

Emergent Bilingual Learners' Target Language Development: A Comparison between Government Policies and School Practices

Yaghsha Sahar¹, Mubeen Ali², Muhammad Sabboor Hussain³

Abstract



This research paper has attempted to explore the importance of bilingual education and how it can be improved. A quantitative research approach has been chosen to investigate Pakistani bilingual educational policies and how they are applied in Pakistani schools. A questionnaire of 24 items, adapted by Panezai (2023) and Chávez-Moreno (2020), was dispatched online to collect data. The questionnaire was distributed among randomly selected 150 teachers in Sialkot. The threshold theory given by Cummins (2014) was used as the major framework for this study. After analyzing the data through inferential analysis, the results showed $t(148) = 6.61, p=0.000$ exploring differences in government policies and school practices of the public and private sectors while teaching the target language. Implications of the study highlight that reviving mother tongue or English-only policies is not the sole solution; young bilingual learners need adequate bilingual education policies fairly implemented in the schools to promote target language learning effectively.

Keywords: *Bilingual Education, English language learning, Government Policies, School Practices*

1. Introduction

The sub-continent has a long history of teaching and learning new languages through native and official languages and dialects. Ali (2020) considers that learners who study a second language at school while acquiring their first language as their mother tongue are bilingual students. Even when one language gives way to another, the entire narrative of advancement is facilitated by the tool of bilingual education. However, Pakistan's academic sector and educational system are not just for all strata of society. Abbas and Bidin (2022) claim that the education sector can be categorized into four major schooling

¹ MS Graduate, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Pakistan
E-mail: yaghsha.sahar@gcwus.edu.pk

² MS Graduate, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Pakistan
Email: mubeen.ali@gcwus.edu.pk

³ Professor, Department of English, University of Sialkot, Pakistan
E-mail: dr.muhammadsabboorhussain@uskt.edu.pk

systems; System of Urdu Medium Public Schools, Madrassa and Religious Academia, Elite Class English Medium Private School System, English Medium Non-Elite Private Schooling

Higher education medium-term development framework-2 (2011), as mentioned in Majoka and Khan (2017), explains how the pedagogy of the English language is intermingled yet interdependent upon types of schooling, proficiency of teachers and acquisition of the mother tongue. It further recommends language teachers with strong bilingual skills to teach English as a foreign language in countries like Pakistan. It is also inevitable that the Pakistani academic sector faces certain constraints, especially in planning and projecting language teaching policies. The National Education Policy of Pakistan (2009) is the most recent one for language teaching guidelines (Majoka & Khan, 2017). This policy strongly urges students to study three languages, including their mother tongue, English and a regional language till K-5. As Rind (2023, p. 114) mentions, “NEP is the ultimate government document that has divided students through social classes and distorted their language learning process”. The academic stakeholders have utilized and implemented this policy on their own terms (Baltodano, 2023). It has become the major dilemma of the Pakistani language education system where education is provided in two languages: for elite schooling, it is English, and for government-assisted schools, it is Urdu.

As a result, the progress rate of bilingual education is not uniform throughout the country. Agnihotri (2017) highlights that within Pakistan, several school practices portray that the utilization of Urdu or a regional language as a mother tongue holds a prime responsibility in the language pedagogical process, which is underlined by positive and adverse effects in particular academic cases. It has been assumed that either government policies are insufficient to promote bilingual education in Pakistan or school practices sabotage the implementation of bilingual policies, thereby harming bilingual education in Pakistan (Jabeen, 2023). Due to the need for more awareness, the question has been raised about how basic school practices for learners enhance English language learning through government policies. Therefore, this study addresses this problem to determine the need for more awareness and inadequacy of the government policies of bilingual education for promoting second language learning alongside the private and public sector school practices.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

Objectives of the study included to;

1. explore policies regarding bilingual education in the Pakistani context.
2. compare government policies for the English language pedagogy with school-administered practices.

