

IMPLEMENTING HORNBERGER'S BILITERACY CONTINUA MODEL IN PAKISTANI HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

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Abstract:

This study explores the benefits of integrating Urdu, the first language (L1), into English Language Teaching (ELT), moving away from traditional monolingual approaches. Using Hornberger's (1989) Biliteracy Continua Model as a theoretical framework, we conducted a case study with a bilingual university instructor fluent in both Urdu and English. The instructor utilized bilingual strategies that allowed students to draw from their complete linguistic repertoire during literacy tasks. Data were collected through interviews with the instructor and 15 students and analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis. The findings demonstrate that the use of a bilingual approach enhanced students' comprehension and engagement, while also addressing the challenges posed by Pakistan's English-only educational policies. This study advocates for the inclusion of Urdu in ELT to create more inclusive and effective learning environments. Our research contributes to the ongoing discussion on language education reform by emphasizing the pedagogical value of bilingualism in multilingual contexts.

Keywords: Biliteracy, Bilingual strategies, Hornberger's Continua Model, Language-in-education policy, Urdu in ELT, Multilingualism.

Introduction

The concept of biliteracy has garnered significant attention in recent years, especially in the context of multilingual and culturally diverse societies. Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy (1989, 2013, 2022) offers an ecological framework to understand the dynamic interplay between languages in educational settings, making it a powerful tool for investigating bilingual pedagogies. Despite the growing global recognition of the value of biliteracy, English language teaching (ELT) in Pakistan remains largely dominated by monolingual ideologies that prioritize English while sidelining local languages such as Urdu. This trend stems from colonial legacies and the perception of English as a gateway to socioeconomic mobility. However, this monolingual emphasis often alienates learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, inhibiting their ability to fully engage with and comprehend academic content.

The theoretical underpinning of this study is Hornberger's Continua of Biliteracy Model (1989, 2003), a robust framework that emphasizes the interconnectedness of various dimensions of biliteracy, including contexts, content, media, and development. Hornberger advocates for an inclusive and dynamic view of biliteracy, proposing that literacy practices occur across continua such as oral-to-literate, monolingual-to-bilingual, and minority-to-majority languages. Her model has been pivotal in recognizing and validating the multilingual and multicultural realities of learners in diverse sociolinguistic contexts.

Recent critiques and expansions of the model have underscored its potential to address global issues of linguistic diversity and equity. For instance, Galante and Dela Cruz (2024) argue for the integration of critical plurilingual pedagogies that move beyond the confines of

bilingualism by embracing the linguistic repertoires of learners in a more holistic manner. Their work demonstrates how plurilingual practices, such as translanguaging and cross-linguistic analysis, empower learners and disrupt hegemonic monolingual ideologies in education. These practices align with Hornberger's emphasis on utilizing the full range of linguistic and semiotic resources available to learners.

Hornberger's model also resonates with contemporary discussions on decolonization in language education. As Galante and Dela Cruz highlight, plurilingual pedagogies are inherently anti-oppressive, challenging colonial language hierarchies and promoting the equitable inclusion of marginalized languages. This perspective complements Hornberger's focus on minority-to-majority continua, advocating for the recognition and revitalization of Indigenous and immigrant languages in educational settings.

Despite its theoretical strength, the practical implementation of biliteracy and plurilingual frameworks faces challenges, particularly in contexts dominated by monolingual policies. Teacher candidates, as revealed by Galante and Dela Cruz, often grapple with the tensions between their progressive, plurilingual ideologies and the restrictive realities of classroom practice. This underscores the need for teacher training programs to provide robust, hands-on opportunities for educators to explore and enact biliteracy in real-world settings.

In the Pakistani context, where English dominates academic and professional domains, Hornberger's model offers a critical lens to reimagine language education. By leveraging Urdu alongside English, educators can foster biliteracy that aligns with learners' linguistic realities and cultural identities, bridging the gap between policy and practice.

Research from various multilingual contexts has demonstrated that leveraging learners' first language (L1) can significantly enhance second language (L2) acquisition and cognitive development (Lin & Wu, 2015; Omidire, 2019; Tian & Macaro, 2012). By integrating L1 in language instruction, educators can scaffold comprehension, foster metalinguistic awareness, and create inclusive classrooms that respect linguistic diversity. Yet, in Pakistan, these insights remain underexplored, and language-in-education policies continue to emphasize English-only approaches, creating barriers to effective learning and teaching (Manan et al., 2017; Mahboob, 2020).

This study investigates how the biliteracy model can be applied in an undergraduate English classroom in Pakistan, where students often navigate complex linguistic landscapes. It aims to challenge the prevailing monolingual ideologies and explore the pedagogical benefits of integrating Urdu alongside English. Using Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy, the research addresses two central questions:

- (1) How does an instructor negotiate biliteracy strategies in an English language classroom within a predominantly monolingual policy framework?
- (2) How do students perceive the use of Urdu as a medium of instruction alongside English?

