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## MULTILINGUAL ACADEMIC LITERACY AND ENGLISH-MEDIUM INSTRUCTION IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES OF SINDH, PAKISTAN: AN APPLIED LINGUISTICS STUDY

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### Abstract

*English has a powerful position in Pakistani higher education, but many undergraduates in Sindh enter university with uneven academic literacy, limited exposure to extended English writing, and strong multilingual resources that are rarely used systematically in English-medium classrooms. This paper investigates how university-level English applied linguistics can respond to the gap between English-medium policy and students' actual multilingual learning practices in Sindh, Pakistan. The paper is framed as a desk-based qualitative research study using documentary analysis and thematic synthesis of recent policy reports, national and provincial education evidence, and empirical studies on English-medium instruction, academic writing, translanguaging, and Pakistani English. The analysis shows that students' English difficulties are not simply individual weaknesses; they are produced by a long transition chain that begins in school, continues through college, and becomes visible at university through problems in academic vocabulary, grammar, morphology, coherence, argumentation, reading-to-write ability, and classroom participation. The paper proposes the Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework, which connects four dimensions: students' linguistic repertoires, academic English development, disciplinary literacy, and institutional support. This framework argues that English teaching at university level should combine explicit academic writing instruction, genre-based pedagogy, corpus-informed vocabulary learning, carefully planned translanguaging, feedback cycles, and teacher professional development. The paper contributes a new idea: English support in Sindh universities should be organized as a credit-bearing Academic Language Transition Studio rather than as a short remedial course. The study concludes that applied linguistics can offer a socially realistic, multilingual, and academically rigorous model for improving English learning at university level in Sindh in contemporary higher education settings.*

**Keywords:** English applied linguistics; Sindh; university students; academic literacy; English-medium instruction; translanguaging; Pakistani English

### 1. Introduction

English occupies a complex and unequal position in the linguistic ecology of Pakistan. It is a language of higher education, government, employment, technology and upward mobility, but it is not the first language of most students entering universities in Sindh. University classrooms in Sindh are therefore multilingual spaces in which Sindhi, Urdu and other local languages interact with English in lectures, reading, note-taking, peer discussion and written assignments. From an applied linguistics perspective, this situation is not a problem to be erased but a reality to be understood and used pedagogically. Research on English-medium instruction (EMI) shows that the expansion of English in higher education has created opportunities for international access, but it has also produced serious language-related challenges when students are expected to learn complex disciplinary content through a language in which they are still developing academic proficiency (Macaro, Curle, Pun, An, & Dearden, 2018; Mahboob, 2017). In Pakistan, where English has historically functioned as a language of elite access, the university English classroom is connected with wider questions of equity, identity and educational opportunity (Rahman, 2005; Nickson & Nudrat, 2022).



The context of Sindh makes the topic especially important. Provincial education planning recognizes challenges of quality, governance, teacher development, learning resources and assessment, and it also emphasizes digital resources and need-based professional development in the school system (Government of Sindh, School Education and Literacy Department, 2019). These school-level conditions matter for university learning because university students do not arrive as blank slates. They carry the consequences of earlier schooling, including uneven English reading ability, limited academic vocabulary, exam-oriented writing habits and little practice in extended argumentation. ASER Pakistan (2024) reported low English sentence-reading performance in rural Sindh at the school level, and such foundational weaknesses become a transition problem when students reach English-medium or English-demanding university programs. Pakistan Education Statistics 2023-24 also keeps attention on the scale and complexity of the national education system, indicating that language policy must be understood within larger questions of access and quality (Pakistan Institute of Education, 2025).

At the university level, English is not only a subject; it is a gatekeeping academic resource. Students in BS English, education, social sciences, natural sciences, business and technology programs may be required to read textbooks, write assignments, give presentations, sit examinations and prepare research projects in English. Higher Education Commission policy also places emphasis on competency-based undergraduate education, breadth of learning and practical skills, which makes academic communication central to student success (Higher Education Commission [HEC], 2023). The updated HEC English curriculum standards similarly locate English studies within linguistic knowledge, applied language work and professional communication (HEC, 2025). However, many students from Sindh's public-sector background may experience a gap between policy expectations and classroom realities: they are required to perform in English but have not received systematic academic literacy support. This gap is an applied linguistics problem because it concerns how language, pedagogy, policy and social context interact.

