

## INVESTIGATING THE URDU LANGUAGE ATTRITION BY ESL LEARNERS IN PAKISTAN: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

**Ayesha Sarwar**

*MPhil Scholar, Department of English, University of Sargodha,  
Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.*

*Email: [ayeshasarwar638@gmail.com](mailto:ayeshasarwar638@gmail.com)*

**Azhar Pervaiz**

*Associate Professor, Department of English Language & Linguistics,  
University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.*

*Email: [azhar.pervaiz@uos.edu.pk](mailto:azhar.pervaiz@uos.edu.pk)*

**Hira Zaib**

*MPhil Scholar, Department of English, University of Sargodha,  
Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.*

*Email: [hirazaib44@gmail.com](mailto:hirazaib44@gmail.com)*

### **Abstract**

*The current study aims to examine the linguistic preferences for English language and behavior of the two generations to ascertain the extent of language shift. For this purpose, a mixed method approach was followed and data was collected through a questionnaire which was given to 120 participants i.e. 60 females, 30 representing from each generation, and 60 males, representing Gen Y and Gen Z living in two cities of the Punjab i.e. Khushab and Sargodha. Additionally, in-depth interviews from 20 participants the adult generation were conducted and observation of casual conversations were employed to analyze social and psychological factors accountable for the attrition. The study focused on what factors contribute to Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan? And differences found in the rate of Urdu language attrition between Gen Y and Gen Z of ESL learners in Pakistan. In order to investigate these questions, the study used the theory of The Sociolinguistics of Globalization (Blommaert, 2010). The findings and the results of the study will be beneficial in providing insights into how and why Urdu language is lost among ESL learners. Overall, the study will play a crucial role in revitalizing and sustaining the Urdu language in changing the linguistic landscape.*

**Keywords:** *Attrition, ESL learners, Globalization, Gen Y, Gen Z, Speech community*

### **Introduction**

Mother Language Day is celebrated globally on February 21 which highlights the significant role of native languages in education, cultural identity, and social cohesion. A native language is acquired since birth and transmitted across generations, strengthening critical thinking, mental growth, and comprehensive development. According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), knowing all languages without one's mother tongue leads to enslavement, while knowing the mother tongue is empowerment. Despite technological advancements and global connectivity, the preservation of indigenous languages remains a pressing concern (Skinner, 1991; UNESCO, 2025). In Pakistan, Urdu was adopted to unify the diverse linguistic landscape of its federating units. However, this adaptation created feelings of deprivation among speakers of local language. English is associated with modernity and upward mobility, whereas Urdu is often considered traditional, resulting in a decline in its active use, particularly among younger generations.

The growing preference for English among ESL learners in Pakistan has contributed to Urdu language attrition. Attrition refers to the loss or reduction of

linguistic competence due to diminished use. It occurs when a previously acquired language gradually declines under the influence of another dominant language. In this context, ESL learners in Pakistan increasingly code-switch and code-mix, incorporating English words into Urdu conversations even when Urdu equivalents exist. This linguistic shift reflects broader socio-cultural and educational pressures.

The present study addresses the problem of Urdu attrition among young generations, focusing on their academic and digital contexts. It explores how formal and informal educational settings influence language use and investigates generational differences between Generation Y (Millennials) and Generation Z. The problem is significant because Urdu, despite being the national language, is gradually losing ground in everyday communication and academic practices. The decline is not merely linguistic but also cultural, as it challenges the preservation of national identity.

The objectives of the study are threefold: (1) to identify the factors contributing to Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan, (2) to examine how educational contexts shape Urdu usage, and (3) to analyze the generational differences between Gen Y and Gen Z in terms of attrition rates. Correspondingly, the research questions inquire into the causes of attrition, the role of formal and informal learning environments, and the comparative tendencies of Gen Y and Gen Z. The study is grounded in Blommaert's (2010) theory of the Sociolinguistics of Globalization, which explains how globalization reshapes linguistic hierarchies. In this framework, English emerges as a global lingua franca associated with prestige, while local languages like Urdu become marginalized. This theoretical lens highlights how macro-sociolinguistic forces such as education, media, and technology contribute to linguistic inequality and language loss.

For understanding some key terms are defined: Urdu language attrition refers to the erosion of Urdu competence due to English dominance among ESL learners. ESL learners are individuals in Pakistan who acquire English as a second language for academic or professional purposes while speaking Urdu or other regional languages as their first language. Generation Y refers to those born between 1981 and 1996, while Generation Z includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The scope of the study is delimited to ESL learners of Gen Y and Gen Z in two cities of Punjab—Khushab and Sargodha. It focuses only on sociolinguistic aspects of Urdu attrition, excluding phonological, psychological, or pathological dimensions. Furthermore, it is restricted to the interaction between Urdu and English, leaving out other regional languages. The sample consists of 120 ESL learners, and the study emphasizes non-pathological factors influencing attrition.