By situating this study within the rich sociolinguistic diversity of Pakistan, we aim to contribute to global discussions on bilingual education and its implications for language policy reform. The findings hold relevance for multilingual educational contexts worldwide, offering insights into the interplay of power, policy, and practice in shaping effective pedagogies for biliteracy development.

Literature Review

Hornberger's Continua of Biliteracy Model (1989, 2003) provides a comprehensive framework for understanding biliteracy as a multidimensional and dynamic process. The model encompasses continua that span oral-literate practices, minority-majority languages, and monolingual-bilingual ideologies, highlighting how literacy develops within and across these dimensions. This study draws on the Continua Model to explore its relevance and

applicability in the context of higher education in Pakistan, a multilingual country with complex linguistic hierarchies and sociopolitical constraints.

Critical Approaches to Biliteracy and Plurilingualism

Hornberger's emphasis on biliteracy has been further enriched by contemporary discussions on plurilingualism. Galante and Dela Cruz (2024) highlight the transformative potential of plurilingual pedagogies, which emphasize leveraging learners' full linguistic repertoires. Their research suggests that plurilingual practices, such as translanguaging, empower learners by validating their linguistic identities and fostering more inclusive classrooms. Translanguaging, as defined by García and Kleyn (2016), involves the strategic and dynamic use of multiple languages to enhance comprehension and meaning-making. This approach aligns with Hornberger's view that biliteracy thrives when educational practices draw from a wide spectrum of linguistic resources, fostering a more holistic view of literacy development. Similarly, Rafi and Kanak Fox (2020) emphasize the pedagogical potential of translanguaging in addressing linguistic challenges in Pakistani higher education. They note that English-dominant policies often marginalize regional languages, creating barriers for students who are more proficient in their L1. Their findings reveal that integrating translanguaging practices can bridge linguistic gaps, allowing students to make meaningful connections between their L1 and English, thereby enhancing cognitive and linguistic outcomes.

The Pakistani Context

In Pakistan, the dominance of English in education reflects colonial legacies and its symbolic capital as a global lingua franca (Bilal, 2019). However, this monolingual emphasis often alienates learners from linguistically diverse backgrounds, particularly those whose mother tongues lack institutional recognition or resources. Yasmin and Sohail (2018) highlight the significant cultural and linguistic gaps between faculty and students, further exacerbating the challenges of English-medium instruction in higher education.

Rafi and Kanak Fox (2020) observe that university students often struggle with academic English due to insufficient exposure and support. Their work advocates for culturally responsive pedagogies that incorporate students' L1 as a scaffold for learning English, thereby aligning with Hornberger's continuum of minority-to-majority languages.

Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Biliteracy Frameworks

Despite its theoretical strengths, implementing biliteracy and plurilingual frameworks poses significant challenges, particularly in contexts dominated by rigid language hierarchies. As Galante and Dela Cruz (2024) reveal, teacher candidates often face tensions between their plurilingual ideologies and the monolingual realities of classroom practice. This calls for robust teacher training programs that equip educators with the skills to design and implement biliteracy strategies effectively. Similarly, Rafi and Kanak Fox (2020) stress the need for faculty to understand the linguistic diversity of their students and adopt translanguaging practices that facilitate more inclusive and equitable learning environments.

These perspectives underscore the importance of bridging theoretical frameworks with practical applications. By integrating translanguaging and biliteracy approaches, educators can address the linguistic and cultural diversity of learners, creating spaces that not only promote academic success but also affirm the identities of multilingual students.

Theoretical Framework: The Continua Model of Biliteracy

This study is grounded in **Hornberger's Continua of Biliteracy Model** (1989, 2003, 2022), an ecological framework that provides a comprehensive lens for examining language practices, pedagogy, and policy in multilingual contexts. The model posits that biliteracy—

the ability to read, write, and communicate effectively in two or more languages—develops along various continua, each representing dynamic and fluid interactions between languages, learners, and their sociocultural environments. These continua allow for a nuanced understanding of the complex ways in which biliteracy unfolds, particularly in educational settings where multiple languages interact.

Hornberger's model consists of FOUR primary intersecting continua: **contexts, media, development and content**, which together form a multidimensional space for analyzing biliteracy practices. The **contextual continuum** addresses the sociocultural, historical, and political conditions under which biliteracy develops. It ranges from more formal, institutional settings (e.g., classrooms) to informal, everyday environments (e.g., homes and communities). In the context of this study, the use of Urdu alongside English in Pakistani classrooms reflects a bilingual approach that challenges the dominant English-only policies, recognizing students' sociolinguistic realities as integral to their academic development.

