

A Comparative Study of the Perception of Higher-Level Students Regarding the Use of English and Urdu as Medium of Instruction

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Abstract

This study examined higher-level students' perceptions of English and Urdu as medium of instruction, focusing on gender and institutional differences. It aimed to identify gender-based variations, compare perceptions between students in public and private institutions, and assess the perceived effectiveness of both languages in academic settings. The research was conducted at higher educational institutes in Gujranwala city using a quantitative research method. Data was collected from 150 students through questionnaire. In questionnaire 34-items were used. 5-point Likert-scale was used to collect data. Data was analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics and t-tests to compare group responses. The findings indicated that female students preferred Urdu for its accessibility, whereas male students favored English for its global significance. Moreover, students from private institutions preferred English for its academic and professional advantages, while public institution students showed a more balanced preference. The study highlighted the influence of gender and institutional context on language preferences, emphasizing the need for inclusive language policies that address diverse needs of students.

Keywords: *Medium of instruction, Perception, English, Urdu, Gender differences, Institutional differences.*

Introduction

Language is a fundamental aspect of human communication and an essential component of education. It serves as a primary tool for individuals to express thoughts, emotions, and ideas while facilitating interaction within society Hussain, (2009). In the field of education, language plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences, influencing their ability to understand, analyze, and apply knowledge effectively Rashid, U. (2019). The medium of instruction (MOI) in schools and universities, therefore, is not merely a mode of communication but a significant factor affecting students'

cognitive and academic development. The choice of MOI can directly impact students' comprehension levels, learning outcomes, and overall academic performance. The concept of MOI refers to the language through which educational content is delivered. It acts as a "vehicle for both teaching and learning", shaping the cognitive and linguistic development of students Arshad, F. (2018). A well-structured language policy is imperative for ensuring that learners' socio-linguistic needs are met. An effective policy should promote bilingualism while creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment. It is essential to strike a balance between the use

of the mother tongue and global languages in education to optimize learning experiences Fareed et al., (2019). When the MOI aligns with students' linguistic proficiency, they are better able to grasp concepts, engage actively in classroom discussions, and apply knowledge in practical scenarios. UNESCO (2007) emphasizes that mother tongue-based instruction enhances cognitive development and facilitates effective learning. Research indicates that students who receive education in their native language acquire a deeper understanding of academic content, as they can relate concepts to their lived experiences more naturally. However, despite the pedagogical advantages of mother tongue instruction, English remains a widely debated MOI in numerous countries. This debate primarily stems from the global importance of English and its role in providing students with better academic and professional opportunities (Fareed et al., 2007). As English continues to be the dominant language in higher education, business, and international communication, many education systems prioritize its use to ensure that students remain competitive in a globalized world.

Pakistan, a country rich in linguistic diversity with over 74 languages spoken across its regions, has adopted Urdu as its national language and English as its official language (Pakistan Constitution, 1973) (Javed, 2017). Both Urdu and English serve as the primary MOI in educational

institutions, creating a bilingual system that caters to different segments of society. English, being the language of global academia and commerce, offers students access to international knowledge and career prospects. Conversely, Urdu strengthens cultural identity, enhances comprehension for native speakers, and facilitates better learning for students who may struggle with English as a second language (Rashid, 2019). Given these dynamics, the debate over the effectiveness of English versus Urdu as MOI remains ongoing, with stakeholders advocating for different approaches based on academic, cultural, and economic considerations. Understanding students' perceptions regarding MOI is crucial for shaping effective educational policies. When students are taught in a language they understand well, their academic performance improves, and their confidence in learning grows. Therefore, incorporating students' viewpoints in policymaking ensures that education systems remain inclusive, effective, and culturally responsive (Hussain et al., 2019). Recognizing the challenges faced by students due to language barriers can help educators and policymakers implement strategies that bridge linguistic gaps and create an optimal learning environment. By considering students' preferences and linguistic backgrounds, education policies can be designed to support both academic success and linguistic diversity, fostering an equitable and accessible learning experience for all.

Background of Study

The medium of instruction (MOI) is pivotal in higher education as it directly influences academic performance, student engagement and cultural identity (Hussain, 2009). The language through which education is delivered shapes not only comprehension and learning outcomes but also the inclusivity of the academic environment (Abbas, 2018).

