

# Teachers' Perceptions of Multilingual Classrooms and Implications for ESL Student Learning Outcomes in Pakistan: An Outcome-Based Education Framework

Sanaullah<sup>1</sup>, Aarif Gohar Salarzai<sup>2</sup>, Shakeel Ahmad<sup>3</sup>, Shahid Iqbal<sup>4</sup> and Syed Munir Ahmad<sup>5</sup>

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## Abstract

*This study investigates teachers' perceptions of multilingual classroom environments and examines their implications for English as a Second Language (ESL) Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs) within Pakistan's Outcome-Based Education (OBE) framework. The research is situated in Peshawar's complex multilingual sociolinguistic landscape, where students regularly transition between multiple home and school languages. An exploratory, descriptive research design was employed to gather comprehensive insights into this phenomenon. Data collection involved ten English language teachers from secondary and post-secondary institutions through structured perception-based questionnaires and open-ended reflective responses. The findings reveal that teachers view multilingual classrooms as presenting considerable instructional challenges, particularly concerning pronunciation accuracy, listening comprehension development, and effective classroom language management, all critical components for achieving ESL SLOs. However, teachers also identified notable benefits, specifically enhanced vocabulary acquisition and increased metalinguistic awareness among students. This study does not directly assess student performance; instead, it analyses teachers' perceptions to understand how multilingual environments either support or hinder the alignment between classroom instructional practices and targeted ESL learning outcomes. The results underscore the need to develop context-sensitive, outcome-aligned pedagogical approaches and to implement focused professional development programs to enhance the effectiveness of ESL instruction in multilingual educational settings. The research provides valuable, contextually grounded contributions to the currently limited scholarship on multilingualism and OBE implementation in Pakistan's educational landscape.*

**Keywords:** Multilingual classrooms; ESL; Student Learning Outcomes; Outcome-Based Education; Teacher perceptions; Pakistan

## Introduction

Pakistan is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in South Asia, with multilingualism embedded in everyday social, cultural, and educational life. Learners typically acquire one or more

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<sup>1</sup>PhD Scholar, Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Peshawar, Pakistan.

Corresponding Author Email: [Sanastd@icp.edu.pk](mailto:Sanastd@icp.edu.pk)

<sup>2</sup>PhD Scholar, Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Peshawar. Email: [argosal@gmail.com](mailto:argosal@gmail.com)

<sup>3</sup>PhD Scholar, Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Peshawar. Email: [kittynaz2000@yahoo.com](mailto:kittynaz2000@yahoo.com)

<sup>4</sup>PhD Scholar, Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Peshawar. Email: [shahidiqbalkhan@uop.edu.pk](mailto:shahidiqbalkhan@uop.edu.pk)

<sup>5</sup>Associate Professor, Institute of Education & Research (IER), University of Peshawar.

Email: [munir\\_ahmad@uop.edu.pk](mailto:munir_ahmad@uop.edu.pk)



regional languages at home, such as Pashto, Urdu, Hindko, Punjabi, or Saraiki, before encountering English as a compulsory subject and, in many cases, as a medium of instruction in formal schooling. In Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and particularly in urban centers such as Peshawar, classrooms frequently bring together students from varied linguistic backgrounds, creating complex multilingual learning environments. These realities shape not only how English is taught but also how learners engage with the language in classroom settings.

In recent years, Pakistan's education system has increasingly emphasized Outcome-Based Education (OBE) as a guiding reform framework. OBE foregrounds clearly articulated Student Learning Outcomes (SLOs), learner-centered pedagogy, and alignment between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. In English as a Second Language (ESL) education, SLOs commonly focus on developing listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, as well as communicative competence and functional language use. Achieving these outcomes requires consistent exposure to the target language, meaningful interaction, and instructional practices that are responsive to learners' linguistic and cognitive needs (Biggs & Tang, 2022).

