The Impact of Language Preferences on English Language Acquisition: Learner Perceptions
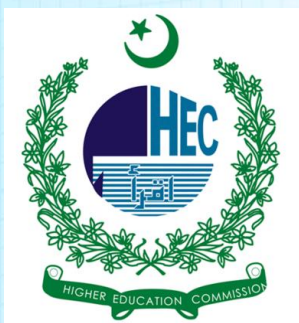
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Abstract

In the present study, an analytical approach was adopted to examine how students' language preferences influence their English learning outcomes in an ESL context. The quantitative research design was used. The population included ESL students from Shaikh Ayaz University, Shikarpur (SAUS). The target population was selected from the 150 undergraduate ESL students through a random sampling technique, with an equal representation of both male and female students. Data were collected using a 12-item questionnaire, which was divided into three key sections: language preference, learning strategies, and the teacher's role. To analyze the findings, the collected data were examined using statistical tools to identify patterns in language preference and their potential impact on English language acquisition. The results were then organized and presented in tabular form for clarity and ease of interpretation. According to the learners' perceptions, the overall results revealed that Language Preferences have a strong impact on English Language Acquisition. On the basis of these results, researchers give some recommendations.

Key terms: Language Preferences, English Language Acquisition, ESL Learner Perceptions.

Background of the Study

In the Pakistani educational background, both cultural norms and classroom practices tend to prioritize students' first language (L1) over their second language (L2), which is often English. Teachers often rely on traditional methods that emphasize completing the syllabus rather than developing students' practical language abilities, particularly speaking (Ali et al., 2020). Consequently, classroom instruction tends to focus more on reading and writing, leaving communicative skills underdeveloped. This lack of focus on oral proficiency leads many students to feel hesitant and insecure when speaking English (Ahmad et al., 2025). A major challenge for ESL learners in Pakistan is the absence of structured opportunities to practice spoken English in public settings, such as stage performances or media participation. As a result, even students who can read and write in English may struggle with speaking

and prefer to avoid it altogether (Amin et al., 2023; Soomro et al., 2025). This difficulty is compounded by the cognitive challenge of learning a second language, as learners must navigate new language structures while still influenced by mental frameworks shaped by their L1 (Rasheed, Nisar, & Phulpoto, 2023). Beyond linguistic barriers, learners' psychological, social, and cultural backgrounds also significantly impact their ability to speak English fluently (Ali et al., 2020). The language used by teachers in ESL classrooms plays a critical role; when instruction is given only in L1, students may experience slower L2 development. On the other hand, exclusive use of L2 can make students who depend on L1 feel disconnected or discouraged (Liu & Zhang, 2022; Shaheen et al., 2025).

Motivation is another vital factor in second language acquisition. According to Gardner's Socio-Educational Model (1985), learners are driven by either integrative motivation, where they are interested in the culture and people associated with the language, or instrumental motivation, which relates to achieving practical goals like academic success or career advancement. Students' preferences for L1 or L2 are often shaped by a combination of these motivations and the broader cultural, social, and educational environment in which they learn (Shakir et al., 2011; Cheema et al., 2023). Research consistently shows that language fluency and confidence correlate strongly with academic achievement. Students who feel more comfortable in English tend to be more motivated and perform better academically Amjad et al., 2024). English is increasingly essential in global education, science, and professional fields, providing a common platform for intercultural communication and collaboration (Iqbal et al., 2023; Liu & Zhang, 2022). Strong English writing skills, in particular, open doors to better job opportunities, social mobility, and global networking (Anjum & Zafar, 2022).

Despite extensive research on L1 and L2 reading and writing, limited attention has been given to how language preference affects overall ESL performance, particularly in speaking and listening. Language choice significantly impacts learners' confidence, motivation, and willingness to engage in active learning in ESL settings (Ahmad et al., 2025). This study aims to address this gap by investigating how students' language preferences and the language used by instructors influence all aspects of ESL learning, reading, writing, speaking, listening, as well as their

academic performance. Using Gardner's Socio-Educational Model, this study explores how both integrative and instrumental motivations shape language preferences and learning outcomes. Integrative motivation reflects a desire to connect and communicate within a target-language community socially (Gardner, 2019), while instrumental motivation is linked to practical goals like education, employment, and international opportunities (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011; Ahmad, Cheema & Farhat, 2023). These motivational factors influence students' attitudes and preferences, which in turn affect their language development across all four key skills. Ultimately, learners' first language (L1) serves as a significant mediator in the language learning process. It shapes the challenges and successes students experience in acquiring English (L2), particularly in reading comprehension, writing clarity, listening accuracy, and speaking fluency (Zimmerman, 2012; Naz & Zafar., 2023; Fatima et al., 2024).