In Pakistan, the education landscape is characterized by dual use of English and Urdu. English is widely associated with global communication, economic disparities and access to international academic resources (Kachru, 2017). Conversely, Urdu is deeply rooted in cultural heritage and is seen as a tool for fostering national identity and equality (Rashid, 2019). This classification creates a complex scenario where each language offers distinct advantages and challenges.

Despite the acknowledge importance of both languages, there remains a notable gap in comparative research investigating how higher-level students perceive English and Urdu as MOI. Therefore, the study aimed to address this gap by examining the factors such as linguistic proficiency, classroom participation, socio-cultural influence and the impact of globalization that shapes students' preferences in public and private institutions.

Research Questions of the Study

The following were the research questions of the study

1. What differences are evident in male and female students' perceptions regarding the efficacy of English and Urdu as medium of instruction?
2. What differences are evident in public and private students' perceptions regarding the efficacy of English and Urdu as medium of instruction?
3. To which degree do higher-level students find helpful English and Urdu as medium of instruction?

Significance of The Study

This study examines the perceptions of higher-level students regarding the use of English and Urdu as medium of instruction, measuring their preferences and its impact on academic performance. It provides insights for teachers to develop instructional strategies aligned with students' needs. Additionally, it helps institutions to formulate language policies that promote inclusivity and equity in education.

Review of the Literature

The debate over the medium of instruction in the Indian subcontinent has been ongoing since the colonial era. Under British rule, English replaced Persian and regional languages as the dominant language in administration and higher education, creating a linguistic divide in society (Rahman, 2002). After gaining independence, countries like Pakistan and India faced challenges in choosing between English and their national languages. In Pakistan, Urdu was declared the national language to uphold cultural identity, while English retained its status in higher education and official communication (Mansoor, 2005). The use of English and Urdu in education today is shaped by broader socio-economic, cultural, and educational factors that influence students' learning experiences and career prospects (Shamim, 2008).

English is widely considered a gateway to international academic and professional opportunities. Its role in global communication, research, and business has reinforced its importance in education systems worldwide (Coleman, 2010). The availability of extensive academic resources, including textbooks, journals, and digital platforms in English, strengthens its position in higher education (Kirkpatrick, 2011). Many students find that proficiency in English facilitates access to diverse career paths, particularly in multinational organizations and technology-driven industries (Crystal, 2012). Consequently, English-medium instruction is perceived as a means of preparing students for competitive global environments (Shamim & Rashid, 2019).

Beyond economic and academic benefits, English is often linked to social mobility and prestige. Fluency in English is associated with intellectual competence and higher socio-economic status in many societies (Phillipson, 1992). This perception influences parental decisions, leading many families to opt for English-medium education to secure better prospects for their children (Rahman, 2010). Additionally, exposure to English through media, technology, and popular culture reinforces its prominence, making it an aspirational language for students in diverse educational settings (Kachru, 2005).

However, the dominance of English as the medium of instruction presents challenges. Students from non-English-speaking backgrounds often struggle with comprehension and academic performance due to linguistic barriers (Shamim, 2008).

The complexity of academic discourse in English can hinder their ability to grasp critical concepts, affecting overall learning outcomes (Mansoor, 2005). Moreover, reliance on English in education may lead to cultural alienation, as students might feel disconnected from their native linguistic and cultural heritage (Rahman, 2010).

Urdu, as the national language, plays a crucial role in fostering identity and inclusivity in education. Instruction in Urdu allows students to grasp concepts more effectively, particularly in early education, as they engage with familiar linguistic structures (Rahman, 2002). It ensures accessibility for a broader population, reducing educational disparities caused by language barriers (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Furthermore, Urdu-medium education aligns with national policies aimed at preserving linguistic heritage and strengthening local intellectual traditions (Mansoor, 2005).

Despite its cultural significance, Urdu-medium instruction faces challenges, particularly in higher education and professional domains. The limited availability of advanced academic materials in Urdu restricts students' access to global knowledge (Rahman, 2010). Moreover, in an increasingly interconnected world, English proficiency remains essential for engaging in international research collaborations, accessing scientific advancements, and pursuing careers in global industries (Coleman, 2010). This situation creates a dilemma for students navigating between national identity and global competitiveness (Kirkpatrick, 2011).

The debate over the medium of instruction reflects broader socio-political, economic,

and ideological factors. Government and institutional language policies significantly influence linguistic choices in education (Phillipson, 2008). While English-medium instruction aligns with globalization and internationalization, Urdu-medium instruction reinforces cultural continuity and inclusivity (Rahman, 2002). The challenge is to balance both, ensuring students remain connected to their national identity while acquiring linguistic skills necessary for global engagement (Shamim, 2008).