### **Literature Review**

Language attrition refers to the loss of any language or portion of language by an individual or speech community. It is often considered as the reverse of language acquisition (He Feng, 2017, p.1). Language attrition is the loss of or alterations in linguistic competence due to reduced use or exposure of a second language (Bardovi-Harling and Stringer, 2010). It is the erosion of linguistic knowledge in a previously learned language, especially due to the dominance of a second language (Gurel, 2004). According to Lambert and Fillenbaum (1960), language attrition is the deduction of linguistic competence that happens in immigrant communities over generations, leading to a decline in proficiency of the native language. Kopke and Schmid (2004) highlighted the neurocognitive perspective of language attrition by defining it as the decline in the mental perceptions of linguistic knowledge due to diminished activation.

Research on bilingualism has been paying more and more attention to the phenomenon of first language (L1) attrition, in which speakers lose proficiency in their native tongue. Schmid and Kopke (2017) examine the role that L1 attrition plays in forming theories of bilingual development, which advances the relationship between first language attrition and second language (L2) acquisition as well as the larger framework of bilingualism. The term “first language attrition” describes the gradual decline in a speaker’s L1 proficiency brought on by prolonged exposure to and usage of a second language. L1 attrition is common among bilingual individuals, especially those who learn L2 later in life or who use L2 more frequently. Bilinguals who live in settings where L1 is less commonly utilized or where L2 predominates in daily conversation are more likely to experience the attrition phenomena (Schmid, 2011). The frequency of L1 usage, language exposure, and the age at which L2 acquisition occurs all affect the rate of language attrition. A number of social and cognitive factors are identified by Schmid and Kopke (2017) as influencing the degree of L1 attrition. The sociolinguistic context, the frequency of L1 usage in everyday life, and the extent to which the L2 is incorporated into the individual’s routine are the social factors. Cognitive factors include individual cognitive resources like working memory and processing speed, as well as the age at which the second language was acquired. Attrition is accelerated by early and frequent use of L2, especially in situations when individuals continue to practice and be exposed to their L1 on a regular basis (Kopke, 2007). The phenomena of cross-linguistic influence, in which aspects of L2 structure are transferred into L1, is a noteworthy effect of L1 attrition. This can further complicate the attrition process and show up as phonological interference, syntactic restructuring, or lexical borrowing (Seliger and Vago, 1991). The work by Schmid and Kopke (2017) has practical consequences for language maintenance of L1 which is frequently a concern in areas where bilingualism is prevalent, especially in immigrant or minority language groups. The difficulties in preserving a language across generations become more apparent when L1 attrition is acknowledged as a normal byproduct of bilingualism. In order to combat L1 attrition, Schmid and Kopke (2017) emphasize the necessity of language maintenance initiatives, which may call for proactive measures to encourage L1 usage and facilitate its integration into social, educational and familial contexts.

Almost 74 languages are spoken in Pakistan, making it a multilingual state (Siddiqui, 2019). Urdu retains a central role in Pakistan both as a cultural and national language, acting as a uniting element among the country’s multiple ethnic and linguistic groups. Its significance is deeply embedded in the cultural, political, and historical framework of the nation. Due to the country’s multilingual identity, the identity of Urdu faced many challenges leading to debates about the country’s linguistic identity and representation. In order to represent cultural diversity and disseminate information, Urdu newspapers and media play a crucial role across the country. Urdu is a compulsory subject taught in both Urdu and English medium schools up to higher secondary level in Pakistan. It has led to the absorption of vocabulary from multiple indigenous Pakistani languages, bringing a diverse linguistic landscape. In regions with strong linguistic identities, the imposition of Urdu has been contentious despite its unifying intent. Significant social and political unrest was raised due to the East Pakistan controversy as the Bengali-speaking population refused the exclusive promotion of Urdu. Due to this complex historical context, language policies faced many challenges in a multilingual society. In order to maintain the national identity of Pakistan, many attempts have been made to replace English with Urdu as the official language.

However, these attempts faced many practical challenges due to the role of English in official and educational domains.

English has emerged as a crucial second language in Pakistan for its role in education, administration and socio-economic stability. English has grown to occupy a significant place in the linguistic landscape of the country. It was introduced as medium of instruction and administration to the Indian subcontinent during the British colonial period. Rahman (1996) highlights that English was promoted as a tool of governance among the elite in South Asia. Upon independence in 1947, English was declared as the official language in a multicultural and linguistically diverse nation due to its administrative mobility and neutrality. According to Kachru (1985), who is known for his “Three Circles of English”, Pakistan is situated in the “Outer Circle”, as English serves as an institutionalized second language in Pakistan. Kachru emphasizes the interrelation between colonial legacy and the role of English in developing educational and governmental structures in post-colonial nations, including Pakistan. The Pakistani education system is divided into two sectors, i.e., public and private sectors where English is a distinguishing feature. English-medium education is considered as a gateway to social mobility and better future opportunities (Mansoor, 2003). In Pakistan, rural and economically disadvantaged populations are often left with fewer opportunities of language acquisition due to the accessibility of English-medium education systems mainly to privileged classes. Coleman (2010) argues that in Pakistan, English being a symbol of modernity and global connectivity influences parents’ and students’ ambitions for better futures. However, native language Urdu is at a higher risk due to the focus on English as a second language. English plays a critical role in business, technology, government and other professional spheres in Pakistan. Graddol (2006) critiques that English has solidified its significance in international trade and diplomacy due to its status as global lingua franca, encouraging proficiency among professionals in Pakistan. With the changing global trends, the corporate sector increasingly demands employees proficient in English. Phillipson (1992) cautions about the economic implications of “linguistic imperialism” where nations like Pakistan, are potentially exacerbating social inequalities, as they are prioritizing English for economic stability. In contemporary times, English’s status has expanded to media and digital platforms. Warschauer (2000) observes that the online content in English has democratized access to language resources and highlights the role of media and technology in reforming the dynamics of English learning worldwide. The dominance of English among youth is further increased through social media platforms and English-language television channels.