Problem Statement

Students at SAUS in Shikarpur are currently learning English, yet it's clear that English is becoming more important in today's world, both for academic success and future job opportunities. Despite this, many students struggle with basic English skills. Those who are more fluent in English tend to perform better in academics, complete tasks like reports and presentations more easily, and are better prepared for the job market, where English is often the key language of communication. However, a large number of students face difficulties when speaking English. They often deal with low confidence, stress, and self-doubt, especially in situations that require them to speak up or participate actively. One key issue that is frequently overlooked is how students' language preferences whether they prefer to use their first language (L1) or second language (L2) impact their ability to learn and use English effectively. Most research so far has focused mainly on reading and writing skills, without giving much attention to how language preference influences overall language learning, especially speaking and listening.

At SAUS, many students frequently fall back on their first language for communication, which may limit their progress in learning English. This can negatively affect their performance in class discussions, assignments, and exams. In professional environments, English is still the dominant language, so struggling with

it can make it harder for students to succeed. This study aims to explore how students' preference for using L1 or L2 influences their English learning and academic performance. It also hopes to offer practical recommendations for ESL teachers on how to support students in overcoming these language barriers across reading, writing, speaking, listening, and academic tasks. Ultimately, the study seeks to help students build stronger English skills, boost their confidence, and improve their chances of success both in school and in their future careers.

Objectives of the Study

I.   To examine learners' preferences regarding the use of native language in English language classrooms.

II. To investigate learners' perceptions of bilingual materials and instruction in facilitating English language acquisition.

III. To identify potential challenges and benefits associated with incorporating students' preferred language in ESL contexts.

Theoretical Framework

According to Ahmad et al. (2024 and Soomro et al. (2023 a theoretical framework is the structure that supports a theory it not only includes the theory itself but also explains how the researcher uses it, along with its assumptions, to explore the research problem. In this study, Gardner's Socio-Educational Theory serves as the foundation for examining how students' language preferences influence their academic performance in English as a Second Language (ESL), particularly in the four core skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Gardner's model highlights the importance of learners' motivation, attitudes, and the broader sociocultural context in second language acquisition. It provides a comprehensive perspective on how students' choices regarding the language of instruction, whether their first language (L1), second language (L2), or a combination of both, can impact their learning outcomes and overall academic success (Jeevan et al., 2023).

Literature Review

According to Cheema et al. (2023) a literature review is a critical summary and analysis of existing research, theories, and scholarly writings related to a specific topic or area of study. It helps to identify what is already known, highlight gaps or inconsistencies in knowledge, and justify the need for own research (Jalbani et al.,

2023).

Language Preferences in ESL Learning

Language preference refers to a person's tendency to use a particular language for communication or learning, influenced by a mix of personal experiences, social environments, and cultural backgrounds. This concept has its roots in sociolinguistics and anthropology, disciplines that examine language as both a cultural expression and a form of social interaction (Abbas, 2019). These fields highlight how language reflects one's identity, perceptions of others, and even social hierarchies or power dynamics.

Pioneering researchers like William Labov and Joshua Fishman have significantly shaped our understanding of language attitudes and identity Spolsky, B., 2011). Fishman, in particular, introduced the concept of language loyalty, which describes an individual's emotional and cultural attachment to their first language (Maitlo, Shah, & Ahmed, 2024). This idea links language choice directly to one's sense of belonging, culture, and group identity, illustrating how language use shapes both personal and collective self-perception.

Anthropologists have also contributed by exploring how language decisions are made and how they affect a person's relationship with their community and self-image (Maitlo, Abbasi, & Ali, 2024). Sociolinguists further build on this by analyzing how social patterns and group behaviors influence language choices. Together, these perspectives reveal that our language preferences not only shape how we communicate but also how we understand our experiences and express our personality in diverse cultural contexts.

