Multilingualism as a Resource for the Kashmiri MS English Students in Pakistan

Zoofishan Anjum
MS Scholar, COMSATS University Islamabad
khanzoofishan0@gmail.com
Dr.Sadia Siddiq
Assistant Professor, Humanities, CUI Islamabad Campus
sadia_siddiq@comsats.edu.pk
Ms. Saba Bahareen Mansur
Assistant Professor, Humanities, CUI Islamabad Campus
sbahareen@comsats.edu.pk

ABSTRACT
Multilingualism is increasingly recognized as a valuable resource with numerous benefits at individual, societal, and global levels. Previous research suggests that multilingualism as a resource offers cognitive advantages, enhances communication skills and fosters cultural understanding in multiple domains. The area though remains less explored for Kashmiri multilingual students. The paper thereby aims to investigate how multilingualism influences the academic performance and socio-cultural lives of multilingual Kashmiri students in academic settings. Through a qualitative research methodology involving focus group interviews with Kashmiri students, the study aspires to explore the impact of multilingualism on academic performance and its influence on the socio-cultural aspects of students within an academic environment. The collected data underwent thematic analysis of the interviews to provide an in depth understanding of the subject. Moreover, the research concludes that multilingualism serves as a vital resource for Kashmiri MS students, significantly enhancing their academic performance, socio-cultural existence, and cognitive, cultural, and social capacities, while empowering them to excel in a multicultural academic environment.
<u>**Keywords:**</u> *Multilingualism, Individual, Societal, Global level, Cognitive Advantage, Thematic Analysis, Vital, Empowering.*

INTRODUCTION

Multilingualism, the ability to speak and understand multiple languages, has been recognized as a valuable resource in various domains of life, including education. In Pakistan, where multiple languages are spoken, the importance of multilingualism becomes even more evident. Pahari language spoken in Kashmir, is predominantly spoken by the Kashmiri

community, particularly in Azad Kashmir. Kashmiri students pursuing their Master of Science (MS) in English at multiple universities of Islamabad including COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI), National University of Modern Languages (NUML), Islamic International University (IIUI) in Pakistan represent a unique group that benefits from their multilingual abilities. Multilingualism has become a critical language advantage in a period of growing globalization, with considerable influence in the academic and socio-cultural spheres. This study aims to provide a thorough explanation of the complex function that multilingualism plays in the academic journey of university-level Kashmiri students. Located in the linguistically complex region of Kashmir, where several languages coexist and interact, this study aims to identify the complex ways that linguistic variety influences university students' social and academic dynamics. Through an examination of the relationship between language, identity, and education, this study seeks to demonstrate the value of multilingualism as an effective strategy for improving student learning outcomes, promoting cross-cultural understanding, and preparing students for the demands of a globalized labor market. This study explores the potential educational benefits of multilingualism for university students in Kashmir, focusing on the effects it has on, academic performance, and social integration. In light of Kashmir's diverse language heritage, the research purposes to clarify how this variety nurture a more stimulating learning environment and raises academic achievements. Through exploring the relationship between multilingualism, identity, and education, the research targets to validate its effectiveness in developing a student body that is more diverse, compassionate, and globally literate. Multilingualism is considered a valuable asset for Kashmiri students at different universities of Islamabad including (COMSATS, IIUI, and NUML) in a variety of ways that is the academic and socio-cultural advantages that come with language diversity. Moreover, in the various environment of different Universities, multilingualism is thought to improve academic achievement. Higher education institutions, like COMSATS, NUML, and IIUI operate as a microcosm of several cultures and languages therefore traversing linguistic borders effectively is essential for maximizing interaction with peers and professors. This opportunity allows multilingual students, in Kashmir to better navigate the environment thereby improving their social interactions. Furthermore, it is expected that multilingualism will enhance communicative and comprehension abilities of Kashmiri multilingual students. Moreover, Multilingualism plays a pivotal role in shaping both the academic and socio-cultural experiences of students in higher education. For Kashmiri students pursuing their MS in English at universities in Islamabad, this linguistic diversity becomes a valuable resource. Moreover, apart from short-term educational and career enhancement advantages, multilingualism is projected to enhance cultural and personal development. While Kashmiri children may discuss their home language and culture and although also understand new cultural and linguistic subtleties by becoming students of universities such as (COMSATS, NUML, IIUI), this bilateral exposure might promote personal growth, cross-cultural perception, and, most importantly, a sense of increasingly connected the world.

Statement of the Problem

Multilingualism has got its academic and socio-cultural implications on the lives of multilingual individuals. The Kashmiri students pursuing their Master's degree (MS) in Pakistan are mostly multilingual due to their diverse linguistic backgrounds. However, the effect of this multilingualism on their academic performance and how it effects their socio-cultural journey in an academic setting remains relatively unexplored. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate the effect of multilingualism on academic performance and socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students at MS level in an academic setting.

Research Aims

This study aims to investigate the effect of multilingualism on academic performance and socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students at MS level in an academic setting.

Research Objectives
- To investigate how multilingualism affects the academic performance of Kashmiri students at university level.
- To examine the various ways in which multilingualism affects the socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students in an academic environment.

Research Questions

- How does multilingualism affect the academic performance of Kashmiri students at university level?
- How does multilingualism influence the socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students in an academic environment?