1.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were considered to meet the objectives;

1. What is the current scenario of learning the target language and government policies in government and private schools?
2. How do government and private school practices differ regarding bilingual education policies?
3. Do bilingual academic policies and school practices help improve English as second language learning in Sialkot's government and private schools?

1.3 Research Hypotheses

To address these questions quantitatively, following hypotheses were formulated:

H_0 = There is no significant difference in government and private school practices signifying bilingual language government policies.

H_A = There is a significant difference in the practices of both schools highlighting bilingual language government policies.

H_0 = There is no significant role of the practices of school and bilingual language government policies to improve learning English as a second language scenario.

H_B = There is a significant role of the practices of both schools and bilingual language government policies to improve the learning of English as a second language.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study signifies the importance of bilingualism in teaching a second language in Pakistan. It is a continuous issue among language teachers whether bilingualism is a valuable tool in foreign language teaching or not. Bilingualism is necessary in our local context because it helps students and teachers grasp the complexities of human interaction and linguistic challenges. This research is believed to be of great support in guiding the stakeholders on the use of a first language to acquire a second language. This study is also valuable for future investigations on the actual policies and which policies are more significant for developing proficient second language learners in Pakistan.

2. Literature Review

As per section 251 of the charter mentioned in Mahboob (2020), Urdu is the language of the state, while English will function as the official language until arrangements are made for Urdu to take on its role. Since independence, Urdu has served as the 'language' of teaching in Pakistani government schools (Ashraf, 2023) and thus remained the Mode of Instruction (MOI) for most learners.

Early English language education can help all education sectors achieve the standard education they promised to give in compliance with international pronouncements such as UNESCO's Dakar Declaration, Education for All, and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Majoka and Khan (2017) mention that the Dakar Framework of Action 2000 is followed by Pakistan, which supports the utility of the first language in primary-level education of pupils. The national curriculum in the year 2006 confirmed teaching the English language from K-1 to K-14. Butt and Shahzad (2019) explained that the ultimate purpose of this framework was to teach the English language from the root level to the advanced stages of academics. This curriculum aimed at triggering students' capabilities to understand cultures and dynamic socio-political conditions of the world through the expert mastery on the English language. In the later stages, the federal government introduced another academic policy that made a trinity of languages (English, Urdu and a regional language) compulsory for language teaching.

The National Language Policy was implemented by Pervaiz Musharraf (Ex-President of Pakistan) in 1999, as mentioned in Mahboob (2020). The prime goal of this policy was to secure the status and enhance the use of English in the government sector. Manan and David (2021) have shared that in the National Education Policy of 2009, English has been marked as the medium of instruction from K-1 to K-12. Teaching English as a compulsory subject became mandatory in all schools. Agnihotri (2017) clarified that such implementations resulted from students' challenges during their present and post-educational era. National Education Policy of 2009 provided a five-year grace period during which Urdu or a regional language could be utilized as Pakistani students grasp English in chunks, focusing upon its grammatical structures preceding the subconscious comparison with their already learnt languages.

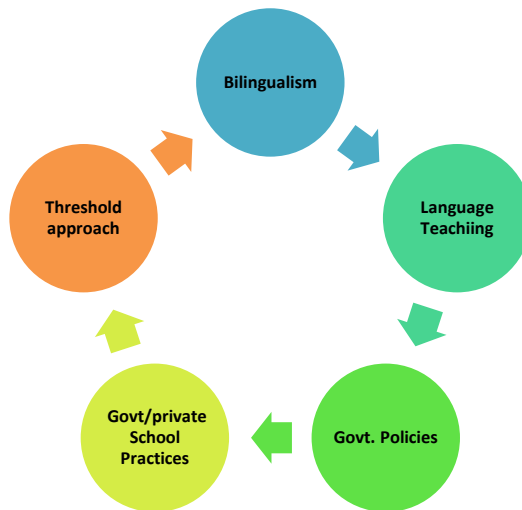
The district administration opted to phase in English as a Medium of Instruction (MOI) beginning in Grade 1 in all government schools. Following that, per departmental instruction, schools were allowed to utilize Urdu as the MOI up to K-3 if they could not follow the policy of English as the MOI commencing in K-1. However, Fareed et al. (2018) confirmed that using the English language in classrooms was a consequence of colonialism in Pakistani classrooms, highlighting issues like inter-languaging, anxiety and fear of learning a markedly superior language. English as MOI has been in effect for more than five years, although with varied outcomes. Jabeen (2023) stated that PSESP 2013-2017 (Punjab School Education Sector Plan) learners' competence in both English and Urdu was found to be below average because neither of the two languages was employed in teaching; instead, the mother tongue (other than

