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**Language, Power and Prestige: A Sociolinguistic study of attitudes among Pakistani University Students towards English language**



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**Abstract**

This research looks into how university students in Pakistan see English and what they think it means in terms of its status as a formal means (thus associated) of being superior to others because of superiority to them, or how much better they are than them on an academic level. Students perceive that when they do not have an adequate command of English (due to low or inadequate levels of education) it consequently has a negative impact on their social status, academic performance and professional qualifications when compared to other students. Using Bourdieu's theory of 'linguistic capital', the research has established that proficiency in English within higher education in Pakistan is a significant factor in forming one's identity, developing self confidence through academic success and creating barriers to entry into social hierarchies that exist within Pakistan's many cultural and linguistic populations. The research used a quantitative methodological approach by using a structured (22-item) Likert scale, questionnaire distributed (100) to students attending public and private universities across the provinces of Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in Pakistan. Overall, there was a significantly positive response (mean approx. 4.5–4.7) regarding the importance of the English language on academic success and (approx. 4.5–4.7) on providing a pathway to professional opportunity, and (mean approx. 4.0–4.5) regarding social prestige. However, there were also ways for this to be negatively impacted by the English language such as having psychological barriers to success established by students with poor English skills (e.g., students feel inferior to their peers, they feel shame due to their accent and they experience a conflict between their own cultural identity with their level of proficiency in the English language). In conclusion, the finding indicates that those who attend English-language schools (whether public or private) have a significant and systematic advantage (in terms of educational attainment and educational attainment compared to those who attend Urdu-language schools) over those who attend Urdu-language schools. Further, there was nearly universal agreement among students of English-language schools on the existence of linguistic discrimination and structural inequity. While there is awareness among participants of the inequalities that exist in Pakistani higher education with respect to English and other regional languages as a result of colonialism, the consensus among participants was that institutions should implement plans to achieve greater levels of linguistic equity (mean score: 4.3 to 4.6). Overall, this research adds to existing knowledge of the interrelationship between language, power, and identity in post-colonial Pakistan by demonstrating that there is still a colonial legacy of linguistic hierarchies within higher education settings today. The outcomes of this research will assist policymakers with creating language policies that encourage balance between the instrumental value placed on English and the value of promoting linguistic diversity, equity, and inclusion in higher education in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Linguistic Capital, English Language Attitudes, Prestige And Power, Identity Formation, Linguistic Inequality, Pakistani Higher Education, Sociolinguistics, Code-Switching, Linguistic Imperialism

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## Introduction

### Background of the Study

Language is not merely restricted to the tool of communication now-a-days it has become a marker of identity, social class and status. In multilingual country like Pakistan, linguistics choices often decide the social belonging, literacy, cultural affiliation, and attitudes towards modernity. Many languages are spoken in Pakistan but English holds a unique place, prestige and power in the society, functioning as a tool in education, a necessity for employment and upward social potency. It is associated with elitism, globalization, and intellectual superiority. This has transformed it into a symbol of linguistic capital and shaping the view of individuals, how they perceive themselves and others in social and academic contexts. The domination of English language is the colonial legacy that institutionalized English a language of elite class, administration and education. Pakistan even after the independence, maintained English as an official language along with the Urdu, perceiving as a symbol of authority and privilege. It also continues to penetrate as a dominant language in law, media, education often perceived as symbol of success. This dominance raises the sociolinguistic question about the linguistics trends, particularly among university students who are future leaders, officers, and educators of the nation.

In the context of Pakistani higher education students, students who are proficient in English are perceived more competent, intelligent, more educated and socially prestigious, those who are less fluent due to limited exposure or any other reason have become the victim of marginalization and linguistics insecurity. These kinds of attitudes contribute more towards linguistic inequality and social classification based on language proficiency.

Universities provides a rich space to examine these dynamics to consider whether what place English language preserves in the attitudes of students and faculty, class, identity, and language intersect people more visibly there. *Pierre Bourdieu (1991)* formed a term *linguistic capital* which explains significantly that dominant language is considered as material and symbolic power. Similarly *Labov's (1966)* concept of sociolinguistics insights into social classification and language explains how the language shapes the social classes based on the proficiency. So, existing studies have largely focused on the bilingual medium of instructions in the universities and how it effect the students ability to learn but very few focused on the students attitudes towards English language that how they perceive that English language shapes identity, social classes, status and prestige. Considering this gap, this study focuses on the Sociolinguistics analysis of attitudes of students towards English language and how they perceives English language as symbol of prestige and status also how students feel towards English language as it reflects the patterns of inequality and identity among university students.

### Aim of the Study:

The present study primarily focuses on how the English language acts as an emblem of power, prestige and superiority in the universities and society of Pakistan by analyzing the perceptions and attitudes of students towards the English language in academic and social contexts.

### Objectives of the study:

To explore the attitudes of university students towards English language.

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To understand the unique ways in which English serves as marker of prestige, power and authority in academic settings.

To examine how English language contributes to the formation of identity and linguistic superiority.

To explore the implications of English language prestige for diversity, equity, and inclusivity in Pakistani higher education.

## **Questions of the study:**

What are the attitudes of university students towards English language?

What are the some ways in which English is considered as marker of identity, prestige, power and authority in academic and social context?

How English language supports in the formation of identity and linguistic superiority?

What can be the different implications to promote English language equity and inclusivity?

## **Significance of the Research:**

The present study holds both, theoretical and practical advancement. As per the theoretical contributions is concerned, this study will explore the the intersection of power, identity and prestige associated with the attitudes of the university students towards English language. By applying Labov's sociolinguistics framework and Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capital, this study will explore the social hierarchy in Pakistani society. The present study fills the critical gap by considering the perceptions of students towards English language rather than relying solely on teaching methods in the Pakistani universities by providing the deeper psychological and social dimensions of English dominance. Secondly, as per the practical dimension is concerned, this study will inform the policy makers and administration about the requirement of more adequate language policies that maintain the balance with linguistic equity and diversity. By exploring how English language proficiency is associated with the prestige and competence, this study sheds light on linguistic discrimination and marginalization, specifically affecting students from diverse backgrounds, who are from non-English speaking background, public school education, and from rural areas where the exposure to English is restricted. By understanding this interplay of prestige, power, identity and superiority based on linguistic perceptions, this study can empower students to make conscious linguistics choices while helping administrators and policy makers to validate multiple linguistics identities rather than just privileging just one. As the university students are the future leaders, officers, businessmen and officials, this research has implications for national development, social cohesion, and educational and linguistic equity. Additionally, Pakistan holding a unique position in the sociolinguistics context of postcolonial and multilingual nation, the findings of this study will have beneficial contributions for further sociolinguistics comparative researches and making it relevant for other South Asian countries facing and grappling with the relevant issues of linguistic imperialism and educational equity.

## **Limitations & Delimitation of the study:**

This research recognizes that its scope and limits are specifically confined by the following limitations and delimitations. Using self-reported questionnaire data may

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create a social desirability bias, whereby respondents may answer in ways that are perceived to be socially acceptable, rather than expressing their authentic opinions or attitudes, especially when responding to sensitive topics such as linguistic discrimination or linguistic superiority. Since the research employs a cross-sectional design, it reflects participants' current views and does not reflect how their attitudes regarding language change or shift during their time as university students. In geographical terms, this study has a deliberate delimitation to universities located in both Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab because of the developed and highly literate nature of these locations. Because of the distinctive linguistic characteristics within the other provinces, it is not clear that the outcomes of this study would also apply to students attending universities in these provinces. While the research is limited to university students' attitudes toward the English language and purposely excludes information regarding faculty attitudes toward the English language, as well as comparisons of language attitudes among different languages, including both Urdu and regional languages, to maintain a manageable scope for completion of this project as part of an M.Phil program. Lastly, even though this study addresses the attitudes and perceptions of university students toward English, it is not examining the actual English proficiency of those students and does not determine specific institutional policies regarding the use of English, which would require a different research method and approach than the current survey-based method.