Purpose of Study/Justification/Significance of the Research

The findings of the study can inform educational institutions, policy makers and educators about the benefits of multilingualism and guide them in creating a supportive environment that accommodates the linguistic diversity of students. Moreover, the study can help teachers to devise activities whereby multilingual students can benefit in an effective way by utilizing their multilingual attributes. Also, findings can help to inform different discourses on different forums regarding multilingualism in the light of current research. Furthermore, it can guide the socio- cultural events of the multilingual individual in progressive way.

Scope and Limitations

This paper focuses specifically on Kashmiri students pursuing their MS in English at three Universities of Islamabad (COMSATS, NUML, IIUI), Pakistan. While this study recognizes the broader context of multilingualism in Pakistan, it primarily concentrates on the Kashmiri community within the university. The research aims to explore the impact and benefits of multilingualism on the academic performance and socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri MS English students.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the research topic, outlines the research questions and objectives, discusses the significance of the study, and presents the scope and limitations. Chapter 2 reviews the relevant literature on multilingualism, academic performance, and the relationship between language and education. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study and discusses them in relation to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes the study by summarizing the key findings, discussing their implications, and suggesting avenues for future research.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Wei (2020) described Multilingualism as "the capacity or exercise of an individual or a community to apply and recognize multiple languages proficiently. It entails the potential to speak, understand, and explicit oneself in multiple language. It highlights the ability not only to speak but also to comprehend and express oneself across different linguistic contexts. This includes understanding nuances, idiomatic expressions, and cultural connotations unique to each language. Also, scholars argued that multilingualism extends beyond mere fluency, encompassing the adaptability of language users to switch between languages depending on the social and communicative setting (Bhatia & Ritchie, 2013). Furthermore, it plays a pivotal role in shaping cognitive flexibility, enhancing cross-cultural communication, and fostering inclusivity in diverse settings (Cenoz & Gorter, 2015). The increasing global interconnectedness makes multilingualism an essential skill for personal and professional growth. Also, Cummins, J. (2001), critically examined existing research on bilingualism and its impact on literacy development. He evaluated how bilingualism influences reading and writing skills across different languages and contexts. Cummins discussed the cognitive and educational benefits of bilingualism, including enhanced literacy abilities. He also highlighted gaps in the research and offers recommendations for future studies. Cummins argued that bilingualism can positively affect literacy if supported by appropriate educational practices. Furthermore, Cummins, J. (2008), explained theoretical perspectives on bilingual and multilingual education, focusing on the cognitive and educational benefits of multilingualism. He emphasized the cognitive and educational advantages of multilingualism, argued that bilingual education can enhance cognitive development, academic achievement, and socio-cultural understanding. Cummins discussed the interplay between language proficiency and cognitive processes, advocating for educational practices that support and leverage students' linguistic diversity for better learning outcomes. Moreover, DIACONU, L. (2021), also in his look at briefly surveyed multilingualism practices and its preferred effects, and explored the advantages and achievements of multilingualism practices in training. Furthermore, DIACONU, L. (2021), is of the opinion that the imposition of one language on the other language is risky and could likely result in language loss of life. It is consequently cautioned in this examine that multilingualism practices have to be integrated into academic settings to prevent language loss of life. Thus DIACONU, L. (2021) concluded that relying at the

composition of the society, multilingualism practices in schooling should include the indigenous, national, authentic and overseas languages as same companions inside the language coverage improvement and education. Other than DIACONU, L. (2021), Dolgunsöz, E. (2013) additionally worked at the perception of multilingualism and its blessings instructional settings. In his study, the distinction between bilingual and multilingual novices in building grammar strategies changed into explored while learning (L2 for bilingual and L3 for multilingual). Also, it become hypothesized that multilingual have advanced grammar techniques than bilinguals. In addition, Dolgunsöz, E. (2013) additionally discovered in his examine that the range of languages regarded has a right away relationship with grammar getting to know strategy utilization. This look at also pondered that the multi-linguals higher apprehend and practice grammar than Bilinguals. As multilingual rookies have one greater language in their linguistic storage, they have a tendency to use greater grammar techniques and apply them extra often considering that each new (learnt) language contributes to the acquisition of latest grammar. Also,Hornberger, N. H., & Johnson, D. C. (2007), emphasized integrating sociolinguistic insights into language teaching to enhance educational practices. They highlighted the impact of language policies on education and advocate for multilingualism. The authors encouraged critical approaches to language teaching, focusing on how language reflects and shapes identity. They stressed the importance of bridging research and practice, suggested that educators use sociolinguistic research to inform their methods and address diverse learners' needs. Furthermore, Garcia, O. (2009), and explored the evolving landscape of bilingual education worldwide. She examined how globalization and shifting demographics impact bilingual education policies and practices. Garcia discussed various models of bilingual education and their effectiveness in diverse cultural contexts. The book highlighted the challenges and opportunities faced by bilingual programs and provides insights into future directions. It emphasized the importance of understanding bilingualism as a global phenomenon rather than a localized issue. Additionally,Cenoz, J. (2003), explored how multilingual individuals develop grammatical competence and the role that additional languages play in this process. He explored how multilingualism impacts grammatical skills. He argued that acquiring multiple languages enhances grammatical understanding by reinforcing cognitive mechanisms underlying language use. Multilingual individuals often display more sophisticated grammatical competence compared to monolinguals due to the interplay and transfer between languages. This cross-linguistic influence helps develop a more flexible and deeper understanding of grammatical structures. He also mentioned that multilingualism can facilitate the learning of new languages and improve overall language processing skills.Kecskés, I. (2007),examined how multilingualism affects cognitive processes involved in language learning, with a focus on grammar acquisition. He explores how being multilingual influences cognitive processes related to language learning. He highlighted that multilingual individuals often exhibit enhanced cognitive flexibility and better metalinguistic awareness. These cognitive advantages facilitate grammar acquisition, as multi-linguals can transfer knowledge and strategies across languages. Kecskés argued that multilingualism improves efficiency in processing linguistic information, leading to more effective grammar learning and application. He mentioned the significant role of multilingual experience in shaping cognitive approaches to language learning. Bialystok, E., & Hakuta, K. (1994), discussed   how multilingualism influences various aspects of language learning, including