Historical Evolution of Language Preferences

Language preferences have evolved due to a complex mix of historical, political, and cultural influences, especially the lasting impact of colonialism. During colonial periods, ruling powers often imposed their languages on native populations as a way to control and assimilate them, leading to the erosion and even loss of indigenous languages in many marginalized communities. Later, during the 19th and 20th centuries, nationalism emerged as a powerful force that shaped language policies. In many newly forming nation-states, language became a symbol of unity and identity. Governments introduced laws to promote a single national language, often at the

expense of regional or minority languages, to strengthen national cohesion (Crystal, 2003). These policies favored some languages over others, reinforcing social inequalities and deepening linguistic divides in multicultural societies.

In the 20th century, the rise of global communication networks and technological advancements led to the rapid spread of dominant languages. Tools like mass media, television, and especially the internet have helped languages such as English become globally dominant, used in business, politics, education, and international communication (Crystal, 2003). English, in particular, has emerged as the world's primary language of global exchange.

Looking back, the history of language preference reflects broader patterns of power, dominance, and cultural resistance. Colonial and nationalist agendas significantly shaped the linguistic landscapes we see today, often elevating certain languages while suppressing others (Crystal, 2003). Recent research has also highlighted how globalization and technology continue to influence how people choose and use languages, with technological advancements playing a major role in shifting language use and accessibility around the world.

Language Preferences and Their Influence on English Learning

Outcomes and Academic Execution in the ESL Context

Students' language preferences, whether they favor the target language (L2), such as English, or their native language (L1), play a vital role in their success in learning and overall academic performance within ESL environments. The language used in the classroom not only influences how well students develop skills in reading, writing, speaking, and listening, but also affects their social interactions with peers. This connection between language choice and academic outcomes is particularly significant in multilingual countries like Pakistan, where learners come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and demonstrate varying levels of English proficiency Rao et al., 2023).

Previous Related Studies

Auerbach (1993) explored the potential benefits of using students' first language (L1) in ESL classrooms, highlighting how it can help make lessons more understandable and reduce learners' anxiety. While the study emphasized these advantages, it did not examine how using L1 might relate to students' academic success or overall progress

in learning English. To address this gap, the current study compares students' language preferences with their academic performance and English learning outcomes.

Gardner (2019), through his socio-educational model, emphasized the role of instrumental and integrative motivation in second language learning. While his work explored how motivation drives language acquisition, it did not focus specifically on how the choice of instructional language (L1 or L2) influences academic achievement. Building on Gardner's framework, the present study seeks to explore the relationship between students' language preferences and their academic performance in ESL contexts. By examining how these preferences affect both English language development and academic outcomes, this research aims to extend the application of Gardner's model and provide deeper insights into the role of language choice in second language learning.

Liu and Zhang (2022) focused primarily on how bilingual education influences students' learning preferences. However, their research did not explore how these preferences relate to students' overall academic performance or their outcomes in learning English. To address this gap, the current study applies Gardner's socio-educational model to examine how students' language preferences impact both their academic success and English language development in an ESL context. This approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how language choices influence various dimensions of academic achievement and language proficiency within ESL environments.

Auerbach (1993) explored the effects of English-only instruction in ESL classrooms, particularly for students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Her study highlighted how enforcing strict separation from the students' first language (L1) can hinder understanding and disrupt the overall learning process. While Auerbach emphasized the drawbacks of excluding L1 in instruction, her research did not specifically examine how language choice influences key English learning outcomes or academic achievement. The present study addresses this gap by analyzing students' language preferences and investigating how these choices affect specific areas of English learning, such as speaking, writing, comprehension, and overall academic performance.

For Contextual Research in Multilingual Environments

Krashen (1981) examined second language acquisition (SLA) primarily within monolingual contexts, particularly in Western countries where English is the dominant language. His work highlighted that in such environments, learners have limited exposure to their native language (L1) within formal education, leading to an overdependence on English as the second language (L2). However, his research does not fully address multilingual contexts like Pakistan, where English is taught strictly as a second language, yet carries significant weight in academic and professional settings, even though the majority of the population does not speak it fluently.

According to Shaheen et al. (2024). In Pakistan's multilingual society, regional languages such as Punjabi, Saraiki, Pashto, and Balochi are commonly used in informal and community-based interactions. Despite their widespread use, these languages are often overshadowed by Urdu, the official national language, and English, which is widely used as the medium of instruction and a symbol of academic and professional prestige. In such settings, code-switching between regional first languages and English is a frequent practice. This blending of languages influences students' attitudes toward English and can significantly impact their academic performance, particularly in ESL classrooms, where the interplay between L1 and L2 affects both motivation and learning outcomes. Abro, B. A., Khokhar, M. I., & Shaheen, R. (2024).