Within multilingual classrooms, the attainment of ESL SLOs may be influenced by a range of contextual and instructional factors. Contemporary research suggests that multilingualism can support language learning by enhancing metalinguistic awareness, cognitive flexibility, and vocabulary development (Bialystok & Poarch, 2023). At the same time, studies also highlight challenges associated with cross-linguistic interference, particularly in pronunciation, grammar, and listening comprehension, when learners navigate multiple linguistic systems simultaneously (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2022). These challenges may become more pronounced in contexts where instructional time is limited, and teachers must balance target-language exposure with learners' need for comprehension support.

Teachers play a central mediating role in managing multilingual classroom dynamics, especially within an OBE framework that requires instructional alignment with defined learning outcomes. Their beliefs, experiences, and classroom practices shape how multilingual resources are either constrained or leveraged to support ESL learning. Recent scholarship emphasizes that teachers' perceptions offer valuable insight into the practical realities of implementing outcome-oriented reforms in linguistically diverse settings (Borg, 2023). However, empirical research examining teachers' perspectives on multilingual classrooms and their relationship to ESL SLO attainment remains limited in Pakistan.

Against this backdrop, the present study explores English teachers' perceptions of multilingual classrooms in Peshawar and examines the perceived implications of these environments for ESL Student Learning Outcomes within an Outcome-Based Education framework. By situating teacher perspectives within the local linguistic and policy context, the study seeks to contribute contextually grounded insights to ongoing discussions on multilingualism, ESL pedagogy, and OBE implementation in Pakistan.

## **Literature Review**

### **Multilingualism and Second Language Learning**

Recent research on multilingualism has increasingly moved beyond deficit-oriented views to recognize the complex ways in which multiple languages interact in the learning process. Contemporary studies indicate that multilingual learners often draw on existing linguistic knowledge when acquiring an additional language, a process described as cross-linguistic transfer (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2022). Positive transfer may facilitate vocabulary development and reading comprehension, particularly when learners recognize cognates or shared semantic structures across

languages. At the same time, negative transfer can occur, especially in phonology and syntax, leading to persistent pronunciation difficulties or grammatical errors in ESL contexts.

Empirical work published in the early 2020s highlights that multilingual learners may demonstrate heightened metalinguistic awareness, enabling them to reflect on language form and use more effectively than monolingual peers (Bialystok & Poarch, 2023). This awareness can be advantageous for learning vocabulary and understanding language rules. However, these benefits are not automatic and depend heavily on instructional practices, classroom language policies, and the degree of meaningful exposure to the target language.

### **Instructional Challenges in Multilingual Classrooms**

Despite potential cognitive advantages, multilingual classrooms present practical instructional challenges for ESL teachers. Recent studies report that teachers often struggle to maintain consistent use of the target language while ensuring learner comprehension, particularly in large or heterogeneous classrooms (De Angelis & Dewaele, 2023). Pronunciation and listening comprehension are frequently identified as areas where learners experience difficulty due to phonological patterns carried over from first or additional languages.

Classroom code-switching has been widely discussed in recent literature as both a pedagogical resource and a potential constraint. While strategic use of learners' first languages can support comprehension and classroom management, excessive reliance on non-target languages may limit opportunities for meaningful English input and output (Macaro, 2022). Teachers' decisions regarding when and how to allow code-switching are therefore central to ESL learning in multilingual environments.

### **Teachers' Perceptions and Classroom Practice**

Teachers' perceptions have gained renewed attention in recent educational research as key determinants of classroom practice. Borg (2023) emphasizes that teachers' beliefs, shaped by experience and context, directly influence instructional choices, particularly in complex settings such as multilingual classrooms. Studies conducted in South Asian contexts suggest that teachers often perceive multilingualism as increasing instructional workload and classroom management demands, even while acknowledging its potential benefits for learner engagement and vocabulary development (Rahman & Pandian, 2021).

Understanding teachers' perceptions is especially important in systems undergoing pedagogical reform. In OBE-oriented contexts, teachers are expected to align instruction with clearly defined learning outcomes, yet research indicates that contextual constraints—such as linguistic diversity—can complicate this alignment (Biggs & Tang, 2022). Teachers' perceptions thus provide valuable insight into the feasibility of outcome-based reforms at the classroom level.