In spite of English’s growing influence, Pakistan is facing many practical challenges in implementing English as a second language significantly. In his analysis of global English, Crystal (2003) highlights the disparities in English language proficiency which are due to inadequate teacher training and uneven resource allocation. In Pakistan, there is a lack of qualified ESL teachers and sufficient teaching materials in rural areas. Government language policies are contradictory, oscillating between promoting English and giving precedence to Urdu. Socio-economic hierarchies are closely linked to English proficiency in Pakistan. “It is through language that a person negotiates a sense of self... and it is through language that a person gains access to – or is denied access to – powerful social networks that give learners the opportunity to speak” (Norton, 2000, p.5). In Pakistan, English acts as “language of power” awarding access to white-collar jobs, higher education and upward mobility.

However, growing influence of English is leading to cultural erosion and decline of indigenous languages. “Languages are today being murdered faster than ever before in human history” (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, p.1). Urdu serves as a unifying cultural symbol in Pakistan but English language’s prominence has challenged Urdu as national identity especially among young generation. As Bukhari and Rehman (2018) point out, younger ESL learners often view English as a prestigious language associated with modernity and success, while Urdu is seen as limited to cultural or familial contexts. Therefore, Urdu language is gradually shifting towards English language in Pakistan.

Language attrition theories have explained the decline of a first language under dominance of a second language. Schmid (2011) argues that attrition occurs due to reduced linguistic input and cognitive exposure, resulting in decreased accessibility of L1 structures. Krashen’s Input Hypothesis (1981) suggests that continuous and comprehensible input is necessary for language retention, and lack of it accelerates attrition. Interference theory explains attrition as a result of competition between L1 and L2 systems where structures from the second language interfere with the first language, leading to erosion of lexical and grammatical features. In Pakistan, ESL learners increasingly code-switch and code-mix in conversations, inserting English vocabulary and structures into Urdu discourse even when Urdu equivalents exist, thus demonstrating this interference. Paradis (2004) in his neurolinguistic model explains attrition in terms of declarative and procedural memory systems. Declarative memory, which stores vocabulary and explicit knowledge, is more vulnerable to forgetting, while procedural memory, which governs phonology and grammar, shows greater resistance. These theories collectively reveal that attrition is not simply a matter of individual neglect but an outcome of educational, cognitive, and sociopolitical conditions.

Urdu attrition in Pakistan is shaped by multiple interrelated factors. Politically, Urdu has symbolized national identity since independence, but English has functioned as the language of governance and mobility. This duality creates tension where Urdu retains symbolic value but English provides practical benefits. Historical examples, such as the resistance of East Pakistan to Urdu imposition, illustrate how language planning has had long-term consequences on unity and identity (Ahmed, 1986). Educational policies have been central in reinforcing English dominance. Elite English-medium schools, catering largely to the upper class, emphasize English as the primary medium of instruction, reinforcing its role as the language of prestige (Rahman, 2002). Public-sector schools relying on Urdu have often been viewed as less competitive, further reinforcing socio-economic divisions. Globalization has intensified these dynamics by establishing English as a lingua franca across professional, academic, and cultural domains. Hybridized speech forms like “Urdish” (Mahboob, 2009) reflect the ongoing erosion of Urdu vocabulary and syntax under English influence. Amin and Qadir (2023) argue that this phenomenon reflects deeper cultural assimilation, where global cultural flows are reshaping linguistic preferences of youth.

Attitudinal factors further contribute to attrition. Mansoor (2003) notes that younger generations increasingly associate English with modernity, science, and advancement, while Urdu is regarded as traditional or less relevant for professional success. Rahman (2004) similarly observed that social mobility is closely tied to English proficiency, leading families to prioritize English in both formal education and home practices. English dominates the digital sphere, including television, films, social media, and online platforms. Shah (2005) and Ahmed (2009) highlighted the dominance of Hindi and English media content, which has overshadowed traditional

Urdu programming. Exposure to such media reduces children's contact with Urdu in cultural and entertainment contexts, further limiting its domains of use. Generational differences present a critical dimension of Urdu attrition. Generation Y (born 1981–1996) was exposed to English but also maintained connections to Urdu through literature, formal education, and cultural practices. Their formative years included exposure to Urdu poetry, novels, and media content that reinforced linguistic pride. In contrast, Generation Z (born 1997–2012) has grown up as digital natives, immersed in English-dominated media, online communication, and education systems. Dimock (2019) defines Generation Z as those who have no memory of a pre-digital world, making their linguistic exposure fundamentally different from earlier cohorts. Seemiller and Grace (2016) highlight that this generation is globally connected, more attuned to transnational cultures, and thus more influenced by global English. Rahman (2002) observed that older generations exhibited stronger emotional attachment to Urdu, while younger individuals increasingly code-switched and adopted hybrid linguistic forms. Mansoor (2005) similarly noted that Urdu is regarded by younger generations as less relevant to upward mobility. The prevalence of “Urdish” in everyday communication, particularly among Gen Z, exemplifies this shift. English vocabulary and syntax frequently replace Urdu equivalents, reducing fluency in the national language. This intergenerational gap poses serious challenges for the sustainability of Urdu as both a cultural and national language.

