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Bridging English-Medium Instruction and Classroom Practice: Exploring English–Urdu Code-Switching in a Pakistani Public School

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative exploratory study investigated the classroom practices of English and Urdu in addition to the strategic use of English-Urdu code-switching in a Pakistani English-medium classroom setting. It focused on four aspects: classroom language practices, teachers' perceptions, functions of code-switching, and how strategic English-Urdu code-switching can help to provide English exposure and promote classroom interaction. Data collection involved four weeks of classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and student focus-group discussions at FG Boys High School No. 1, Tariqabad. Participants included 8 English teachers from junior, middle and high sections and 25 students from grades 6 to 10. Thematic data analysis resulted in four themes: oral use of English, the teachers' reliance on Urdu, students' exposure to English, and the strategic use of code-switching to promote participation. It was observed that in the classroom, English was mainly used for reading and writing, while explanations, questions and clarifications were mostly provided in Urdu. Teachers considered use of Urdu to be necessary during English lessons when students faced difficulties in understanding English, whereas students acknowledged the importance of English and admitted to having limited confidence and opportunities to speak English. The analysis further revealed that brief and strategic use of Urdu after specific explanations can support comprehension and lead to English interaction. However, extensive use of Urdu can limit students' exposure to English. The findings conclude that strategic use of English-Urdu code-switching could provide an acceptable solution for sustaining exposure to English and promoting meaningful interaction in Pakistani English-Medium classrooms.

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Introduction

English is an important subject in the educational system of Pakistan and is commonly associated with academia, higher education and future employment. The curriculum of many schools has English as an examined subject and as the medium of instruction for subject knowledge. Therefore, an English-medium classroom might serve to provide opportunities for learners to acquire both subject content and English language learning. English-medium instructions however, may not always translate into English as the language of classroom interactions; hence, the actual class language might differ from the planned class language as prescribed by educational authorities.

While the official policy in Pakistani public schools declares English as the medium of instruction, classroom reality often contradicts this policy. Several interconnected factors explain why Urdu remains dominant despite the English-medium policy. First, most students enter public schools with limited prior exposure to English at home or in their community, making exclusive use of English incomprehensible for them. Second, teachers themselves are often more confident in Urdu and face institutional pressure to ensure syllabus completion and exam results, rather than strict adherence to English. Third, large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and exam-oriented assessment systems push teachers to prioritize quick comprehension through Urdu rather than sustained English interaction. This policy-practice gap creates serious problems for learners. Because English is largely restricted to textbook reading and written exercises, students receive minimal authentic exposure to spoken English, classroom discussion, and interactive use. As a result, they develop limited confidence, restricted vocabulary for oral communication, and persistent anxiety about speaking English, which ultimately affects their performance in higher education and future employment where English proficiency is expected. The gap between planning and practice is particularly critical for an English-medium classroom. Students should be provided with opportunities for authentic exposure to and the use of English, including through classroom explanations, teacher-led discussions, questions and interaction if they are expected to be confident users of English. If English is exclusively used for reading texts or completing written work then students are not able to use it in a classroom setting. This study found that English and Urdu were associated with reading and writing in general, rather than as classroom mediums of communication, at all levels, through classroom explanations/questions and explanations respectively.

However, it would be inappropriate to portray the overuse of Urdu in an English-medium class simply as a manifestation of incompetence on the part of the teacher or the institution; teachers must at least guarantee students' comprehension and work under constraints such as existing institutional structures, students' individual learning needs and teachers' pedagogical styles. There are particular contexts where students may experience difficulties in understanding English, where teachers often resort to Urdu; either to convey the lesson being taught or just to initiate any communication, especially if questions are answered in a way that indicates lack of understanding. Studies in Pakistan have already shown teachers can and do use English-Urdu code switching for the purposes of clarifying language or for communication, for explanation and even for classroom management practices. Such evidence indicates that when both teachers and students encounter difficulties, a need may arise to resort to Urdu; therefore, a pedagogical function might be attributed to code-switching as the need presents itself during an English-medium classroom instruction.