grammar.Bialystok and Hakuta explored how multilingualism impacts language acquisition by examining cognitive processes and developmental changes. They argued that knowing multiple languages can enhance metalinguistic awareness, which improves understanding of grammatical structures. Multilingual individuals often exhibit greater flexibility in switching between languages, which influences their approach to learning grammar. They also highlighted how multilingualism affects memory, attention, and problem-solving, further influencing language learning outcomes. Multilingualism has been identified as a capacity useful resource which could positively impact academic overall performance. Research indicates that folks who are proficient in more than one languages frequently show off more suitable cognitive competencies, inclusive of improved interest, trouble-solving abilities, and innovative questioning (Bialystok, 2017).Multilingualism is considered a valuable resource that can enhance academic performance. According to Bialystok, those individuals who are proficient in multiple languages often exhibit superior cognitive skills. These skills include improved attention, better problem-solving abilities, and enhanced creative thinking. Multilingual individuals tend to develop more robust cognitive functions, which contribute to better overall academic achievements. This advantage is attributed to the mental exercise involved in managing multiple languages These cognitive advantages can transfer to academic settings, in which multilingual students may additionally have an advantage in language gaining knowledge of, essential wondering, and academic fulfillment (Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, & Ungerleider, 2010).Multilingual students often experience cognitive benefits that extend to academic contexts. These advantages can enhance their language learning abilities, improve critical thinking skills, and boost overall academic performance. According to Adesope, Lavin, Thompson, and Ungerleider (2010), being multilingual can lead to more effective learning strategies and better problem-solving skills. This cognitive flexibility allows multilingual students to excel in diverse academic tasks and achieve higher levels of success in their studies. Also, De Angelis, M. (2007), investigated the acquisition of a third language and its impact on grammatical strategies compared to bilinguals. He explored how learning a third language influences grammatical strategies and cognitive processes .He also highlighted the role of multilingualism in shaping linguistic strategies and cognitive flexibility. Moreover, Hernández, A., Li, P., MacDonald, M., & Muñoz, M. (2014), looked at how multilingualism affects cognitive functions related to language processing and grammar learning. They examined the cognitive effects of multilingualism on executive functions and language processing. They explored how managing multiple languages influences cognitive abilities such as attention, working memory, and problem-solving. They also investigated that how multilingual individuals process and learn grammar differently compared to monolinguals. The authors discussed evidence suggesting that multilingualism enhances certain cognitive functions while potentially altering others. Their findings contributed to understanding the broader cognitive impacts of being multilingual.Therefore,being multilingual can offer Kashmiri MS English students with a strong basis for studying additional languages, together with English. Studies have proven that scholars who're already talented in more than one languages tend to accumulate new languages extra easily due to their superior language consciousness, metalinguistic talents, and cross-linguistic switch (Cenoz& Genesee, 2001). Therefore, Thomas, W. P., & Collier, V. P. (2002), highlighted the academic benefits of language minority students in educational settings. Thomas and Collier (2002) found that

language minority students achieve better long-term academic outcomes when enrolled in schools with effective educational practices tailored to their needs. Their study emphasized that programs offering strong linguistic and academic support, such as dual-language instruction, significantly boost these students' academic success. They also highlighted that the benefits are enhanced when there is a focus on high-quality instruction and a supportive learning environment. The study underscored that effective school practices are crucial for maximizing the potential of language minority students. Furthermore, Marian, V., & Shook, A. (2012), stated that cognitive advantages associated with bilingualism that support language learning. Marian and Shook (2012) explored how bilingualism can enhance cognitive functions beyond language skills. They highlighted that bilingual individuals often demonstrate improved executive functions, such as better attention control and task-switching abilities. They also discussed the cognitive reserve effect, where bilingualism may delay the onset of cognitive decline in aging. Additionally, bilinguals often show superior problem-solving skills and creativity due to their ability to switch between different linguistic and cultural frameworks. The authors argued that these cognitive benefits support and facilitate language learning. In addition, Nicoladis, E., & Genesee, F. (1996), investigated bilingual children's language development and its impact on learning additional languages. They examined how early bilingualism influences language development in children. They focused on whether bilingual children acquire two distinct languages separately or through an integrated system. The research indicated that bilingual children often develop both languages simultaneously, with each language influencing the other. This bilingual exposure can impact their ability to learn additional languages later. The authors suggested that early bilingualism may enhance metalinguistic awareness, which aids in learning new languages. They also highlighted the complex interplay between bilingual development and subsequent language acquisition. Also,Tse, L. (1996), explored the relationship between bilingualism and academic success. He explained how bilingualism impacts academic performance in children. He examined whether bilingual children experience advantages or disadvantages in their academic achievements compared to monolingual peers. His findings suggested that bilingualism can influence cognitive and linguistic development, potentially affecting school performance. He also explored factors such as language proficiency, educational environment, and socio-cultural influences. He highlighted the complexity of bilingualism's effects and underscores the need for supportive educational practices. He also contributed valuable insights into how bilingualism interacts with academic success. Kashmiri students at multiple universities of Islamabad, Pakistan, convey with them a rich cultural and linguistic range. Research shows that instructional environments that embody and fee college students' diverse linguistic backgrounds can foster high quality learning. Previous researches dealt with the benefits of multilingualism in educational settings in different areas of Pakistan. However, the role of multilingualism for Kashmiri MS English students in an academic setting remains less explored. Therefore, the current study aims to explore the role of multilingualism as a resource for Kashmiri MS English students at different Universities of Islamabad, Pakistan.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This paper employed a qualitative research methodology to investigate the experiences and perspectives of MS English students belonging to the Kashmiri community. Qualitative analysis was deemed suitable for this research as it aimed to gather in-depth insights and understanding from a diverse range of participants through interviews, enabling the attainment of desired results.

