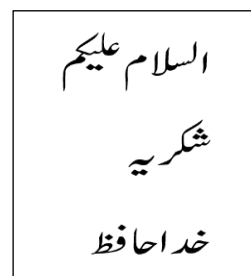


## Urdu: a Snapshot

Sheraz Ali (University of Manchester and Deputy Director of Learning – MFL Urdu and Arabic at Eden Girls' Leadership Academy Manchester)

### Urdu language and culture

Urdu is culturally a rich language which has been a *lingua franca* for centuries among different communities and ethnic groups, especially since the Mughal Empire era. Urdu is the official language of Pakistan and is also widely spoken in India. Across the two countries nearly 70 million people speak it as a first language and 100 million as a second language. It is also used in countries across the Middle East, Bangladesh, Nepal and many other countries where Pakistani communities have settled, including the UK. Urdu is very similar to Hindi and, in fact, before Partition in 1947 they were generally referred to as one language - Hindustani. The main difference between Urdu and Hindi is that the former is written in Perso-Arabic script and the latter in Sanskrit (See Urdu script sample).



Urdu culture is very rich and refined. We see it reflected

- in religious faith – the large majority of Urdu speakers are Muslims;
- in family values and elaborate wedding customs;
- in food with Indian, Far Eastern and Middle Eastern influences;
- in traditional dress (shalwar kameez, dupatta, kurta pyjamas, sherwani);
- in literature including beautiful love poems known as ghazals;
- in music played on a variety of instruments (tabla, sitar, bansuri) and including fusions with other styles;
- in cinema including popular Lollywood movies;
- in sport – cricket;
- in textiles, pottery and woodcraft.

### English words from Urdu-Hindi

avatar bandana bangle  
chutney cushy dinghy guru  
juggernaut jungle khaki loot  
pukka pyjamas shampoo  
thug veranda yoga

### Urdu in the UK

With an estimated 400,000 speakers, Urdu is the fourth most commonly spoken language in the UK with communities in Manchester, Leeds, Bradford, parts of Scotland and the West Midlands and parts of London (Newham, Waltham Forest, Redbridge). It should be noted that most of those who identify as Urdu speakers use a variety of Panjabi at home and speak Urdu as a second language for religious and cultural reasons.

### Urdu education

In the UK Urdu is taught both in mainstream and supplementary schools as well as in some independent schools. Currently over 4000 students enter GCSE Urdu each year and over 300 take A Level.

The National Council for Development of Urdu (NCDU) has produced numerous resources for GCSE and GCE students and teachers.

Range of resources covering beginner, GCSE and Advanced levels

<https://urduinuk.com/3d-flip-book/1-3-cultural-life-celebrations-and-festivals/>

Guidance on using short films for teaching Urdu at GCSE and A Level.

[https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/routesintolanguages.ac.uk/files/visualliteracy\\_-\\_urdu.pdf](https://www.routesintolanguages.ac.uk/sites/routesintolanguages.ac.uk/files/visualliteracy_-_urdu.pdf)

Essay writing competition supported by Pakistan's High Commission in London

<https://www.urduessay.co.uk>

Interactive online Urdu learning website for KS2, 3 & 4. Subscription required.

[www.urduathome.com](http://www.urduathome.com)

Coventry university offers Urdu Live web classes for beginners and post beginners.

<https://www.coventry.ac.uk/study-at-coventry/our-language-programme/learn-a-language/world-languages-autumn-courses/>

### Examinations

Both Pearson Edexcel and AQA examination boards offer GCSE Urdu.

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-gcses/urdu-2017.html>

<https://www.aqa.org.uk/subjects/languages/gcse/urdu-8648>

Pearson Edexcel also offers Advanced Level Urdu.

<https://qualifications.pearson.com/en/qualifications/edexcel-a-levels/urdu-2018.html>

Since 2007 the University of Manchester has been offering a LEAP Urdu 1 course for beginners.

<https://www.alc.manchester.ac.uk/study/university-language-centre-leap-courses/course-information/leap-courses/courses-for-all/urdu/leap-urdu-1/>



### Supporting Urdu speakers in your school

Both Sheraz Ali and Mr Nawaz are happy to be contacted for advice about Urdu education matters:

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With sincere thanks to Sheraz Ali for giving permission to use the photo in this snapshot.