Research Methodology

This study utilized a descriptive and quantitative research design to examine the perceptions of higher-level students. The target population consisted of students from public and private institutions in Gujranwala city, ensuring diversity in academic backgrounds, genders and socioeconomic status. A stratified-random sampling technique was used to collect data, selecting 150 students (75 from public and 75 from private institutions) to get a balanced representation. Data was collected through a self-constructed, close-ended questionnaire. Researchers visited institutions for direct data collection, ensuring accuracy.

The data were analyzed using SPSS, applying descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation, along with inferential statistics like t-tests to compare groups. Ethical considerations were strictly followed, ensuring participants' privacy. The validity of the research instrument was checked through experts' opinions and reliability was ensured through Cronbach's alpha.

Data analysis and interpretation

The study focuses on analyzing and interpreting the quantitative data collected

from students through a questionnaire based on a 5-point Likert scale. The analysis was conducted in several stages. Firstly, demographic variables such as gender and type of institution were examined using frequency and percentage distributions. Following this, the reliability of the scales was assessed. Descriptive statistics, mean and standard deviation were used to summarize the responses. Lastly, an independent t-test was performed to compare the perceptions of different groups i.e., gender and institution type to evaluate the effectiveness of English and Urdu as medium of instruction.

Demographics distribution

This section presents an analysis of respondents' distribution based on demographic characteristics. To achieve this, the frequency of demographic variables, such as gender and institution type, was determined.

Table

Distribution of respondents based on gender

It shows the frequency distribution of the sample based on gender. Out of 150

<i>Gender</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	75	50.00
Female	75	50.00
Total	150	100.00

respondents (students) 75 were female and 75 were male students of higher-level.

Table 2

Distribution of respondents based on the type of institution

Institute	F	%
Public	75	49.3
Private	75	50.0
Total	150	100.0

It shows the frequency distribution of the sample based on the type of institution. Out of 150 respondents 75 were from the public and 75 from private institutes of higher-level.

Reliability Analysis of the Questionnaire

After the completion of the data collection, data was entered into the Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS). To measure the reliability of all scales in relation to the sample of the study, internal consistency of scales was measured. Cronbach Alpha coefficient values were calculated with the help of SPSS. The results of this test are shown in Table 3.

Table 3:

Reliability measures of scales

Scales	No. of items	α
English as a medium of instruction	18	.77
Urdu as a medium of instruction	16	.87

The scale (English as a Medium of Instruction) has 18 items (statements) designed to measure perceptions related to using English as a medium of instruction. Cronbach's Alpha value above 0.77 suggests that the scale is reliably measuring the construction that is intended to measure.

The scale (Urdu as a Medium of Instruction) includes 16 items that assess perceptions of students related to using Urdu as a medium of instruction. And the Cronbach Alpha value of this scale above 0.87 shows high reliability and internal consistency.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics show both scales mean and standard deviation scores.

Table 4

English as medium of instruction

Statements	M	S.D
Using English as the medium of instruction positively affects my motivation.	3.59	.97
English is essential for academic success.	4.06	.89
The medium of instruction is based on international demand.	3.21	1.21
I feel more stressed when studying in English.	4.00	1.01
English helps me make friends from other countries.	3.37	1.12
I feel that English as a medium of instruction promotes better social integration.	3.36	.96
I felt disadvantaged due to the English medium of instruction.	3.93	.98
English helps me learn more about different cultures.	3.69	.94
I feel that using English as a medium of instruction affects my culture identity.	4.06	.89

The table shows the positive perceptions of students as all the items have high mean value above 3.0. The mean and standard deviation of all the items were as follows:

Item no. 1 showed that respondents generally feel comfortable using English as the medium of instruction ($M=3.68$, $SD=0.91$) but vary opinions.

Item no. 2 indicated that English is perceived to have a more complex grammatical structure than Urdu ($M=3.26$, $SD=0.99$), with some disagreement.

Item no. 3 represented that English helps in understanding complex concepts ($M=3.52$, $SD=0.93$), making it effective for academic learning.

Item no. 4 showed that the dominance of English affects students' interest in subjects both positively and negatively ($M=3.66$, $SD=0.91$).