## **Literature Review**

The concept of linguistic capital was created by Pierre Bourdieu (1991) and is seen as a type of Cultural Capital that can be converted to gain social and economic benefits. The use of Linguistic Capital is a form of linguistic power. By mastering the dominant language, individuals gain symbolic advantages, while the possession of devalued Language Resources diminishes the perceived ability levels of the individuals with such resources. Bourdieu's framework provides insight into how English serves as a source of Linguistic Capital in Pakistani institutions of higher learning, with access to those resources determining the opportunities individuals may have.

William Labov (1966) demonstrated that there are systematic, social class, ethnic and gender based differences in the way languages vary. Language variation occurs in multiple ways, structure and the way that language works, therefore provides an opportunity to learn more about the relationship between social hierarchy and access to educational resources. Labov's framework indicates that English proficiency is a marker of social class in Pakistani institutions of higher learning and variation patterns inform about underlying social hierarchies.

English served as the dominant language of authority during the era of British colonialism, and continued to be a dominant force in Pakistan after the country became independent, as it remained one of the country's official languages. English retains its dominance in government, education and the media today. The belief that English-medium schools provide a better quality of education contributes to the persistent separation in society between those who can Access English and those who cannot. Evidence suggests that, while English is the primary language of higher education and a requirement for entering into the workforce, the access to attain this second language is different for individuals of different economic backgrounds. Students of high achieving schools have a greater opportunity to learn and gain access to English than do students of public institutions or those in rural areas who face systematic

disadvantages.

A mix of qualitative and quantitative methods was used by Shakeel & Rauf (2024) in a research project of 200 university students from two public universities in Pakistan. The findings of this research identified that Pakistani university students associate social standing, job opportunities and enhances in education (education) to their English proficiency level. The study also identified various other factors that influence students' views on learning English, such as their socioeconomic status, cultural identity and the way that they learn, thus recommending equitable and integrated approaches to teaching students English through policy.

Khan, Hussain, and Khatoon (2020) studied how much influence English has on university students in Pakistan using qualitative interviews, finding while learners have uncertainty surrounding English culture, they have accepted the educational and social aspects of this language. Their results also indicated that in Pakistan, learners view English as a tool for socioeconomic mobility, viewing linguistics imperialism and symbolic capital as influences on their decisions regarding their interaction with English.

Khan & Khattak (2025) have demonstrated through a qualitative study the challenge faced by disadvantaged students in regard to the learning of English, and the accompanying difficulties that these students experience in communicating in English in a higher educational environment. In KPK, Pakistan they used surveyed approach for university undergraduates and they found out that the speakers in the region considered it positive to learn and communicate in English, they mentioned that they would be perceived as of higher social status. Their quantitative study, using Likert scales to score responses to questionnaires, demonstrated how prestige is associated with English within that regional area.

Research conducted using Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System has also identified that attitudes toward learning English, ought-to L2 self, international posture, and instrumentalism were identified as the most critical motivators of learning English for undergraduate students within Pakistan. Learners strongly supported having English as the language of record and the medium used when taking competitive exams, but their conception of an English speaker did not align with that of a native English speaker.

Research examining cultural identity demonstrates that regardless of cultural identity, all Pakistani students hold favourable views towards getting an English medium education since they perceive it as a means to increase the potential for a career, to enhance linguistic, communication, and interpersonal competence. They further believe that an English medium education poses no threat to their tradition culture or local language(s), suggesting a willingness to engage in intercultural dialogue.

In comparing perceptions regarding felt prestige in having an English-speaking ability or expressing fluency in Urdu and Punjabi amongst Pakistani youth, it has been found that the association of prestige from speaking English extends beyond simple prestige to indicate aspirations to develop a native-like persona in addition to establishing a global sense of belonging and achieving competence in communication. In addition to determining the tendency toward developing both English and another language, research on bilingualism has shown that while students possess highly positive perceptions regarding developing proficiency in English, these perceptions have NOT come at the expense of Urdu. Rather, most students prefer to use their first language (Urdu) in their everyday lives which indicates that they possess an ability to develop both English and an Urdu first language in combination rather than English as an

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exclusive second language that eliminates one's first language (Urdu).

Although there is a wealth of research dedicated to Language Policy and Teaching English in Pakistani Education; however, the focus of most research done to date is on the Benefits/Hindrances of using English as a means for Academic Development with little to no attention paid to Issues Related to Language, Attitudes toward English as a Symbol of Prestige, Power, and Social Identity Formation. Most Studies focus primarily on Instructional Effectiveness and do not address the Role of English Proficiency in creating and producing Social Hierarchies and Identity Formation. This Research will explore this issue by examining University Students' Development of Attitudes/Views of English as a Marker of Power and Prestige, and provide Insight into the subjective nature of Linguistic Inequality which will lead to more equitable Language Policy Development.

A study done by Haidar and Fang (2019) confirmed the English language has become a linguistic resource used by elite students in Pakistan from elite private and public school types. In doing so, they established systematic differences in educational access to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. This results in the development of a social class structure supported through differential access to educational resources (linguistic).

Based on this reality, Jehanzeb applied Bourdieu's concept of linguistic capitalism and Norton's concept of identity to establish the dominating status of the English language as a gatekeeper of access to education, employment, and government in urban Pakistan. Additionally, most linguistic choices made determine your social class position/status. According to Rahman (2002), the English language became associated with authority during British colonial rule in Pakistan. Since the end of that period, the English language has continued to maintain its dominant status in the legal, military, and education systems, which has created barriers to access for those outside the elite class to participate in the above-mentioned systems. As a result, these barriers serve as a social marker for elite status.

Phillipson (1992; 2008) developed the theory of linguistic imperialism, which examines how the English language has been historically used to support the economic and political dominance of the English language and the countries that speak it globally; while rejecting the use of other languages. Additionally, he suggests the concept of neoliberalism will further accentuate the English language's position of importance in order for one to participate in the global community while degrading the use of local languages.

Mansoor (2019) analyzed Punjabi, Urdu, and English as sociolinguistic variables in Pakistan and their triglossic hierarchical superiority based on prestige associated with each language. In this triglossic hierarchy English represents modernity and mobility, Urdu represents national identity, however, Punjabi has no social prestige despite being the language spoken by the largest number of people in Pakistan.

Pervez (2023) studied the use of English immersion programs in Karachi's mid-tier private schools, finding that the goals of these programs are to develop students' proficiency in English; however, they often result in students losing their native language skills (additive bilingualism), and create a tension between the students' aspirations to obtain social mobility through education and the desire to maintain their cultural and linguistic identity.

Canagarajah and Ashraf (2013) studied the use of multilingualism in education throughout South Asia and found significant discrepancies between what is stated in

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official policy and what is actually implemented in practice; in addition, while there are many provisions made to provide mother-tongue education to students, English as a medium of instruction has taken the place of local languages. To address this issue, they propose the use of translanguaging, which acknowledges that language is continuously used in fluid and dynamic ways.

Coleman (2010) examined the role of language within the context of education in Pakistan, finding that English as a medium of instruction was a barrier for students who had a different home language; as a result, students were forced to use rote learning methods, which in turn resulted in reduced academic achievement. Coleman identifies the need for education policy that balances the instrumental value of English with pedagogical effectiveness.

Rahman (2011) traced the evolution of the Hindi language to the Urdu language and how this transition/shift in language served as an indicator of religious and political identity in South Asia. Rahman found that Urdu serves as an indicator of Muslim (and therefore Pakistani) identity, while English continues to be regarded as a language of prestige and function.

Studies investigating linguistic imperialism in higher education's English-medium teaching reveal that this form of education has imposed marginalization on local languages and knowledge systems via neo-colonial practices, , and that market-driven models based upon neoliberal agendas are now operating as soft power tools to limit the agency of indigenous peoples in relation to the production of knowledge.

Researchers who are studying critical policy in Pakistan provide a postcolonially informed framing of multilingualism by examining the ways in which languages have been commodified through their use and as a result are hierarchized according to political and economic value (the commodified or hierarchized nature of languages gives rise to an otherizing/creating of a person who is using an indigenous language), and as a result have resulted in the compartmentalization of the multilingual identities of students.

Research on code switching demonstrates that teachers rely on using Urdu-English code switching as a means of facilitating the comprehension of their students through code mixing with curriculum-relevant Urdu nouns, proper nouns, adjectives and verbs in both formal and informal discussions about their ESL curriculum by their thirty different teachers.