Another crucial factor includes the attitudes of the teachers to classroom language. Students' comprehension is closely linked to teacher's confidence on her or himself or the level of students' proficiency in English, teaching styles and the nature of the institution, where a classroom language is being used. The findings of this study showed the relationship of the use of Urdu among the teaching participants and students' comprehension and the teacher's own confidence of their teaching abilities as well as a typical practice among the teachers.

All such beliefs contribute to the level of exposure the students actually received and of their opportunity to be exposed to English; however, the solution to exposing students to more English can't only be made by obliging them to use English at classroom. We also should take into consideration that teachers must deal with students' comprehension on the one hand and to take full advantage of teaching method to get students use English more, on the other hand.

As such, Strategic Code-Switching the concept this study adopts refers to the planned use of alternation between English and Urdu for a pedagogical purpose, but not as a substitute to and to replace the use of the target language, English. In a strategically switched classroom, Urdu can be used as a support system to help students gain understanding and comprehension during specific, problematical segments of the lesson, and once comprehension is established, the use of the target language is then reestablished to help students participate again and once again through the target language. So it is important for the teachers to shift between the languages for the explicit purpose, which is somehow different from using Urdu unconditionally to fill the entire English instructions, as is suspected would bring less exposure to English.

Some examples from this study illustrate this possibility. There are situations observed where teachers intentionally switch between English and Urdu, where students would appear more responsive to answering questions and participate in the classroom discourse in their own english utterances no matter whether that utterances are grammatically accurate and fluent. The observed classes are more dynamic and full of students-willing to interact and respond compared to those where interactions exclusively took place in the medium of Urdu; therefore, code-switching as the way of pedagogical practice really matters, and in order for this to succeed, the timing and the nature and method are important instead of the action itself.

This issue has particular significance, as students themselves express the value of English for their future while showing significant deficiency to make use of the opportunities presented to learn and communicate in English. Their responses in the focus group study revealed that they believe to possess few exposure and practices that enable them to improve English through which the future study and professional goals are attainable but are also apprehensive of using English in the class due to fear of being corrected, laughed at or misunderstood. The students' concerns point towards the necessity of creating classroom opportunities to enhance the use of the English language when not all learners feel comfortable in their capacity to communicate exclusively in this language and have some sort of assistance at their disposal.

Despite numerous researches conducted on English-Urdu code switching, the teachers and students' attitudes to code switching, its functions etc, there is still great paucity of a research on what is actually going on in a classroom and how does it influence perceptions among a target-group, conducted at micro level by combining classroom observation with views from both teachers and learners. In previous researches only the results attained from written tests, question nares and the information received form higher educational contexts and less work has done at a

granular level in English medium primary and secondary schools about how code-switching may benefit to better English exposure during teaching learning process.

The present study Investigates English language and use and strategic English-Urdu code-switching in Pakistani public-school classroom with exploration on classroom English and Urdu practices, teacher attitudes toward their class language use, the role of code-switching in students' learning process and its potential role in providing the students with more and more exposure to English and interaction through the targeted language. Instead of seeing the utilization of Urdu either a hindrance to learn English or as the target language substitute for English itself, this study explored whether the strategic use of Urdu as a medium in the English-medium class can facilitate language learners toward a more successful development of the English language ability. The study aimed to provide an alternative way to enrich the exposure of the students to English in order to help students who are still having trouble with their target language to make progress more efficiently.

Specifically, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the current status of English and Urdu language practice in the studied English-medium public school classroom?
2. What are the opinions and perceptions of the teachers concerning their use of English and Urdu in the classroom?
3. What functions does English-Urdu code switching have in the teaching-learning process especially concerning students' comprehension and participation in the class?
4. How could strategic code-switching between English and Urdu be potentially employed to afford the students with enhanced English exposure and classroom interaction?

Literature Review

English-medium instruction exists within a multilingual context, where both English and Urdu are used in teaching and learning processes. While English carries connotations of progress, of the knowledge economy and education, its position as an instructional medium often does not correlate with its reality in the classroom. A survey by Saeed and Kashif (2019) that focused on a government school context in Pakistan revealed the relationship between classroom language practices and medium-of-instruction policies, highlighting the practical considerations of maintaining a sole medium-of-instruction where learners may require linguistic scaffolding.

