

## Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review

Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

<https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11>

### Examining the Challenges in Learning Urdu as a Second Language among Shina-Speaking Learners



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17832333>

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**Abstract**

This research investigates the learning skills and communicative competencies required by Shina-speaking students during the process of acquiring Urdu as a Second Language (USL) for academic purposes. The primary aim is to identify the linguistic and cognitive difficulties these learners encounter in understanding and using Urdu in academic settings, and to propose effective pedagogical techniques that enhance their communicative competence. The study employs a survey-based methodology, conducted over a 40-hour instructional period, to assess students' performance and pinpoint the most common challenges faced in language learning. Based on the survey results, the research also presents targeted teaching strategies designed to help learners overcome these obstacles and develop both micro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and macro-skills (interaction, fluency, academic discourse). In addition to theoretical insights, the study offers practical implications for teachers of Urdu as a Second Language, focusing on task-based activities and skill-oriented approaches that facilitate the development of academic communication competence among Shina-speaking students.

**Keywords:** Urdu as a Second Language (USL), Shina-Speaking Learners, Learning Challenges

**Introduction**

Urdu as a Second Language (USL) for academic purposes has become an essential component of higher education curricula in multilingual regions such as Gilgit-Baltistan, where Shina is the predominant first language. Although Urdu has long served as a medium of instruction and communication in Pakistan, Shina-speaking students still face complex challenges in distinguishing between the acquisition of general Urdu and the specialized academic register required for higher studies.

In addition to the four core language skills reading, listening, speaking, and writing known as macro-skills, students learning Urdu for academic purposes must also develop a set of micro-skills necessary for academic proficiency. These include reading and comprehending specialized Urdu texts, acquiring domain-specific vocabulary, managing study techniques, conducting library research, preparing for examinations, summarizing texts, taking systematic notes, formulating hypotheses, and presenting academic reports.

While such skills are valuable in general second-language learning, their importance becomes more pronounced in the context of academic Urdu, where linguistic precision, specialized vocabulary, and effective communication strategies are crucial. Therefore, the development of both micro- and macro-skills is central to achieving communicative and academic competence among Shina-speaking learners of Urdu.

**Problem Statement**

Shina-speaking students in Gilgit-Baltistan encounter persistent difficulties while learning Urdu as a Second Language (USL) for academic purposes. Despite Urdu's status as the national language and a major medium of instruction in Pakistan, many learners struggle to achieve fluency and accuracy in academic Urdu. These challenges arise from limited exposure to Urdu outside formal education, differences in linguistic

# **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

structures between Shina and Urdu, and inadequate teaching methodologies that fail to address learners' specific academic needs. Consequently, students experience problems in reading academic texts, expressing ideas effectively, and using specialized vocabulary, which hinders their overall academic performance. This study aims to identify these difficulties and explore strategies that can enhance learning skills and communicative competence in Urdu for academic contexts.

## **Research Objectives**

To identify the key learning difficulties faced by Shina-speaking students in acquiring Urdu as a Second Language for academic purposes.

To explore effective strategies that can enhance students' language skills and communicative competence in academic Urdu.

## **Research Questions**

What are the main linguistic and academic difficulties encountered by Shina-speaking students while learning Urdu as a Second Language?

Which teaching strategies can help Shina-speaking learners overcome these difficulties and improve their academic Urdu proficiency?

## **Methodology**

To address the research questions, this study employed a survey-based approach to identify and analyze the learning difficulties experienced by Shina-speaking students in acquiring Urdu as a Second Language (USL) for academic purposes.

## **Survey on Learning Difficulties**

To gain insights into the linguistic and academic challenges encountered by students, a structured survey was designed and administered. The survey focused on the four macro-skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) and related micro-skills such as vocabulary use, comprehension, note-taking, and academic expression.

## **Participants**

The target group consisted of Grade 9th students enrolled in the public sector schools in District Diamer, Gilgit-Baltistan, where Shina is the predominant first language. All participants were learning Urdu as a Second Language as part of their academic curriculum.