Blommaert's (2010) theory of the Sociolinguistics of Globalization provides a critical lens to interpret these dynamics. According to this perspective, globalization reshapes linguistic hierarchies by privileging languages such as English, which serve as global lingua franca, while marginalizing local languages like Urdu. English dominates education, technology, and media, positioning it as the language of modernity and progress. Urdu, in contrast, is increasingly relegated to traditional or cultural domains. Blommaert emphasizes that linguistic inequalities reflect broader power dynamics, where access to global opportunities is contingent upon proficiency in dominant languages. Within this framework, Urdu attrition is not an isolated phenomenon but part of a larger restructuring of linguistic practices under global pressures.

The review of literature demonstrates that Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan is a complex sociolinguistic process influenced by education, politics, globalization, and intergenerational dynamics. While Urdu retains symbolic and cultural value, its functional role is increasingly undermined by English dominance. Theoretical perspectives on language shift, maintenance, and attrition provide insights into these dynamics, while Blommaert's globalization framework situates them within global linguistic hierarchies. This underscores the urgency of examining Urdu attrition not only as a linguistic concern but as a matter of cultural identity, national cohesion, and intergenerational continuity.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the phenomenon of Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan. Qualitative research is concerned with exploring meanings, experiences and understanding of individuals in their natural settings. It provides deep insights into the social and cultural contexts in which language practices are shaped and transformed. The interpretive paradigm was adopted in order to explore the lived experiences of the participants, as it focuses on understanding the meanings individuals ascribe to their social world. This

approach was particularly suitable for the present study because the issue of language attrition is embedded in social, educational and generational contexts, requiring exploration of participants' attitudes, practices and perceptions.

The population of the study consisted of ESL learners from two cities of Punjab, namely Khushab and Sargodha. The selection of these cities was based on accessibility and representation of both urban and semi-urban linguistic contexts. The sample of the study comprised of 120 participants belonging to Generation Y and Generation Z. Generation Y, also known as Millennials, were born between 1981 and 1996, whereas Generation Z includes individuals born between 1997 and 2012. The comparative analysis of these groups provided insights into intergenerational differences regarding Urdu usage and decline.

Purposive sampling was employed in the selection of participants. Participants were selected on the basis of their status as ESL learners, their regular exposure to English in educational settings, and their ability to reflect upon their experiences of language use. The inclusion criteria ensured that the participants were appropriate representatives for studying the issue of Urdu language attrition in the given context. Data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The questionnaire was designed to obtain demographic information and general patterns of language use among the participants. Semi-structured interviews were the primary data collection tool because they allowed flexibility in exploring the participants' perspectives while ensuring that the main research objectives were addressed. The interview guide contained open-ended questions that encouraged participants to share their experiences, attitudes and practices regarding the use of Urdu and English in academic, social and familial contexts. The interviews also enabled the researcher to explore the factors contributing to the decline of Urdu, such as the role of education, peer influence, family environment, media exposure and generational attitudes.

The data collection process was conducted in natural and familiar environments of the participants to ensure comfort and authenticity of responses. Ethical considerations were strictly followed during the study. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study and their consent was obtained prior to data collection. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and were informed that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any stage without any consequences. These ethical measures ensured the protection of the participants' rights and enhanced the credibility of the research process.

Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, which is a widely recognized method in qualitative research for identifying, analyzing and reporting patterns within the data. Thematic analysis was chosen because it provides flexibility and allows a detailed account of the participants' experiences. After transcription of the interviews, the data were read multiple times to gain familiarity and initial impressions. Codes were then generated by highlighting meaningful units of text related to the research objectives. These codes were grouped into categories, and broader themes were developed to capture the underlying patterns. Themes were refined through constant comparison and re-examination of the data, ensuring that they accurately represented the participants' views and were coherent with the research questions. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured by applying the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was maintained by prolonged engagement with the participants, persistent observation and triangulation of data collection methods. Transferability was supported through thick description of the

context and participants so that readers may determine the applicability of findings to other contexts. Dependability was established by maintaining an audit trail of the research process, documenting each stage of data collection and analysis. Confirmability was enhanced through reflexivity, as the researcher continuously reflected on her own role, assumptions and potential biases during the study.