The aim of this paper is to examine English applied linguistics at the university level in Sindh through the lens of multilingual academic literacy. The paper does not treat students' use of Sindhi or Urdu as interference only. Instead, it asks how students' multilingual repertoires can be used to build stronger English academic writing, reading and participation. The paper also does not assume that English-only instruction automatically creates English proficiency. International EMI research has warned that learning content through English does not guarantee language development unless explicit language support is built into teaching (Macaro et al., 2018; Rose, McKinley, & Galloway, 2021). Pakistani research on university EMI has similarly shown that teachers often negotiate institutional English-only expectations by using multilingual strategies, sometimes feeling that such practices are pedagogically necessary but institutionally undervalued (Manan, Channa, & Haidar, 2022).

The research question guiding this paper is: How can English applied linguistics inform a context-responsive model of academic English development for university students in Sindh, Pakistan? The paper also asks three supporting questions. First, what language challenges are reported in policy documents and empirical studies related to Pakistani and Sindh-based English learning? Second, what theoretical perspectives from applied linguistics best explain these challenges? Third, what instructional framework can support university students' English academic literacy while respecting their multilingual backgrounds? These questions are important because they shift the debate from blaming learners for weak English toward



designing institutions that teach academic English more explicitly, fairly and effectively (Hyland, 2019; Wingate, 2015).

The paper is organized as a complete research article. The introduction establishes the problem and purpose. The literature review presents scholarship on EMI, academic literacies, translanguaging, Pakistani English and university writing, and it introduces the Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework. The methodology explains the documentary and thematic research design. The data collection and analysis section presents the documentary corpus and major themes. The discussion interprets the findings in relation to Pakistani and international applied linguistics studies. The conclusion provides implications for universities, English departments and policy makers in Sindh.

## **2. Review of Literature**

Applied linguistics investigates real-world language problems through theories of language learning, language use, literacy, multilingualism and pedagogy. In the context of Sindh universities, the central applied linguistics problem is not simply that students make grammatical errors; rather, students are asked to participate in academic communities through English while their prior schooling, home languages, social identities and institutional support systems differ greatly. The academic literacies approach argues that university writing is not a neutral technical skill but a set of socially situated practices involving identity, power and disciplinary expectations (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015). This approach is useful for Sindh because many students may understand English grammar rules in isolation but still struggle to produce university-level assignments, literature reviews, presentations and research reports.

Research on second language writing also supports a broader view of academic literacy. Hyland (2019) argues that L2 writing teaching should include genre awareness, audience, purpose, feedback, drafting and disciplinary discourse rather than only grammar correction. This matters in Sindh universities because students often move from exam-based writing to assignment-based and research-based writing without explicit guidance in genre. Local studies show that Pakistani learners frequently face difficulties related to vocabulary, spelling, grammar, L1 influence, rhetoric and lack of feedback (Akbar, Pathan, & Shah, 2018; Naseem, 2021). A Hyderabad-based study of public-sector colleges found that L2 writing problems were linked to spelling, vocabulary, L1 interference, grammar and insufficient feedback, and teachers also identified limited resources and traditional methods as causes (Akbar et al., 2018). Although that study focused on colleges, its findings are highly relevant because those learners form part of the future university intake in Sindh.

English-medium instruction is another major theme in the literature. EMI has expanded globally because universities seek internationalization, access to global knowledge and graduate employability (Macaro et al., 2018). However, systematic reviews show that EMI can create problems when students have to learn content and academic language at the same time without language-sensitive pedagogy (Macaro et al., 2018; Pun, Curle, & Macaro, 2023). In Pakistan, Mahboob (2017) argues that EMI in higher education is shaped by policy ambitions, social prestige and practical challenges. Manan et al. (2022) further show that Pakistani university teachers often use multilingual resources to help students understand content, but institutional expectations of English-only instruction can make such practices appear unofficial or even guilty. These findings are important for Sindh because English departments and content departments both need a realistic language policy that recognizes students' actual repertoires.