Urdu) was generally used as the MOI. Implementing a school language strategy increased proficiency in both English and Urdu while supporting children's cognitive development. As a result, the current government in Punjab has declared a strategy in which Urdu would be made the MOI and English would be taught as a compulsory subject beginning from K-1.

Shamim and Rashid (2019) argue that English is preferred as the medium of education in schools and institutions of higher education despite the proclamation of Urdu, the national language, as MOI in the schools. Their investigation shared a set of reasons behind the preference for the English Language as MOI in schools, especially in private sector. Pervez (2024) shed light on the English language fever in Pakistan's academic sector, possibly generating several differences between government policies and school practices. Their studies have inferred to develop a policy that is fairly implemented and supported by the majority of the academic sectors in Pakistan so that it could prove fruitful in the long run. Haidar and Manan (2021) proclaim the clear dominance of the English language in Pakistani private schools in the coming decade if the policymakers and academic stakeholders do not consider a mid-way. Meanwhile, Mirza and Rubab (2024) identified how bilingual teaching practices, including the use of Urdu and another regional language, are imminent in imparting language education in classrooms of Pakistani government schools in coming times.

This study bridges a glaring gap that though government policies have been studied in Pakistan, comparative analyses of the implementation of such policies in public and private sectors have been overlooked (Panzai, 2023). The particular study has paved the road for future investigators to research further in the current domain. This research study has emphasized bilingual education through the lens of Cummins's threshold theory (2014, p. 77). This theory particularly focuses on the minimum threshold provided to learn a language. As a result, the influence of differences in bilingual policies and school practices can be studied.

Figure 1
 Conceptual Framework



3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study has chosen a quantitative research method, survey research, as its design. The rationale behind selecting the research design was the urge to quantify the results to fill the literary gap. Survey design is highly appropriate for quantitative studies conducted in a strict time frame and with limited resources (Story & Tait, 2019).

3.2 Population and Sample

The population for this study included only K-1 to K-10, 200 language teachers of two private and two government renowned schools of city Sialkot.

Table 1

Demographical Information of the Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Gender	96 Females	64%
	54 Males	36%
Government Teachers	63	42%
Private Teachers	87	58%
Total	150	100%

Table 1 represents that only 150 voluntary participants have been considered in this study.

3.3 Sampling Technique

Simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants for this study. Random sampling was an essential component of this entire survey study design, as Emerson (2015) marks it as faster as and more convenient than other techniques, for quantitative investigations. The sampling criterion included the following credentials:

- Bilingual EL teachers
- Experienced language instructors for a minimum of 2 years

3.4 Research Instrument

The data were collected through a questionnaire including 24 close-ended questions adapted by Panezai (2023) and Chávez-Moreno (2020). The Cronbach's alpha value recorded for this adapted questionnaire was 0.78, where $n=150$, making this questionnaire valid and reliable. The questionnaire included three major sections, following a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, neutral, strongly agree).

1. Current scenario of bilingual policies and English language learning (6 items)
2. Government and private school practices (12 items)
 - Curriculum (6 items)
 - Teaching methods (5 items)
3. Confluence of bilingual policies and school practices (7 items)

3.5 Data Collection

The questionnaire was circulated to the language instructors in Sialkot through Google Forms in September 2023, following all research ethics (acquiring participants' consent, impartiality, and maintaining data privacy). The forms were collected and synthesized within one month.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive analysis has been run through SPSS version 21.0 to acquire the average mean and standard deviation of each questionnaire item. Levene's test was performed to measure the equality of the variances, where $F=1.110$ and $p=0.29 > 0.005$ marked the inequality of variance in both groups. Later, inferential testing and an adjusted independent sample t-test were applied to compare the government and private school practices. The acquired data were then analyzed and inferred using the threshold theory.