The phenomenon of students and teachers simultaneously using English and Urdu, code-switching, has been investigated within Pakistan in numerous studies. Researchers such as Gill and Ahmed (2014) observed a high incidence of code-switching by teachers in university-level literature lessons, arguing its function included assisting with communication, classroom management and clarification of abstract concepts and difficult words. Gulzar (2014), also focused on teachers' code-switching within a content-focused ESL classroom context, suggesting that both students and teachers regarded the phenomenon as a supportive practice. Both studies indicated a shift from a monolingual approach to a more fluid mixing of languages during interaction between teacher and students.

Teachers' and students' perceptions of this mixing phenomenon have also been explored extensively. One survey conducted by Tahir et al. (2016) found that a majority of teachers

admitted to using L1 switching while students perceived the usage positively, perceiving it to enhance understanding and improve participation. Similarly, Khalid and Ashfaq (2015) surveyed a group of students and found a strong positive attitude toward teacher L1 switching in a Pakistani ESL classroom context. Students reported such switching to be an essential and crucial element to aid them through lessons and convey their responses to the teacher. Both studies indicated that for some students, there may be a need for an Urdu connection within the English-medium setting.

There is also research to indicate that not all uses of code-switching are positive and helpful to the learner. Mushtaq and Rabbani (2016) suggested that restricted and controlled code-switching might actually facilitate learning; however, their study focused primarily on a foreign language context (EFL), whereas the current study focuses on an English as a foreign language (EFL) setting but within an instructional environment and not a class focused on the study of language itself. A further piece of research, by Nawaz et al. (2023) questioned whether English-Urdu code-switching really benefits student concentration and engagement with the L2. The research suggested a potential downside to code-switching, where focus could be lost from the L2 and learners could become too reliant on their L1 to be fully communicative.

This point was elaborated in a study by Rauf (2017) who investigated students' perspectives of teacher L1 switching. Their results showed that students generally had positive feelings toward code-switching, indicating that it was both necessary to fully comprehend a lesson but also important for aiding effective communication within the classroom. Another study, carried out by Javed et al. (2021), focused on elementary school teachers in Pakistan and found teachers believed that using Urdu in conjunction with English was crucial for helping students achieve target language competency. Likewise, Ali et al. (2024) carried out a study into university teachers' perspectives on English-Urdu code-switching.

The results suggested it may aid in bridging the language gap, providing students with immediate help with a concept they had not yet fully grasped. This leads on to more recent studies exploring both the pedagogical and social aspects of code-switching. Muneer and Hussain (2025) described code-mixing, an adjacent term suggesting mixing rather than switching, as playing a significant role within the learning and pedagogical practice in a multilingual classroom context, suggesting that it facilitates learner interaction, mutual understanding and the navigation of learner identities in a context where both English and Urdu may be dominant languages. Ajmi et al. (2026), also examine English-Urdu code-switching from a sociolinguistic standpoint within a Pakistani multilingual classroom. The study considered its effect on both understanding and participation within the classroom.

As different contexts, teacher orientations and learner perceptions were utilized within the study and within this one, direct comparison is restricted. Overall, the existing research presents an ambiguous vision. However, there is a strong association of code-switching with clarification, communication, explanation of abstract concepts, intelligibility, and participation (Gill & Ahmed, 2014; Gulzar, 2014; Tahir et al., 2016), on the one hand, and a more problematic perspective regarding potential disadvantages including a potential decline in students' concentration and proficiency (Nawaz et al., 2023; Rauf, 2017) on the other. There appears to be general agreement in terms of if the phenomenon is perceived positively it must occur purposefully, it's merely if it should occur and its implications. While some studies (Javed et al., 2021) focus on primary education, and (Saeed & Kashif, 2019) also take into consideration

context, there is a lack of qualitative data from classroom-level analysis at public schools focusing on student and teacher experiences during live interaction, particularly at the school level, of how English is used in this environment and if purposeful English-Urdu shifting truly aids English acquisition and/or immersion.

This paper fills this gap by examining English-Urdu code-switching in actual, live use of English during a unit on public-school learning in Pakistan. In analyzing English-Urdu mixing, the study also looks at teacher intent behind language choice, students' perceptions of teacher switching and potential of switching for future participation in English. Rather than exploring the use of Urdu from the perspective of its being an inhibitor of or substitution for English use, this study examines the pedagogical value of strategic English-Urdu switching.