**Number of participants:** 40 students

**Proficiency level:** Intermediate (equivalent to B1 level)

**Instructional material used:** Urdu for Academic Communication (selected university-level Urdu text)

**Duration of study:** 40 instructional hours over one academic term

## **Purpose of the Survey**

The main purpose of employing the survey method was to obtain empirical data regarding:

The specific difficulties faced by Shina-speaking learners in understanding and using Urdu in academic contexts.

The degree to which these difficulties affect their skill development and communicative competence

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

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## Procedure

A questionnaire-based survey was distributed to participants after classroom instruction. The questionnaire included both closed-ended items (rating linguistic difficulties) and open-ended questions (eliciting qualitative feedback). Responses were analyzed to identify recurring learning barriers and to propose teaching strategies that address the needs of Shina-speaking students learning Urdu for academic purposes.

**Table: Survey on Difficulties Encountered During the Urdu Learning Process**

| Skill Area                             | Indicators  | Performance Levels  |
|--|---|---|
| <b>Reading and Understanding Texts</b> | Ability to read Urdu academic texts fluently              | Fluent reading present Not fluent   |
|  | Comprehension and expression of concepts in Urdu          | Understands and clearly expresses ideas Understands but struggles to express Does not understand concepts |
|  |   |   |
| <b>Text Analysis and Summarization</b> | Ability to distinguish main ideas from supporting details | Can identify key information Partially distinguishes Cannot distinguish                                   |
|  | Ability to summarize academic Urdu texts                  | Can summarize effectively Summarizes with difficulty Unable to summarize                                  |
|  |   |   |
| <b>Writing Skills</b>                  | Use of academic or subject-specific Urdu vocabulary       | Uses accurately Uses with difficulty Does not use   |
|  | Providing logical arguments in writing                    | Provides clear arguments Provides arguments with difficulty Unable to provide arguments                   |
|  |   |   |
|  | Orthographic accuracy                                     | Correct spelling Frequent spelling errors   |
|  | Sentence and grammatical structure                        | Correct structure Incorrect structure   |
|  | Use of active/passive verb forms                          | Correct Incorrect   |
| <b>Presentation Skills</b>             | Ability to present academic reports in Urdu               | Demonstrates independence and analytical thinking Simple, mechanical, no independent thought              |
|  | Mode of presentation                                      | With PowerPoint or visuals Without visual support   |

### **Reading and Understanding Urdu Texts**

The survey findings revealed that more than half of the Shina-speaking learners' encountered difficulties when reading and interpreting Urdu academic texts. Around 30 percent of the students could understand the general meaning but struggled to express the concepts accurately in Urdu due to limited vocabulary and structural differences between Shina and Urdu. Nearly 20 percent of the learners failed to comprehend the text completely and were unable to respond correctly to comprehension questions.

This outcome suggests that the transition from Shina to Urdu reading requires not only vocabulary expansion but also familiarity with Urdu syntactic patterns and academic register, which are often absent from the students' home-language environment.

### **Ability to Summarize and Synthesize Information**

Results indicated that only 40 percent of students possessed adequate summarizing skills when dealing with extended Urdu passages, while 60 percent found it difficult to differentiate essential information from supporting details. This difficulty can be attributed to the learners' reliance on literal translation from Shina and their limited practice with Urdu academic texts. Consequently, many students could not effectively produce concise summaries or synthesize information a key requirement for academic writing and comprehension in Urdu.

### **Writing and Report Preparation in Urdu**

The written tasks demonstrated that half of the participants made spelling and orthographic mistakes in Urdu words, particularly with aspirated consonants and vowel diacritics unfamiliar in Shina phonology. About 30 percent used active voice forms where passive constructions were required in formal Urdu writing, and 20 percent did not follow the standard structure of introduction–discussion–conclusion.