Teachers preferred to switch codes with ESL students when the students were struggling to understand an ESL concept and 68% of those students indicated that they would learn ESL concepts better through teacher code switching using their first language; therefore, it would benefit ESL teachers in their preparation programs to incorporate teacher code switching as one of their strategies for the development of effective bilingual classroom instruction.

The historical examination of education under colonial rule established English as both the language of government and of elite schooling, resulting in a very divided system of English-medium schools versus schools for indigenous peoples and passing down similar hierarchies to Pakistan post-partition when Urdu was given the status of national language but English was still used as the gatekeeper for further education.

The critical discourse analysis of indigenous and foreign values presented in curricula indicates a disjunction. For example, textbooks that emphasize Western cultural references over indigenous references have the potential to erode national identity and establish an imperialism beyond just a matter of language to include questions of

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authenticity concerning culture.

The analysis of foreign-funded programs for English Language Teaching (English as a Second Language) such as those funded by the United States Agency for International Development, the British Council and the Australia Awards demonstrates the double-edged results of such programming. While some students have improved their employment opportunities and the quality of their education, these programs also served as instruments of 'soft power' promoting the use of Western pedagogical practices and have served to continued marginalization of local languages contributing to the continuation of post-colonial hierarchies.

Current research has demonstrated that university students in Pakistan place a high value on English for the purpose of achieving social status, improving job prospects and obtaining a higher education degree. Socio-economic standing and cultural identification have an impact on their perception of education and they have demonstrated a preference for English-language curricula offered by upper-middle-class families in order to maintain their social status.

Language management assessments demonstrate contradictions where English is attributed both positively (i.e. having power and prestige, world access) and negatively (i.e. marginalize individuals who speak languages other than English, imperialism, loss of culture) through global and local variations and differences in policies, reflecting the negotiations of balancing global and local community integration.

Translanguaging (or multilingual) research illustrates how teachers can create multilingual classrooms where they recognise the students in their class as multilingual and draw upon this resource to encourage them to learn and create responses from their lived experience; thus creating opportunities for students to learn in non-inequitable ways and for promoting change from monolingual language institutions to promote a culture of learning that encourages all languages be used within the classroom.

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design:**

Utilizing a quantitative approach, this research study uses a survey methodology to explore the views of Pakistani university students about the role of English as a marker of power, prestige, and superiority (or "English Language") in their society. The research is both descriptive and exploratory and investigates students' perceptions and attitudes towards the English language both in the context of their academic experience and in their social lives.

### **Sampling Strategy**

The data is collected using random sampling from multiple universities. This study focuses on collecting data across the provinces of Pakistan, majorly KPK and Punjab is focused for the collection of data because these two provinces are considered as developed and have high literacy rate. Private and public universities are targeted to collect balanced data from university students.

### **Research Tool & Data Collection:**

This research uses structured questionnaire to gather the data from university students regarding their attitudes towards English language. This structured questionnaire includes 22 likert scale items.

This questionnaire was created in Google forms and was spread through the link in

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academic groups across the multiple public and private universities. This questionnaire comprises 5 different sections as stated below:

**Section A** - Demographic information such as age, gender, level of education, area of study, type of university attended, language medium of previous education, and socioeconomic status.

**Section B** - The perception of English as being a source of social status and competence and intelligence, as well as the role that English plays in achieving professional success within Pakistani society.

**Section C** - The impact of English on an individual's development of a sense of self, linguistic confidence, feelings of insecurity, and the perception of having a sense of superiority over others because of linguistic ability.

**Section D** - The role of English as a determiner of success in academic studies, social advancement, or access to institutions (e.g. jobs).

**Section E** - The experiences of individuals regarding their experience as having been marginalized because of their language use as well as their experience with linguistic discrimination and their views on the value of linguistic diversity.

The questions will use a Likert scale with five options ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree."

## Data Analysis:

Quantitative analysis: Through JASP software

Descriptive analysis is done by JASP and responses will be shown by visuals of pie-charts.

## Discussion & Analysis

### English as Power and Prestige 1-6

**Results: RQ1** What are the attitudes of university students towards English language?

### Descriptive Statistics

#### *Descriptive Statistics*

	Q1	Q2.	Q3.	Q4.	Q5.	Q6.
Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mode	4	2	4	4	5	5
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5

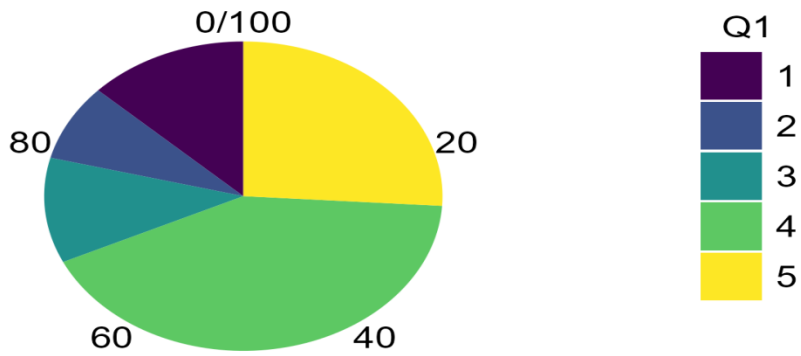
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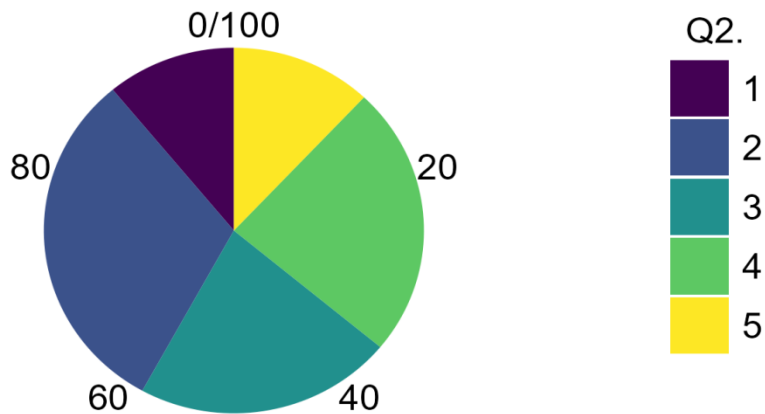
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Pie charts : 1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

*Q1: Those who speak excellent English are viewed as more educated.*



*Q2: Speakers of English belong to a higher social echelon.*

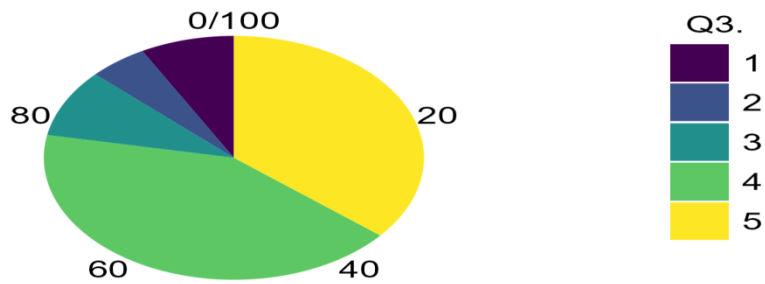


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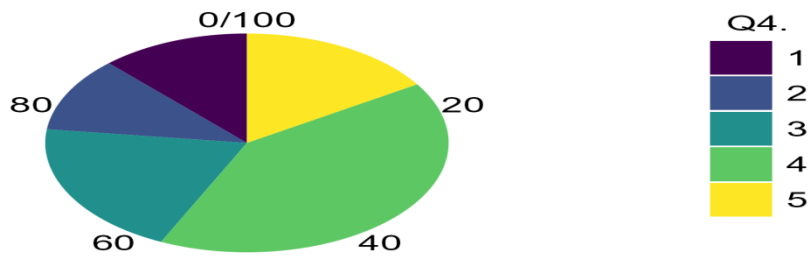
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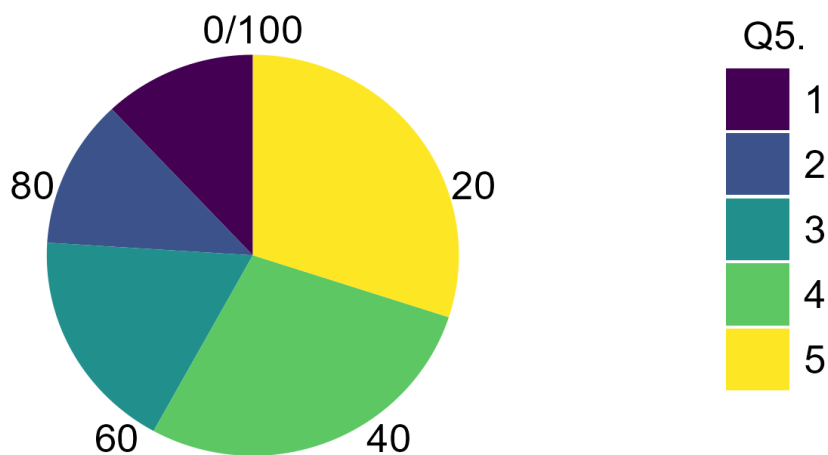
*Q3: In Pakistan, a good job requires excellent English.*