4.1 Current Scenario of Government Bilingual Policies

Sahar and Shahbaz (2023) claim that perceptions shape practices. To investigate these practices, it was necessary to investigate the current state of

bilingual language policies in schools. This section dealt with the general perceptions and attitudes of school language teachers about bilingual language policies.

Table 2

Mean Score of Items Measuring Current Scenario

S#	Section 1	Government		Private	
		Mean	SD*	Mean	SD
1.	General Awareness	4.13	0.72	2.24	1.03
2.	Historical perspective	3.76	0.98	1.75	0.92
3.	Perspective on policies Implementation	3.96	0.78	2.25	0.99
4.	English learning goals only	3.43	0.90	3.47	0.97
5.	Keeping L1 intact	3.45	1.05	2.43	1.06
6.	Learning of both L1 and L2 languages	3.73	0.83	2.75	0.97

*Standard Deviation

Table 2 discusses that the mean score of government teachers for general awareness regarding the policies is 4.13, which is higher than that of private teachers (mean=2.24). For knowing the historical background and having a clear perspective, government teachers share a higher mean score of 3.76 and 3.96 than private teachers, who have 1.75 and 2.59 mean scores. For seeking language goals, government teachers have the highest mean score for learning both L1 and English, which is 3.73, while private school teachers have a higher mean score for seeking English learning goals, which is 3.47.

Table 3

Average Mean Score of Current Scenario

Factors	Schools	N	Mean	SD	SE*
Current Scenario	Government	63	3.20	0.574	0.55
	Private	87	2.48	0.707	0.52

*Standard Error

Table 3 reflects that the overall mean score for this section was 3.20, SD=0.574 for government schools despite having a lower value of N= 63 compared to private schools' mean score of 2.48, with an average SD= 0.707 for N=87.

4.2 Government and Private School Practices

Rind (2023) explains that government and private schools implement a variety of school practices due to the globalization of language education. This section sought government and private sector school practices and their relevance to bilingual policies. The first sub-section investigates practices regarding

curriculum design (As the textbooks used in government sector schools in Punjab include the same list of topics, all textbooks are implied to be the same, while private schools approved books from other publishers (Oxford and Cambridge).). The second subsection regards the teaching practices of government and private schools.

Table 4

Mean Values of School Practices Concerning Curriculum

S#	Section 2a	Government		Private	
		Mean	SD*	Mean	SD
1.	Government approved topics	4.13	0.72	3.56	0.86
2.	Promotes bilingualism	2.90	1.00	2.78	1.05
3.	Bilingual language learning activities	2.56	0.98	2.67	1.08
4.	English language learning activities	3.10	1.06	3.38	0.90
5.	Effects on L1	2.23	0.87	3.69	0.96
6.	School-implied curriculum improvement	3.82	0.88	3.16	0.98

Table 4 shows that government language textbooks include government-approved topics with a mean value of 4.13, whereas the mean score for private schools is 3.56. Both sectors share a mean score below 3; government schools' mean=2.90, 2.56 and private schools' mean=2.78, 2.67 for claiming government-approved topics promote bilingual learning and activities. Mean 3.18 for government schools and 3.38 for private schools for curriculum supporting English learning activities. Government practices have the least impact on L1, mean=2.26, while private practices have a mean value=3.69. While average mean=3.8 for government and mean=3.16 for private schools with an urge for improvement in policy-supported curriculum. The subsection of section.2 dealt with the instruction methods and teaching strategies most teachers use.