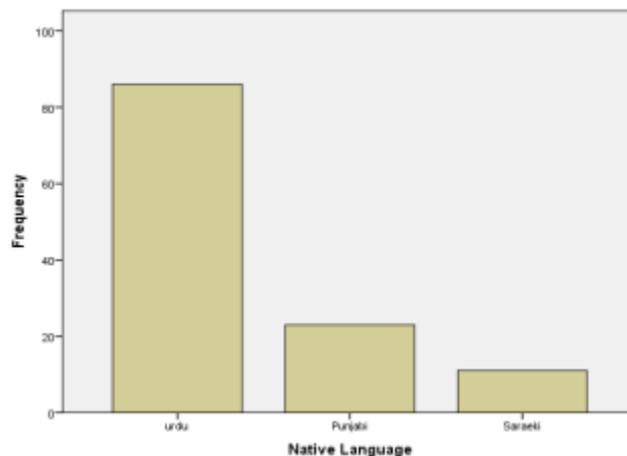
This methodological framework allowed the study to address its research objectives effectively. By focusing on ESL learners from different generations in two representative cities, the research was able to explore how educational context, generational differences and socio-cultural factors contribute to the attrition of Urdu language. The use of qualitative methods provided rich and detailed insights into the lived realities of the participants, highlighting the complex interplay of language, identity and globalization in the Pakistani context.

### Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected through the questionnaire and interviews provided comprehensive insights into the phenomenon of Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan. The linguistic profile of the participants was examined first to understand their native language background and self-assessed proficiency in English and Urdu. As presented in Table 4.1, a majority of the respondents (71.7%) reported Urdu as their native language, followed by Punjabi (19.2%) and Saraiki (9.2%). Figure 4.1 visually reinforces these distributions, reflecting that the participants predominantly had Urdu as their mother tongue, which provided a strong basis for examining attrition in the same language.

**Table 4.1: Frequency Distribution of Native Language**

Native Language	Frequency	Percent
Urdu	86	71.7
Punjabi	23	19.2
Saraiki	11	9.2
Total	120	100.0



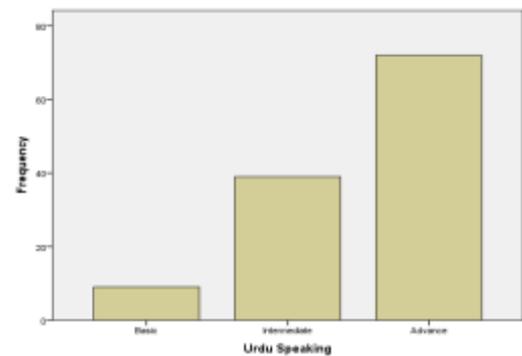
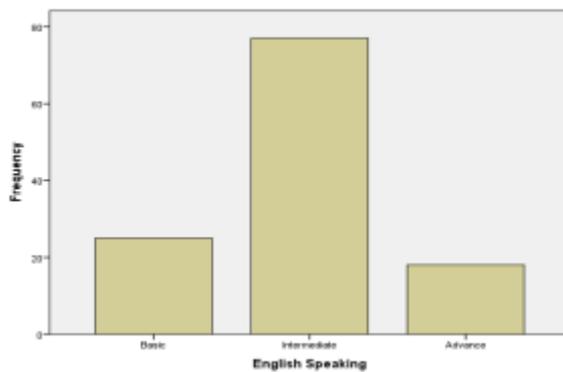
**Figure 4.1: Frequency of Native Language**

The results for speaking proficiency in Urdu and English, as shown in Table 4.2, indicate that 60% of respondents rated themselves as advanced speakers of Urdu, compared to only 15% who considered themselves advanced in English. A majority of participants (64.2%) described their English-speaking skills as intermediate,

highlighting that although English was regularly used, Urdu remained the stronger spoken language.

**Table 4.2: Speaking Proficiency in English and Urdu**

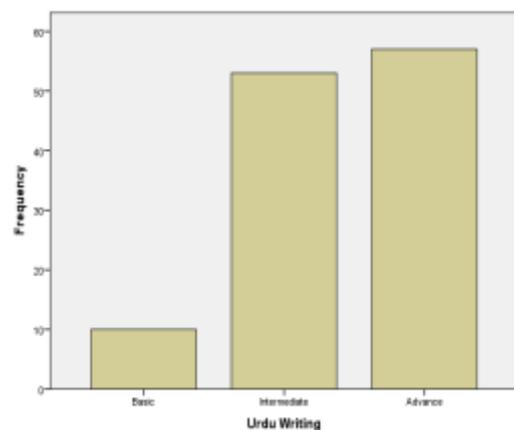
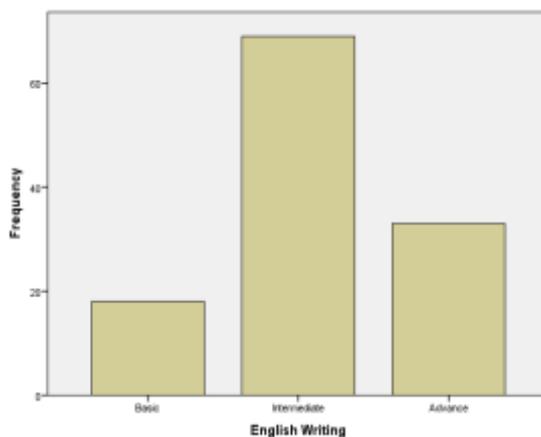
Categories	English Speaking		Urdu Speaking	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basic	25	20.8	9	7.5
Intermediate	77	64.2	39	32.5
Advance	18	15.0	72	60.0
Total	120	100.0	120	100



Writing proficiency followed a similar trend, as presented in Table 4.3, where 66.7% of participants described themselves as advanced Urdu writers, while only 12.5% claimed advanced English writing skills. The majority (60.8%) identified their English writing as intermediate, whereas Urdu continued to dominate their literacy practices.