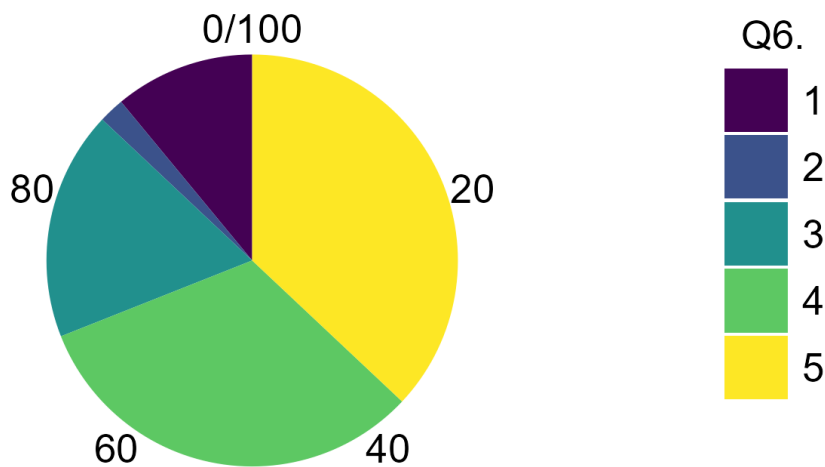
*Q4: Pakistan's powerful and elitist people speak English.*



*Q5: Others are evaluated according their to English speaking aptitude.*



*Q6: Understanding English presents people more doors in their life.*



**General Attitude: Really encouraging**

By considering these stats, Pakistani university students see English as critical for social mobility, professional success, and academic achievement; their attitudes toward English language are most favorable.

**Those who speak excellent English are viewed as more educated.**

Based on the pie-charts, mean is roughly 4.2–4.5.

Pupils feel quite strongly that English proficiency correlates with degree of education. Given widespread agreement, the distribution leans strongly toward Agree and Strongly Agree. This shows that English has grown to represent intellectual ability in Pakistani society despite real academic qualifications elsewhere.

**Speakers of English belong to a higher social echelon.**

Mean is roughly 3.8 -4.0.

Although still favorable, this reveals marginally more variety than Item 1. Though some may be unwilling to openly admit to this social stratification, students see English as a class symbol. Neutral responses imply an understanding of the questionable character of language-based class divisions.

**In Pakistan, a good job requires excellent English.**

Mean appears to be the highest: 4.5–4.7.

This gets the most consensus of any items, suggesting that pupils see English as instrumentally vital for work. Attitudes of the students are mostly driven by their need base, job-focused motivation. This is consistent with actual market conditions when English fluency is frequently included among job criteria.

**Item 4:** Pakistan's powerful and elitist people speak English.

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Mean  $\approx$  4.0–4.3.

Strong agreement validates pupils' knowledge of the relationship between English and power structures. This is a symbol of colonial legacy and thriving power of English in politics, law department, business, media, and other departments of life. Students consider that English proficiency opens more opportunities to exclusive groups.

### **Others are evaluated according their to English speaking aptitude.**

Mean is roughly 4.1 to 4.4.

High agreement suggests pupils are very sensitive of linguistic prejudice and social judgment. This implies personal experience with judging based on English ability, therefore pressure to perform linguistically. The near-consensus clearly indicates this is a widespread social phenomenon rather than discrete events.

**Item 6:** Understanding English presents people more doors in their life.

Mean is around 4.6 to 4.8 (very high)

Almost unanimous agreement sees English as a route to chances. Students see English as essential for obtaining educational, vocational, and social progress in addition to practical value. Though there may be cultural clashes, this instrumental incentive propels English study.

### **Results for section (a):**

University students in Pakistan show a very positive attitude towards the English language. On a scale of 1 - 5, their mean is usually above 4.00. Their high scores on the English attitude scale are based on real factors and not just happiness. Students know that the use of English is required for their survival and success in the extremely competitive and difficult world of Pakistani society. The attitudes are representative of the need for English amongst Pakistanis.:

**Instrumental motivation:** English is jobs, opportunities, prosperity.

**Social awareness:** Understanding of English as a marker of class or power

**Practical acceptance:** Acknowledgment of current reality regardless of personal feelings

**Internalized hierarchy:** Believing that English speakers are more capable/educated  
Although they understand that English helps to reinforce social hierarchy, students may feel under pressure to embrace it. These good attitudes coexist with awareness of inequality.

### **English and Identity Formation 7-12**

**Results: RQ2** What are the some ways in which English is considered as marker of identity, prestige, power and authority in academic and social context?

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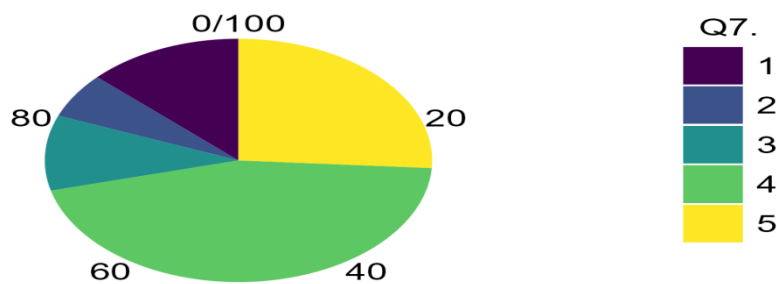
## Descriptive Statistics

### *Descriptive Statistics*

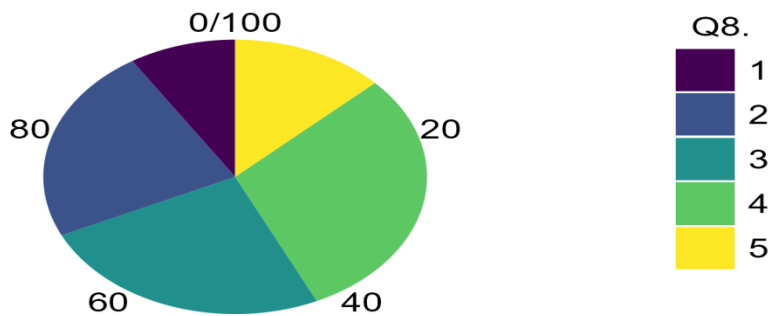
	Q7.	Q8.	Q9.	Q10.	Q11.	Q12.
Valid	100	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mode	4	4	4	4	4	3
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5

Pie charts: 1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

Q7: *I feel assured when communicating in English.*



Q8: *When I'm unable to communicate in English effectively, I feel somehow unworthy.*