Table 5

Mean Values of Teaching Methods in Government and Private Schools

S#	Section 2b	Government		Private	
		Mean	SD*	Mean	SD
1.	English as MOI	1.82	0.96	3.99	0.83
2.	Both languages, as MOI	3.66	0.98	2.90	1.08
3.	Traditional teaching	3.71	0.82	3.21	0.74
4.	Personalized teaching	2.56	0.98	3.68	0.87
5.	Extracurricular activities for English learning	3.23	0.82	3.77	0.75

Table 5 shows that English is used as MOI for most private schools, with a mean=3.99, while government schools imply both L1 and English as MOI, with a mean of 3.66. Private school teachers use more personalized strategies, M=3.68, whereas more traditional methods are employed in government schools, M=3.728.

Table 6

Average Mean Score of School Practices

Factors	Schools	N	Mean	SD	SE
School Practices					
Curriculum	Government	63	3.13	0.67	0.59
	Private	87	3.21	0.64	0.53
Teaching Methods	Government	63	3.01	0.68	0.54
	Private	87	3.51	0.67	0.55

Table 6 shows that the overall mean scores for the curriculum and strategies section are 3.13,3.01 for government schools compared to private schools' mean scores, which are 2.48 and 3.51, slightly higher than the former.

Table 7

t-test for School Practices

S #	School Practices	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig.(2-tailed)	95% Lower bound	95% Upper bound
1.	Curriculum	5.56	148	1.97	0.05	0.00	0.39	0.67
2.	Teaching Methods	8.53	148	1.12	0.07	0.00	0.97	1.27

Table 7 shows that t=5.56 for school practices regarding curriculum and t=8.53 for teaching practices where df=148. The p-value<standard 0.005 rejects the null hypothesis, hence accepting the alternate hypothesis; however, private school practices play a comparatively significant role in improving target language learning in schools than in government schools.

4.3 Improvement in the English Language Learning Through Policies and Practices

This section shares that both school's practices follow policies, government=4.31 and private=3.19. However, government practices share a lower score below 3 for improving English, while private school practices show a maximum higher score of 4.11. It is evident that English fluency in private, mean=3.91, is higher than in government, mean=2.33.

Table 8
Mean Values of Items in the Section.3

S #	Section 3	Government		Private	
		Mean	SD	Mean	SD
1.	The school practices follow government policies	4.31	0.75	3.19	0.95
2.	Bilingual education promotion	3.70	0.95	2.33	1.06
3.	English language skills Improvement	2.43	1.06	4.11	0.56
4.	Both languages skills development	2.99	0.77	3.87	0.93
5.	The student's English fluency	2.33	1.99	3.91	0.97
6.	Students L1 fluency	3.78	0.86	2.89	0.88
7.	Students with both L1 and English fluency	3.16	0.99	3.57	0.94

Table 8 reflects that government practices promote bilingual education and L1 fluency, mean=3.70, 3.78, whereas private practices have a mean value=2.33 of 2.89.

Table 9
Average Mean Score of Policies and Practices

Factors	Schools	N	Mean	SD	SE
Confluence of Policies & Practices for English Learning	Government	63	3.15	0.74	0.45
	Private	87	3.48	0.64	0.43

It is reflected in Table 9 that the average mean score for the government sector is 3.15, and for the private sector is 3.48.

Table 10
t-test for Bilingual Policies and School Practices assisting English Learning

Sr	t	df	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	Sig.(2-tailed)	95% Lower bound	95% Upper bound	
1.	Bilingual Policies and School Practices	6.61	148	1.20	0.076	0.000	1.05	1.36

