

BEYOND TOP-DOWN POLICY: HOW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND UNIVERSITIES PRESERVE PAKISTAN'S LINGUISTIC HERITAGE

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ABSTRACT

This research sees how social movements, education systems, and online platforms are shaping language policy and protecting local languages in Pakistan. Pakistan has many regional languages, But Urdu is national language of Pakistan. it makes language scenes challenging, valuable and instructing for planning. Language demands for the local population of Pakistan, especially in urban areas, usually unsatisfied on meeting traditional top-down approaches. However, community bases efforts show greater promises in cultural engagement and language development. This study collects data from Saraiki, Punjabi, Marwari speaking peoples by using both qualitative and quantitative methods. This research shows how social movements impacts on our language documentation, cultural heritage preservation and transfer of languages among generations. Education systems like universities helps these efforts by research and academic programs. This Research highlights the success of grassroots efforts and also showing the need for more educational institutes and government support to continue language preservation activities in this research we find that by social and digital media, research contributions and grassroots actions we can promote our language and culture identity. I wish that government officials and policymakers can create more inclusive language regulations that observed and guide.

Keywords: Language Planning and Policy, Regional Languages, Saraiki, Punjabi, Marwari, Grassroots Efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Pakistan's linguistic and cultural diversity calls for a sensitive approach to language planning and policy. From a traditional top-down, government-led perspective, the area has been dominated by top-down, government-led initiatives, but bottom-up, grassroots movements are increasingly recognized as more effective in achieving sustainable language development. Such grassroots initiatives play a crucial role in fulfilling

the language needs and expectations of the populations, especially those in rural settings, where language policies become a reflection of the people being targeted (Abbas & Bidin, 2022).

Grassroots language initiatives are bottom-up approaches, targeted at meeting local populations' desires and needs linguistically. It is in direct contrast to the top-down approach, where the policies are actually formulated by central

authorities. This bottom-up approach is organically developed within a community. Initiatives can involve awareness-raising campaigns, workshops for education purposes, documentation and archiving, and other related cultural promotion exercises. These endeavours are vital to the preservation of linguistic diversity as well as fostering cultural inclusiveness (David, 2021).

The role of local actors and community groups is fundamental in the formation of the linguistic landscape. Such initiatives as language-specific social gatherings, educational programs, and digital courses play a significant role in this advancement, especially in the digital domain. Assessing the effectiveness of these endeavors will give policymakers and language specialists useful insights through case studies on successful community-driven language planning (David, 2021).

The importance of bottom-up approaches to language planning research in Pakistan is highlighted by the complexities in its linguistic diversity and cultural amalgamation. It has a multiple-language scenario, one that expects a dominantly Urdu national language and several regional languages prevalent in their specific areas. It is a challenge as well as an opportunity to language planners and formulators of policy. A bottom-up approach empowers communities to choose languages according to usage and need, which fosters a sense of identity and unison among the populace (Abbas & Bidin, 2022).

Through these social media applications, such as Instagram, language planning initiatives become highly influential in shaping the status and maintenance of local languages. The role of social media on language dynamics should be considered to develop effective policies, engaging the young generations as it adapts to the changes in the digital landscape (Minhas & Salawu, 2024). Analyzing local players and organizations active in issues related to language helps determine useful approaches for language preservation and promotion (Ahmed, 2021). To mainstream languages and keep their identity strong, use culture-related activities, social clubs based on languages and appropriate curricula. Looking at their achievements can help explain how decision-makers can guide their policies according to grassroots communities to support their languages (David, 2021).

An equal policy on language should consider how social media, grassroots groups and campaigns run by communities provide proof for combining national decisions with what locals prefer to protect the country's linguistic diversity and inclusion (Abbas & Bidin, 2022).

The main aim of this research is to describe how Pakistani grassroots groups work to maintain local languages, assess the impact of social media and its maintenance on these languages and analyze how special community groups help shape how local languages are used in different areas.

Its results might reveal methods used by community members in grassroots movements, how online communication supports their efforts and successful strategies by individuals supporting their language. The information acquired would aid in the development of steady language planning strategies in Pakistan and preserve the diversity of languages, as well as fuel community involvement and responsible planning (Abbas & Bidin, 2022).