Item no. 5 showed that many students find lectures easier to understand in English ($M=3.48$, $SD=0.93$), though experiences differ.

Item no. 6 indicated that students frequently use English in assignments ($M=3.82$, $SD=0.96$), reflecting its strong academic role.

Item no. 7 represented that confidence in speaking English in class is generally high ($M=3.57$, $SD=1.04$), though some students feel less confident.

Item no. 8 showed that some students participate more in class when taught in English ($M=3.36$, $SD=1.06$), but engagement levels are different.

Item no. 9 showed that English is generally favored as the medium of instruction across subjects ($M=3.53$, $SD=1.04$).

Item no. 10 represented that using English positively influences motivation ($M=3.59$, $SD=0.97$), encouraging academic engagement.

Item no. 11 indicated that English is considered essential for academic success ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.89$), emphasizing its importance in education.

Item no. 12 showed that the selection of English as the medium of instruction is influenced by international demand ($M=3.21$, $SD=1.21$).

Item no. 13 represented that studying in English increases stress levels for many students ($M=4.00$, $SD=1.01$), indicating challenges in adapting.

Item no. 14 indicated that English helps in making friends from different countries ($M=3.37$, $SD=1.12$), fostering cross-cultural connections.

Item no. 15 showed that using English as a medium of instruction promotes better social integration ($M=3.36$, $SD=0.96$).

Item no. 16 showed that some students feel disadvantaged due to English as the medium of instruction ($M=3.93$, $SD=0.98$).

Item no. 17 represented those English aids in learning about different cultures ($M=3.69$, $SD=0.94$), broadening students' perspectives.

Item no. 18 indicated that many students believe English as the medium of instruction affects their cultural identity ($M=4.06$, $SD=0.89$), raising concerns about language and cultural shifts.

Table 5

Urdu as a medium of instruction

Statements	M	SD
I am comfortable with Urdu as a medium	3.72	1.03

of instruction.			medium of instruction (M=3.72, SD=1.03), though their comfort levels are different.
Urdu has more grammar than English to describe knowledge.	3.75	.91	Item no. 20 indicated that Urdu is perceived to have a more complex grammatical structure than English (M=3.75, SD=0.91), with moderate agreement.
I prefer Urdu language instruction for all subjects.	3.08	1.23	Item no. 21 represented that some students prefer Urdu for instruction across subjects (M=3.08, SD=1.23), but opinions are highly varied.
I understand lectures better in Urdu.	4.00	.91	Item no. 22 indicated that lectures in Urdu are easier to understand for most respondents (M=4.00, SD=0.91), with consistent agreement.
I feel confident while speaking Urdu in class.	4.05	.93	Item no. 23 showed that confidence in speaking Urdu in class is high (M=4.05, SD=0.93), showing strong familiarity.
I participate more in class when taught in Urdu.	3.69	1.09	Item no. 24 represented that participation in class increases when instruction is in Urdu (M=3.69, SD=1.09).
I feel confident writing assignments in Urdu.	3.38	1.21	Item no. 25 represented that confidence in writing assignments in Urdu is moderate (M=3.38, SD=1.21), with considerable difference.
Urdu helps me to do better in my studies.	3.60	1.06	Item no. 26 indicated that Urdu is seen as beneficial for academic performance (M=3.60, SD=1.06), with moderate agreement.
I feel comfortable expressing my ideas in Urdu during class	4.10	.86	Item no. 27 showed that respondents feel comfortable expressing ideas in Urdu during discussions (M=4.10, SD=0.86), showing strong ease in communication.
Urdu is essential for understanding literature and history.	4.07	.88	Item no. 28 represented that Urdu is essential for understanding literature and history (M=4.07, SD=0.88).
I feel a stronger connection to my cultural identity when the medium of instruction is Urdu.	3.94	.93	Item no. 29 indicated that using Urdu strengthens cultural identity (M=3.94, SD=0.93), showing moderate agreement.
Using Urdu as the medium of instruction positively affects my motivation.	3.94	.92	Item no. 30 showed that Urdu positively affects motivation (M=3.94, SD=0.92).
I feel Urdu medium of instruction promotes better social integration among students.	3.87	.81	
Urdu helps me make friends locally.	3.99	1.01	
The medium of instruction is based on cultural context.	3.88	.87	
I find it easier to interact with my peers when the medium of instruction is Urdu.	3.92	.82	
Item no. 19 showed that respondents generally feel comfortable using Urdu as the			

Item no. 31 indicates that respondents believe Urdu promotes better social integration ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.81$).