Translanguaging and translingual theories provide a useful alternative to strict English-only ideology. García and Li Wei (2014) define translanguaging as the dynamic use of a speaker's



linguistic resources to make meaning, learn and communicate. Canagarajah (2013) similarly argues that multilingual writers negotiate meaning across language boundaries rather than simply transferring fixed systems. In the Sindh university context, this means students' Sindhi and Urdu resources can help them understand concepts, plan ideas, compare rhetorical structures and develop metalinguistic awareness. Translanguaging does not mean replacing English or lowering standards; it means using multilingual scaffolding to reach stronger English academic performance. Global Englishes research also challenges the idea that only native-speaker norms should guide English teaching, especially in contexts where English is used for local, national and international communication (Rose et al., 2021).

Pakistani English and local multilingual identity also deserve attention. Pakistan has a long history of localized English use in administration, education and media. The recognition of Pakistani English as a legitimate variety can reduce unnecessary stigma attached to local accent, idiom and rhetorical patterns, while still teaching students to control academic conventions required for international and professional writing (Mahboob, 2017; Rahman, 2005). A balanced applied linguistics approach should neither reject local linguistic identity nor ignore academic standards. Instead, it should teach students when local expression is acceptable, when formal academic English is required and how writers make choices across audiences and contexts (Canagarajah, 2013; Hyland, 2019).

Recent Sindh-related and Pakistan-focused empirical studies strengthen the need for academic language support. Tunio, Nawaz, and Batool (2025) studied morphology in academic writing among English undergraduates at a public-sector university in Sindh and highlighted errors in inflectional and derivational morphemes. Soomro (2025) found that Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners reported grammar problems, limited vocabulary and coherence issues in academic English. These findings align with international studies on EAP and EMI, which show that students need explicit support in discipline-specific vocabulary, writing structure, reading comprehension and classroom participation (Hyland, 2019; Macaro et al., 2018). They also match policy evidence that Pakistan's English teaching system needs improvement in teaching, learning and assessment practices (Nickson & Nudrat, 2022).

The present paper proposes the Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework (SMALF) as a new contribution. The framework has four connected dimensions. The first dimension is students' multilingual repertoire, which includes Sindhi, Urdu, English and other local languages as learning resources. The second dimension is academic English development, including vocabulary, grammar, morphology, cohesion, genre and citation practices. The third dimension is disciplinary literacy, meaning the ability to use English differently in linguistics, education, social sciences, science and professional programs. The fourth dimension is institutional support, including writing centers, teacher training, feedback cycles, assessment rubrics and corpus-informed materials. The framework is grounded in academic literacies theory, second language writing, translanguaging and EMI research (García & Li Wei, 2014; Hyland, 2019; Lea & Street, 1998; Macaro et al., 2018; Manan et al., 2022).

The SMALF framework argues that university English improvement in Sindh requires more than a single compulsory English course. It requires a structured academic language transition system that begins in the first semester and continues across the degree. This paper calls this new idea the Academic Language Transition Studio. The studio would be credit-bearing, diagnostic, multilingual and discipline-linked. It would include academic vocabulary notebooks, genre-based writing tasks, corpus-informed language awareness, peer review, teacher feedback, oral presentation practice and purposeful use of Sindhi or Urdu for planning and concept clarification. This proposal responds to the reality that students need English for



academic success, but they learn most effectively when instruction starts from their real linguistic resources and builds toward explicit academic outcomes (Canagarajah, 2013; Hyland, 2019; Rose et al., 2021).

**Table 1. Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework (SMALF)**

| <b>Dimension</b>             | <b>Meaning</b>                                                                                      | <b>University-level application in Sindh</b>                                                                  |
|------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Multilingual repertoire      | Students' Sindhi, Urdu, English and other languages used as meaning-making resources                | Use Sindhi/Urdu for brainstorming, concept clarification and comparison before revising into academic English |
| Academic English development | Explicit teaching of vocabulary, grammar, morphology, cohesion, genre and citation                  | First-year academic writing, reading-to-write tasks, vocabulary notebooks and feedback cycles                 |
| Disciplinary literacy        | Awareness that English differs across linguistics, education, science, business and social sciences | Discipline-specific assignments, model texts, rubrics and departmental writing support                        |
| Institutional support        | Policies, training and structures that make language development a university responsibility        | Academic Language Transition Studio, writing center, teacher development and diagnostic assessment            |

### **3. Research Methodology**

This study used a qualitative documentary research design supported by thematic synthesis. The purpose was not to survey a new group of students but to develop a research-based explanation of university-level English applied linguistics needs in Sindh. Documentary research is appropriate when the researcher analyzes policy documents, reports and published studies to identify patterns, assumptions and gaps (Bowen, 2009; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In this paper, the data sources included national and provincial reports, higher education policy documents, and empirical studies on English-medium instruction, academic writing, translanguaging and Pakistani English. This design is suitable because the problem is both educational and linguistic: it involves institutional policy, classroom practice, student writing, language identity and university expectations.