Background of Study

LPP means carefully overseeing how, when and who uses languages in a specific society. This area helps to maintain a variety of languages so unity, government and economic benefits are available to everyone (Michele, 2023). The principle elements of LPP are status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning. Status planning reflects on whether there are languages that enjoy official status and their use in government, education, and the media (Kendall, 2017). Corpus planning reflects the development of structures in language, such as grammar, lexicon, and writing systems, (Sandagomi, 2009), but acquisition planning is strategies that enable learners to learn and use the language; such policies would include educational provision, and immersion programs (Clinton, 2013).

Language planning can be manifest in various ways. Some are language revival, where the almost dead languages are revitalized by documentation and intergenerational transmission. An example of language revival is the restoration of Hebrew in Israel (Paul et al., 2021). Another type is language maintenance. Language maintenance means keeping a language alive by having bilingual education or other cultural practices to ensure that Welsh lives on in Wales (Tove, 2008). Language shift is a situation where a community

changes from one language to another, which may be influenced by socio-political or economic factors, as seen in the case of promoting Mandarin in China (Nasiba, 2023).

LPPs have significant implications, especially regarding the formation of cultural identity, social mobility, and national cohesion. Policies in support of minority languages promote the culture and promote inclusion, but exclusionary policies marginalize the linguistic community (Lenore, 2014). In a multilingual society, effective planning ensures equal representation for all linguistic communities, promotes national unity while preserving linguistic diversity.

Pakistan's historical evolution of language planning indicates its complexity and socio-political significance. Pakistan, since the country became free in 1947, could not materialize a language policy that served to this diverse linguistic country. Initially, the Local language was declared the national language, although it was the first language for only a few of its population (David, 2021). This decision was supposed to integrate the country but caused tensions, especially in East Pakistan, where Bengali speakers insisted on recognition of their language, which led to the eventual secession of Bangladesh in 1971 (Khan, 2023).

Post-1971, Pakistan took a bilingual policy by retaining local and English as official languages of the federation and recognized regional languages at the provincial level (Bushra, 2017). There is an effort to introduce such provincial languages in education and media. However, the scarcity of resources and political constraints bound to withhold such initiatives (Jummah, 2023). New trends focus on multilingual learning and language protection, such as preserving endangered languages like Burushaski and Brahui (Abba, 2022). However, the gap between policy and implementation continues to hinder progress (Chen, 2022).

Language planning strategies include top-down approaches and bottom-up approaches. Under the top-down approach, a government-led approach to policy decisions determines language usage, as done in Pakistan following independence when local language was adopted (Shen, 2016). As these policies for national unity generally fail to reflect linguistic realities, resistance and social unrest are developed (Fareeda, 2017). In contrast, bottom-up approaches spring from grassroots movements in

support of preserving and educating on the community level regarding a specific language (Zubair, 2020). Efforts made are likely to ensure a higher involvement and cultural appropriateness by the community but without institutional resources or support (Sue, 2016).

Theoretical frameworks such as Community-Based Language Planning, Ethnolinguistic Vitality, and Social Capital Theory help explain grassroots language initiatives. CBLP identifies how language policies are affected by the people within a particular community (McLeroy, 2022). Ethnolinguistic Vitality Theory views status, demographic strength, and institutional support as factors that influence the sustainability of linguistic practices (Howard, 1973). Lastly, Social Capital Theory views social networks' role in maintaining linguistic activities (Alejandro, 1998). Grassroots language initiatives focus on community-driven activities to promote and preserve languages. These initiatives may include educational programs, cultural festivals, language documentation, and media advocacy. For instance, promotion of the Marwari language through literature and education has fortified its existence in Pakistan (Maya, 2021). Language revitalization in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is achieved through the integration of regional languages in education (Neelam, 2024). Resource and policy constraints along with limited access to technology present challenges (Dril, 2021).

Community involvement in policy formulation increases its inclusiveness and cultural appropriateness. The involvement of the local stakeholders guarantees that policies account for linguistic facts and are adopted more widely (Sana, 2011). Community participatory decision-making allows communities to claim their rights to their linguistic identity, increasing ownership and sustainability (Zenawi, 2023). In contrast, several challenges such as power imbalances, inadequate resources, and fragmented policies hinder successful engagement (Zahra, 2021).