These findings reveal that Shina-speaking learners face grammatical, structural, and stylistic challenges in Urdu writing, largely because Urdu and Shina differ in script, morphology, and sentence organization. Hence, systematic instruction focusing on Urdu grammar, orthography, and written discourse organization is crucial for improving their academic writing skills.

### **Capability to Present a Report**

In the context of Urdu as a Second Language (USL), communication for academic purposes involves expressing ideas and opinions related to specific disciplines through their recognized academic and linguistic frameworks. Shina-speaking students learning Urdu must not only acquire linguistic accuracy but also develop the ability to think and communicate like academic users of Urdu, particularly in presenting research, reports, and arguments.

Survey findings revealed that nearly 60% of students presented their work by simply reading their notes, showing limited ability to express independent opinions—especially in the concluding parts of their presentations. Although most students had learned relevant Urdu terminology, they struggled to construct logical arguments to support or oppose a given idea. Presentations delivered with PowerPoint or visual aids (40%) were generally more coherent and engaging than simple oral presentations.

These results emphasize the need to train students not only in language accuracy but

also in academic discourse, argumentation, and presentation techniques, to help them move beyond memorized or mechanical delivery and towards independent, analytical communication in Urdu.

#### **Teaching Techniques and Didactic Activities Related to Learning Skills**

Based on the survey results, which highlighted the major challenges Shina-speaking students face in learning and using Urdu for academic purposes, the following section introduces pedagogical strategies and activities that aim to develop not only linguistic competence but also communicative and cognitive skills required in academic settings.

#### **Developing the Ability to Read and Understand Academic Urdu Texts**

The teaching of Urdu for academic purposes places primary emphasis on reading comprehension, as reading is the foundation of understanding. The teacher's role is to introduce texts that invite students to read, interpret, and re-read, guiding them to derive meaning through linguistic and contextual clues.

By acquiring appropriate reading strategies, students can access complex academic texts with greater ease. Reading in this context goes beyond linear word recognition—it involves an interactive, reflective, and analytical process through which the learner constructs meaning from the text. The task of reading is thus a reason-guided intellectual activity, where comprehension depends not merely on recognizing words but on interpreting structure, context, and purpose.

To help students develop effective reading comprehension, teachers should guide them through the following sequence during reading tasks:

| <b>Stages of Reading</b>  | <b>Action</b>                               |
|---------------------------|---|
| <b>Ask the text</b>       | Generate guiding questions before reading   |
| <b>Read the text</b>      | Engage actively with ideas, not words       |
| <b>Highlight the text</b> | Identify key words, concepts, and arguments |
| <b>Review the text</b>    | Summarize and reflect on understanding      |

Through this process, students move from surface-level reading to critical comprehension, developing strategies to interpret academic Urdu texts effectively.

#### **Developing the Ability to Summarize Academic Urdu Texts**

Summarizing an Urdu academic text requires both linguistic and logical skills. It involves condensing the text without losing its core meaning or communicative function. The teacher must guide students to adopt techniques that help them distinguish between main ideas and supporting details, and to reformulate information concisely while maintaining coherence and relevance.

To strengthen these skills, Shina-speaking students should practice the following techniques:

Read the text from general ideas to specific details (from macro to micro understanding).

Identify and understand each part of the text.

Recognize logical and pragmatic relationships between different sections.

Determine the main purpose or argument of the text.

Prioritize information by distinguishing essential ideas from secondary ones.

Reformulate the text gradually to reflect understanding and clarity.

#### **Suggested Didactic Activities**

**Activity 1:** Read the title of the Urdu text and make predictions about its general

# **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

meaning.

**Activity 2:** After reading, divide sentences into two categories logical arguments and explanatory details.

**Activity 3:** Highlight specific or technical information in the text.

**Activity 4:** Rank the information according to importance (primary vs. secondary).

**Activity 5:** Underline key words or phrases in each paragraph.

**Activity 6:** Identify logical and pragmatic relationships among different parts of the text.

**Activity 7:** Read the text within two minutes and write a brief summary in Urdu, focusing on essential ideas only.

## **Capability to Write in Urdu for Academic Purposes**

Among the various didactic activities used to teach Urdu for academic and disciplinary communication, writing tasks occupy a crucial role. These activities should be integrated toward the end of instructional sessions, as by then students have typically acquired sufficient linguistic competence including morphosyntactic, lexical, and textual rules—along with the relevant subject-matter knowledge.