The study followed four methodological steps. First, relevant policy and research sources were identified through purposive selection. Sources were selected if they addressed English education in Pakistan, Sindh education conditions, university English or EMI, academic writing, multilingual pedagogy or applied linguistics frameworks. Second, the sources were read analytically and notes were prepared on recurring problems, proposed solutions and theoretical assumptions. Third, the notes were coded into themes: school-to-university transition, EMI pressure, academic writing challenges, multilingual classroom practices, teacher support and institutional intervention. Fourth, the themes were synthesized into the Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework. This process allowed the study to connect policy evidence with applied linguistics theory rather than treating them separately (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Hyland, 2019).



The main documentary sources included the British Council report on English language teaching, learning and assessment in Pakistan, the Sindh School Education Sector Plan and Roadmap 2019-2024, Pakistan Education Statistics 2023-24, the HEC Undergraduate Education Policy, the HEC English curriculum standards, World Bank documentation on higher education development in Pakistan, ASER evidence on English learning in Sindh, and empirical studies by Akbar et al. (2018), Manan et al. (2022), Soomro (2025), and Tunio et al. (2025). These sources were selected because they combine policy-level, system-level and learner-level evidence. Policy documents show official expectations, while empirical studies show what students and teachers experience in classrooms.

The unit of analysis was not an individual person but a documented claim about English learning, university language use or academic literacy. For example, a report statement about teacher professional development was coded under institutional support; a study finding about vocabulary and grammar problems was coded under academic English development; and an EMI study about teachers' use of local languages was coded under multilingual pedagogy. The analysis therefore produced thematic categories rather than numerical statistics. To enhance trustworthiness, the paper compared local evidence with international applied linguistics research. If a local theme appeared in both Pakistani and international studies, it was treated as a strong pattern. If a theme appeared mainly in Pakistani or Sindh-related evidence, it was discussed as context-specific.

The study has limitations. It does not include fresh survey data from a university in Sindh, and therefore it cannot claim statistical representation of all public or private universities. It also does not measure students' writing through a new test. However, its strength is that it integrates existing evidence into a practical framework that can guide future empirical research. The framework and recommendations can later be tested through classroom experiments, writing portfolios, interviews and pre-post academic writing assessments. In this sense, the paper is both analytical and generative: it synthesizes what is known and proposes a new model for action.

#### **4. Data Collection and Analysis**

The documentary corpus was organized into three groups: policy and system reports, Pakistan and Sindh empirical studies, and international applied linguistics scholarship. The first group showed the institutional conditions under which students learn English. The second group showed local classroom and learner problems. The third group provided concepts for interpreting those problems. This structure was important because applied linguistics research should not separate theory from context. A grammar error in a Sindh university student's assignment, for example, may reflect prior schooling, limited reading, lack of feedback, unfamiliarity with academic genre and multilingual thinking processes, not only failure to memorize a rule (Akbar et al., 2018; Hyland, 2019).

The first theme was the school-to-university transition gap. Evidence from ASER Pakistan (2024), the Sindh School Education Sector Plan and the British Council report suggests that English learning in Pakistan is shaped by uneven teaching quality, assessment practices and access to resources (Government of Sindh, 2019; Nickson & Nudrat, 2022). When students from such backgrounds enter university, they may suddenly face English-medium lectures, academic texts and research writing. This means university English problems are partly produced before university. The transition gap is therefore not remedied by blaming first-year students; it requires diagnostic assessment and structured academic literacy support in the first year.