Challenges Grassroots language policies face various challenges, including political resistance, lack of support from the government, and educational inequalities (Robert, 2016). The dominance of national and global languages also hampers the prominence and institutional support for minority languages (Ebrahim, 2021). Lastly, globalization and urbanization promote language shift since younger generations give

priority to more economically useful languages (Vernon, 2020).

Community ownership, capacity building, and integration into education are some of the key ways to ensure grassroots language initiatives become sustainable (Maarten, 2022). Digital resources and social media have become a fundamental part of language documentation and dissemination (Novan, 2023). Crowd sourcing and online platforms have improved accessibility and engagement in the process of language revitalization (Nathan, 2017).

Assessment of bottom-up language policies has to do with the preservation of a particular language, empowering a community, and educational results (Elana, 2005). Grass-root actions add up to linguistic diversity, social cohesion, and economic opportunities but face issues such as limitations on certain resources and inconsistent policies (Walter, 2024). In this case, coordination between grassroots movements and government policies ensures sustainability and impact (Giuseppe, 2021).

The sociolinguistic model provides an all-encompassing framework of understanding language planning. Language, in this regard, is used as a marker of identity, power, and social change (Howard, 1973). Grassroots movements in Pakistan challenging dominant language ideologies promote linguistic diversity and cultural preservation (Paul, 2023). Power dynamics and policy constraints often restrict grassroots influence; collaboration between community-led initiatives and institutional support is needed (Karim, 2021).

Government cooperation is necessary for grassroots language planning to be successful. Funding, legal safeguards, and policy structures support the revitalization of languages (Aliya, 2017). Collaborations with educational institutions and cultural organizations enhance capacity building and institutional support (Chen, 2023). Inconsistencies in policy implementation and resource allocation present a challenge that requires strategic planning and sustained commitment (Zenawi, 2023).

A comparative analysis of grassroots language planning at the international level reveals best practices and challenges. Indigenous language revitalization programs in Canada are supported by a generous government budget and institutional resources (Canada, 2023). New

Zealand's Kōhanga Reo movement successfully embeds Māori language into early childhood education (Castl, 2023). Australian community-led initiatives focus on cooperation with universities and cultural organizations (Kisten, 2014). Key challenges include funding sustainability, community empowerment, and policy coordination (Elvin, 2020).

Bottom-up language planning debates focus on sustainability, government support, and community engagement (Vaidehi, 2005). Future research should look into long-term impacts, government-community collaboration, and resource allocation strategies (Johan, 2020). More research should focus on how social media protects language diversity and how it affects it (Shahid, 2024).

Methodology

For this reason, the research applied a mix of research methods to explore the impact of grassroots movements, universities and social media on preserving and promoting local languages in Pakistan. There was a descriptive survey design purposefully designed to systematically examine the objectives of the research, both qualitatively and quantitatively (Creswell, 2018). In response, the structured questionnaires were used to help delve into language promotion and sustainability efforts.

Three main languages in Pakistan, Siraiki, Punjabi and Marwari, made up the people surveyed for this project. Researchers carried out purposive sampling so that the required types of people were included from different language and demographic groups (Palinkas, 2015). The total sample included one hundred participants, all from a range of socio-economic and educational backgrounds, as well as city and rural residents. Therefore, the conference brought together many perspectives on language documentation and conservation.

Structured questionnaires were adopted to collect data. The questionnaires were divided into four main categories: demographics, language documentation, role of institutions, and social media influence. Questions in the questionnaire tool would be Likert scaled (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The scores or the level of respondents' perceptions would be measured in the questionnaire tool. The instrument was reviewed by experts in sociolinguistics to ensure its

validity and reliability (Bryman, 2016). Surveys were administered both online, through Google Forms, to urban respondents and in-person to rural respondents. To minimize response bias, the respondents were assured of anonymity and confidentiality.

The study also applied thematic analysis to elicit patterns and insights about grassroots movements and their implications for local languages. This included data familiarization, initial coding, theme development, and refinement. Key themes that emerged include: (i) revitalization of local languages through grassroots movements, (ii) the strategic use of English for advocacy and visibility, and (iii) the formation of hybrid linguistic identities.

Grassroots movements formed the most essential role in reinvigorating local languages. This was by engaging communities and cultural festivals through intergenerational language transfer. Workshops and informal learning served to bridge intergenerational gaps, thereby promoting the survival of indigenous languages. Interest in language preservation was raised with messages in English, mainly by using bilingual outreach and advocating for the cause on social media. Through Twitter, Instagram and Facebook, the "Save Saraiki" campaign reached both its local followers and those around the world.