Population

The population of interest for this paper comprised MS English students from the Kashmiri community at (COMSATS, NUML, IIUI), Islamabad. The inclusion of multilingual students was a requirement of the study, as it aimed to explore the experiences of individuals with proficiency in multiple languages. By focusing on MS level students, the research aimed to capture the perspectives of individuals with a more advanced understanding of the subject matter.

Sample

The researcher identified a total of 50 participants from the Department of Humanities, all of whom were MS level Kashmiri students at different universities of Islamabad including (COMSATS, IIUI and NUML).

Sampling Techniques

Convenience sampling was utilized to select participants for this study. This non-probability sampling technique involved the selection of individuals who were readily accessible and available to participate in the research. The researchers identified a total of fifty participants from the Department of Humanities, all of whom were MS level students. To accommodate participant preferences and convenience, the researchers divided them into ten focused groups. Convenience sampling, as defined by Hancock and Mueller (2020), is a method that relies on the accessibility, convenience, or proximity of potential participants as determined by the researcher. It does not adhere to a random or systematic approach to sampling. This technique allowed the researchers to gather data efficiently from participants who met the specific requirements of the study.

Epistemology

The epistemology that supplements the argument in this research is social constructionism. The theory of Social Constructionism was first brought forward by Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, two sociologists, in their magnum opus of 1966, "The Social Construction of Reality." Many believe it was the first explored theoretical perspective on social constructionism by the American philosopher and social theorist George Herbert Mead in his masterpiece "Mind, Self and Society" in 1930. Berger and Luckmann, in their magnum opus work, argue that how social institutions and interactions shape individuals' perception of

reality. To them, society is an ongoing human production where individuals collectively create and maintain shared meanings, beliefs, and norms through daily interaction. The concept of Social constructionism is premised on the reality, not being inherent or objective but socially constructed through the collective interactions, interpretations, and understandings of the people living within a society. It underlines how language, symbols, cultural norms, and institutions shape and construct people's perceptions of reality and are used in constructing and maintaining social structures, identities, and inequalities. In essence, social constructionism holds that what is seen as reality is a function of social processes and not based on an objective, pre-existing reality. It is a theory that suggests people develop knowledge about the world in a social context, and that we think is reality depends on shared assumptions. Many things that we take for granted and think of as objective reality are, in fact, socially constructed. Furthermore, the theory argues all meanings are socially created. Social constructions may be so ingrained that they seem natural, but they are not. They are inventions of any given society and, therefore, have nothing to do with actual reality.

Data Collection

The data collection process involved the use of focus group interviews, which provided an opportunity for participants to engage in group discussions and express their views on the research topic. Focus groups are particularly useful for capturing diverse perspectives and generating rich, qualitative data. The participants were selected based on their relevance to the research objectives and their ability to provide insightful contributions to the discussions. During the focus group interviews, audio recordings were utilized to ensure accurate and comprehensive data capture. The use of audio recordings allowed for the preservation of participants' voices, ensuring the fidelity of their expressions and minimizing potential biases that may arise from note-taking or the researcher's interpretations. The audio recordings served as the primary source of data for subsequent analysis.

Method of Analysis

The method of analysis that supplement the argument in this research is Thematic Analysis.The term 'thematic analysis' was coined by the American physicist, philosopher, and historian of science Gerald Holton in the 1970s (Merton, 1975). In the present day, thematic analysis presents a means of the qualitative data analysis to analyze the complexity of the data in a systematic but quantitative way. It is the search for themes which can capture the narratives presence in the data set. It is about the process that the researcher undertakes when they are trying to make sense of the interview transcripts. The significance of thematic analysis can also be realized from the aspect that it is a continuous-comparative strategy and it requires careful and thorough reading and re-reading of the transcripts in a systematic manner (Cavendish, 2011). One of the important points about the thematic analysis is that the researchers have to be systematic in their approach to the analysis in order to produce a good quality final product. In order to maintain the reliability of the analysis method it is important that the six-phase process suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006) is adopted. This six phase frame work includes:

Step 1. Becoming familiar with the data, Step 2. Generating initial codes, Step 3. Searching for themes, Step 4. Reviewing themes, Step 5. Defining themes, Step 6.Writing up.