The **media continuum** concerns the various forms through which literacy is expressed, from oral to written, and from L1 to L2 (Hornberger, 2003). In this study, the media dimension is particularly relevant as it explores how students navigate between English and Urdu, leveraging both languages to enhance comprehension and participation. The biliteracy approach encourages students to use their full linguistic repertoire, drawing from both oral and written forms of communication in their L1 (Urdu) and L2 (English), which enhances their engagement with academic content.

The **content continuum** refers to the types of knowledge and information that are conveyed through biliteracy practices, spanning from academic to cultural knowledge. Hornberger (2022) emphasizes that biliteracy does not merely involve the mechanical use of two languages but also incorporates the meanings, identities, and cultural experiences that students bring into the classroom. This study examines how the instructor integrates culturally relevant examples in both Urdu and English, making content more accessible and meaningful to students who may struggle with traditional English-only instruction.

Central to Hornberger's model is the understanding that biliteracy involves power relations between languages, particularly in contexts where one language holds higher status or institutional value than others. In Pakistan, English is often regarded as the language of power and prestige, while Urdu, despite being the national language, is seen as less prestigious in academic settings (Mahboob, 2017; Manan & David, 2021). Hornberger's model allows for the examination of these power dynamics and provides a framework for promoting linguistic equity by advocating for the inclusion of L1 in language learning. In doing so, the model challenges monolingual ideologies that devalue students' native languages and cultural identities.

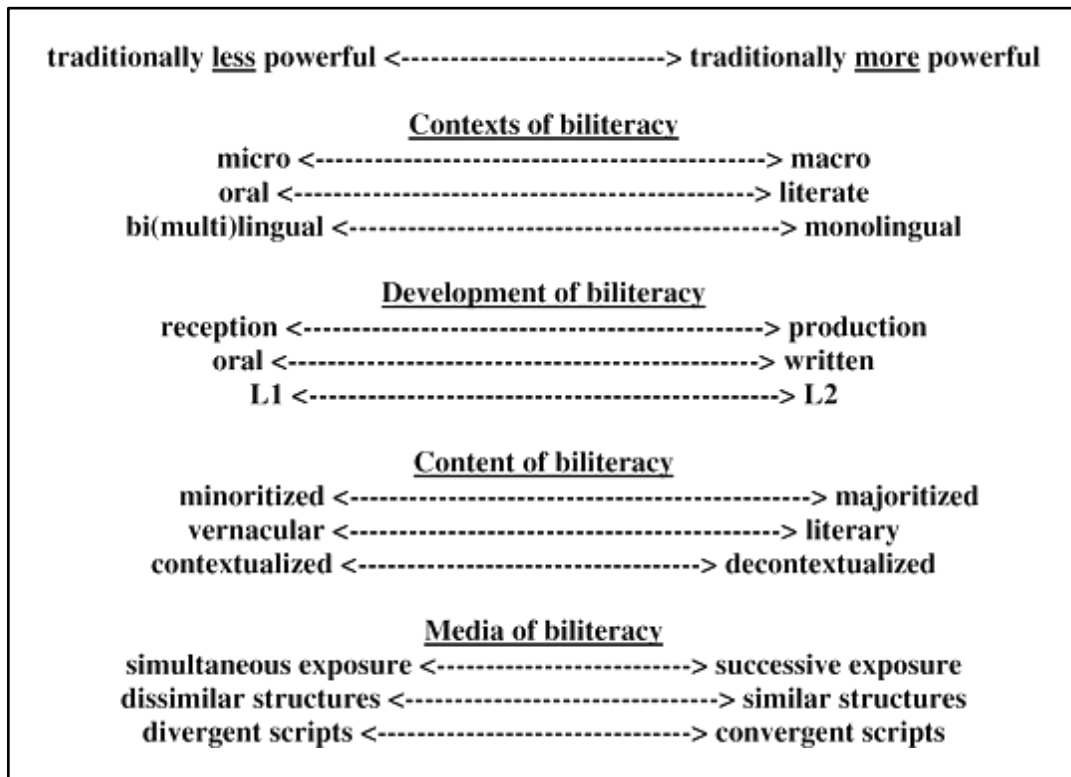
Furthermore, the model's **intersecting continua** emphasize that biliteracy development is not a linear process but a multidirectional and evolving one. For example, students may develop proficiency in writing in one language before achieving similar proficiency in reading or speaking in another (Bauer & Gort, 2012). This flexibility in development is essential for understanding how students in the study move between English and Urdu, using each language as a resource depending on the context and task at hand.

By applying Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy to the context of Pakistani higher education, this study highlights the pedagogical potential of a bilingual approach in an environment traditionally dominated by English-only instruction. The model serves as a critical tool for analyzing the effectiveness of integrating Urdu into English Language

Teaching (ELT), providing insights into how biliteracy strategies can foster more inclusive and effective learning environments. This theoretical framework underscores the importance of moving beyond monolingual norms and embracing multilingual practices that align more closely with students' linguistic realities

Figure 1

Power relations in the continua model of biliteracy



Source: Hornberger, N. H., & Kvietok Dueñas, F. (2019).