Such community events gave rise to a situation where speaking English and local languages was normal. Linguistic blending, especially among the younger age groups, reflected a pragmatic attitude toward language use by incorporating local languages with English without reducing their cultural value. The findings indicated some policy implications for bilingual education programs that could balance accessibility with cultural preservation (Mazhar, et. al., 2025).

Some of the main challenges identified during the research are connecting with the public, difficulties passing a language down through different age groups, powerful global languages making learning hard, insufficient social media use and issues related to forming policies. Achieving long-term sustainability in language preservation calls for members of local communities, government help and the strategic use of online tools.

Using descriptive statistics, data was studied to look at central measures including the mean and the frequency. Any statistical analysis done was done by inferential analysis. The findings have been presented with graphs and tables for better representation. The qualitative approach has therefore provided a quantitative underpinning on the sustainability factors of promoting the language of Pakistan.

Sampling Size for Qualitative data

Stakeholder Group with certain characteristics	Sample Size	Description
Poets	9	Poets: Influential persons advocating for cultural and linguistic preservation within communities.
Educators	9	Educators: Teachers and trainers committed to promoting regional languages through educational initiatives
Activists	9	Activists: Advocates pushing for language rights and preservation in local and national contexts
Members of linguistic communities	9	Members of linguistic communities: Speakers dedicated to maintaining and revitalizing their native languages and cultures.
Local community people of Saraiki, Punjabi, Marwari	58	Local people from different linguistics background.

3.3.3 Sampling Size for Quantitative description

Stakeholder Group with certain characteristics	Sample Size	Description
Poets	9	Poets: Influential persons advocating for cultural and linguistic preservation within communities.
Educators	9	Educators: Teachers and trainers committed to promoting regional languages through educational initiatives
Activists	9	Activists: Advocates pushing for language rights and preservation

Results

The learning from this study show how important grassroots movements, universities and social media are for the protection and promotion of local languages in Pakistan. Speakers of Siraiki, Punjabi and Marwari responded to a Likert scale questionnaire. The analysis discusses major topics in the fields of language documentation, contributions from organizations, community activities and digital involvement. The study shows what works well in local language programs and underlines the importance of various groups joining forces.

Language Documentation Efforts

An overwhelming number of respondents (84%) answered positively that their communities take steps to record their local languages and traditional stories on paper. Therefore, it's obvious that activism at a community level helps preserve culture. However, when asked whether book, manuscript, or digital archives exist for written records of their language, only 32 percent agreed. A higher percentage, 58%, disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting that even after the efforts exerted, a huge gap in formally recorded linguistic resources exists. Moreover, 84% strongly agreed that the documentation of their languages was very important for the future, as they have issues with language endangerment and want more systematic strategies for preservation. Interestingly, responses regarding local organizations' involvement in documentation projects showed a divide. While 37% believed that such initiatives were being undertaken, a greater proportion (48%) disagreed or strongly disagreed, suggesting dissatisfaction with the level of institutional support for language preservation. Similarly, cultural and religious events were reported to contribute to language promotion, with 51% of participants agreeing that such occasions foster linguistic continuity.

University Contributions and Challenges

Higher education institutions are important in language documentation, but their effectiveness seems to differ. When asked if universities in their region offer courses or research programs focused on local languages, 75% of the respondents agreed. This indicates that many universities are

trying to preserve indigenous languages through academic initiatives. However, awareness of these programs remains an issue. Only 22% of respondents reported having participated in or knowing about university-based workshops on language documentation, with 47% reporting that they had not, which may suggest a lack of outreach or access to such programs.

Opinion on having access to digital archives or language labs was also divided. With 46 percent agreeing that the universities do equip them, while 41 percent disagreed and still believed facilities remain limited or unused. Still, when asked whether universities do effectively play a role in the preservation and promotion of local languages, 67 percent agreed with it, showing higher education institutions have value regardless of resource issues.