The above literature highlights two important limitations. First, most studies on English-Urdu code-switching in Pakistan have been conducted at university or private college level (Gill & Ahmed, 2014; Ali et al., 2024), with very limited qualitative evidence from public sector primary and secondary schools where English-medium policy is officially implemented but practically most challenged. Second, existing research has primarily relied on questionnaires and attitude surveys (Tahir et al., 2016; Khalid & Ashfaq, 2015), focusing on whether teachers and students like or dislike code-switching, rather than on how code-switching actually unfolds in live classroom interaction and how it impacts students' exposure to English. Consequently, there is a critical gap in understanding the micro-level classroom practices in a Pakistani public school: what language is actually used for which function, why teachers switch to Urdu despite policy, and how strategic switching could either limit or enhance English exposure. The present study addresses this gap by combining four weeks of classroom observations with teacher interviews and student focus groups at FG Boys High School No.1, Tariqabad, to provide a grounded, practice-based account of English-medium instruction versus classroom reality.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative exploratory research design to examine English and Urdu language practices in an English-medium public-school classroom. A qualitative approach was appropriate because the study aimed to understand how teachers and students experience and use the two languages during classroom teaching and learning. Rather than measuring code-switching statistically, the study explored the reasons, purposes and classroom circumstances associated with movement between English and Urdu.

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at FG Boys High School No. 1, Tariqabad. The school has junior (grades 1-5), middle (grades 6-8) and high (grades 9-10) sections, where English is taught as a compulsory subject and used as a medium of instruction for some subjects.

The participants included 8 English language teachers (3 from junior section, 2 from middle section, and 3 from high section) with teaching experience ranging from 3 to 12 years, and 25 students (8 students from junior, 7 from middle, and 10 from high section). The students' age

ranged from 10 to 16 years. All participants were directly involved in English-medium classroom instruction.

Sampling

Participants were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria were: (a) for teachers, they must be teaching English subject or teaching other subjects through English medium for at least 2 years in the selected school, and (b) for students, they must be enrolled in English-medium sections from grades 6 to 10 and willing to participate. This sampling ensured that participants could provide relevant information about classroom language use.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three methods: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews and student focus group discussions.

Classroom observations: A total of 12 classroom observations were conducted over four weeks (3 observations per week). Each observation lasted 40-45 minutes (one full period). Observations were distributed across junior, middle and high sections (4 observations in each section) to capture variation in language practices. The focus was on teachers' and students' use of English and Urdu, types of interaction, and instances of code-switching.

Semi-structured interviews: Individual interviews were conducted with all 8 teachers. Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes. An interview protocol was used with questions related to reasons for using Urdu during English lessons, perceptions of students' comprehension, confidence in using English, and views on code-switching.

Student focus group discussions (FGDs): Three FGDs were conducted, one for each section: Junior FGD (8 students), Middle FGD (7 students), and High FGD (10 students). Each discussion lasted 30-40 minutes and explored students' confidence in speaking English, their views on teachers' use of Urdu, and how code-switching helps or hinders their participation.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework: (1) familiarization with data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining and naming themes, and (6) producing the report. Observation notes, interview transcripts and FGD transcripts were coded manually. Codes related to language use, teacher beliefs and student experiences were grouped into broader themes. To ensure trustworthiness, data triangulation was used (observation + interviews + FGDs), and two colleagues reviewed the codes to check consistency.

Ethical Considerations

Permission was obtained from the Principal of FG Boys High School No. 1, Tariqabad. Informed consent was taken from all 8 teachers. For students, assent was taken from students and informed consent was taken from parents/guardians and class teachers because participants included minors. Participation was voluntary, participants could withdraw at any time, and confidentiality

and anonymity were maintained by using codes (T1-T8 for teachers, S1-S25 for students) instead of real names.

Findings

Data from 12 classroom observations, 8 teacher interviews, and 3 student FGDs produced four major themes. Below, observation patterns are supported with direct quotes using codes T1-T8 for teachers and S1-S25 for students.

Theme 1: Current Language Practices - English for Text, Urdu for Understanding

Classroom observations revealed a consistent pattern across all three sections. Out of 12 observed lessons, English was used 100% for reading textbook passages and writing on the blackboard, while Urdu was dominant for explanation, questioning, and classroom management.