Methodology

This study adopts a **qualitative case study approach** to explore the implementation of biliteracy strategies in an English language classroom at a public university in Islamabad, Pakistan. The qualitative methodology is well-suited to this investigation as it allows for an in-depth exploration of participants' lived experiences, beliefs, and perceptions regarding the use of bilingual strategies. The case study design, defined by its focus on a bounded system (Creswell, 2013), enables a detailed examination of the interaction between the instructor's biliteracy approach and students' language learning experiences within a specific classroom setting.

Participants

The study involved a purposive sample of 16 participants, comprising one experienced bilingual instructor and 15 undergraduate students enrolled in a Business Communication course. The students were from the Bachelor of Science (BS) in Accounting and Finance program, and all were proficient in both Urdu and English to varying degrees. The instructor, with over 20 years of teaching experience, is fluent in Urdu, English, and Punjabi. The participants were selected to provide insight into the dynamics of biliteracy in an ELT classroom, particularly in a context where English is the dominant medium of instruction, but Urdu is frequently used to facilitate comprehension.

Data Collection

Data were collected through **semi-structured interviews** conducted at the end of the semester. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for their flexibility, allowing participants to express their views freely while ensuring that key topics relevant to the study were covered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The interview guide included questions about the instructor's language use, the effectiveness of bilingual strategies, students' perceptions of the bilingual approach, and its impact on their language learning outcomes.

- **Instructor Interview:** The first author conducted an in-depth interview with the course instructor to gain insights into the rationale behind the use of bilingual strategies, the challenges encountered, and the perceived benefits of incorporating Urdu into the ELT classroom.
- **Student Interviews:** Fifteen students were interviewed individually to capture their experiences with the bilingual approach and how they perceived the integration of Urdu alongside English in their learning process. Interviews were conducted in English, with the option for students to switch to Urdu when necessary for clarity or comfort. The interviews ranged from 20 to 40 minutes in length and were audio-recorded with the participants' consent.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to stringent ethical guidelines to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all participants. They were assured of anonymity, and pseudonyms were used to protect their identities. All audio recordings and transcripts were securely stored, and only the research team had access to this data. Ethical approval was granted by the university's research ethics board, and all procedures followed the ethical standards outlined by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018).

Data Analysis Procedure

The interview data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) that allows for the systematic identification of patterns and themes within qualitative data.

Validity and Reliability

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, several strategies were employed. Triangulation was achieved by comparing data from the instructor and student interviews, which provided multiple perspectives on the bilingual approach. Additionally, member checking was used to confirm the accuracy of interview transcripts and interpretations. The use of inter-coder reliability checks, where two researchers independently coded a sample of the transcripts and compared their findings, further enhanced the rigor of the thematic analysis.

Limitations

While this case study provides valuable insights into the implementation of biliteracy strategies in a specific classroom setting, it is limited by its small sample size and focus on one university. Future research could expand the scope of the study by including a larger and more diverse group of participants from various educational institutions across different regions. Additionally, incorporating quantitative measures of student performance could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of bilingual strategies on academic outcomes.

Demographics of the Teacher

The teacher in this study was an Assistant Professor at a public university in Islamabad, Pakistan, with over 20 years of teaching experience. The instructor held an MPhil in Linguistics and was fluent in Urdu, English, and Punjabi, making her proficient in both the students' first language (L1) and the target language (English). The teacher's linguistic background and extensive experience in English Language Teaching (ELT) allowed her to

skillfully integrate bilingual strategies into her classroom practice. The instructor's proficiency in multiple languages enabled her to effectively navigate the multilingual needs of her students, promoting a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Demographics of the Students

The student participants consisted of 15 undergraduate students enrolled in a Business Communication course within a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Accounting and Finance program at the same university. The students came from diverse linguistic and educational backgrounds, representing the multilingual and multicultural context of Pakistan. The majority of the students were bilingual or multilingual, with Urdu being the common language of communication among all participants.

- **Gender:** The group was mixed-gender, with both male and female students participating in the study.
- **Mother Tongue:** The students' mother tongues varied, including Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Urdu. All students, regardless of their L1, were able to communicate in Urdu, which often served as the lingua franca within the classroom.
- **Languages in Linguistic Repertoire:** In addition to Urdu and their mother tongues, the students had varying degrees of proficiency in English, with some also knowing regional languages like Pahari and Gujrati, and in a few cases, foreign languages such as Chinese and Italian.
- **Educational Background:** The students had diverse educational experiences, with some having completed their prior education in Urdu-medium schools, while others had attended English-medium institutions. This diversity in educational backgrounds contributed to differing levels of English proficiency among the students, which impacted their ability to engage with English-only instruction. The majority of the students had completed their FSc (Intermediate) in Pakistan, while a few had attended O-Levels and A-Levels in English-medium schools.