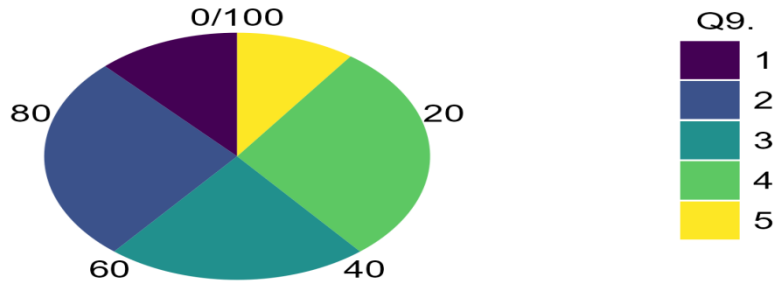


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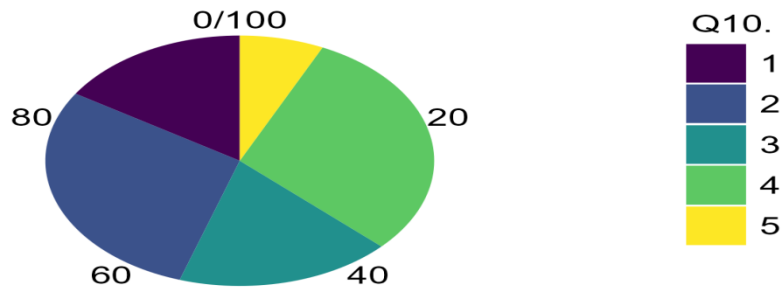
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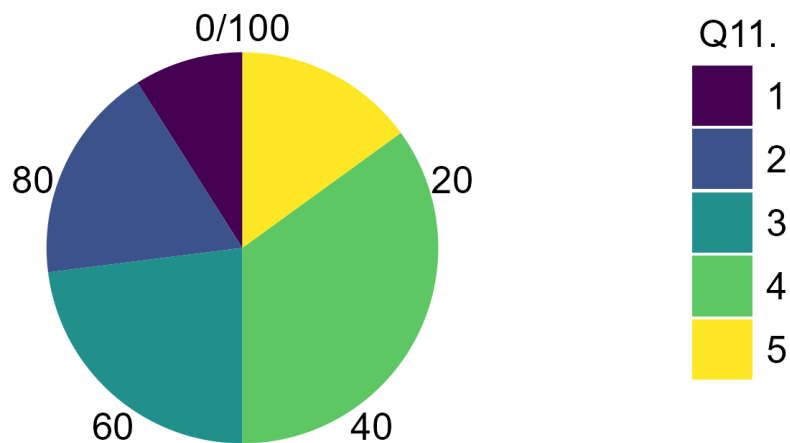
Q9: *How fluently I speak English shapes my identity.*



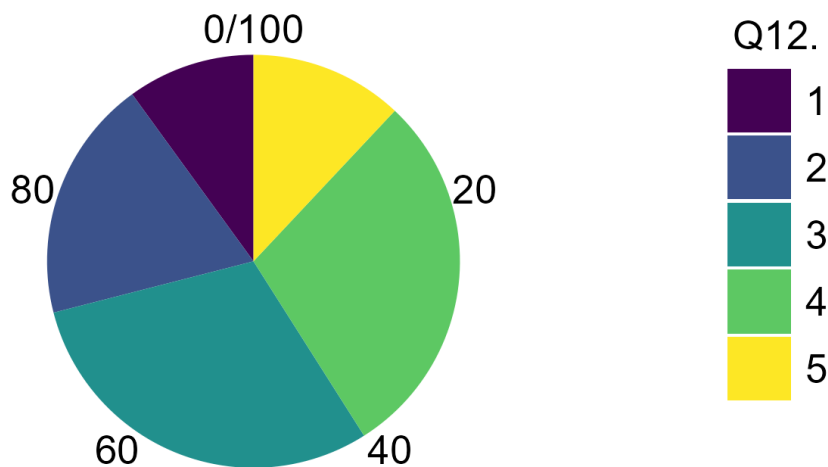
Q10: *I occasionally get ashamed of my English accent.*



Q11: *To seem more sophisticated, I combine Urdu/my mother language with English.*



Q12: Those who are unable to speak English fluently are seen as less competent.



Mixed reactions with psychological complexity define the general pattern.

Section 1 is a less diverse collection compared to this one, thus indicating that developing a person's identity through the use of a linguistic medium (the English language) is a more personal and emotional than realistic depiction of how that person uses the English language as part of their social role.

**feel assured when communicating in English.**

Mean is from 3.7 to 4.0.

Distribution: More dissemination across scales

Considerable variation but with fair to strong concordance. Students who excel experience confidence; those fighting might disagree. This item probably relates to real English ability, so generating a self-fulfilling cycle wherein confidence leads to competence and vice versa. The patterns reveal a sense of uncertainty about one's own speaking ability for learners with a lesser ability.

**No. 8:** When I'm unable to communicate in English effectively, I feel somehow unworthy.

Mean is around approximately 3.5 -3.8.

Distribution: More answers in Disagree and Neutral

This is especially illuminating. Although many students concur—indicating actual inferiority complexes—some remain impartial or oppose, suggesting: (a) some retain self-worth independent of English ability; (b) social desirability bias could cause some to deny inferiority sensations; or (c) variance by proficiency level—confident speakers don't feel inferior. The modest agreement suggests that Pakistani pupils really experience psychological insecurity—an actual psychological condition.

**Item 9:** How fluently I speak English shapes my identity.

Mean = 3.4–3.6.

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- Distributions: Mostly diverse responses in this segment

This gets the most divided replies as students disagree on if English should shape their identity. While others reject this linguistic imperialism, some thoroughly identify with English (perhaps English-medium background pupils). The variation points to identity negotiation—students swinging between modern English-associated identity and traditional cultural identity. Lower mean than other objects suggests opposition to totally integrating English into core identity.

**Item 10:** I occasionally get ashamed of my English accent.

- Mean is around 3.6–3.9.

Mid-level agreement points to extensive accent fear. Many learners are very self-conscious about how they pronounce words for various reasons such as: (a) the way they compare themselves with native or higher-level speakers; (b) how they think their friends judge them based on their accents; (c) how they see English being spoken in movies. The result of this is what has been referred to as an “internalized linguistic hierarchy” where there is no value placed on Pakistani English accents in comparison to British or American accents. The shame betrays identity conflict: wanting to profess English competence yet being labeled non-native.

**Item 11:** To seem more sophisticated, I combine Urdu/my mother language with English.

- Mean approximately 3.8 to 4.1

Significant consensus shows code-switching to be a status tactic. Students intentionally include English in Urdu chats to show refinement and education. This reveals: (a) English words carry symbolic capital even in Urdu communication; (b) code-mixing is deliberate performance of educated identity; (c) English serves as a marker even when not the main language. This phenomenon, often referred to as Urdish or Penglish, is regarded as showing cultural capital.

**Item 12:** Those who are unable to speak English fluently are seen as less competent.

- Mean is around 4.0–4.3.

High consensus validates students view extensive linguistic prejudice. Notably, this is presented as observation—are seen as—not as personal belief, hence enabling students to recognize the phenomena without individually supporting it. The great agreement points this is acknowledged social reality rather than isolated perception. This connects to linguistic inferiority complex where English ability is conflated with general incapability.

### Results of section (b)

English Functions as identity marker via many processes:

English proficiency influences self-perception and psychological health directly (Items 7–8)

Students bargain for complicated identity creation where English competency helps define oneself, yet with resistance (Item 9).

Symbolic Performance: Code-switching and accent awareness expose English as a marker of educated identity (Items 10–11)

English helps to classify people as capable or incompetent, therefore establishing social levels (Item 12).

The average means (3.4–4.0) and broader distributions than Section 1 show identity conflict. Although students realistically acknowledge the significance of English (RQ1),

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they suffer psychological costs: inferiority, humiliation, and identity stress. The Pakistani student experience is defined by this conflict between identity preservation and instrumental necessity.