### **Outcome-Based Education, SLOs, and ESL Instruction**

Outcome-Based Education continues to influence curriculum and assessment reforms globally, with renewed emphasis on learning outcomes that are observable, measurable, and aligned with instructional practice. In language education, SLOs typically focus on communicative competence and functional language use rather than rote knowledge (OECD, 2023). Recent studies suggest that successful OBE implementation in ESL contexts requires flexible pedagogical approaches that account for learner diversity while maintaining a focus on outcome attainment.

In Pakistan, the integration of OBE and SLOs into school curricula has been uneven, with teachers often reporting limited professional support in translating outcome statements into classroom

practice (Akhtar & Mahmood, 2022). The interaction between multilingual classroom realities and OBE-driven expectations remains under-researched, particularly from the perspective of practicing teachers. This gap underscores the need for context-specific studies examining how multilingualism shapes teachers' ability to support ESL students' attainment of SLOs.

### Research Problem

Implementing Outcome-Based Education in Pakistan requires effective alignment between instructional practices and the intended ESL Student Learning Outcomes. However, in multilingual classroom environments, teachers may encounter challenges that complicate this alignment. There is limited empirical evidence documenting teachers' perceptions of how multilingual classrooms influence ESL instruction and the attainment of intended learning outcomes, particularly within the Pakistani context.

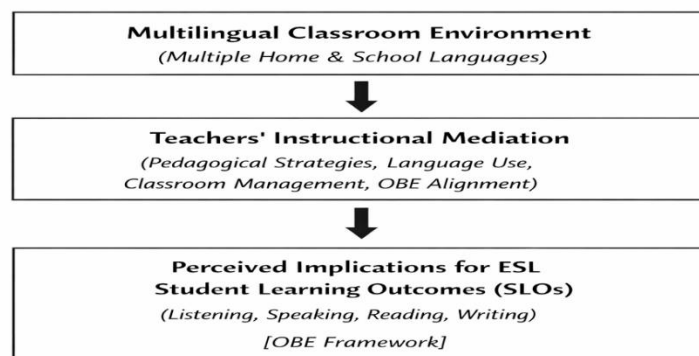
### Research questions

1. What challenges do English teachers perceive when teaching ESL in multilingual classrooms in Peshawar?
2. Which ESL-related learning domains (e.g., pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension) are perceived as most affected by multilingual classroom environments?
3. How do teachers perceive the implications of multilingual classrooms for achieving intended ESL Student Learning Outcomes within an OBE framework?

### Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by a conceptual framework that positions multilingual classroom environments as contextual factors shaping ESL instruction. Within this framework, teachers' instructional practices function as a mediating influence through which multilingual classroom dynamics are interpreted and managed. These practices include pedagogical strategies, classroom language use, and alignment with Outcome-Based Education (OBE) requirements. Rather than directly measuring Student Learning Outcomes, the framework emphasizes teachers' perceived implications for ESL SLO attainment across listening, speaking, reading, and writing domains. The framework thus provides an interpretive lens for understanding how multilingual contexts may facilitate or constrain outcome-oriented ESL instruction.

**Figure 1: Conceptual framework illustrating the relationship between multilingual classroom environments, teachers' instructional mediation, and perceived implications for ESL Student Learning Outcomes**



## **Theoretical Framework**

This study is informed by sociocultural theory and cross-linguistic transfer theory as complementary lenses for interpreting teachers' perceptions of multilingual classrooms. Sociocultural theory emphasizes the central role of social interaction, classroom discourse, and linguistic context in shaping learning processes, highlighting how language practices mediate learner engagement and meaning-making (Vygotsky, 1978; Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2020). Within multilingual classrooms, this perspective underscores the significance of teacher-guided interaction and classroom language use in supporting or constraining ESL learning. Cross-linguistic transfer theory provides a second interpretive lens by explaining how learners' prior linguistic knowledge may facilitate or interfere with second language acquisition. Research indicates that transfer effects are particularly evident in pronunciation, grammar, and lexical development, areas frequently highlighted by teachers in multilingual ESL contexts (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2022). Together, these theoretical perspectives support an interpretive understanding of teachers' perceptions by situating instructional challenges and observed learning patterns within broader social and linguistic processes. Rather than predicting learner outcomes, the framework is used to contextualize how multilingual classroom dynamics are perceived to influence the alignment between instructional practices and intended ESL Student Learning Outcomes within an Outcome-Based Education framework.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