This mix of linguistic and educational backgrounds made the classroom a rich environment for examining the role of bilingual strategies in English language teaching. The instructor's use of biliteracy strategies was particularly beneficial for students with limited English proficiency, as it allowed them to draw on their existing knowledge of Urdu to facilitate comprehension and engagement in academic tasks.

Data Analysis

The data from the semi-structured interviews were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, a qualitative method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), which allows for the systematic identification and interpretation of patterns and themes within the data. The aim of this analysis was to explore how the instructor and students navigated biliteracy strategies, and how these strategies influenced students' learning experiences in an English language classroom. The thematic analysis process followed a structured, six-phase approach:

1. Data Familiarization

The first phase involved thoroughly familiarizing the research team with the data. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim, after which the transcripts were read and re-read to gain an in-depth understanding of the content. During this process, initial observations and reflective notes were recorded to capture early impressions of recurring ideas and key issues related to biliteracy practices.

2. Generating Initial Codes

In the second phase, initial codes were systematically applied to the data. This involved organizing the transcripts into meaningful segments that reflected specific ideas or concepts. The coding was conducted both inductively, allowing new themes to emerge from the data,

and deductively, guided by Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy. This dual approach ensured that the coding captured both participants' lived experiences and the theoretical dimensions of the study. Key codes included categories such as "language-switching," "comprehension challenges," "biliteracy benefits," and "policy constraints."

3. Searching for Themes

After coding was completed, the next step involved identifying patterns among the codes to develop broader themes. Codes were grouped based on conceptual similarities and connections, leading to the emergence of key themes that reflected participants' perceptions of the biliteracy approach. At this stage, the focus was on recognizing how the coded data aligned with Hornberger's continua, such as the contextual, media, and developmental dimensions of biliteracy. Initial themes that emerged included "enhanced comprehension through bilingualism," "role of policy in shaping language use," and "balancing English and Urdu in the classroom."

4. Reviewing Themes

The fourth phase involved refining and reviewing the preliminary themes to ensure they accurately represented the dataset. This process required revisiting both the individual data extracts and the full dataset to ensure consistency and coherence across themes. The aim was to ensure that the themes were distinct, well-supported by the data, and directly addressed the research questions. Some themes were merged due to conceptual overlap, while others were redefined for clarity. For example, themes related to the challenges of English-only instruction and students' reliance on Urdu for comprehension were consolidated into a broader theme of "navigating monolingual norms in a bilingual context."

5. Defining and Naming Themes

In this phase, the finalized themes were clearly defined and labeled to capture the essence of each theme. This process involved writing detailed theme descriptions and ensuring that each theme addressed a specific aspect of the research focus. For instance, one of the key themes, "Urdu as a cognitive bridge," encapsulated the way in which students used their L1 to enhance understanding of complex academic content delivered in English. Another theme, "policy constraints on biliteracy practices," highlighted how institutional language policies limited the instructor's ability to fully implement biliteracy strategies.

6. Producing the Report

The final phase of the analysis involved compiling the findings into a coherent narrative. The themes were organized into sections corresponding to the research questions, ensuring that the analysis was both comprehensive and aligned with the study's theoretical framework. Each theme was supported with illustrative quotes from the participants, showing how their experiences related to Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy. The final themes included:

- **Bilingual Strategies as a Pedagogical Tool:** Emphasizing how the instructor balanced English and Urdu to facilitate student comprehension.
- **Challenges of Monolingual Policies:** Highlighting the limitations imposed by English-only instruction and the value of integrating L1 in ELT.
- **Student Perceptions of Biliteracy:** Detailing how students responded to the use of Urdu and English in the classroom and its impact on their language development.

By connecting the emergent themes to the theoretical framework, the analysis demonstrated how the biliteracy strategies employed in the classroom supported students' language learning, offering valuable insights for language education reform in multilingual contexts.

Findings

The findings of this study reveal several key insights into the effectiveness and challenges of implementing biliteracy strategies in a higher education English language classroom in

Pakistan. The analysis highlights how the integration of Urdu alongside English in instruction can facilitate comprehension, engage students more actively, and navigate institutional policies that favor monolingual English instruction. The findings are presented according to the themes identified during the thematic analysis, all of which are connected to Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy.

1. Bilingual Strategies as a Pedagogical Tool

One of the central findings of this study is that the instructor's use of bilingual strategies, particularly the integration of Urdu into English language instruction, significantly enhanced students' comprehension and engagement. Both the instructor and students reported that using Urdu as a medium of instruction, alongside English, bridged the gap between students' existing linguistic resources and the academic content presented in English. Students noted that explanations given in Urdu helped them grasp complex concepts, particularly in areas where their English proficiency was limited.