Data Analysis Procedure

Data Analysis is an organized procedure of breaking data into noteworthy and convenient components that can be fragmented in phases (Biklen& Bogdan, 2007). Data were categorized to highlight the relationships , patterns , themes and classification with in collected data to answer the research questions posed for this study (Cohen , et al ., 2007). The researcher coded the categories, finding similarities and differences, by creating links. The researcher used Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis method to analyze the collected data .Data Analysis was inductive, where the researcher sought out themes and categories. Focused grouped interviews were analyzed by following six steps of thematic analysis under the perspective of social constructionism. This six phase frame work includes: Step 1. Becoming familiar with the data, Step 2. Generating initial codes, Step 3. Searching for themes, Step 4. Reviewing themes, Step 5. Defining themes, Step 6.Writing up.

Focus Group Interview 1 (COMSATS STUDENTS)

The section presents the thematic analysis of data collected from the focus group interview 1, specifically addressing Question 1. The focus group consisted of Kashmiri MS English students from COMSATS University, and the data were gathered through an audio recording method. The discussion centered on how multilingualism influences the academic performance of these students. The analysis was conducted using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step thematic analysis framework, which involves familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally, writing the report. The first step in the thematic analysis involved familiarization with the data. The researcher transcribed the audio recordings of the focus group interview and reviewed the transcripts several times to identify emerging patterns and key points raised by the participants. The Kashmiri students frequently emphasized the positive impact of multilingualism—particularly in Pahari, Urdu, and English—on their academic journey. The recurrent themes highlighted included the role of multilingualism in enhancing cognitive abilities, accessing diverse resources, and improving the understanding of complex academic concepts. During the second step, generating initial codes, the researcher systematically examined the data to pinpoint specific sections of the responses that could be coded. This process involved assigning descriptive labels to capture the essence of the participants' statements. For instance, codes such as "multilingualism as a resource," "enhanced comprehension," "communication through language-switching," and "improved research skills" were identified based on the students' narratives. Some participants specifically noted that multilingualism facilitated access to knowledge, while others highlighted the advantages of language-switching in communication and group interactions. These initial codes served as the foundation for subsequent theme identification. The third step, searching for themes, involved organizing the initial codes into broader thematic categories that encapsulate the data's underlying patterns. Codes related to knowledge access and improved comprehension were grouped into the theme "Cognitive Benefits of Multilingualism." Similarly, codes associated with effective communication and

peer interaction were categorized under the theme "Communication and Interaction." Lastly, the codes that reflected cultural understanding and creativity were consolidated into the theme "Cultural and Creative Enrichment. "In the fourth step, reviewing themes, the researcher meticulously examined the preliminary themes to ensure they accurately represented the data and were coherent with the participants' experiences. This phase involved refining and consolidating overlapping themes to create a cohesive framework for analysis. The final themes identified were: "Cognitive Benefits of Multilingualism," "Communication and Interaction," and "Cultural and Creative Enrichment." These themes effectively encapsulate the diverse ways in which multilingualism influences the academic experiences of Kashmiri MS English students. During the fifth step, defining and naming themes, each thematic category was clearly defined to reflect its scope and relevance. The theme "Cognitive Benefits of Multilingualism" was articulated as the ability of students to access academic resources in multiple languages and enhance their comprehension of complex concepts. The theme "Communication and Interaction" emphasized how multilingual students employ their language skills to engage in academic discussions and collaborate effectively in group projects. Finally, the theme "Cultural and Creative Enrichment" highlighted how multilingualism broadens students' cultural awareness and fosters innovative thinking. The final step, writing the report, involved presenting the thematic analysis in a structured manner, incorporating examples from the focus group data to illustrate the key findings. The analysis revealed that multilingualism, particularly the use of Pahari, Urdu, and English, significantly aids students in their academic success by enhancing cognitive abilities, communication skills, and cultural understanding. The researcher highlighted that multilingualism is not merely a cognitive ability but also a socially and culturally constructed phenomenon shaped by students' interactions within their academic environment. This view of researcher aligns with the epistemological stance of social constructionism, which posits that reality is not inherently objective but is co-created through the collective interactions, interpretations, and understandings of individuals within a society (Burr, 2015). Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that society itself is a product of human activity, shaped and maintained by the shared meanings and beliefs that individuals generate through social interactions.

Focus Group Interview 2 (ISLAMIC INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS)

The section presents the thematic analysis of data derived from Focus Group Interview 2, Question 2, conducted with students from the Islamic International University. The participants shared their insights on how their proficiency in Pahari, Urdu, and English shapes their cultural identity and sense of belonging. Data was collected through audio recordings to ensure an accurate representation of the participants' experiences. The familiarization process involved a comprehensive review of the interview transcript and repeated listening to the audio recordings. This allowed the researcher to gain a thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives on how their language proficiency influences their cultural identity. Their responses highlighted various ways in which language connects them to their roots and enhances their sense of belonging. From the responses, several initial codes were identified, including "connection to roots," "adaptability," "community building," "cultural expression," and "sense of home." These codes capture the key themes emerging from the participants'