Research Gaps

- **Influence of Language Preferences on English Learning Skills:** This study explored how students' first languages (such as Saraiki, Punjabi, and Urdu) and their second language (English) affect their abilities in speaking, writing, and comprehension.

- **Language Preference and Academic Success:** It examined the impact of choosing either L1 or L2 as a preferred language on students' overall academic performance.

- **Research in a Multilingual Setting:** The study was conducted in Pakistan, a multilingual country where various regional languages interact with English as a second language, offering a rich context for analysis.

- **Motivation and Language Preference:** Using Gardner's socio-educational

model, the research investigated how students' motivation, both integrative (cultural interest) and instrumental (practical goals), shapes their language preferences and affects their speaking proficiency.

- **Preferred Language of Instruction:** The study analyzed which language, L1 or L2, students prefer to be taught in, and how this choice influences their English language development.

- **Multilingual Exposure and ESL Learning:** It looked into how students' exposure to multiple languages (Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu, and English) influences their English language learning in the context of a multilingual society like Pakistan.

Materials and Methods

A research method refers to the systematic approach used to study a specific process or phenomenon. In this study, an analytical approach was adopted to examine how students' language preferences influence their English learning outcomes in an ESL context. The research design outlines the entire process followed during the study, Khokhar, M. I., Ghafoor, A., & Ahmed, I. (2024).

The target population included undergraduate ESL students from SAUS University. A quantitative research design was used, and a random sampling technique was applied to select a total of 150 participants, with an equal representation of both male and female students. Data were collected using a 12-item questionnaire, which was divided into four key sections: language preference, learning strategies, the teacher's role, and learning outcomes. To analyze the findings, the collected data were examined using statistical tools to identify patterns in language preference and their potential impact on English language acquisition Murtaza et al., 2025). The results were then organized and presented in tabular form for clarity and ease of interpretation.

Data Analysis

This section analyzes the survey data to explore how students' native language preferences impact their English learning outcomes, with a particular focus on speaking skills. The results highlight common patterns in students' opinions about using their first language to help them better understand English content, boost their confidence, and enhance their communication abilities. Statistical tools such as mean

scores and standard deviations were used to identify overall trends, revealing a strong preference for bilingual approaches in language instruction. These findings underscore the value of incorporating students' first language in ESL classrooms to support comprehension, increase motivation, and improve overall learning performance.

Results

Table 01: **i Find It Easier To Understand English Concepts When i Use My Native Language**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	122	143.5%	143.5%	143.5%
	Disagree	28	32.9%	32.9%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that students find it easier to understand English concepts when they use their native language from the total 150 participants the 143.5% agreed; the 32.9% disagreed. So, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 02: **i Gain More Confidence In Learning English When Lessons Are Taught In My Native Language.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	108	127.1%	127.1%	127.1%
	Disagree	42	49.4%	49.4%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above showing that students gain more confidence in learning English when lessons are taught in my native language Of the total 150 participants the 127.1% agreed; the 49.4% disagree. So, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 03: **Converting English Content Into My Native Language Makes It Easier To Understand The Subject.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	132	155.3%	155.3%	155.3%
	Disagree	18	21.2%	21.2%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that converting English content into a native language makes it

easier to understand the subject. Among the total 150 participants, 155.3% agreed, while 1.2% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 04: i Think My Learning Improves When The Teacher Explains Concepts Using Examples In My Native Language.

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	96	112.9%	112.9%	112.9%
	Disagree	54	63.5%	63.5%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that their learning improves when the teacher explains concepts using examples in their native language. Among the total 150 participants, 112.9% agreed, while 63.5% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 05: I Use Bilingual Resources Like Dictionaries And Textbooks To Enhance My English Skills.

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	113	132.9%	132.9%	132.9%
	Disagree	37	43.5%	43.5%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that they use bilingual resources like dictionaries and textbooks to enhance their English skills. Among the total 150 participants, 132.9% agreed, while 43.5% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 06: Participating In Group Discussions In My Native Language Helps Me Learn English More Effectively.