Table 1: Instructor's Reflections on Biliteracy Practices

Aspect	Summary of Reflections	Alignment with Biliteracy Continua
Language Policy	The university mandates 80% instruction in English; Urdu is used for the remaining 20%.	Context of Biliteracy: Monolingual vs. Bilingual
Challenges of Urdu Integration	Urdu helps comprehension but may reduce English practice opportunities.	Media of Biliteracy: Simultaneous vs. Successive
Student Engagement	Bilingual strategies lead to improved understanding and classroom participation.	Development of Biliteracy: Oral-to-Written, L1-to-L2
Teaching Strategy	Concepts are introduced in English, with Urdu used to clarify complex ideas and foster inclusivity.	Content of Biliteracy: Contextualized vs. Decontextualized

This finding aligns with Hornberger's media continuum, which recognizes that students develop literacy skills through both oral and written communication across languages. In this context, Urdu functioned as a cognitive bridge, allowing students to engage with the content more meaningfully. The instructor reported that switching between English and Urdu enabled her to adapt her teaching to students' varying levels of English proficiency, ensuring that all students could participate actively in classroom discussions. As one student explained, "When the teacher explains in Urdu, the concepts become clearer, and then it's easier to understand and use the English terminology later."

2. Challenges of Monolingual Policies

While the use of bilingual strategies proved beneficial, the study also uncovered significant challenges posed by the university's monolingual language policies, which prioritize English as the primary medium of instruction. The instructor noted that institutional policy required her to conduct 80% of classroom instruction in English, limiting the extent to which she could fully implement a bilingual approach. This constraint often left students struggling, particularly those from rural or Urdu-medium educational backgrounds.

This challenge relates to Hornberger's contextual continuum, which highlights how language policy shapes the learning environment. The instructor expressed frustration with the rigid

policy, emphasizing that students' linguistic diversity required a more flexible, bilingual approach. Some students shared similar concerns, noting that the English-only emphasis hindered their ability to engage deeply with the material. One student remarked, "It's difficult to understand everything in English, especially when our previous education was mostly in Urdu."

The findings suggest that while the biliteracy approach offers significant benefits, institutional policies need to evolve to accommodate the linguistic realities of the student body, enabling more inclusive and effective teaching practices.

3. Student Perceptions of Biliteracy

Students' perceptions of the bilingual approach were overwhelmingly positive. Many students reported that the use of Urdu in conjunction with English allowed them to engage more actively in the learning process. For students who had previously struggled with English-medium instruction, the integration of Urdu helped reduce anxiety and increase confidence in their ability to participate in classroom discussions. As one student stated, "When the teacher uses both Urdu and English, I feel more comfortable, and I'm able to express my ideas better."

This finding supports Hornberger's developmental continuum, which emphasizes that biliteracy is an evolving process, with students developing language proficiency at different rates across different modes of communication (See Table 2). The use of Urdu in the classroom helped students build their English language skills in a more supportive and less intimidating environment. Several students noted that this approach not only improved their comprehension but also encouraged them to practice their English more confidently, knowing they could rely on their L1 when necessary.

Table 2: Student Perceptions of Bilingual/Biliteracy Approach

Theme	Key Insights	Example Quotes
Comprehension	Students reported improved understanding of complex concepts when Urdu was integrated.	"When the teacher uses both languages...we understand most of the concepts" (S7).
Language Thought	Students think in Urdu before translating their ideas into English.	"I was thinking in Urdu and then I wrote it in English" (S6).
Translational Thinking	Many students use Urdu-to-English translation to process ideas during writing.	"I generally translate my Urdu thoughts into English when writing" (S13).
Inclusivity	The bilingual approach created a more inclusive and comfortable learning environment.	"It makes us comfortable...not everyone is on the same level" (S7).
Divergent Opinions	Some students preferred a monolingual approach for faster English proficiency development.	"Simple English that we can understand is enough" (S13).

4. Balancing English and Urdu in the Classroom

Another key finding of the study was the instructor's ability to balance English and Urdu in the classroom to maximize learning outcomes. The instructor strategically used Urdu to explain difficult concepts, clarify instructions, and encourage participation, while maintaining

English as the primary language of academic discourse. This balance was essential in maintaining students' focus on improving their English proficiency while ensuring that they could fully engage with the content.

This aligns with the media and content continua of Hornberger's model, where students navigate between languages depending on the complexity of the task or concept. The students reported that this balanced approach helped them retain the benefits of an English-medium education while still drawing on their linguistic strengths in Urdu. One student explained, "The use of Urdu helped me understand the core ideas, and once I understood them, it was easier to work on my English."