**Table 4.3: Writing Proficiency in English and Urdu**

Categories	English Writing		Urdu Writing	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basic	18	15.0	10	8.3
Intermediate	69	57.5	53	44.2
Advance	33	27.5	57	47.5
Total	120	100	120	100

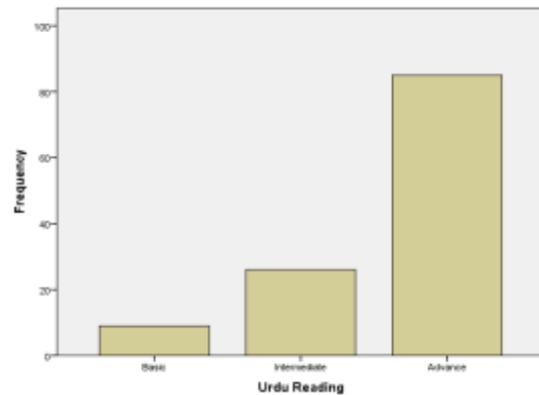
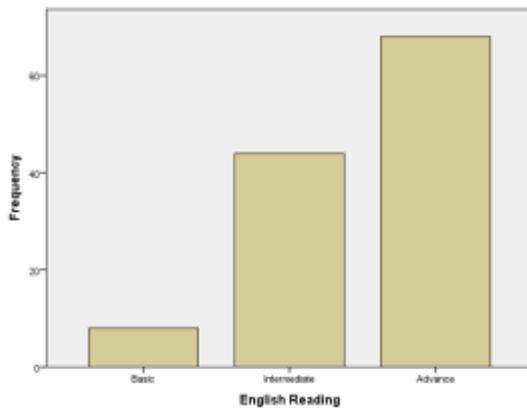


In the reading domain, participants demonstrated even stronger proficiency in Urdu, with 71.7% rating themselves as advanced readers compared to only 14.2% in English (Table 4.4). Similarly, in listening skills (Table 4.5), 75% of participants reported advanced ability in Urdu, while just 30.8% did so in English. These findings highlight

that Urdu still dominates in receptive skills such as reading and listening, while English proficiency remains at the intermediate level for most respondents.

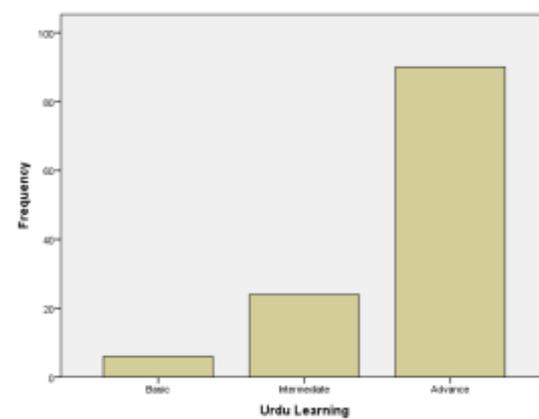
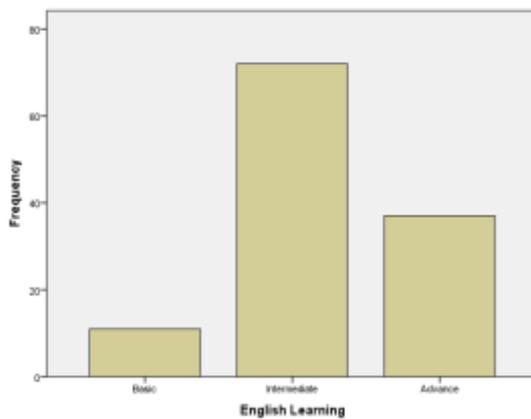
**Table 4.4: Reading Proficiency in English and Urdu**

Categories	English Reading		Urdu Reading	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basic	8	6.7	9	7.5
Intermediate	44	36.7	26	21.7
Advance	68	56.7	85	70.8
Total	120	100	120	100



**Table 4.5: Listening Proficiency in English and Urdu**

Categories	English Listening		Urdu Listening	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Basic	11	9.2	6	5.0
Intermediate	72	60.0	24	20.0
Advance	37	30.8	90	75.0
Total	120	100	120	100



The summary of these results suggests that although English is increasingly used in academic and social contexts, Urdu remains the stronger language across all domains. This indicates that attrition is not yet uniform but is domain-specific, showing gradual erosion under the pressures of English dominance.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, which produced a value of 0.753 for the 20-item scale (Table 4.6). This indicated acceptable internal consistency, confirming that the items consistently measured the construct of Urdu language attrition. Furthermore, the KMO value of 0.693 (Table 4.7) indicated moderate sampling adequacy, and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was highly significant, validating the suitability of the dataset for factor analysis.