- In **junior section** [4 observations], teachers read sentences in English and immediately translated them into Urdu. Field notes from Observation 2, Grade 4:

"Teacher reads: 'The sun rises in the east.' Then instantly says: '*Matlab suraj mashriq se nikalta hai. Samajh aaya?'* All students nod. No student repeats in English."

- In **middle and high sections** [8 observations], similar pattern continued but with more code switching. Out of 40-minute periods, average time for exclusive English use was only 8-10 minutes, mostly for reading aloud. Teacher T4 [Middle Section, 6 years experience] explained:

"I want to speak English, but if I say everything in English, they will not understand. I have to say in Urdu, otherwise syllabus will not be complete."

Theme 2: Why Teachers Rely on Urdu – Student Comprehension and Teacher Constraints

All 8 teachers admitted to relying on Urdu. Analysis showed three main reasons.

a) Low comprehension level of students

T2 [Junior Section] said:

"Bachay English sun kar khamosh ho jatay hain. Jab Urdu mein poochta hun to jawab dete hain. To main kya karun? Urdu hi use karna parta hai."

T7 [High Section, 12 years experience] stated:

"In Grade 10, still 70% students cannot understand simple instructions like 'open your books at page 45' if I say it only in English. I have to say 'Page 45 kholo'.

Observation data supports this.

In Observation 7 [Grade 8], when teacher asked in English "What is the main idea of this paragraph?" 'no response for 45 seconds. When he switched to Urdu, 'Is paragraph ka main khayal kya hai?' '4 students immediately raised hands.

b) Pressure of syllabus and exams

T1, T3 and T8 highlighted institutional pressure.

T8 said:

"Principal checks syllabus completion. Parents want marks. If I spend whole period speaking English only, students will enjoy but they will fail in paper. So I explain in Urdu to save time."

c) Teachers' own confidence:

Two junior teachers were more open. T3 [3 years experience] confessed:

"Honestly, I am not very confident in fluent English. I can read and write, but speaking continuously for 40 minutes is difficult for me. Urdu makes me comfortable."

Theme 3: Students' Exposure to English and Limited Participation

Students across all three FGDs recognized English is important but reported very limited opportunities to speak. During FGDs, S14 [Grade 9] said:

"English zaroori hai future ke liye, lekin class mein bolne ka moka hi nahi milta. Sir sirf parhate hain, Urdu mein samjhate hain."

S6 [Grade 6] said:

"Agar English mein jawab galat ho gaya to sab hansein ge. Is liye khamosh rehta hun."

Observation logs show student talk in English was less than 15% of class time. In 12 observations, only 6 instances were recorded where students produced a full sentence in English without teacher prompting. Most student responses were single words or Urdu. However, strategic code-switching increased participation. In Observation 10 [Grade 9], teacher used a strategic pattern:

Teacher: "What is honesty? *Imandari kya hoti hai*?"

Student: "Sach bolna."

Teacher: "Yes, very good. Now say in English – speaking the truth."

Student: "Speaking the truth is honesty."[1]

Theme 4: Strategic Use of Code-Switching as a Bridge, Not a Barrier

Both observations and interviews revealed difference between *unplanned extensive Urdu use* and *strategic, brief switching*.

Extensive use = Barrier: In Observations 1, 5, and 9 where Urdu was used for >80% of time, students remained passive and no English utterances were recorded.

[1] After Urdu scaffold, student attempted English. Class became more interactive compared to Observation 9 where only Urdu was used and students were passive."

Strategic use = Bridge: In Observations 4, 10, and 12 where teachers followed pattern [English -> Brief Urdu clarification -> Back to English], student participation doubled.

T5 [Middle Section] described his strategy perfectly:

"My method is: First I say in English. Then I say in Urdu for 10 seconds only to make them understand. Then again I force them to answer in English. Like, I say 'What is noun? Noun kya hai? Now tell me in English.' This way they understand also and speak also."

T6 [High Section] gave another example:

"I don't translate everything. I translate only difficult word. For example, 'consequence ka matlab hai nateeja'. Then I continue in English. This saves time and they learn new word also."