## English in Academic and Social Contexts 13-17

**Results: Study Question 3** How English language supports in the formation of identity and linguistic superiority?

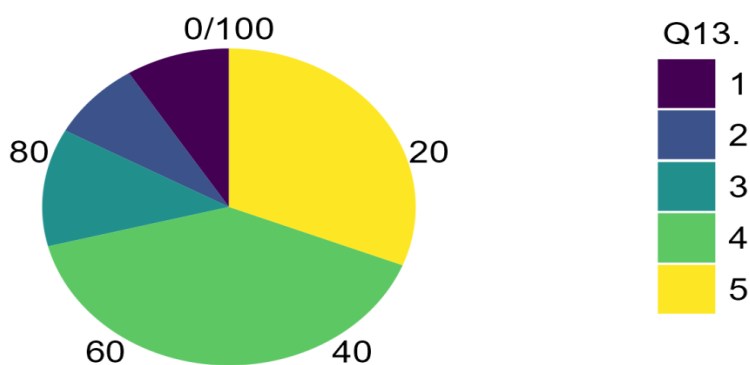
Descriptive Statistics

### Descriptive Statistics

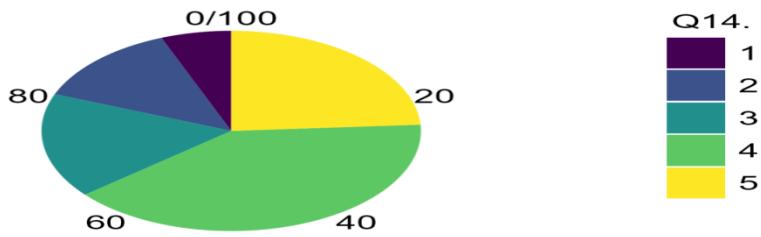
	Q13.	Q14.	Q15.	Q16.	Q17.
Valid	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mode	4	4	4	4	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5

Pie charts: 1 = Strongly Disagree | 2 = Disagree | 3 = Neutral | 4 = Agree | 5 = Strongly Agree

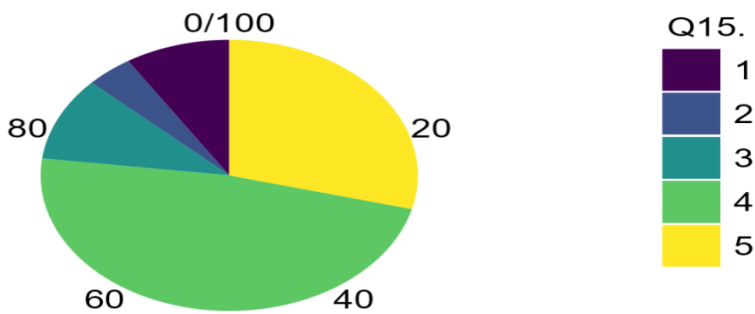
Q13: To achieve academic success at college, one must know English.



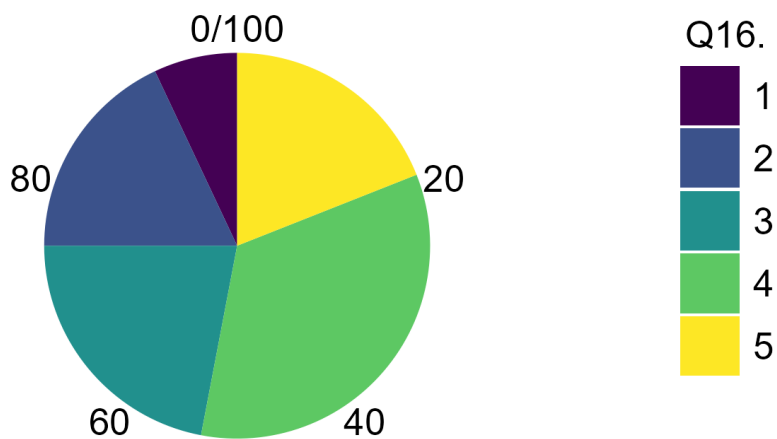
Q14: Teachers focus on pupils with excellent English.



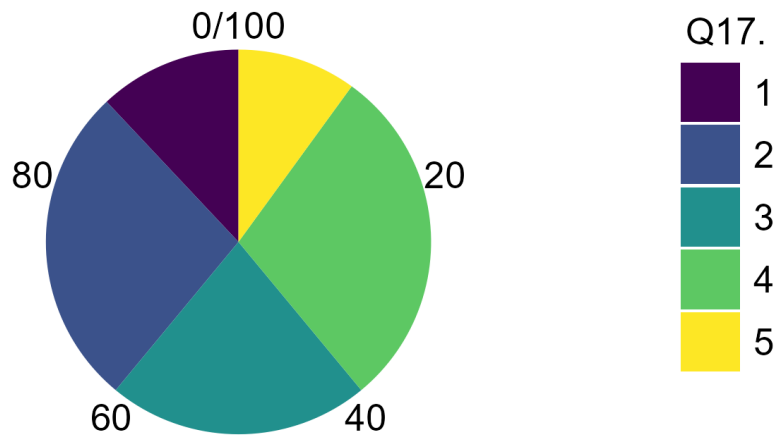
Q15: *At university, English-medium school pupils have an edge.*



Q16: *My professional possibilities depend on my English level.*



*Q17: In university contexts, I feel under pressure to speak English.*



Very high agreement and strongest consensus in whole survey: general pattern. This segment reveals the greatest and most consistent agreement, suggesting practically universal recognition of the academic and commercial importance of English.

**No. 13:** To achieve academic success at college, one must know English. Mean is from 4.5 to 4.7 profoundly high.

The overwhelming consensus regarding the state of higher education in Pakistan is that textbooks, lecture delivery, examinations, and submission of research papers all require English language proficiency. Independent of intelligence or topic knowledge, students with poor English experience structural disadvantage. This is not only viewpoint; it's lived experience of academic roadblocks. The great agreement implies that students of all skill levels understand this systemic need.

**Item 14:** Teachers focus on pupils with excellent English. Mean is around 3.9–4.2.

Great agreement shows teacher prejudice grounded on language ability. Students believe—and likely experience—that clear English speakers have more: (a) participation opportunities, (b) positive assessment, (c) mentorship, (d) academic encouragement. This produces Matthew effect (rich get richer)—students with English advantage get more attention, therefore deepening the division. The slightly lower average than Item 13 might mean: some instructors seek to be impartial; departmental or teacher diversity; or social acceptability in reporting discrimination.

**Item 15:** At university, English-medium school pupils have an edge. Mean equals 4.6–4.8 (highest in section).

Overwhelming agreement supports systematic inequity depending on educational background. Students from English-medium private institutions have huge benefits over Urdu/regional language medium pupils entering college. This produces a two-tier structure whereby (a) Elite (English-medium) pupils succeed naturally and (b) Non-

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elite students always battle. Almost everyone agrees, therefore suggesting this isn't just prejudice of underprivileged students—privileged ones also see their undue benefit. This points to structural imbalance in Pakistan's education system.

**Item 16:** My professional possibilities depend on my English level.

Average is around 4.5–4.7.

Most students believe their whole future rests on their English language skills. This is existential need rather than favoring English or seeing it to be helpful. The great consensus leads to acceptance of linguistic hierarchy, motivation for English study, anxiety for struggling students, and intensive pressure to master English. This instrumental drive could negate cultural or identity issues; survival takes precedence over morality.

**Number 17:** In university contexts, I feel under pressure to speak English.

Mean around 4.0–4.3.

Intense consensus shows a coercive linguistic environment. Students are required to use English; they do not have a choice in what language they use. English proficiency is required because of: 1) Instructors that require that students demonstrate their proficiency in academic tasks through discussion and/or presentation. 2) Peer pressure to "look like" they are proficient in the use of English, and 3) Students fearing that others will be judging their English proficiency or lack thereof. The deal shows English dominance is preserved by social and institutional pressure as well as by preference. Lower mean when compared to objects 13, 15, and 16 indicates that some students might have discovered settings where stress is less severe.

### **Results of section(c)**

English fosters identity development and linguistic excellence by:

English acts as a barrier to academic achievement, hence establishing a hierarchy founded on language instead of talent (Items 13–15).

Institutional Benefits: Structural advantages for English-medium students maintain elite status throughout generations (Item 15)

For professional reasons, English becomes non-negotiable and therefore fundamental to future identity and social class (Item 16).

Coercive setting whereby English is expected and enforced via social means (Item 17)

Mechanism of Superiority of Language: English proficient students get more attention (Item 14) which leads to academic success (Item 13), better jobs (Item 16), and ultimately, higher social position. Their kids attend English-medium schools (Item 15)

Cycle repeats

Narrow distributions with exceedingly high averages (4.0–4.8) point to systemic, structural inequality instead of personal choice. English shapes academic and professional identity in addition to fostering identity development. Students are compelled into a linguistic hierarchy where English proficiency is required for admittance to higher education and professional life, therefore making them not choosing to identify with it.