**Table 4.6: Reliability Statistics**

Cronbach's Alpha	Number of items
0.753	20

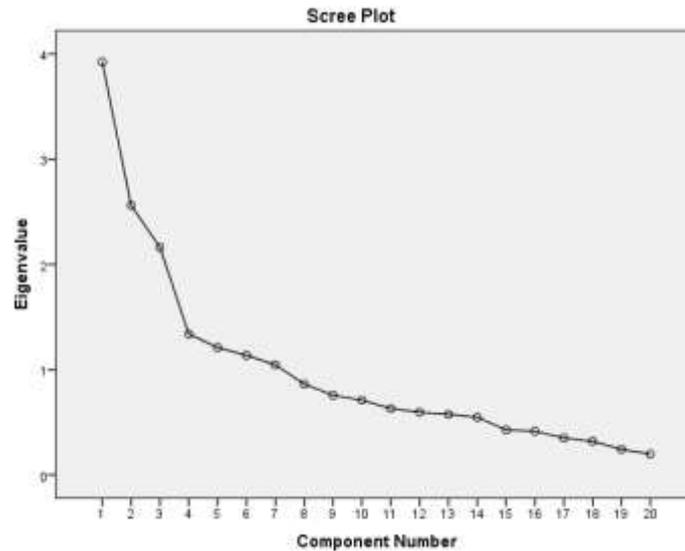
**Table 4.7. KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.693
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Chi-Square	655.074
	Degree of freedom	190
	P-value	.000

The Principal Component Analysis (Table 4.8) revealed that eight components had eigenvalues greater than one, collectively explaining 71.2% of the variance. The first three components accounted for over 43% of the total variance. Figure 4.2 shows the scree plot for eigenvalues, confirming that Urdu language attrition is not the result of a single factor but is influenced by multiple underlying dimensions, including technology use, social media preferences, educational practices, and the symbolic prestige of English.

**Table 4.8: Total Variance Explained**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.926	19.630	19.630
2	2.561	12.806	32.437
3	2.162	10.810	43.247
4	1.338	6.691	49.938
5	1.209	6.047	55.984
6	1.136	5.679	61.663
7	1.045	5.227	66.890
8	.862	4.311	71.201
9	.756	3.781	74.982
10	.709	3.546	78.528
11	.630	3.150	81.678
12	.595	2.977	84.655
13	.575	2.875	87.531
14	.547	2.735	90.265
15	.426	2.132	92.398
16	.414	2.068	94.465
17	.350	1.751	96.217
18	.318	1.590	97.807
19	.241	1.207	99.014
20	.197	.986	100.000



These results directly address the first research question by confirming that Urdu language attrition is multifaceted, driven by educational, social, and technological factors as explained by the theory of the Sociolinguistics of Globalization (Blommaert, 2010). The role of formal and informal educational contexts was examined through a Paired Sample t-test, which compared language practices across these two domains. Table 4.9 presents the results, showing that the mean difference between formal and informal contexts was statistically significant ( $t = 10.731$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). The findings indicate that ESL learners use Urdu significantly less in formal educational settings compared to informal environments such as home and peer interaction. This confirms that institutionalized contexts, where English dominates as the medium of instruction, are accelerating the process of Urdu language attrition, while informal contexts still provide space for its use.

**Table 4.9: Paired Samples Statistics**

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Formal	3.3083	120	.83812	.07651
Informal	3.5500	120	.76532	.06986

The results also provide evidence regarding the third research question, which focused on the generational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z. Table 4.10 summarizes the Independent Samples Test results for Urdu language attrition scores between the two groups. Generation Z had a significantly higher mean score ( $M = 63.41$ ,  $SD = 5.48$ ) than Generation Y ( $M = 58.92$ ,  $SD = 6.02$ ), with the difference being statistically significant ( $t = -4.293$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This indicates that Generation Z is experiencing greater levels of Urdu attrition compared to Generation Y.

**Table 4.10: Paired Samples Correlations**

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Formal & Informal	120	.546	.000

This generational comparison highlights that while both groups are exposed to English, Generation Z demonstrates a sharper decline in Urdu proficiency, particularly in academic and technological contexts. These findings align with Dimock (2019) and Seemiller and Grace (2016), who emphasized that Generation Z, being digital natives,

have greater exposure to English-dominated online and media environments, which further diminishes their use of Urdu.

The analysis of the questionnaire was supplemented with the participants' qualitative responses, which provided depth and contextual understanding of the statistical findings. Many respondents admitted that they prefer English for academic writing, online communication, and professional tasks, considering it essential for career growth and social prestige. They acknowledged that although Urdu remains important in cultural and familial contexts, they are increasingly substituting English expressions, often unconsciously, even in everyday speech. Several participants emphasized that the dominance of English-medium education and peer influence in urban areas have shaped their linguistic choices, leading them to undervalue Urdu in formal situations. Others reported that their exposure to media, particularly social media and English television content, influenced them to adopt English vocabulary, expressions, and stylistic preferences at the expense of Urdu.