Table 10 shows that $t=6.61$, $df=148$, and $p=0.000$ reject the null hypothesis. The $p\text{-value} < \text{standard } 0.005$ accepts the alternate hypothesis that

bilingual academic policies and school practices assist English language learning for emergent bilinguals; however, private school practices play a comparatively more primary role in improving target language learning.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of this study highlight that the current scenario of bilingual education is not fully promising in the Pakistani context. Though many school teachers (both government and private) are aware of bilingual policies, the outcomes must flourish through reflection and research. It is visible that government teachers, rather than private ones, are aware of the historical background of government language policies as they are much influenced and funded by the government. As a result, their learning goals include nourishing both languages. The scenario of government policies is different in private schools. The emphasis has been placed on English learning and teaching, regardless of government policies (except mandatory ones). The results aligned with Sah (2022), who points out that an "English-Only" scenario where pupils emphasize speaking English to develop strong English skills while ignoring other languages and conceptual knowledge. The lower mean score values in the first section indicated that not many private teachers favor implementing government policies as they believe that it is much more significant for emergent learners to learn a new language (English in this case) with nonconformist approach.

The curriculum of both schools is somewhat aligned with the government's bilingual policies. Both textbooks include activities that foster the development of the English language in bilingual emergent learners; however, supplementary material and practical language learning activities in private schools are practiced and promoted concerning educational policies. In government classrooms, both English and the learner's mother tongue act as MOI. They believe that the learner becomes competent in both languages at the end of the academic session this way. Private practices prefer English as MOI with a view to prepare them for future that demands high level of English language proficiency.

Most government schools have opted traditional methods like Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for teaching the English language. It is also evident that government teachers may not enjoy complete liberty to explore and implant discreet bilingual practices as private teachers do. This study has provided that how concept-based bilingual education differs from cramming-language system. Private school practices include concept-based language teaching and several up to date teaching methods. The results revealed that private teachers engage in a wide range of practices that may not be parallel to the government policies. Such autonomous practices are beneficial for improving bilingual learning. Hence, the

results in this regard are aligned with Talebi and IranNejad (2020), who claim that private school practices are comparatively effective for promoting target language development in emergent learners.

Private school practices often ignore that pre-installed notions of the first language are useful while government schools keep L1 intact. Aligned with Bialystok and Craik (2022, p. 1255), the inferences show that English, the language of the officials, is preferred in private schools over the mother tongue, which equally plays a role in the language learning of emergent bilinguals. Unlike government policies, private school practices are quite peculiar in teaching four skills of English. To sum it up, no primarily effective language educational policies promoting English as second language learning are implemented in all Pakistani schools. Thus, the results spotted the irregularities and heterogeneities of Pakistan's bilingual education system, which teachers and administrators may address properly (in future). The English fluency score is much higher in private schools than government institutions which call for reforms and reflection on government school practices. Current bilingual policies must be more coherent with learners' particular needs from various social conditions and academic backgrounds. The results have also shown that more improvement is required to complement bilingual policies with school practices in both sectors.

This study emphasized the importance of bilingual education for the target language development of emergent bilingual learners. Bilingual education is vital for the effective growth of the target language in both public and private educational settings. It is implied that educational policies should urge to incorporate activities and practices to enhance productive language learning instead of focusing solely on covering the syllabus in the target language.

6. Recommendations

This study has outlined following recommendations based on conclusions;

1. The results have highlighted the uneven situation of bilingual education in Pakistani schools. The reasons can be several and severe. So, the first recommendation is that both government officials and academic researchers should conduct fair investigations to study the current scenario of bilingual education and the implementation of educational policies at the school level across board across the country. Language instructors should be guided to use advanced language teaching strategies and translanguaging techniques.
2. The results have explained that planned and judicious first language (L1) is successful in fostering bilingualism in school education. So, it is highly recommended that the first language be utilized along with the English language to promote language development. Both languages should be

promoted instead of following English only or mother tongue only approach. Apart from that, instructors should acknowledge the importance of L1 in learning. The parental role should also be increased in this regard. It is advised that they use more of their mother tongue in elite homes and vice versa in middle-class households.

3. Results have evidently shown differences in government and school practices. The current environment calls for several modifications in the country's national education policy on English language learning. A one-nation academic policy should be generated that is aligned with the modern requirements of communication, pedagogy, and worldwide applications. It must be monitored at planning, preparation and execution level with a will to reform the current bilingual landscape in the educational institution.

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