Item no. 32 represents that using Urdu helps in making local friends ($M=3.99$, $SD=1.01$), with moderate variation in experiences.

Item no. 33 showed that the medium of instruction is influenced by cultural context ($M=3.88$, $SD=0.87$), with general agreement.

Item no. 34 indicated that interacting with peers is easier when Urdu is used as the medium of instruction ($M=3.92$, $SD=0.82$).

Inferential statistics

Independent Sample T-test

Independent t-test was conducted to compare the perceptions of male vs female and public vs private students of higher-level regarding the use of English and Urdu as a Medium of Instruction.

Table 6: Independent t-test by gender regarding Urdu as a Medium of Instruction

Variables	Gender	N	M	SD	T	Df	P
Urdu as a Medium of Instruction	Male	75	3.76	0.81	-0.71	148	.473
	Female	75	3.86	0.85			

It indicated the results of independent sample t-test of student's perceptions, that there is no significant difference ($P(.73)>.05$) in the perceptions of female students ($M=3.76$, $SD=.07$) and male students with ($M=3.86$, $SD=.05$), regarding

Urdu as a Medium of Instruction at higher education level.

Table 7: Independent t-test based on

Variable	Gender	N	M	SD	T	Df	P
English as a Medium of Instruction	Male	75	3.77	.50	-.26	148	.79
	Female	75	3.52	.38			

gender regarding English as a Medium of Instruction

The results showed that there is statistically difference ($p>0.5$) in the perception of female students with ($M=3.72$, $SD=.50$) and male students with ($M=3.55$, $SD=.38$), along with other values regarding the use of English as a Medium of Instruction at higher level.

Table8: Independent sample t-test by Institution type (public, private)

Variable	Institution	N	M	SD	T	Df	p
English as a Medium of Instruction	Public	75	3.62	.44	-.56	148	.59
	Private	75	3.66	.46			
Urdu as a Medium of Instruction	Public	75	3.86	.56	1.19	148	.23
	Private	75	3.75	.58			

It showed the results of independent samples t-test that compared Public and Private institutes regarding the use of English and Urdu as a Medium of Instruction. For English, table indicated that there is a minimal difference that was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), with mean score of Public ($M=3.62$, $SD=0.44$) and Private ($M=3.66$, $SD=0.46$) institutions.

Similarly, for Urdu, the mean scores of Publics ($M=3.86$, $SD=0.56$) and Private ($M=3.75$, $SD=0.58$) institutions, with a p-value of 0.23, revealed no significant difference. Overall, the results suggest no strong evidence of a meaningful difference between Public and Private institutes in their use of English or Urdu as a Medium of Instruction.

Discussion

The findings of the topic “A Comparative study of the Perceptions of Higher-level students regarding the use of English and Urdu as medium of instruction” indicates that higher-level students recognize the value of both English and Urdu as mediums of instruction, though their experiences with each language differ. Students generally feel comfortable with English, viewing it as beneficial for grasping complex concepts, achieving academic success, and facilitating international communication (Curry, 2018 & Graddol, 2010). However, English is also linked to higher stress levels and concerns about its impact on cultural identity. Despite these challenges, students acknowledge their role in broadening academic and professional opportunities. On the other hand, Urdu is perceived as more effective for understanding lectures, strengthening cultural identity, and fostering social

integration among students (Hussain & Khan, 2019). Gender-based differences in perceptions were minimal, though males showed a slightly stronger preference toward English and females gave preference towards Urdu. Institutional differences (public vs. private) did not significantly affect students' views on either language. Overall, students find both English and Urdu valuable in their educational journey, with each language offering distinct benefits that contribute to different aspects of learning and engagement.

Conclusion

From the study, researchers have found out the valuable insights into the perceptions of higher-level students regarding the use of English and Urdu as mediums of instruction. The findings suggested that English is perceived as essential for academic success and global engagement, it also presented challenges that can affect students' stress levels and participation in class. On the other hand, Urdu is viewed as more culturally relevant and comfortable, particularly in certain subjects and for fostering classroom interaction.

The study highlighted the need for a more refined approach to language instruction in higher education, one that recognizes the strengths and challenges of both English and Urdu as mediums of instruction. By addressing these challenges and supporting students in their language learning journey, educators and policymakers can help create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

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