Impact of Grassroots Movements

The study had overwhelming support towards grassroots movements in language preservation. In fact, 70% of those consulted believed that grassroots activism helps to spur the use of local languages, while 60% preferred bottom-up policy initiatives over government-implemented top-down policies. However, as far as the possibility of grassroots activities influencing language policy is concerned, there was division of opinion—only 35% believed they had a good impact, while 45% disagreed. This indicates that grassroots activism is widely acknowledged, but its direct impact on official policy is limited.

Similarly, 70% of the respondents considered community-based organizations to play a role in preservation of language, while 50% believed in local language initiatives that are necessary to safeguard the national position of indigenous languages. This indicates that community-led initiatives have potential, but more institutional support is needed to translate it into policy change.

Role of Social Media in Language Promotion

Preserving languages using Social Media- 86% answered that modern day language planning was not complete unless online tools would be provided; 84 % said campaigns based on social media positively influenced linguistic

preservation. Almost 82 percent of them had an opinion regarding the notion as to why digitals and all other kinds of media platforms that are nontraditional are able to promote their cause among youngsters but not on electronic media. They have underlined the ever-present role of Digital Engagement for preserving languages. Still, not all respondents had totally positive views regarding social media. While 40% of the respondents agreed that "Facebook really supports local language use," another 40% disagreed, indicating that not all platforms support equal linguistic diversity. Furthermore, 45% of the respondents disagreed or were neutral about social media increasing the prestige of local languages, which indicates skepticism regarding its effect on official language status.

Community-Led Language Initiatives

Further, this study elaborates the contributions of local actors toward shaping the linguistic landscape of Pakistan. An overwhelming majority

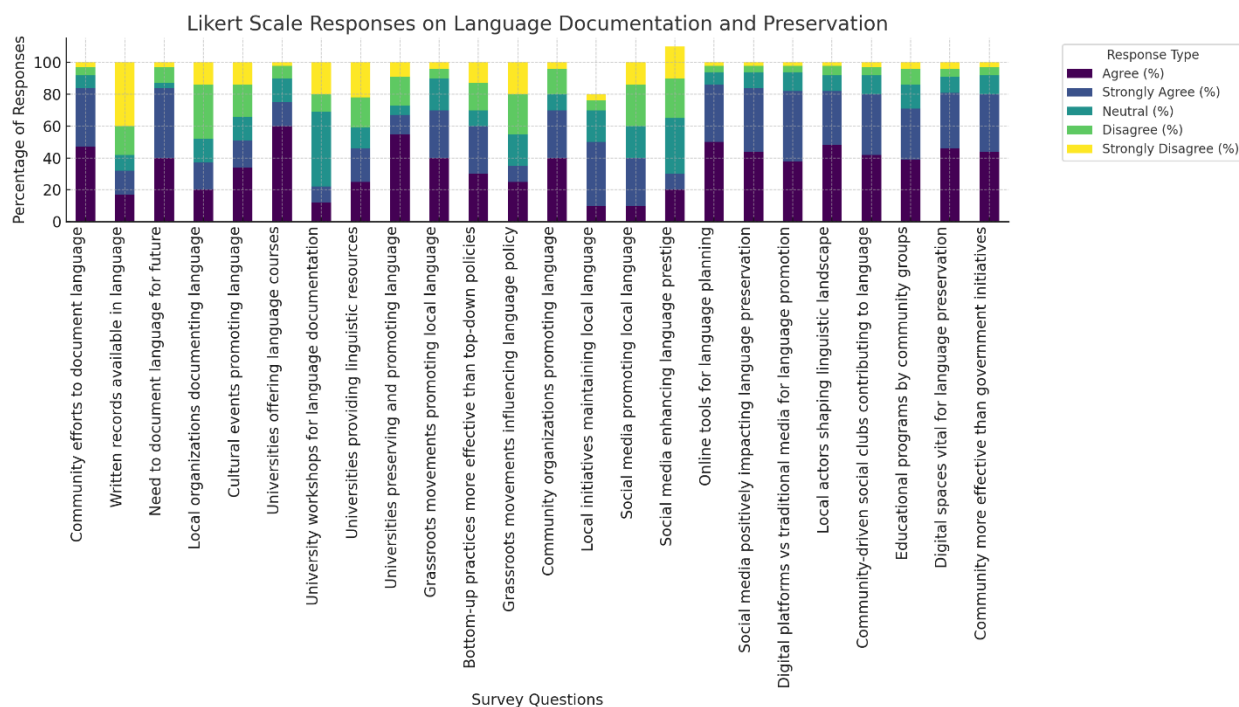
(82%) agreed to the role that community groups played in promoting the language, while 80% were supportive of activities like language-based social clubs. Likewise, 71% of respondents supported educational programs established by community groups in digital contexts.