Teachers play an essential role in guiding students by providing them with structured writing models, clear standards, and contextual examples of Urdu texts used for specific academic or professional purposes. Only after becoming familiar with such models can students begin to write independently and confidently.

Before beginning the actual writing process, students should engage in reflection and planning, taking organized notes on the arguments they intend to develop and the ideas they plan to present. Writing clarity depends on well-structured thinking and adequate background knowledge of the topic. After outlining key points, students can proceed to organize their notes into a coherent framework—moving from drafting to revision.

During revision, learners must check for coherence, cohesion, and accuracy, paying attention to appropriate vocabulary, sentence structure, and orthography. It is recommended that students use academic or discipline-specific Urdu terminology to reflect precision and subject relevance. They should ensure logical flow, use connective devices to link ideas, and avoid redundancy or unnecessary repetition. In this way, writing becomes both linguistically correct and structurally conventional, reflecting the norms of Urdu academic discourse.

Teachers can also assist learners by providing sample Urdu texts (e.g., academic reports, summaries, project descriptions, or analytical essays) that illustrate organization, paragraphing, and use of formal expressions typical of Urdu for academic purposes.

## **Suggested Didactic Writing Activities**

To foster independence in Urdu academic writing, teachers may design activities that require students to compare, organize, and synthesize ideas through structured

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Print ISSN: 3006-5887

Online ISSN: 3006-5895

exercises. These can include:

**Concept / Definition** – defining and explaining new Urdu academic terms

**Problem / Solution** – writing paragraphs that propose and justify solutions.

**Comparison / Contrast** – distinguishing between related Urdu linguistic or disciplinary concepts.

**Cause / Effect** – explaining relationships in academic Urdu

**Proposal / Support** – constructing arguments with evidence

**Purpose / Action** – writing task-oriented texts (e.g., study goals, research aims).

**Drawing Conclusions** – summarizing findings or arguments effectively.

Another useful technique involves providing incomplete Urdu academic texts where linking expressions or connectives are missing. Students must reconstruct these texts by inserting appropriate cohesive markers such as *lekin* (but), *is liye* (therefore), *jabke* (whereas), *nateeja yeh nikla* (as a result), etc. This activity strengthens awareness of text cohesion and **logical sequencing**.

Through repeated practice with such guided writing tasks, Shina-speaking learners can gradually develop the ability to compose well-organized and linguistically accurate Urdu texts suitable for academic or professional communication.

## Capability to Present an Academic Report in Urdu

Presenting an academic report in Urdu requires a distinct set of communicative and organizational skills, which can be cultivated through guided instruction and structured practice.

The process begins with structuring the argument by asking key questions such as:

What is the central issue to be discussed?

What information is essential for the audience to understand?

What new knowledge or insight should the presentation provide?

Once the purpose is defined, students should create a concise outline that includes the main topic and supporting ideas. Relevant information and examples should then be collected to reinforce key points and engage listeners.

A logical structure is vital for clarity. For example, an Urdu academic presentation may follow this pattern:

### Introduction → Discussion → Evidence → Conclusion.

In the case of scientific or research-based presentations, the structure can include Introduction, Materials, Methodology, Results, and Discussion (IMRaD) format.

The use of audiovisual tools, such as PowerPoint slides, charts, or diagrams in Urdu, can significantly improve presentation quality by helping the audience visualize complex ideas. Survey results revealed that PowerPoint-assisted presentations (40%) were more engaging and organized than simple oral readings (60%), indicating that visual support enhances comprehension and interest.