discussions regarding the relationship between language and cultural identity. Through the coding process, four key themes emerged: Connection to Roots**,** Adaptability in Different Settings**,** and Community Building through Language**,** Cultural Expression and Sense of Home. These themes reflect the various ways language proficiency influences the students' cultural identities and feelings of belonging. In the fourth step, each theme was reviewed by the researcher to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The first theme, Connection to Roots, highlights how proficiency in Pahari fosters a strong connection to cultural heritage. Participant 1 emphasized that while English provides access to global knowledge, Pahari is vital for keeping them grounded in their roots. The second theme, Adaptability in Different Settings**, e**mphasizes how multilingualism enables students to navigate various environments. Participant 2 shared that being proficient in Pahari, Urdu, and English helps them adapt to different contexts, particularly within the academic environment. The third theme, Community Building through Language**,** reflects how speaking Pahari fosters a sense of community among Kashmiri students. Participant 3 noted that using Pahari in university creates a bond that reinforces their identity as Kashmiris. The fourth theme, Cultural Expression and Sense of Home, focuses on how Pahari serves as a means of cultural expression and a source of comfort. Participant 4 expressed that while proficiency in English and Urdu is essential for education, Pahari is what truly makes them feel at home. During the fifth step, the themes were defined and named to capture the distinct aspects of participants' experiences regarding language proficiency and cultural identity: The theme Connection to Roots emphasized how proficiency in Pahari helps students stay connected to their cultural heritage and reinforces their sense of identity. The second theme Adaptability in Different Settings highlighted the ability to navigate various environments due to multilingualism, allowing for flexibility in communication and social interactions. The third theme Community Building through Language focused on how speaking Pahari fosters a sense of belonging and creates a supportive community among Kashmiri students. The last theme Cultural Expression and Sense of Home reflected the role of Pahari in expressing cultural values and providing comfort, enhancing the students' sense of home and belonging. The final report illustrates how students in the MS English program at Islamic International University perceive the impact of their language proficiency on their cultural identity and sense of belonging. Participant 1 expressed that their proficiency in Pahari maintains a deep connection to their roots, emphasizing that while studying English expands their perspective, Pahari grounds them in their heritage, fostering a strong sense of belonging to their local culture. Participant 2 highlighted that their upbringing in a multilingual environment allowed them to adapt easily in various settings. They explained that while Pahari is the language of home, their ability to speak Urdu and English helps them engage effectively in academic contexts, enhancing their adaptability. Participant 3 shared that while proficiency in English has opened up opportunities, it is through Pahari that they connect with their cultural values. They stated that speaking Pahari among peers fosters a sense of community that reinforces their identity as Kashmiris. Participant 4 noted that Pahari is central to their cultural engagement, providing them with a sense of home even in a diverse university environment. They remarked that although they are proficient in English and Urdu, they often find solace and self-identity through their native language. Participant 5 emphasized that their identity as a Kashmiri is closely tied to Pahari. They explained that while English and Urdu are crucial for academic and social interactions, Pahari captures the essence of their

heritage and allows them to express their true self, particularly among fellow Kashmiri students. Addressing to the Research Question 2, the responses highlighted that the participants' reflections illustrate their language proficiency significantly shapes their cultural identities and sense of belonging. Pahari serves as a vital connection to their heritage, fostering a sense of community among Kashmiri students and enhancing their overall university experience. By addressing Research Question 2, it becomes evident that the participants' experiences demonstrate how language proficiency influences their cultural identity and sense of belonging. The ability to navigate multiple languages enables students to construct their identities and express their cultural heritage effectively. Pahari emerges as a crucial means of maintaining a connection to their roots, while Urdu and English facilitate broader social interactions. The participants' insights underscore the importance of considering how language shapes cultural narratives and fosters community among diverse student populations, ultimately enriching their academic experiences. The relationship between language and identity can be understood through the lens of social constructionism, as articulated by Berger and Luckmann (1966) in *The Social Construction of Reality*. This theoretical framework posits that social institutions and interactions fundamentally shape individuals' perceptions of reality. It emphasizes that reality is not inherent or objective; instead, it is socially constructed through collective interactions, interpretations, and understandings among individuals within a society. In this context, the participants' multilingual abilities reflect a socially constructed reality where language plays a pivotal role in defining cultural identity and sense of belonging.

Focus Group Interview 3(NUML Students)

The section presents the thematic analysis derived from Focus Group Interview 3, focusing on the advantages and challenges that Kashmiri students experience in understanding and engaging with course materials due to their multilingual backgrounds. The responses highlight various aspects of how multilingualism influences their academic experiences at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML).In the beginning, the analysis commenced with a comprehensive review of the interview transcript to gain insights into the participants' perspectives on the impact of multilingualism on their engagement with course materials. Their responses revealed both benefits and challenges associated with being multilingual in an academic setting. From the participants' responses, several initial codes were identified, including "enhanced comprehension," "diverse perspectives," "technical vocabulary challenges," and "cultural references." These codes reflect the key themes emerging from the discussions about their academic engagement. Through the coding process, three key themes emerged: Enhanced Comprehension and Engagement, Diverse Perspectives in Analysis, Challenges with Technical Vocabulary and Cultural References. These themes represent both the positive and negative effects of multilingualism on their academic experiences. In the fourth step, each theme was reviewed to ensure it accurately reflected the participants' experiences. The first theme, Enhanced Comprehension and Engagement**,** highlighted how multilingualism positively influences students' ability to understand complex concepts. Participant 1 expressed that their familiarity with Urdu and Kashmiri helps them grasp English literature more easily, although they face challenges with technical vocabulary. The second theme, Diverse Perspectives in Analysis, focused on the ability of multilingual students to analyze texts