The study underscores the importance of flexibility in language use within the classroom, particularly in multilingual contexts. The instructor's approach demonstrated how bilingual strategies, when carefully implemented, can support language learning while respecting institutional requirements for English-medium instruction.

Overall, the findings suggest that integrating bilingual strategies in ELT classrooms can significantly enhance student engagement, comprehension, and participation (see Table 3). However, the effectiveness of such strategies is contingent on the flexibility of institutional language policies, which, in this case, posed a notable barrier to fully realizing the potential of biliteracy in higher education. The study advocates for a rethinking of monolingual educational policies and suggests that a more inclusive, bilingual approach would better serve the diverse linguistic needs of students in multilingual contexts like Pakistan.

Table 3: Key Dimensions and Their Impact on Learning

Biliteracy Continuum	Key Finding	Example
Context Biliteracy	of Multilingual contexts enhance comprehension but require balancing English and Urdu.	"Some students cannot understand in English alone, so Urdu is necessary" (S11).
Media Biliteracy	of Translational thinking between Urdu and English supports cognitive and communicative tasks.	"First I think in Urdu, then write in English" (S8).
Development Biliteracy	of Simultaneous use of Urdu and English enhances oral-to-written skills and comprehension.	"It helps when the teacher explains in Urdu and then switches back to English" (S5).
Content Biliteracy	of Contextualized bilingual teaching aids understanding of complex topics and promotes inclusivity.	"Urdu examples make it easier to grasp the concepts" (S7).

Discussion

This study explored the application of Hornberger's Continua of Biliteracy Model in an undergraduate English classroom in Pakistan, revealing critical insights into the dynamics of bilingual education in a linguistically diverse context. The findings highlight the challenges and opportunities associated with integrating Urdu and English to foster biliteracy and improve learning outcomes.

Negotiating Biliteracy in the Classroom

The instructor's use of Urdu as a supplementary language demonstrates the potential for biliteracy practices to address comprehension gaps, particularly for students with limited

exposure to academic English. This aligns with Hornberger's continuum of minority-to-majority languages, where the inclusion of minority languages enhances learners' engagement and cognitive processing. However, the study also identified practical constraints, such as the institutional emphasis on English proficiency, which limits the systematic incorporation of Urdu. This tension reflects broader challenges in multilingual educational contexts, where monolingual ideologies often prevail despite the documented benefits of bilingual instruction (Galante & Dela Cruz, 2024).

Students' perceptions further underscore the value of translanguaging strategies. Many reported that using Urdu in the classroom not only clarified complex concepts but also created a more inclusive learning environment. This supports García and Kleyn's (2016) assertion that translanguaging fosters metalinguistic awareness and builds linguistic bridges between learners' L1 and L2. However, some students expressed concerns that relying on Urdu might impede their English proficiency, suggesting a need for carefully balanced instructional practices that prioritize both languages without compromising learners' fluency in either.

The use of Urdu as a pedagogical tool in this study demonstrated how bilingual strategies can significantly enhance student comprehension and engagement. As the students articulated, the integration of their L1 (Urdu) provided them with a cognitive scaffold, facilitating the understanding of complex academic content delivered in English. This supports Hornberger's (2013, 2022) assertion that biliteracy involves the dynamic interaction between multiple languages, with each language offering unique resources for meaning-making.

This finding resonates with prior research emphasizing the value of students' L1 in supporting their learning of a second language (L2) (Baker, 2011). By using Urdu in conjunction with English, the instructor created a more inclusive classroom environment, allowing students to leverage their full linguistic repertoire. Similar findings have been reported in other multilingual contexts, where students' L1 is shown to reduce cognitive load and enhance content understanding (Creese & Blackledge, 2010; Omidire & Ayob, 2020).

The implications of this finding are critical for language education reform. It suggests that Pakistan's language-in-education policy, which promotes English-only instruction in higher education, may inadvertently hinder students' academic success by disregarding their linguistic resources. As the findings show, bilingual approaches can bridge the gap between students' linguistic realities and academic expectations, creating more effective and equitable learning environments.

Theoretical Implications

The findings extend Hornberger's Continua Model by demonstrating its applicability in higher education settings, particularly in contexts with entrenched language hierarchies like Pakistan. While the model emphasizes the fluid interplay of linguistic resources, this study reveals that institutional and societal constraints often restrict these dynamics. For instance, the dominance of English in Pakistani higher education mirrors the global privileging of English as a lingua franca, limiting the agency of other languages. This supports critiques that advocate for more localized and equitable language policies to counteract the hegemony of English (Rafi & Kanak Fox, 2020).