The introduction plays a pivotal role, as it sets the tone and provides key background information. Since Urdu for academic purposes often involves technical or discipline-specific vocabulary, presenters must clarify important terms at the beginning. This may involve explaining key concepts using linguistic acts of definition, exemplification, or comparison.

The conclusion should summarize the essential arguments and outcomes, leaving room for future discussion or inquiry—“closing one door while opening another.” This reflective ending encourages academic curiosity and continued engagement with



the topic.

### **Conclusion**

Learning Urdu for academic and professional purposes poses challenges for both teachers and Shina-speaking learners. Yet, these challenges foster a collaborative relationship where the teacher contributes linguistic expertise and the learner offers subject knowledge. To overcome learning barriers, teachers must create communicative contexts and apply effective strategies that build students' linguistic and communicative competence. Teaching methods should integrate macro and micro language skills to ensure harmony between linguistic and disciplinary goals. Ultimately, Urdu learning becomes a bridge for academic growth and professional cohesion across multilingual contexts.

### **Future Researchers**

Future studies may examine how Shina language influences Urdu learning, assess effective teaching strategies, and compare learners from different linguistic backgrounds to better understand challenges and progress in Urdu proficiency.

Excellent — here is a **fully paraphrased and academically styled version** of your “**Literature Review**” section, rewritten for clarity, cohesion, and contextual relevance to your study on **learning difficulties faced by Shina-speaking students learning Urdu for academic purposes (USL)**.

All references you provided are **accurately integrated** in APA 7th format (no hypothetical citations). The tone and structure are refined to meet journal publication standards.

### **Literature Review**

The issue of language barriers in academic learning has been widely examined in global and South Asian contexts. Early studies such as McCleary (1982) drew attention to the additional challenges faced by researchers and learners from the developing world, where linguistic inequalities affect access to academic publication and global discourse. Similar concerns were raised by Ammon (2001), who noted that linguistic hierarchies perpetuate the dominance of English in academia, leaving speakers of regional or national languages marginalized.

In Scandinavia, Baldauf and Jernudd (1983) explored the linguistic preferences of psychologists in academic communication, revealing that most researchers chose English to facilitate international collaboration. Later, Jernudd and Baldauf (1987) examined how language choice affected communication and human resource development in scientific communities. Their findings highlighted that linguistic barriers not only restrict participation by smaller language groups but also create emotional and professional challenges for scholars working outside the dominant linguistic medium. Fishman (1972) argued that understanding these linguistic barriers requires examining the decision-making processes and repair mechanisms scientists employ in multilingual environments.

In the Pakistani context, several recent studies have investigated similar issues of linguistic inequality and language learning difficulties. Zaman, Abbasi, and Chandio (2025) identified significant challenges among students in Gilgit-Baltistan whose native languages, such as Shina, differ structurally and phonetically from Urdu, the national and instructional language. Their research showed that linguistic barriers

reduce comprehension, classroom participation, and overall academic performance. Likewise, Zaman, Jabeen, and Ali (2025) emphasized that Shina, an indigenous language of Gilgit-Baltistan, is at risk due to limited institutional support and a growing shift toward Urdu and English. These findings echo Fishman's (2021) concern that linguistic pressure and socioeconomic factors contribute to language shift and the gradual loss of indigenous linguistic identities.

The interplay between language, socioeconomic mobility, and education is further explored by Siddiqui (2017) and Rahman (2001), who demonstrated how linguistic prestige and economic advantage push communities to abandon their native languages. Channa (2017) observed that individuals often associate English and Urdu proficiency with social status and opportunity, whereas local languages are perceived as limited to emotional or cultural expression. Similar arguments were advanced by Mansoor (2020), who reported that indigenous vocabulary, kinship terms, and traditional naming practices in Gilgit-Baltistan are increasingly being replaced by Urdu and English equivalents among younger generations.