through various linguistic lenses. Participant 3 noted that their multilingual background enriches their understanding by allowing them to approach course materials from multiple perspectives. The third theme, Challenges with Technical Vocabulary and Cultural References, reflected the specific struggles students encounter in their academic engagement. Participant 4 shared that, despite their advantages, they face difficulties with specialized terminology in English, necessitating additional resources for better understanding. Participant 2 also mentioned challenges related to unfamiliar cultural references or idioms in English, which can hinder their engagement. During the fifth step, the themes were defined and named to capture the distinct aspects of the participants' experiences regarding the influence of multilingualism on their academic engagement: The first theme Enhanced Comprehension and Engagement emphasized how multilingualism facilitates the understanding of complex concepts, helping students engage with course materials effectively. The second theme Diverse Perspectives in Analysis highlighted the richness of analysis that multilingualism fosters, enabling students to approach literary texts from multiple linguistic angles. The last theme Challenges with Technical Vocabulary and Cultural References underscored the difficulties related to technical vocabulary and cultural references, which can complicate students' engagement with course materials. The final report illustrates how students in the Kashmiri community at NUML perceive the impact of their multilingual backgrounds on understanding and engaging with academic materials. Participant 1 expressed that their multilingualism enhances their ability to grasp complex concepts in English literature due to their familiarity with Urdu and Kashmiri. However, they acknowledged struggles with technical vocabulary, necessitating extra effort to fully engage with the materials. Participant 2 highlighted that their proficiency in Urdu and English helps them understand nuances in literary texts, although they encounter challenges with unfamiliar cultural references or idioms in English, which can hinder their academic engagement. Participant 3 noted that their multilingual background allows them to approach course materials from diverse perspectives, enriching their understanding. However, they mentioned difficulties with speedy reading comprehension in English, which requires more time to engage effectively. Participant 4 emphasized the advantage of understanding historical and cultural contexts in English literature due to their multilingual proficiency. Despite this, they face challenges with specialized terminology in English, which necessitates additional resources to supplement their understanding. Participant 5 pointed out that their multilingualism facilitates deeper connections between literary texts and real-life experiences. However, they encounter challenges when instructors use colloquialisms or regional slang in English, requiring clarification to engage fully with the course materials. Addressing Research Question 1, it is seen that the participants' reflections indicate that their multilingual backgrounds significantly influence their understanding and engagement with academic materials. The data suggests that multilingualism enhances comprehension and critical analysis by providing various linguistic frameworks that facilitate deeper engagement with academic discourse. The ability to draw from multiple languages allows students to connect more intimately with literary texts and course materials, enriching their analytical perspectives. However, they also encounter challenges, particularly related to technical vocabulary and cultural references, which require additional effort and resources to navigate effectively.

Findings

This paper demonstrates that multilingualism serves as a vital resource for Kashmiri MS students, profoundly influencing both their academic performance and socio-cultural existence in university settings. The findings reveal that multilingualism enhances cognitive development, deepens comprehension, and fosters analytical abilities by enabling students to engage with complex academic concepts through multiple linguistic perspectives. Simultaneously, it strengthens cultural identity, facilitates social integration, and promotes cross-cultural communication within diverse academic environments. By bridging their native languages with Urdu and English, Kashmiri students not only enrich their academic experiences but also navigate the complexities of their socio-cultural realities with adaptability and resilience. Ultimately, this study affirms that multilingualism is a powerful tool, both academically and socially, empowering students to excel in a multicultural and interconnected academic landscape.Answering the research question 1, the findings show that multilingualism significantly enhances the academic performance of Kashmiri students at the university level. The findings highlights cognitive benefits, improved communication, and cultural enrichment as key outcomes of multilingualism. Moreover, students' fluency in Pahari, Urdu, and English enabled them to access a broader range of academic resources and deepen their understanding of complex concepts. Answering research question 2, the findings show that multilingualism significantly shapes the socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students in an academic environment. The findings highlight key themes such as "Cultural Translation," where students translate complex English literary themes into Pahari, making the material more culturally relatable. Additionally, the "Multilingual Perspective in Literature Discussions" shows that students' diverse linguistic backgrounds enrich classroom discussions, promoting inclusivity and cultural exchange. The theme of "Language and Critical Thinking" shows that language-switching between Pahari, Urdu, and English enhances students' analytical abilities. These findings demonstrate that multilingualism supports both cognitive engagement and cultural identity within the academic environment. Answering research questions 1 and 2, the findings show that multilingualism serves as both an academic resource and a socio-cultural asset. Regarding academic performance, the theme of multilingualism as an academic resource demonstrates that students use their linguistic abilities to enhance comprehension and engagement with course content, translating and interpreting complex concepts across languages. Also, cultural and linguistic interpretation in academia" and multilingualism in peer support and collaboration highlight that students relate academic theories to their cultural contexts and leverage their multilingualism to facilitate peer learning, creating a collaborative and inclusive academic environment. Moreover, findings highlight that multilingualism allows students to bridge their academic and cultural worlds, fostering a strong connection to their heritage while also supporting integration into broader academic and social contexts. This adaptability strengthens their sense of identity and belonging, enabling them to navigate both local and global environments effectively..