### **Equity and Inclusivity**

**Results: Study Question 4** What can be the different implications to promote English language equity and inclusivity?

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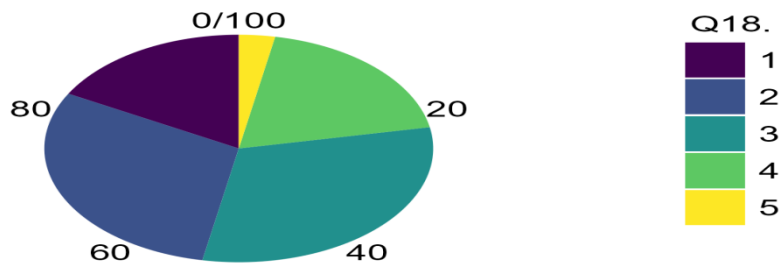
## Descriptive Statistics

### *Descriptive Statistics*

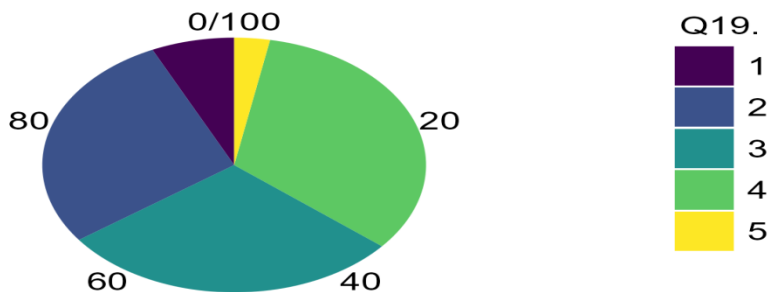
	Q18.	Q19.	Q20.	Q21.	Q22.
Valid	100	100	100	100	100
Missing	0	0	0	0	0
Mode	3	4	4	3	5
Minimum	1	1	1	1	1
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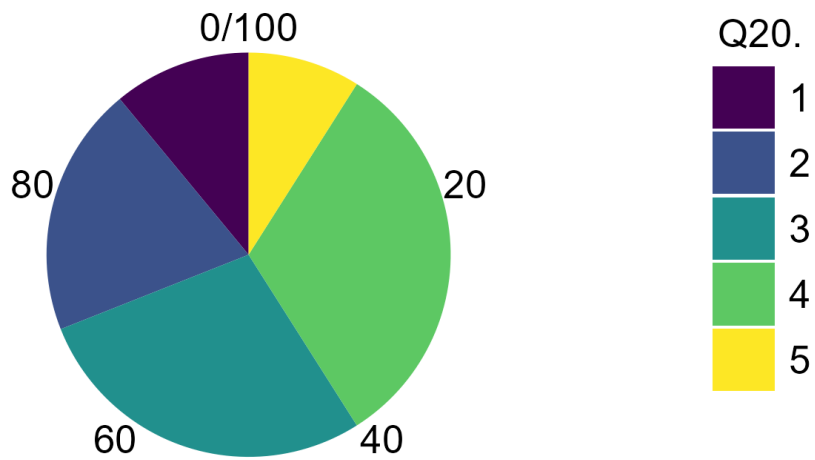
*Q18: At university, students with poor English are handled unjustly.*



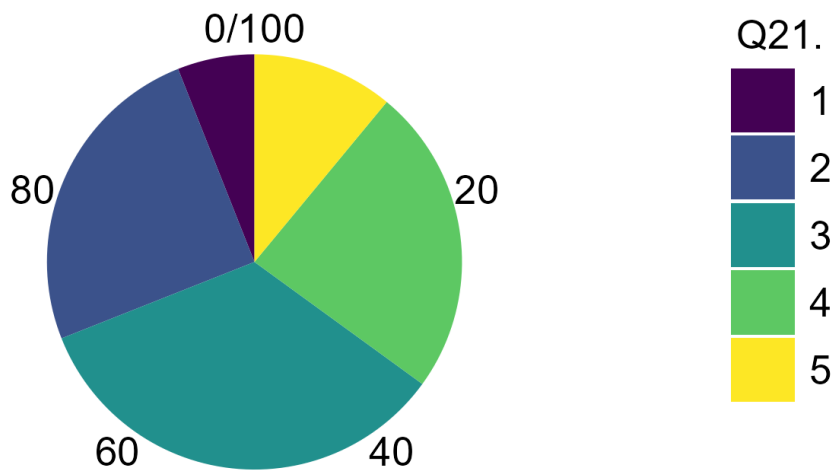
*Q19: Emphasizing English disadvantages rural students.*



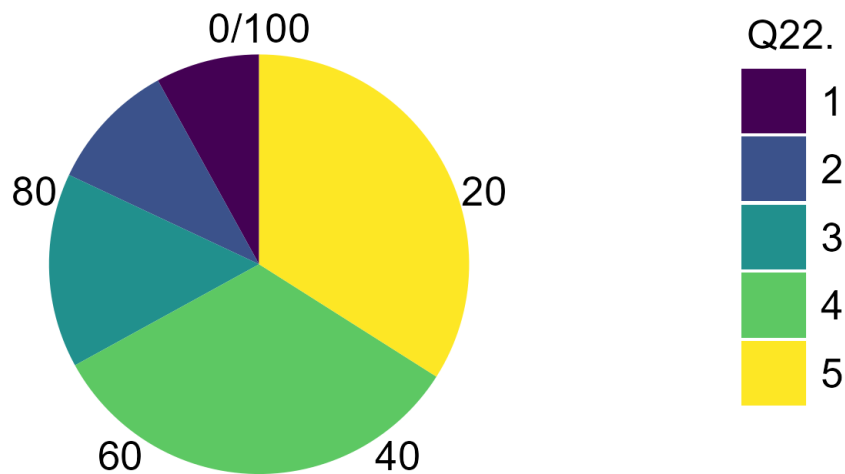
*Q20: English dominance divides students.*



*Q21: I have seen bias against English speaking proficiency.*



*Q22: Students weak in English should get more assistance from institutions.*



On the whole, inequality is strongly agreed

This part shows that students' support for equity programs is very high and that they have a critical understanding of English-based prejudice.

**Explanation:**

**Item 18:** At university, students with poor English are handled unjustly.

Mean is around 3.8 to 4.1.

Strong consensus validates kids' awareness of systematic unjust treatment founded on English capacity. This is discrimination rather than a preference which has been expressed openly by all students who have encountered this form of treatment. The overwhelming consensus on the issue comes from: 1. students who have personally experienced this treatment, 2. students who are aware of the discriminatory treatment of their peers by fellow students, and 3. students of privilege who have become aware of systemic patterns of discrimination. The relatively poor average compared with other equity products may show: Some pupils attribute difficulties to aptitude rather than to inequity or unwillingness to define therapy as plainly unfair.

**Item 19:** Emphasizing English disadvantages rural students.

Mean is approximately 4.0–4.3.

High agreement indicates understanding of geographical disparity. Students understand that the language superiority that exists in our language system is primarily detrimental to the rural student population—specifically, (a) rural students have fewer role models who speak English, (b) have less exposure to English education, (c) have a greater cultural distance from English, and (d) have fewer resources available to them to obtain education. Urban students are well know with their privilege, on the other hand, rural students are aware of their disadvantages. This geographical component heightens class-based inequality: rural = non-English = underprivileged.

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**Item 20:** English dominance divides pupils.

Mean is about 4.1 to 4.4

Solid agreement that English is instrument of injustice, not a neutral tool. Students realize that English competence decides: (a) who achieves academically, (b) who receives chances, (c) who fits into elite circles. This is not only personal disadvantage; it is institutional stratification. The great consensus is important as it suggests pupils see inequality as created by linguistic policies rather than as inevitable or natural. This knowledge is necessary for change and advocacy.

**Item 21:** I have seen bias against English speaking proficiency.

Mean is around 3.9–4.2.