The second theme was academic writing difficulty. Local studies report grammar, spelling, vocabulary, morphology, coherence and L1-influenced patterns as repeated challenges (Akbar et al., 2018; Soomro, 2025; Tunio et al., 2025). These problems are not separate; they interact. Limited vocabulary affects sentence construction, weak grammar affects clarity, weak morphology affects accuracy, and limited experience with academic reading affects coherence and argumentation. Hyland (2019) explains that academic writing develops through attention to genre, audience, structure and feedback. Therefore, a university course that focuses only on isolated grammar exercises may not be enough. Students need to read academic texts, notice language patterns, draft paragraphs, receive feedback, revise and learn how academic arguments are built.

The third theme was EMI pressure. HEC policy and university practice often expect students to use English for learning and assessment, but English ability varies widely (HEC, 2023; Mahboob, 2017). International EMI research shows that students can experience difficulties in lecture comprehension, academic vocabulary, participation and written assessment when English support is weak (Macaro et al., 2018; Pun et al., 2023). In Pakistan, Manan et al. (2022) show that teachers may use multilingual strategies to support understanding while operating inside institutions that value English-only norms. This creates a hidden pedagogy: multilingual support happens, but it is not formally planned, assessed or valued. In Sindh universities, this hidden pedagogy should be brought into the open and organized responsibly.

The fourth theme was multilingual potential. Students in Sindh are not language-deficient; they are multilingual. Many can discuss ideas in Sindhi or Urdu even when they struggle to express them in formal English. Translanguaging theory suggests that these languages can be used to scaffold learning, plan writing, compare meanings, explain concepts and develop metalinguistic awareness (García & Li Wei, 2014). However, translanguaging must be purposeful. If students only translate word-for-word from Sindhi or Urdu into English, they may produce awkward structures. If teachers guide students to compare rhetorical patterns, build vocabulary, plan ideas in familiar language and then revise into academic English, multilingual resources can support stronger English development (Canagarajah, 2013; Manan et al., 2022).

The fifth theme was institutional support. Many universities offer compulsory English courses, but these are often disconnected from disciplinary writing needs. The analysis suggests that Sindh universities need a more systematic Academic Language Transition Studio. Such a studio would not label students as weak; it would treat academic English as a normal part of university learning. It would diagnose student needs, teach academic genres, support vocabulary and grammar in context, introduce corpus tools, provide writing feedback and train teachers to integrate language support in content courses. International EAP research supports embedded and discipline-sensitive academic literacy, while local evidence shows the need for support in vocabulary, grammar, coherence and feedback (Hyland, 2019; Wingate, 2015; Akbar et al., 2018; Soomro, 2025).

The analysis also identified a tension between standardization and localization. Students need access to formal academic English because it is required for exams, research, employment and global communication. At the same time, they need recognition of their local linguistic identities. A productive model does not reject Standard Academic English; it teaches it explicitly while making space for local languages as learning tools. This is the central insight of the proposed framework. The target is not English-only performance but academically effective multilingual development.



**Table 2. Documentary Sources Used for Analysis**

| Source type                                   | Examples                                                                                                                                   | Analytical purpose                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Policy and system reports                     | British Council Pakistan ELT report; Sindh School Education Sector Plan; Pakistan Education Statistics; HEC Undergraduate Education Policy | Identify official expectations, quality concerns and English learning conditions             |
| Sindh/Pakistan empirical studies              | Akbar et al. (2018); Manan et al. (2022); Soomro (2025); Tunio et al. (2025)                                                               | Identify local learner challenges, EMI practices and writing problems                        |
| International applied linguistics scholarship | Hyland (2019); Macaro et al. (2018); García and Li Wei (2014); Rose et al. (2021)                                                          | Provide theoretical concepts for academic writing, EMI, translinguaging and Global Englishes |

**Table 3. Thematic Analysis of Key Findings**

| Theme                  | Main finding                                                                         | Applied linguistics implication                                                        |
|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Transition gap         | Students reach university with uneven English reading and writing foundations        | First-year diagnostic assessment and academic language transition support are required |
| Writing difficulty     | Vocabulary, spelling, grammar, morphology, coherence and rhetoric appear repeatedly  | Grammar should be taught through writing genres, feedback and revision                 |
| EMI pressure           | English is required for content learning, but language support is often insufficient | Content teachers need language-aware pedagogy and EAP collaboration                    |
| Multilingual potential | Sindhi/Urdu resources are often used informally to support comprehension             | Planned translinguaging can scaffold academic English without lowering standards       |
| Institutional support  | English courses are often too general or remedial                                    | Universities should create credit-bearing writing studios and writing centers          |