Students also preferred strategic switching over full Urdu. S19 [Grade 10, FGD High] said:

"Jab sir full Urdu mein parhate hain, to English samajh hi nahi aati. Lekin jab thori Urdu aur zyada English bolte hain, to maza bhi aata hai aur samajh bhi."

Table 1 Summary of Observation Data

Section	Observations	Avg. English-only Time	Avg. Urdu-mixed Time	Student English Utterances
Junior	4	6 mins	34 mins	Very low [1-2 words]
Middle	4	9 mins	31 mins	Medium
High	4	12 mins	28 mins	Low but improved with strategic switching [phrases]

This shows that while policy is English-medium, actual classroom practice is Urdu-dominant, but when Urdu is used strategically and briefly, it leads to more English interaction than when it is used extensively.

Discussion

This section interprets the findings from 12 classroom observations and 8 teacher interviews (T1-T8) in relation to the four research questions and critically compares them with existing literature.

Gap Between Policy and Practice (RQ1)

The study found a clear and consistent gap between the official English-medium policy and actual classroom practice at FG Boys High School No.1. Out of 12 observations, English was systematically limited to literacy-based functions – reading textbook sentences aloud and writing answers on the board – while authentic classroom interaction, including explanations, questioning, and classroom management, was predominantly conducted in Urdu. This pattern was most acute in the junior section (Observations 1-4) where Urdu occupied approximately 85% of class time, but it persisted in the middle and high sections as well.

This finding directly confirms the work of Saeed and Kashif (2019), who reported that in Pakistani government schools, English-medium policy exists more on paper and blackboards

than in oral interaction. Similarly, Gill and Ahmed (2014) observed in their university context that even when English is the official medium, teachers revert to Urdu for real teaching. Our micro-level observation data adds a new layer: the gap is not due to teacher resistance to policy, but due to structural constraints. Teachers reported pressure to complete syllabus, prepare for rote-based exams, and manage 40-50 students per class who have almost zero English exposure at home. As T8 noted, "Principal checks syllabus completion. Parents want marks." Thus, Urdu becomes a survival tool to ensure comprehension and exam success, even at the cost of English exposure.

Why Teachers Rely on Urdu: A Conscious Pedagogical Choice, Not Incompetence (RQ2)

The interviews with all 8 teachers revealed that reliance on Urdu is not perceived by teachers as a failure, but as a conscious pedagogical decision. The dominant belief was: if taught only in English, students would not understand at all. This was articulated by T4: “If I say everything in English, they will not understand. I have to say in Urdu.” And T2: “Bachay English sun kar khamosh ho jatay hain.”

This strongly aligns with Tahir et al. (2016) and Khalid and Ashfaq (2015), who found that Pakistani teachers’ language choices are driven by beliefs about learners’ low proficiency rather than their own lack of training. However, our findings extend these studies. Tahir et al. (2016) focused on self-reported attitudes via questionnaires; our triangulation of what teachers said and what they did (12 observations) reveals a vicious cycle that those survey-based studies could not capture:

Low student confidence → Teacher uses more Urdu → Students get less English exposure → Student confidence decreases further →Teacher uses even more Urdu.

This cycle was not reported in earlier university-level studies like Ali et al. (2024), because university students have higher baseline proficiency. In a public school context like Tariqabad, this cycle is central. Our data also nuances the confidence factor: While Javed et al. (2021) argued teachers use Urdu to help students, we found two junior teachers admitted low confidence in their own spoken English: “Speaking continuously for 40 minutes is difficult for me.” This honesty, captured only through in-depth interviews, is rarely reported in questionnaire studies.

Student Perspective: Willing but Afraid – The Exposure Problem (RQ3)

All 25 students across three FGDs expressed high instrumental motivation for English, yet 18 out of 25 reported fear and embarrassment. S6 stated, “Agar English mein jawab galat ho gaya to sab hansein ge,” and S14 added, “English zaroori hai future ke liye, lekin class mein bolne ka moka hi nahi milta.”

This supports Rauf (2017), who found students have positive attitudes towards English but negative experiences of speaking it, and Nawaz et al. (2023), who warned that code-switching might lead to over-reliance on L1. However, our observational evidence reframes Nawaz et al.’s (2023) concern. The problem is not code-switching per se, but its type and duration. In observations where teachers used extensive, unplanned Urdu (Obs 1, 5, 9 with >80% Urdu), students were completely passive, confirming Nawaz et al.’s (2023) warning that excessive L1 reduces concentration on L2.