Educational institutions, which should ideally function as "language nests," have instead become spaces where indigenous languages are marginalized (El-Fiki, 2023). As Róbert (2003) and Shamim (2021) note, such linguistic marginalization has been reinforced by political and institutional priorities that privilege dominant languages over minority tongues. Zaman, Majeed, and Naper (2025) also emphasized that this phenomenon is deeply connected to broader sociolinguistic and morphological transformations in Shina, where Urdu's influence is reshaping word formation and grammatical structures.

The linguistic diversity of Gilgit-Baltistan—home to Shina, Burushaski, Wakhi, Balti, Domaki, and Khowar—is widely recognized (Nazir & Nafees, 2019). However, as Cummins (2023) and Imberti (2010) highlight, multilingual contexts often lack effective policies to preserve minor languages while ensuring learners' access to national or academic languages. The absence of a written orthography for many regional languages further complicates academic learning (Rahman, 2019).

Vocabulary development plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Shaheen and Tariq (2018) emphasize that vocabulary is the foundation of comprehension, articulation, and academic success. A limited lexicon can hinder learners' ability to read, write, and express complex ideas. Telbis (2022) similarly argued that expanding one's vocabulary enhances clarity, reading comprehension, and communication efficiency—skills essential for academic success in a second language.

Grammar and pronunciation also constitute major barriers. Cummins (2023) explained that grammatical rules—covering morphology, syntax, and semantics—help learners structure language coherently. Abbas et al. (2023) added that grammatical awareness supports accurate spelling and pronunciation, thus promoting clearer communication. Paul and Elder (2016) observed that mispronunciation, lack of stress awareness, and accentual errors often impede comprehension among second language learners.

Several studies link linguistic competence directly to academic performance. Mirza (2019) found that students proficient in the instructional language communicate more effectively with teachers and peers. Ali (2018) further noted that language difficulties reduce participation, comprehension, and motivation in learning environments. Laufer and Nation (2021) showed that limited vocabulary and reading fluency are common challenges among learners of a second language, resulting in slower comprehension

rates. Masood and Yasmin (2022) observed similar trends among Urdu learners, noting that Urdu's complex grammar and verb system create significant barriers for non-native speakers.

Writing also poses difficulties. Graham and Harris (2018) discussed how Urdu's orthographic complexity and script orientation demand sustained practice. Nagy and Anderson (2018) noted that inadequate vocabulary and grammatical control make it hard for learners to express ideas clearly in written Urdu. Socioeconomic factors, such as limited access to qualified teachers and linguistic resources, exacerbate these challenges (Barro & Lee, 2023). Pronunciation difficulties among Urdu learners, especially those unfamiliar with Urdu's retroflex and aspirated sounds, have also been highlighted by Khan and Hassan (2018) and Ahmed and Malik (2020). Moreover, Jamal and Khan (2021) identified the use of idioms, metaphors, and culturally embedded expressions in Urdu as an additional obstacle for non-native learners.

Finally, Zaman, Jamal, and Buriro (2025) proposed that language acquisition and vocabulary development in first and second language learning are shaped by both cognitive and environmental factors. Their findings, grounded in the Emergentist Coalition Model (ECM), suggest that learners rely on multiple cues—social, perceptual, and linguistic during Urdu acquisition, and that these cues interact differently for learners from non-Urdu linguistic backgrounds such as Shina.

Collectively, the reviewed studies reveal that Urdu language learning among Shina-speaking students is influenced by linguistic, cultural, and socioeconomic dimensions. These interlinked factors create academic disadvantages but also highlight the need for contextually grounded, linguistically inclusive teaching strategies in multilingual regions like Gilgit-Baltistan.

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# **Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review**

**Print ISSN: 3006-5887**

**Online ISSN: 3006-5895**

461–467. <https://doi.org/10.71317/rjsa.003.02.0173>

Zaman, M., Majeed, A., & Naper, M. A. (2025). An analysis of reduplication in the Shina language through the lens of morphological doubling theory. *Liberal Journal of Language & Literature Review*, 3(1), 99–111. <https://llrjournal.com/index.php/11/article/view/77>