## 5. Discussion

The findings suggest that English applied linguistics in Sindh's universities must move beyond the narrow idea of English as a remedial subject. The data show that English is linked with academic transition, disciplinary knowledge, social inequality, multilingual identity and institutional policy. This finding is consistent with academic literacies theory, which treats writing and language as socially situated practices rather than neutral skills (Lea & Street, 1998; Wingate, 2015). In Sindh, students may have learned English for years, but they may still be



unfamiliar with the expectations of university writing: thesis statements, argument development, source integration, paraphrasing, citation, genre structure and disciplinary vocabulary. Therefore, university English courses should be redesigned as academic literacy courses rather than grammar review courses only.

The first major discussion point concerns the school-to-university transition. The weak foundations reported in provincial and national evidence help explain why students struggle at university. ASER Pakistan (2024) and the Sindh School Education Sector Plan indicate that English learning cannot be separated from larger issues of teaching quality, assessment and resources (Government of Sindh, 2019). When a student reaches university with limited English reading fluency, academic lectures and textbooks become doubly difficult: the student has to understand new content and unfamiliar language at the same time. This aligns with international EMI research, which shows that English-medium learning creates additional cognitive and linguistic load for students who need stronger language support (Macaro et al., 2018; Pun et al., 2023).

The second discussion point concerns writing. The analyzed studies indicate that students' academic writing problems are multidimensional. Akbar et al. (2018) identified spelling, vocabulary, L1 interference, grammar and rhetorical problems among learners in Hyderabad, while Tunio et al. (2025) highlighted morphological errors among undergraduate English students in a public-sector university in Sindh. Soomro (2025) similarly reported grammar, vocabulary and coherence problems among Pakistani undergraduate ESL learners. These findings show that university students need more than correction of surface errors. They need sustained practice in academic reading-to-write tasks, morphological awareness, collocation, sentence control, paragraph unity, cohesion and genre-based writing. This conclusion agrees with Hyland's (2019) argument that L2 writing pedagogy should be text-based, feedback-rich and socially aware.

The third discussion point concerns EMI and teacher agency. English-medium policy often assumes that if English is used as the medium of instruction, students will automatically acquire academic English. However, the evidence does not support this simple assumption. Macaro et al. (2018) found that EMI research does not clearly prove automatic language gains without support. Manan et al. (2022) show that Pakistani university teachers often use multilingual strategies because they are pedagogically necessary, even when English-only ideology remains powerful. In Sindh, where multilingualism is normal, universities should not treat teacher use of Sindhi or Urdu as failure. Instead, institutions should develop guidelines for planned translanguaging: when to use local languages for concept explanation, when to shift back to English, and how to help students transform multilingual understanding into formal academic writing.

The fourth discussion point concerns equity. English functions as a form of linguistic capital in Pakistan. Students who come from elite English-medium backgrounds often enter university with confidence, while students from rural or government-sector backgrounds may experience linguistic insecurity (Rahman, 2005; Nickson & Nudrat, 2022). If universities assess students only through English without providing academic language support, they may reproduce social inequality. A strong applied linguistics approach should therefore combine high expectations with fair support. Students should not be excused from learning academic English, but they should be taught it through explicit, scaffolded and context-sensitive methods. The Academic Language Transition Studio proposed in this paper is designed to serve that purpose.



The fifth discussion point concerns the legitimacy of local English and Global Englishes. Global Englishes research argues that English teaching should prepare learners to communicate across diverse contexts rather than imitate only native-speaker norms (Rose et al., 2021). This is highly relevant to Sindh because students may use English with Pakistani teachers, local administrators, national employers, international scholars and digital communities. The goal should be intelligibility, academic clarity, rhetorical control and audience awareness. Students can be taught to respect Pakistani English as part of their linguistic identity while also learning the conventions of academic English required for formal writing and publication. This balanced position avoids both linguistic inferiority and careless relativism (Canagarajah, 2013; Hyland, 2019).