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	89	104.7%	104.7%	104.7%
	Disagree	61	71.8%	71.8%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that participating in group discussions in their native language helps them learn English more effectively. Among the total 150 participants, 104.7% agreed, while 71.8% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 07: **I Like To Organize My Thoughts In My Native Language Before Sharing Them In English.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	93	109.4%	109.4%	109.4%
	Disagree	57	67.1%	67.1%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that students like to organize their thoughts in their native language before sharing them in English. Among the total 150 participants, 109.4% agreed, while 67.1% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 08: **My English Writing Skills Improve When i Begin By Outlining My Ideas In My Native Language.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	82	96.5%	96.5%	96.5%
	Disagree	68	80.0%	80.0%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that my English writing skills improve when I begin by outlining my ideas in my native language. Among the total 150 participants, 96.5% agreed, while 80.0% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 09: **Teachers Should Include My Native Language In Classroom Activities.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	75	88.2%	88.2%	88.2%
	Disagree	75	88.2%	88.2%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that teachers should include my native language in classroom activities. Among the total 150 participants, 88.2% agreed, while 88.2% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 10: **Providing Instructions In Both English And My Native Language Makes It Easier To Understand The Lessons.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	137	161.2%	161.2%	161.2%
	Disagree	13	15.3%	15.3%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that providing instructions in both English and my native language makes it easier to understand the lessons. Among the total 150 participants, 161.2% agreed, while 15.3% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 11: **i Grasp Grammar Rules More Clearly When They Are Explained In My Native Language.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	100	117.6%	117.6%	117.6%
	Disagree	50	58.8%	58.8%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that I grasp grammar rules more clearly when they are explained in my native language. Among the total 150 participants, 11.76% agreed, while 58.8% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Table 12: **My English Vocabulary Grows When Teachers Provide Explanations In Both English And My Native Language.**

	Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Agree	70	82.4%	82.4%	82.4%
	Disagree	80	94.1%	94.1%	176.5%
	Total	150	100%	100%	100%

The table above shows that English vocabulary grows when teachers provide explanations in both English and the native language. Among the total 150 participants, 82.4% agreed, while 94.1% disagreed. Therefore, the majority of respondents responded positively.

Discussion

In the responses of twelve close ended questions that were asked from the 150 students participants, the majority of the participants responded positively that they find it easier to understand English concepts when they use their native language. The majority of the participants, responded positively that converting English content into a native language makes it easier to understand the subject. The majority of the participants responded positively that that their learning improves when the teacher explains concepts using examples in their native language. The majority of the participants responded positively that they use bilingual resources like dictionaries and textbooks to enhance their English skills. The majority of the participants responded positively that participating in group discussions in their native language helps they learn English more effectively. The majority of the participants responded positively that they like to organize their thoughts in their native language before sharing them in English. The majority of the participants responded positively that my English writing skills improve when I begin by outlining my ideas in my native language. The equal frequency of the participants responded positively and negatively that teachers should include my native language in classroom activities. The majority of the participants responded positively that providing instructions in both English and my native language makes it easier to understand the lessons. The majority of the participants responded positively that I grasp grammar rules more clearly when they are explained in my native language. The majority of the participants responded negatively that English vocabulary grows when teachers provide explanations in both English and the native language. The overall results showed that language preferences has impact on English Language acquisition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study aimed to explore how students' language preferences influence their English learning outcomes in ESL environments. It provided an overview of bilingual education strategies and examined how using students' preferred language of instruction could support the development of their language skills. The chapter also emphasized the relevance of Gardner's Socio-Educational Model in understanding how learners' attitudes toward English and their motivation levels can shape learning outcomes.

The study set the foundation for its research aims, significance, and questions by focusing on the need for more effective and personalized teaching methods in ESL classrooms. The analyzed data strongly support the idea that integrating students' native languages into ESL instruction not only improves their learning experience but also enhances their overall English proficiency. These findings offer valuable guidance for ESL teachers and curriculum designers seeking to develop more inclusive and impactful teaching approaches that address the needs of students from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Recommendations

- Teachers should strategically use students' native languages during complex explanations, especially for grammar, vocabulary, and abstract concepts, to enhance comprehension and retention.

- Educational institutions should create or provide access to bilingual resources such as dictionaries, glossaries, and textbooks that support English learning through native language scaffolding.

- Allowing controlled code-switching in the classroom can help learners feel more confident and reduce cognitive overload, especially at beginner and intermediate proficiency levels.

- Professional development programs should equip educators with skills to effectively integrate students' language preferences into English teaching methodologies.

- Group discussions and collaborative tasks in students' preferred languages can support the development of ideas before expressing them in English, reinforcing understanding.

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