An exploratory, descriptive research design was employed to examine teachers' perceptions of multilingual classrooms and their perceived implications for ESL Student Learning Outcomes within an Outcome-Based Education framework. Exploratory designs are particularly appropriate when investigating under-researched contexts and when the aim is to generate contextual insights rather than test hypotheses (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **Participants**

The study involved ten English language teachers teaching at secondary and post-secondary levels in Peshawar, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Participants were selected through convenience sampling based on their availability and experience teaching English in multilingual classroom settings. Such sampling approaches are commonly used in exploratory educational research where access to participants is context-dependent (Etikan et al., 2016).

### **Instrumentation**

Data were collected using a structured, perception-based questionnaire comprising closed-ended items and open-ended reflective prompts. Due to archival limitations, individual questionnaire items could not be retrieved. Consequently, analysis focused on aggregated response patterns from closed-ended items and thematic interpretation of teachers' qualitative reflections. This approach aligns with exploratory studies that prioritize interpretive understanding over instrument validation (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

### **Data Collection**

Data were collected during the academic session through direct administration of the questionnaire. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study prior to data collection.

### Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. Qualitative responses were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to instructional challenges and perceived learning implications.

**Table 1: Summary of Teachers' Perceived Challenges and Affected ESL SLO Domains**

| Perceived Instructional Challenge  | ESL SLO Domain(s)   | % of Teachers (n=10) |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|----------------------|
| Pronunciation interference         | Speaking            | 70%                  |
| Listening comprehension difficulty | Listening           | 80%                  |
| Limited classroom language control | Speaking, Listening | 100%                 |
| Vocabulary development issues      | Reading, Writing    | 50%                  |
| Grammar interference               | Writing             | 60%                  |

As shown in Table 1, teachers most frequently identified limited classroom language control and listening comprehension difficulties as major challenges affecting ESL Student Learning Outcomes.

### Findings

The findings indicate that teachers widely perceive multilingual classrooms as instructional challenges, particularly in managing classroom language use and addressing pronunciation difficulties. Most respondents reported that learners' pronunciation and listening comprehension were adversely affected due to cross-linguistic interference.

**Table 2: Distribution of Teachers' Perceptions of Multilingual Classrooms**

| Perception Dimension                              | Agree (%) | Neutral (%) | Disagree (%) |
|---------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|--------------|
| Multilingualism complicates ESL teaching          | 100       | 0           | 0            |
| Mother tongue negatively affects English learning | 30        | 20          | 50           |
| Multilingual learners have stronger vocabulary    | 50        | 30          | 20           |

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics summarizing teachers' perceptions of multilingual classrooms are presented. While all respondents agreed that multilingualism complicates ESL teaching, views regarding the role of the mother tongue and vocabulary development were more mixed.

Conversely, some teachers perceived that multilingual learners demonstrated stronger vocabulary development, potentially due to exposure to multiple linguistic systems. Overall, teachers expressed concern about maintaining alignment between instructional practices and intended ESL Student Learning Outcomes within an OBE framework.

**Table 3: Thematic Summary of Teachers' Qualitative Reflections**

| Theme                         | Description                                      | Illustrative Teacher Comment                   |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|
| Phonological interference     | Difficulty in managing pronunciation differences | "Students carry Pashto sounds into English..." |
| Classroom language management | Frequent switching limits English exposure       | "Too much reliance on L1 reduces practice..."  |

Qualitative reflections further highlighted recurring concerns related to phonological interference and classroom language management. These themes are summarized in Table 3.

### Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participants provided informed consent and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. Participation was voluntary, and data were used solely for academic purposes.

### Concluding Remarks

The study recommends targeted professional development for ESL teachers focusing on multilingual pedagogy and outcome-aligned instruction. Curriculum planners should consider flexible language policies that support ESL SLO attainment in multilingual contexts. Future research should incorporate larger samples, validated instruments, and direct measures of student learning outcomes to strengthen empirical evidence.

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