Moreover, the study highlights the importance of addressing power dynamics inherent in bilingual education. The instructor's role in negotiating language use reflects a balancing act between adhering to institutional norms and responding to students' linguistic needs. This echoes Hornberger's notion that educators are central agents in creating spaces for biliteracy, but also raises questions about how institutional policies can better support such practices.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings offer actionable insights for designing bilingual pedagogies in multilingual classrooms. First, the use of Urdu as a scaffold for learning English should be formalized through teacher training programs that equip educators with translanguaging strategies. Such training can empower teachers to navigate the complexities of bilingual instruction, ensuring that minority languages are leveraged effectively without diminishing the role of English (Asif et al., 2020; Masood et al., 2020).

Second, incorporating learners' linguistic repertoires into classroom practices can foster inclusivity and improve engagement. For example, activities that require students to draw parallels between Urdu and English can enhance their metalinguistic awareness and strengthen their academic skills. These approaches align with research advocating for culturally responsive teaching practices that validate and build upon students' linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Rafi & Kanak Fox, 2020; Galante & Dela Cruz, 2024).

Policy Implications

At the policy level, the findings call for a reevaluation of monolingual language policies in higher education. Institutions should adopt frameworks that explicitly recognize and support the role of local languages in fostering academic success. This includes revising curriculum guidelines to integrate biliteracy goals and developing assessment tools that measure students' bilingual competencies rather than prioritizing English alone (Ali & Umar 2021; Tariq et al., 2019). The institutional requirement to maintain English as the dominant medium of instruction limited the instructor's ability to fully integrate biliteracy practices. This reflects broader challenges in language education policies across many post-colonial societies, where English is often positioned as a symbol of power and prestige, overshadowing local languages (Mahboob, 2017; Manan & David, 2021).

The instructor's experience mirrors findings from research in similar contexts, where rigid language policies fail to account for the sociolinguistic diversity of the student body (Lin & Wu, 2015; Irfan, 2019). The previous research also find that policies create a disconnect between language policy and classroom practice, as educators are often forced to prioritize English at the expense of students' comprehension and engagement (Amanat & Hussain, 2021).

This study's findings suggest the need for a more flexible and responsive language policy that allows for the strategic use of students' L1, particularly in contexts where English proficiency is unevenly distributed among students. This aligns with the growing body of research advocating for language policies that recognize the pedagogical value of bilingualism and biliteracy in multilingual contexts (Manan et al., 2017; Omidire, 2019).

Implications for Teacher Training and Professional Development

The findings also highlight the need for teacher training programs to incorporate a focus on biliteracy strategies. The instructor in this study skillfully balanced the use of Urdu and English, demonstrating the potential of bilingual strategies when implemented thoughtfully. However, without adequate training, many teachers may struggle to navigate the complexities of biliteracy, particularly in contexts where monolingual norms dominate educational policies.

Teacher training programs in Pakistan, and other similar contexts, should emphasize the pedagogical benefits of biliteracy and provide educators with the tools to integrate students' L1 into English language instruction effectively. This aligns with calls for more comprehensive professional development programs that address the realities of multilingual classrooms and equip teachers to meet the diverse needs of their students (Omidire & Ayob, 2020; Irshad & Janjua, 2022).

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides valuable insights, its scope is limited to a single classroom and instructor. Future research should examine biliteracy practices across diverse educational contexts in Pakistan, including rural and under-resourced areas, to capture a broader spectrum of experiences. Additionally, longitudinal studies could explore the long-term impact of bilingual instruction on learners' academic and professional trajectories.

By situating the findings within the broader discourse on biliteracy and multilingual education, this study contributes to the growing body of research advocating for inclusive and equitable language policies. It underscores the transformative potential of Hornberger's Continua Model as a guiding framework for reimagining bilingual education in higher education.

Conclusion

This study highlights the pedagogical potential of integrating bilingual education within English language classrooms in Pakistan, guided by Hornberger's Continua Model of Biliteracy. By incorporating Urdu alongside English, the findings emphasize the importance of creating inclusive learning environments that respect the linguistic diversity of students. The biliteracy approach fosters deeper comprehension, enhances metalinguistic awareness, and provides equitable access to academic content, particularly for learners from varied sociolinguistic backgrounds.

The insights from both the instructor and students reveal that while English remains pivotal for academic and professional success, the thoughtful integration of Urdu serves as a powerful scaffold in language learning. This dual-language approach enables students to leverage their linguistic repertoire, facilitating a smoother transition between their first language (L1) and second language (L2). The findings challenge the dominant monolingual ideologies in English language teaching, advocating for a paradigm shift toward bilingual and multilingual instructional practices in higher education.

Future research should expand on these findings by exploring bilingual teaching practices across diverse educational levels and regions in Pakistan. Additionally, including the perspectives of policymakers and administrators could provide a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and opportunities associated with bilingual education. By addressing these gaps, subsequent studies can contribute to a broader discourse on leveraging biliteracy for equitable and effective education in multilingual contexts.

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