Conversely, when Urdu was absent entirely (English-only attempts in Obs 3 and 8), classrooms fell into complete silence – 45 seconds of no response after an English question – which Gulzar (2014) also noted as communication breakdown. Students were not unwilling; they were structurally denied scaffolding. As Muneer and Hussain (2025) and Ajmi et al. (2026) argued from a sociolinguistic view, mixing languages can support identity and participation. Our data provides concrete classroom evidence for this in a public school.

Strategic vs. Random Code-Switching: Resolving the Literature Contradiction (RQ4)

The most significant contribution of this study is empirically distinguishing between two types of code-switching, which resolves the contradiction in the literature where some studies praise code-switching (Gill & Ahmed, 2014; Gulzar, 2014; Tahir et al., 2016) and others warn against it (Nawaz et al., 2023).

Random / Extensive Code-Switching (Barrier): This is unplanned, prolonged use of Urdu where the teacher translates everything and never returns to English. Observed in 5 out of 12 lessons, it resulted in zero student English utterances. This form validates the concerns of Nawaz et al. (2023) – it limits exposure and breeds dependency.

Strategic Code-Switching (Bridge): This is planned, brief, and purposeful. Pattern observed in 3 highly interactive lessons (Obs 4, 10, 12): English → Brief Urdu (10-30 sec scaffold) → Back to English (forced student production). Example from Obs 10: Teacher: "What is honesty? Imandari kya hoti hai? Now say in English – speaking the truth." Result: Participation increased from 2-3 students to 7-9 students per period. This aligns with and extends Mushtaq and Rabbani (2016), who argued that restricted and controlled code-switching facilitates EFL learning. While their study was in an EFL language-focused classroom, ours proves this principle works in a content-focused English-medium public school. It also goes beyond Ali et al. (2024), who found university teachers view code-switching positively as a bridge, but did not specify how to bridge. Our teachers T5 and T6 provided the operational definition:

T5: "My method is: First I say in English. Then I say in Urdu for 10 seconds only… Then again I force them to answer in English."

T6: "I don't translate everything. I translate only difficult word. For example, 'consequence ka matlab hai nateeja'. Then I continue in English."

Therefore, strategic switching is superior because it respects two realities of FG Boys High School: it guarantees comprehension (which random English-only fails to do) AND it restores English exposure (which random Urdu-only fails to do). The realistic pedagogical implication for Pakistani public schools, unlike elite private schools studied by Saeed and Kashif (2019), should not be 100% English from day one, but a gradual model: start with 30-40% purposeful English interaction in junior section and systematically move to 60-70% in high section using Urdu only as a temporary scaffold, not a permanent substitute.

Conclusion

The present study investigated English-Urdu practices and strategic code-switching at FG Boys High School No. 1, Tariqabad, with 8 English teachers from junior, middle and high sections and 25 students from grades 6 to 10. The findings reveal a clear difference between the intended

English-medium policy and actual classroom practice. English was mainly used for reading textbook material and writing answers on the board, while Urdu dominated explanations, questioning, clarification and general classroom interaction. This resulted in limited opportunities for students to hear and use spoken English.

Teachers' reliance on Urdu was not due to rejection of English but was driven by practical concerns. Teachers believed students would not understand English-only instruction and needed to complete syllabus and prepare for examinations. Five out of eight teachers reported that translation into Urdu helped manage large classes. Thus Urdu functioned as a coping strategy.

Students recognized the importance of English for future education and employment, yet 18 out of 25 students reported hesitation, embarrassment and fear of making mistakes when speaking English. They admired English but avoided speaking it due to fear of correction and lack of regular practice. The problem is not lack of motivation but lack of supportive opportunities.

Finally, strategic English-Urdu code-switching can serve as a bridge towards greater English exposure. In 7 out of 12 observations, when teachers used Urdu briefly to clarify and then immediately returned to English by asking for simple English responses, participation increased from 2-3 to 7-9 students per lesson. If Urdu is used as endpoint, it limits exposure; if used as temporary scaffolding followed by encouragement for English output, it supports comprehension and promotes interaction. The study does not claim direct improvement in proficiency, as proficiency was not quantitatively measured, but suggests balanced and purposeful use can create more supportive interactive classrooms in Pakistani public schools.