The sixth discussion point concerns institutional responsibility. HEC policies emphasize competency-based undergraduate education and communication skills, while World Bank higher education documentation highlights reforms such as faculty capacity, digital systems and quality assurance (HEC, 2023; World Bank, 2025). These reforms should include academic language development. English departments alone cannot solve the problem if content departments continue to assign English writing without teaching disciplinary writing. A university-wide approach is needed. English departments can lead writing studios, but departments of education, business, science and social science should also teach students how language works in their disciplines. This approach is consistent with EAP and academic literacies research, which emphasizes discipline-specific communication (Hyland, 2019; Wingate, 2015).

The proposed SMALF framework therefore offers a practical way forward. At the student level, it values multilingual identity and teaches academic English explicitly. At the teacher level, it encourages language-aware pedagogy and feedback. At the curriculum level, it links English courses with disciplinary tasks. At the institutional level, it calls for writing centers, diagnostic assessment, rubrics and professional development. Such a framework is more realistic than English-only ideology because it starts from actual classroom conditions in Sindh. It is also more rigorous than informal code-switching because it requires purposeful movement from multilingual comprehension toward academic English performance.

The main implication is that public universities in Sindh should establish an Academic Language Transition Studio in the first year of undergraduate study. The studio should begin with a diagnostic writing and reading task, followed by modules on academic vocabulary, sentence accuracy, paragraph development, genre awareness, source use, oral presentation and digital/corpus tools. Students should be allowed to brainstorm in Sindhi or Urdu, but final drafts should be revised toward clear academic English. Teachers should use feedback cycles rather than only marks. Departments should share sample assignments and rubrics. Over time, student writing portfolios can provide evidence of growth. This model could be piloted in BS English and Education programs and then extended to other disciplines.

The study also points toward future research. A next phase could collect essays from first-year students in Hyderabad, Jamshoro, Sukkur and Larkana universities and analyze errors, lexical range, cohesion and genre structure. Another phase could interview teachers about translanguaging practices and institutional language expectations. A third phase could test the Academic Language Transition Studio through a quasi-experimental design comparing students who receive the intervention with students in traditional English courses. Such research would move the present documentary study toward empirical evaluation while preserving its theoretical foundation.



## 6. Conclusion

This paper examined university-level English applied linguistics in Sindh, Pakistan, with a focus on multilingual academic literacy and English-medium instruction. The analysis shows that students' English challenges at university level are not merely individual deficiencies. They are connected with earlier schooling, English-medium expectations, limited academic writing support, multilingual classroom realities and unequal access to English resources. Evidence from reports and studies indicates that students face difficulties in vocabulary, spelling, grammar, morphology, coherence, academic reading and formal writing, while teachers often negotiate English-only expectations through multilingual support (Akbar et al., 2018; Manan et al., 2022; Soomro, 2025; Tunio et al., 2025).

The paper's main contribution is the Sindh Multilingual Academic Literacy Framework. This framework connects multilingual repertoires, academic English development, disciplinary literacy and institutional support. It argues that universities in Sindh should not choose between English standards and local languages. Instead, they should use local languages strategically to support conceptual understanding while teaching students to produce clear, formal and discipline-appropriate academic English. The framework is based on academic literacies theory, second language writing, EMI research, translanguaging and Global Englishes (Canagarajah, 2013; García & Li Wei, 2014; Hyland, 2019; Macaro et al., 2018; Rose et al., 2021).

The paper also proposes a new institutional idea: the Academic Language Transition Studio. This studio would be a credit-bearing first-year support system that diagnoses student needs, teaches academic genres, builds vocabulary and grammar in context, uses corpus-informed tasks, provides feedback cycles and recognizes multilingual learning resources. Such a model is suitable for Sindh because it addresses the realities of public-sector education, multilingual students and English-medium university expectations. It also aligns with policy directions that emphasize competency, quality, digital resources and teacher development (Government of Sindh, 2019; HEC, 2023; Nickson & Nudrat, 2022).

The conclusion is clear: improving English at university level in Sindh requires a shift from remedial grammar teaching to context-responsive academic literacy development. English should be taught as a language of knowledge-making, research, professional communication and multilingual identity. Applied linguistics offers the tools to design this shift because it connects language theory with educational practice. If universities adopt structured academic language support, train teachers in multilingual pedagogy and integrate writing development across disciplines, students in Sindh can gain stronger access to academic success without losing the value of their local linguistic resources.

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