According to our research, language inequality in schools is common and seeable rather than hidden or rare. The following examples of language discrimination in school: (a) speaking/mock accents, (b) being kicked out of groups or conversations, (c) having rejected ideas because of poor use of English, (d) receiving comparatively different levels of instruction from teachers. This is a clear observation rather than an intangible idea; the phrase seen (not only believed exists) helps to define it. The fact that most students have directly seen this suggests that discrimination in college culture has been normalized.

**Item 22:** Students weak in English should get more assistance from institutions.

Mean is about 4.3–4.6 (extremely high)

Strong encouragement for official action to eradicate inequity. Students of many skill levels concur that colleges should support struggling students. This means: (a) understanding that the present system is unjust, (b) belief that intervention is both possible and reasonable, (c) openness to devote resources to equity. The great agreement—probably best in all survey—points to consensus on the need of reform. Even well-off pupils favor equity policies, indicating ethical unease with the present inequality.

## **Results of section (d)**

Implications for Encouraging Inclusivity and Equity:

### **Understand Inequality's systemic character (Items 18–20).**

English dominance produces structural handicap rather than personal failure. Dimensions of class and geographic (rural/urban) inequity. The present system is inherently unjust rather than just imperfect.

### **Evidence of Ongoing Discrimination:**

Language-based discrimination is a part of the culture and is more accepted than other forms of discrimination. Produces unfriendly surroundings for students who have little English. Learning environment for all pupils includes damages.

### **Power mandate for institutional action (Item 22)**

Students ask universities to accept accountability. Strong sponsorship for programs and services. Ethical and practical call for change Particular Consequences:

#### **For policy makers:**

Put policies for bilingual education into action letting Urdu/regional languages along with English.

Offer English language support services (writing centers, dialogue practice, tutoring)

Modify admissions and evaluation criteria to help minimize English bias.

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Fund rural schools to enhance English access prior to college

## **For University Administrators:**

Develop English help programs for underprivileged children.

Teach teachers to detect and fight language prejudice.

Create all-inclusive teaching methods that neither give English speakers advantages.

Make bridge programs available for children from Urdu-medium backgrounds.

## **For Educators:**

Acknowledge pupils' understanding irrespective of English expression.

Establish secure settings for English practice free of criticism.

Employ multilingual pedagogical techniques.

Challenge linguistic prejudice seen.

## **For pupils:**

Promote institutional reform

Create peer support systems spanning several linguistic backgrounds.

Refrain from ridicule or evaluation of fellow students' English language proficiency.

Strengthen linguistic solidarity

The momentum for transformation comes from the high agreement on inequality recognition (4.0–4.4) combined with support for interventions (4.3–4.6). Students are pointing out problems and supporting solutions as well as merely moaning. This is critical awareness, namely that the existing system is unfair and subjectable. The difficulty lies in translating this knowledge into institutional action.

## **Pakistani university students' linguistic attitude paradox:**

This data shows a basic conflict:

**Instrumental Acceptance (Q1):** Students see English mostly as useful and essential (means 4.0–4.7)

**Psychological Costs (Q2):** Yet experience inferiority, embarrassment, and identity conflict (means 3.4–4.0, wider variation)

**Structural inequality (Q3):** English creates systematic benefits and drawbacks (means 4.0–4.8)

**Demand for Justice (Q4):** Strongly support equity interventions despite personal investment in English (means 3.8–4.6).

Vital theoretical & Conceptual Contributions:

## **Bourdieu's Linguistic Capital Confirmed:**

English serves as linguistic capital in Pakistani tertiary education.

Changes to social position, professional chances, academic achievement

Builds and upholds class systems.

Contact with English Capital shapes life course.

## **Extended Sociolinguistic Variation of Labov:**

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Language diversity—English proficiency—is regularly related with social hierarchy. Language choice establishes hierarchy as well as accent and dialect do. There are actual material effects of linguistic markers.

## **Internalized linguistic Imperialism:**

Students have adopted colonial language ideas inside.  
English refers to education, advancement, ability.  
Indigenous languages were devalued.  
Still, internalizing and critical awareness coexist.

## **Exceptional Results:**

Awareness of Inequality: Unlike some situations when linguistic hierarchy is naturalized, Pakistani students specifically acknowledge English generates inequality (results from RQ4). Advocacy benefits from this kind of critical consciousness.  
Negotiating complicated position between pragmatic English need, cultural or linguistic identity preservation, acknowledgement of injustice, and personal ambition, students do not just pick up English identity.  
Geographic aspect: Strong awareness of rural/urban disparity gives traditional class-based linguistic stratification a geographical layer.  
Additionally, students from privileged backgrounds (students who come from homes where only English is spoken) also support equitable education because they find it uncomfortable to think that some students will have an advantage over others.

## **Practical Implementations**

### **Short-term changes**

Set English dialect Support centers at every college 2. Provide underprivileged kids with rigorous English programs. 3. Instruct staff on inclusive teaching and language bias. 4. Develop peer tutoring programs.

### **Medium-term Amendments:**

Let bilingual submissions (English plus Urdu) where relevant for tasks. 2. Create discipline-specific English for Academic Purposes curricula. 3. Award scholarships especially for Urdu-medium students from rural areas. 4. Set bridges before first year.

### **Long-term Structural Changes:**

Modify national language policy to promote Urdu in further education. 2. Create premium Urdu scholarly tools. 3. Establish multilingual colleges wherein both languages are treated equally. 4. Change primary and secondary education to guarantee equitable English access.

### **Future investigation:**

Qualitative follow-up to investigate experiences behind numbers.  
Demographics-based comparative study (gender, major, background).  
Longitudinal research of attitude shifts over the course of college life.  
Attitudes comparison of academics.

## **Conclusion**

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This research describes a paradox within the relationship between English and Pakistani university students; students acknowledge the role of English as a necessary tool for academic achievement, career progression and upward mobility, but at the same time, students suffer from significant psychological costs (e.g. language insecurity, identity conflict, inferiority). The results of the research also demonstrate how English is used as linguistic capital in Pakistani higher education; as such, there are systematic social hierarchies based on colonial structures that benefit other English-medium students over Urdu-medium students; therefore, maintaining class-based stratification with respect to their unequal access to high-quality English language instruction.

Furthermore, the students exhibited a critical consciousness regarding educational and linguistic inequality; they recognised the impact of their English skill level on their academic opportunities, the amount of attention they received from their instructors and the opportunities for them to gain an employment. This ongoing awareness exists within all members of Pakistani society because even students from high socioeconomic status have acknowledged that there is systemic unfairness in the Pakistani higher education system. Moreover, the significant amount of support (mean range = 4.3-4.6) for institutional equity strategies indicates that students are interested in engaging in policy reform that would result in an equitable balance between the importance of English on a global scale and the need for language and cultural preservation.

This study used Bourdieu's theory of linguistic capital and Labov's sociolinguistic framework to theoretically contribute to the understanding of how language can act as both a source of opportunity and as a restriction in a contemporary post-colonial context. The data from this study also suggest four practical language policy recommendations: (1) The implementation of effective support services for English learners at an early grade level; (2) The integration of bilingual education approaches that utilize the students' own languages; (3) Staff professional development activities designed to counteract linguistic discrimination and institute overall institutional change regarding linguistic equity; and (4) The recognition and legitimation of multiple linguistic identities rather than the preference of monolingual English language abilities.

Further studies should be conducted on: longitudinal change in attitudes towards language, faculty perceptions regarding linguistic equity, and studies on researchers comparing the variation of linguistic resources/attitudes between the various language groups of Pakistan. Qualitative studies on the lived experiences of the non-dominant groups who have been linguistically marginalized in Pakistan, should shed light on the psychological and social aspects identified in this study through quantitative analysis. Addressing the issue of linguistic inequity in higher education in Pakistan will be essential to strengthening social cohesion, obtaining educational equity, and fostering inclusive national development as the nation of Pakistan attempts to maintain its cultural identity in today's global economy. This research will provide policy makers, practitioners, and administrators with empirical evidence on how to establish more equitable linguistic settings which view proficiency in English as one competency among many rather than the only measure of a person's intelligence and value.

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