komunikasi (JURKOM)*, 9(1), 169-186.
16. Rashid, R., Riaz, M., Abdullah, M., & Ahmad, A. (2026). Activity-Based Teaching: A Strategy for Promoting Engagement in Science Education. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, 4(1), 1128-1136.
17. Riaz, M., Rashid, R., Yousaf, I., & Ahmad, A. (2026). BRIDGING HOME AND SCHOOL: THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT ON PRIMARY STUDENTS. *Contemporary Journal of Social Science Review*, 4 (1), 158-175.
18. Saleem, R., Arshad, Z., Bukhari, S., Ahmad, A. (2024). Construction and validation of the Emotional Intelligence Scale (EIS): A Comprehensive Study among Undergraduate Students. *Remittances Review*, 9(3), 2094-2106.
19. Yousaf, A., Shaheen, R., & Ahmed, I. (2026). AI-Driven Smart Education: Concepts, Technologies and Case Studies. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(1), 129-195. <https://doi.org/10.63878/jalt2442>
20. Yousaf, I., Ahmad, A., & Riaz, M. (2026). READING PROFICIENCY AND LEXICAL DEVELOPMENT: A STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN KASHMIR. *Journal of Applied Linguistics and TESOL (JALT)*, 9(01), 908-916.