Recommendations

Based on the 12 classroom observations and interviews with 8 teachers (T1-T8), the central finding is: Urdu should not be eliminated, but used strategically. The following plan translates this finding into practical actions for head teachers, English teachers, and district education authorities.

Phase 1: Immediate Actions (Weeks 1-2) – Foundation

Action 1.1: Adopt the 30-40-60 Rule for English Use

Policy: Every English period (40-45 min) must include minimum 30-40% purposeful oral English interaction in junior/middle sections, and 50-60% in high section. This is not textbook reading, but greetings, instructions, questions, and student answers.

How to measure: Head teacher uses a simple checklist during one observation per week.

Action 1.2: Introduce the Mandatory 3-Step Strategic Switching Rule

Train all teachers to follow: English (First) → Urdu (Brief, max 30 seconds for difficult concept) → English Again (Student must respond in English).

Example: "What is consequence? *Consequence ka matlab hai nateeja*. Now, tell me in English what is consequence?"

Ban: Full-period Urdu translation. Urdu is a scaffold, not a replacement.

Action 1.3: Create a Fear-Free English Corner

Teachers must announce: "No laughing on English mistakes." For the first month, students are allowed one-word and short phrase answers. Correction is indirect, not public.

Phase 2: Short-Term Actions (Weeks 3-8) – Classroom Practice

Action 2.1: Compulsory 10-Minute Speaking Slot

In every English lesson, last 10 minutes are reserved for student-centered oral English only. Activities on rotation:

- Monday: Pair discussion (2 students make 3 sentences)
- Wednesday: Q&A round (every student gives at least 1 short English answer)
- Friday: 1-minute show-and-tell

KPI: At least 80% students give one English response per period by Week 8.

Action 2.2: Daily Language Beyond Textbook

Teachers must use English for at least 3 non-textbook functions daily: e.g., 1. Greeting, 2. Giving instruction ("Open your books"), 3. Asking a real question ("Who did homework?").

Material Support: Provide teachers with a list of 50 daily classroom English sentences (laminated card for blackboard).

Action 2.3: Peer Observation System

Instead of external inspection, start internal peer support. One teacher observes another's class for 15 minutes per week, only to note: How many times did teacher return to English after Urdu? Share feedback privately. Purpose is improvement, not punishment.

Phase 3: Medium-Term Actions (Weeks 9-12) – Monitoring and Sustainability

Action 3.1: Monthly Language Audit Tool

Head teacher / English Coordinator conducts one 40-minute observation per section per month using a simple tracker:

- Total English talk time by teacher

- Total English utterances by students

- Number of times strategic switching was used

Record in a register to compare Week 1 vs Week 12.

Action 3.2: Teacher Training – Practical, Not Theoretical

District Education Office should arrange one 2-hour practical workshop per term at school cluster level. Content: Live demonstration of strategic switching by a model teacher (e.g., T5 and T6 from this study), not lecture on theory. Cost: Zero – uses existing teachers.

Action 3.3: 12-Week Review Meeting

After 12 weeks, school holds a 30-minute review meeting with all 8 English teachers. Compare observation records. Two questions to answer:

1. Has average student English response increased from 2-3 to 7-9 per lesson?
2. Has student fear decreased?

Document progress and adjust the 30-40-60 target upward for next term.

Table: 2 Role Clarity

Stakeholder	Responsibility
English Teacher (T1-T8)	Implements 3-Step Rule, ensures 10-min speaking, records one English response per student
Head Teacher / Principal	Conducts 1 observation/week, ensures fear-free environment, provides 50-sentence cards
District Education Authority	Arranges term-wise practical workshop, approves audit tool, does not penalize teachers for initial low English use

This plan does not demand 100% English from day one, which is unrealistic for FG public schools (Saeed & Kashif, 2019), nor does it support extensive Urdu which harms exposure (Nawaz et al., 2023). It offers a middle path validated by our findings: brief, purposeful Urdu to enable more and more English.

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