Conclusion

This paper aimed to explore the role of multilingualism as a resource for Kashmiri students pursuing their MS degrees at various universities in Islamabad, including COMSATS University, the National University of Modern Languages (NUML), and the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). The research examined how multilingualism impacts their academic performance and influences their socio-cultural journeys, revealing the significant and multifaceted ways in which multilingualism contributes to both educational success and cultural identity formation. Moreover, the conclusion section is arranged in order of research questions. Answering Research Objective 1, it is seen that multilingualism positively impacts Kashmiri students' academic performance. Students who switch between Pahari, Urdu, and English engage more deeply with academic material, showing improved cognitive processing and better academic outcomes. Answering Research Objective 2, it is seen that multilingualism plays a vital role in shaping the socio-cultural existence of Kashmiri students in the academic environment. Their diverse linguistic backgrounds foster inclusive discussions and cultural exchanges in the classroom. Answering Research Objective 1, it is seen that students' access to a wider range of academic resources is enhanced by their multilingual proficiency. The ability to translate challenging academic concepts into their native languages allows them to better comprehend and retain complex ideas. Answering Research Objective 2, it is seen that multilingualism reinforces students' cultural identities. By using Pahari, Urdu, and English, they effectively balance their Kashmiri heritage with their academic and social experiences, contributing to their integration into both local and global contexts. Answering Research Objective 1, it is seen that multilingualism fosters students' analytical abilities. Cognitive flexibility, gained through switching languages, leads to a more nuanced understanding of academic content and enhances their critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Answering Research Objective 2, it is seen that multilingualism enables students to form stronger social connections. The ability to communicate across languages helps them engage more effectively with peers from various linguistic backgrounds, fostering a sense of belonging within the university community.

Recommendations

1. Investigate the specific ways in which each language (English, Urdu, and Pahari) contributes to the academic success of Kashmiri MS English students at different universities of Pakistan this can help provide a deeper understanding of the unique benefits of each language and how they can be utilized effectively in the learning process.

2. Explore the role of multilingualism in the development of cultural identity among Kashmiri MS English students. Investigate how their multilingual background influences their cultural perspectives and attitudes towards language use.

3. Conduct a comparative study between Kashmiri MS English students who have multilingual educational background and those who do not. Compare their language learning strategies, academic performance, and overall linguistic competence to understand the specific advantages of a multilingual background.

4. Investigate the impact of multilingualism on the professional and career opportunities available to Kashmiri MS English students. Examine how their language skills and multicultural experiences contribute to their employability and success in the job market.

5. Explore the challenges and barriers faced by Kashmiri MS English students in developing proficiency in multiple languages. Identify specific strategies and interventions that can help overcome these challenges and optimize the benefits of multilingualism.

References

1   Adesope, O. O., Lavin, T., Thompson, T., & Ungerleider, C. (2010). A systematic review and meta-analysis of the cognitive correlates of bilingualism. Review of Educational Research, 80(2), 207-245.

2   American Council of Foreign Language Teachers. (2022). The Benefits of Being Multilingual in the Workforce. Retrieved from https://www.actfl.org/advocacy/language-matters/benefits-being-multilingual-workforce

3   Andrews, T. (2012). What is Social Constructionism? The Grounded Theory Review, 11(1), 39-44. Retrieved from https://ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/web/direct-files/13146564/9a5a9439-6037-45d7-84da-284f930f20b1/WhatisSocialConstructionism%20(1).pdf

4   Baker, C. (2011). Foundations of bilingual education and bilingualism. Multilingual Matters.

5   Bialystok, E. (2017). The bilingual adaptation: How minds accommodate experience. Psychological Bulletin, 143(3), 233.

6   Blackledge, A., &Creese, A. (2015). Heteroglossia and agency: Linguistic and social diversity as resources in educating linguistically minority's students. In S. May & C. E. Miramontes (Eds.), Critical multiculturalism: Theory and praxis (pp. 59-72). Routledge.

7   Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology.

8   Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2014). Thematic analysis. In T. Teo (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Critical Psychology (pp. 1947-1952). New York: Springer.

9   Dawadi, S. (2020). Thematic analysis approach: A step by step guide for ELT research practitioners. Journal of NELTA, 25(1-2), 62-81. https://ppl-ai-file-upload.s3.amazonaws.com/web/direct-files/15228133/ccc8d193-3193-4f3a-9c91-73273c01513b/ED612353.pdf

10   Dolgunsöz, E. (2013). Benefits of multilingualism in foreign language learning: A comparative study of bilingual and multilingual grammar strategies. International Online Journal of Education and Teaching, 1(1), 148-225.

11   Galbin, A. (2014). An introduction to social constructionism. Social Research Reports, 26, 82-92. Retrieved from www.researchreports.ro

12   García, O., &Kleifgen, J. A. (2010). Educating emergent bilinguals: Policies, programs, and practices for English language learners. Teachers College Press.

13   Gardner, R. C. (2010). Motivation and second language acquisition: The socio-educational model (Vol. 10). Peter Lang.

14   Genesee, F., &Cenoz, J. (2001). Trends in bilingual acquisition. Trends in Bilingual Acquisition, 1-292.

15   Grosjean, F. (2010). Bilingual: Life and reality. Harvard University Press.

16   Hancock, G. R., & Mueller, R. O. (2020). The reviewer's guide to quantitative methods in the social sciences. Routledge.

17   Kramsch, C. (2013). Culture in foreign language teaching. Iranian Journal of Language Teaching Research, 1(1), 57-78.

18   Krippendorff, K. (2019). Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology (4th ed.). Sage Publications.

19   Wei, L. (2020). Multilingualism and multilingual education. In J. I. Liontas (Ed.), The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching (pp. 1-6). John Wiley & Sons.