The overall results therefore provide strong evidence in support of all three research questions. Urdu attrition among ESL learners is influenced by multiple factors including education, technology, media, and the symbolic prestige of English, as confirmed through Principal Component Analysis. The paired sample t-test clearly demonstrated that formal educational settings play a critical role in reducing Urdu usage compared to informal contexts. Finally, the independent samples t-test revealed significant generational differences, with Generation Z exhibiting higher levels of Urdu attrition than Generation Y. Together, these findings illustrate that Urdu, despite its symbolic status as the national language, is losing ground among ESL learners in Pakistan, particularly within institutionalized education and among younger generations shaped by globalization and digital culture.

### **Conclusion**

The present study was set out to investigate the phenomenon of Urdu language attrition among ESL learners in Pakistan, with a particular focus on the role of educational contexts, the contributing factors, and the generational differences between Generation Y and Generation Z. The findings revealed that Urdu, despite its symbolic and cultural importance as the national language, is gradually losing its practical dominance in academic and professional spheres due to the increasing influence of English. The analysis of the data confirmed that attrition is not a uniform process but is shaped by multiple dimensions including educational practices, peer influence, technological exposure, and social prestige attached to English. The results indicated that formal educational contexts, where English is prioritized as the medium of instruction, significantly reduce the opportunities for Urdu usage, while informal contexts such as homes and peer groups still provide space for its maintenance. This suggests that institutionalized education plays a central role in accelerating the shift from Urdu to English among young learners. The study also highlighted clear generational differences in Urdu attrition. Generation Y, though exposed to English, retains a stronger connection with Urdu, particularly in reading and writing, while Generation Z, as digital natives, demonstrate higher levels of attrition due to greater immersion in English-dominated online and media environments. The findings confirmed that Generation Z learners exhibit a sharper decline in Urdu proficiency, reflecting broader processes of globalization and cultural assimilation. This intergenerational gap underscores the urgency of addressing the issue of language

sustainability in Pakistan, as failure to strengthen intergenerational transmission may further endanger Urdu in the coming decades.

Overall, the study concludes that Urdu attrition among ESL learners is a complex sociolinguistic process shaped by the interplay of education, globalization, media, and generational attitudes. The results align with theoretical perspectives on language shift and attrition, as well as with Blommaert's theory of the sociolinguistics of globalization, which highlights how local languages are marginalized under global linguistic hierarchies. These findings carry important implications for language policy, education, and cultural preservation in Pakistan. Unless deliberate efforts are made to strengthen the role of Urdu in educational and institutional contexts, the language may continue to face erosion, particularly among younger generations whose linguistic practices are shaped by global and digital influences. The study thus emphasizes the need to balance the functional utility of English with the cultural and national significance of Urdu in order to preserve linguistic diversity and ensure intergenerational continuity of the mother tongue.

### References

- Ahmed, F. (1986). *Ethnicity and politics in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Amin, U., & Khan, A. Q. (2023). Urdu language attrition due to the preference for English: A cross-generation comparative study. *Kashmir Journal of Language Research*, 26(1), 107–126.
- Baumgartner, R. J. (1993). *The English language in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.
- British Council. (2010). *Teaching and learning in Pakistan: The role of language in education*. British Council.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *English as a global language* (2nd Ed.). Cambridge University Press.
- Dimock, M. (2019, January 17). *Defining generations: Where Millennials end and Generation Z begins*. Pew Research Center. [www.pewresearch.org](http://www.pewresearch.org)
- Fish Press.
- Coleman, J. A. (1991). *Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages*. Multilingual Matters.
- Graddol, D. (2006). *English next*. British Council.
- Gurel, A. (2004). Selectivity in L1 attrition: A psycholinguistic account. *Journal of Neurolinguistics*, 17(1), 53–78. doi.org
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the Outer Circle. In R. Quirk & H. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the world: Teaching and learning the language and literatures* (pp. 11–30). Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S. D. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Pergamon.
- Lambert, W. E., & Fillenbaum, S. (1960). A pilot study of bilingualism and personality. *Canadian Journal of Psychology/Revue canadienne de psychologie*, 14(1), 28–34. doi.org
- Mahboob, A. (2009). English as an Islamic language: A case study of Pakistani English. *World Englishes*, 28(2), 175–189. doi.org
- Mansoor, S. (2003). Language planning in higher education: Issues of access and equity. *The Lahore Journal of Economics*

- , 8(2), 17–42. <https://ideas.repec.org/a/lje/journal/v8y2003i2p17-42.html>
- Mansoor, S. (2005). *Language planning in higher education: A case study of Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Norton, B. (2000). *Identity and language learning: Gender, ethnicity and educational change*. Longman.
- Paradis, M. (2004). *A neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism*. John Benjamins.
- Phillipson, R. (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (1996). *Language and politics in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2011). *From Hindi to Urdu: A social and political history*. Oxford University Press.
- Schmid, M. S. (2011). *Language attrition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Schmid, M. S., & Köpcke, B. (2017). The relevance of first language attrition to theories of bilingual development. *Linguistic Approaches to Bilingualism*, 7(6), 637–667. <https://doi.org/10.1075/lab.17058.sch>
- Seliger, H. W., & Vago, R. M. (1991). *First language attrition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education—or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410605191>