77% believe community efforts have influence on the type of programs used to support linguistic diversity, and 10% were neutral or disagreed. Hence, this requires more formal mechanisms to help develop community-based policies.

Perceptions on Government vs. Local Efforts

The most critical finding was that in language preservation, local and governmental efforts were compared. While 80% of respondents favored community-based initiatives over central government strategies, only 50% strongly supported the maintenance of national status in initiatives of local language initiatives. This hints at a general trust placed in grassroots efforts but requires governmental input to ensure such policies are sustainable in the long run.

Question	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	Strongly Disagree (%)
Community efforts to document language	47	37	8	5	3
Written records available in language	17	15	10	18	40
Need to document language for future	40	44	3	10	3
Local organizations documenting language	20	17	15	34	14
Cultural events promoting language	34	17	15	20	14
Universities offering language courses	60	15	15	8	2
University workshops for language documentation	12	10	47	11	20
Universities providing linguistic resources	25	21	13	19	22
Universities preserving and promoting language	55	12	6	18	9
Grassroots movements promoting local language	40	30	20	6	4
Bottom-up practices more effective than top-down policies	30	30	10	17	13
Grassroots movements influencing language policy	25	10	20	25	20
Community organizations promoting language	40	30	10	16	4
Local initiatives maintaining local language	10	40	20	6	4
Social media promoting local language	10	30	20	26	14
Social media enhancing language prestige	20	10	35	25	20
Online tools for language planning	50	36	8	4	2
Social media positively impacting language preservation	44	40	10	4	2
Digital platforms vs traditional media for language promotion	38	44	12	4	2
Local actors shaping linguistic landscape	48	34	10	6	2
Community-driven social clubs contributing to language	42	38	12	5	3
Educational programs by community groups	39	32	15	10	4
Digital spaces vital for language preservation	46	35	10	5	4
Community more effective than government initiatives	44	36	12	5	3



Discussion

According to the study, keeping and promoting Pakistani local languages relies greatly on grassroots movements, universities and social media. Because formal institutions often fail to address all needs, people are using community-based efforts to keep languages alive. This study confirms that grassroots activities by local individuals in events, advocating for language and passing it between generations support the importance of languages like Siraiki, Punjabi and Marwari (Hornberger & Liddicoat, 2023). Still, many interviewees say that, in their opinion, documentation is not up to the task, suggesting that support from the organisation is necessary. (Grenoble & Whaley, 2021).

Even though universities help a lot by offering research and courses in different languages, it is mostly accessible to city residents, because rural areas are hardly involved. (Ricento, 2023). Others expressed that though workshops and other resources were university-run, respondents admitted to never hearing about it. This points to the fact that academic institutions aid in revitalization but are left to do a lot in their outreach to increase collaboration with other local groups around them for full effectiveness (Fishman, 2019).

The study also highlights the transformative power of social media in language preservation. Digital

platforms have opened new avenues for promoting local languages, especially among the younger generations (Danet & Herring, 2021). Social media campaigns, bilingual content, and online advocacy efforts have increased the visibility and prestige of local languages. However, the respondents were divided on whether social media effectively enhances the official status of these languages, with some indicating that dominant languages like English continue to overshadow them (Androutsopoulos, 2022).

One of the debates arising from these findings is the effectiveness of bottom-up approaches versus top-down policies. Many respondents supported grassroots efforts over government-led policies, while some believed that unless institutional support is forthcoming, community initiatives remain fragmented and lack sustainability (Pauwels, 2021). This will resonate with prior research, indicating that there is a need to incorporate grassroots movements with policymakers in integrating local languages into education, administration, and media (Spolsky, 2022).

Despite the challenges, the study reiterates that grassroots-driven language planning is necessary for linguistic diversity in Pakistan. Strengthening collaborations and collaboration between community groups, academic institutions, and

digital platforms can create sustainable language preservation strategies. Future research work should consequently focus on long-term impacts, policy integration, and how the role of digital tools in linguistic sustainability is morphing (UNESCO, 2021).

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