

## SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVES ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE ATTITUDES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF URBAN AND RURAL COLLEGE STUDENTS IN KPK

*Muhammad Tufail (The University of Lahore)*  
*Tayyab Ghani Khattak (The University of Lahore)*  
*Rahat Munir (The University of Lahore)*  
*Zia Ullah (The University of Lahore)*

### Abstract

*This research explores the sociolinguistic perspectives on English language attitudes of rural and urban students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) toward English. This study primarily focuses on the comparative analysis of urban and rural students' attitudes toward English in KPK, and it also focuses on the reasons behind these diverse perspectives of urban and rural students. This research also sheds light on the purposes of urban and rural students for which they learn English. The researcher uses a qualitative approach for data analysis in this study using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews as research tools of inquiry. The study employs language attitude theory as a theoretical framework for this study; for the data collection, the researcher selected a sample of 10 students from the metropolitan city of Peshawar, which represents the urban area, and ten students from a rural area of Mardan, which represents the rural area. These participants are college students enrolled in grade 11<sup>th</sup>. The study shows that urban students are more exposed to English language than rural students due to the availability of resources. Results show that many rural students also acknowledge the importance of English, but the emphasis on English is less than that of urban students. Urban students have a more positive attitude toward English, and rural students have less positive attitude toward English. The rural and urban students believe that the primary reason for learning English is to avail future opportunities, and it's a key to communicating with the international community. Additionally, the present study uncovers the reasons for the difference in the attitudes of urban and rural students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, which mainly include a lack of family support and a lack of resources for language learning in rural areas of KPK. At the same time, the case is different in urban regions of KPK.*

**Keywords:** Socio linguistic perspective, Global communication language attitude, language attitude theory, rural and urban students

### 1. Introduction

English is the language of the international community, and it is the language of a large number of people. In many countries, it serves as a lingua franca (Jenkins & Leung, 2013). English as a lingua franca helps people of different communities communicate with each other for trade, education, and social interaction (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). Every language evolves with time. So, the same is the case of English, which evolved with the passage of time and gave birth to many varieties of English. These different varieties are known as World Englishes. The variation in English in different parts of the world is due to the variation in culture and the context in which that language is used (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023; Ahmad et al., 2022). This study focuses on the Pakistani variety of English, how Pakistani English is used, and the attitude of different sections of the population toward English.

Pakistan is a linguistically rich country where people speak and understand a variety of different languages (Amjad et al., 2021). The relationship between Pakistani society and English is very complex because it is treated differently in different parts of the country, and

even within the same area, English is treated differently by different sections of people. English serves as the official language of Pakistan, so proficiency in English is the centre of attention in many educational institutes (Mahboob, 2004).

According to Shamim (2017), proficiency in English is considered key to social interaction and global connectivity. Despite its importance, the English language is not treated uniformly across the country (Mansoor, 2005). People from urban and rural areas show different attitudes and have different experiences regarding the English language.

Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) is one of the linguistically diverse provinces of Pakistan. This province mainly consists of urban areas and rural areas. Urban areas have more significant global interaction, so they embrace English more often in their education and daily conversation than in rural areas (Rahman, 2002). Rural areas are strongly attached to their native language, so they hesitate to embrace the English language and sometimes even show resistance. This shows a division and difference in the attitude of urban and rural people towards English. A question arises with this division: Is this division found in college students of both regions or not?

Several studies have been conducted on the role of English in Pakistani educational institutions. A study (Mansoor, 2005) shows that English plays a vital role in the advancement of individuals, but it also creates hurdles for those individuals who are not very familiar with this language.

The study aims to explore the attitudes of urban and rural college students in KPK toward English. This paper explores their attitudes, motivations, and comfort levels while they are taught in English. This research helps policymakers formulate specific course outlines for urban and rural college students in KPK that will address their specific needs in the long term.

### **1.1.Statement of the problem**

English is considered one of the important languages in Pakistan. But despite the emphasis on English language, there is still a knowledge gap regarding the attitude of college students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), specifically in the context of rural and urban divisions. Previously, the attitude of students of urban high schools towards English in Indonesia is explored by (Qimmahtum et al., 2023). Similarly, (Ali et al., 2020) studied the attitude of students in Swat toward English. The researcher has gone through all the available resources, but the comparative attitude of urban and rural students toward English at college has not been explored before. Exploring the comparative attitude of urban and rural students and their comparative experience with English in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is a significant knowledge gap that needs to be filled. The present study will fill this gap. This study addresses the comparative attitude of urban and rural students of KPK and explores why urban and rural students have different attitudes toward English.

### **1.2.Research objectives**

1. To investigate the comparative attitudes of urban and rural students towards English in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK).
2. To explore the urban and rural students' purposes for learning English.
3. To explore the reason for the difference in sociolinguistic perspectives of urban and rural students of KPK toward English.

### **1.3.Research Questions**

1. What are the attitudes of urban and rural students toward English in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK)?
2. What are the motives of the Urban and rural students behind learning the English language?

3. Why do urban and rural college students of KPK have different sociolinguistic perspectives toward the English language?

#### **1.4. Significance of the study**

The comparative study of urban and rural students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa holds huge importance on several bases. This area contributes to the field of knowledge because it has never been explored before. Only a few researchers explore the students' attitudes towards English in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. (Ali, Rahman, & Ullah, 2020) School students' attitudes toward English in Swat, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, and the comparative attitude of rural and urban students in KPK have not been explored. This study is important on several levels. First, it gives insight into how language is affected in different geographical settings. This insight will help policymakers understand students' motivation in different geographical settings and tailor a suitable language education system according to their needs. Second, this study adds knowledge to the broader context of second language acquisition. The present comparative study can be used as a reference in future research on other regions.

#### **2. Literature Review**

Many factors affect second language acquisition. According to Hashim & Yunus (2018), school setting and daily practice mostly affect second language acquisition. This study explores how suitable teaching methodology, classroom management, and daily classroom activities can enhance language learning.

It is obvious that there are obstacles in every process (Akram & Oteir, 2025). So, there are obstacles to learning English as a second language (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Ramzan et al., 2023, 2021, 2020). In this regard, a study is conducted by (Khan & Khan, 2016) to investigate the obstacles and hurdles in learning English as a second language in male colleges of the public sector of Districts Mianwali and Bhakkar in Pakistan. This study argues that the education system of these districts is very complex, which is a hurdle in acquiring English as a second language (Abdelrady & Akram, 2022). This study further says that the non-serious attitude of teachers and parents is also a hurdle in learning English. Students and teachers face problems in the process of learning in every society. These problems are different from region to region and system to system. (Memon, 2007) researched the problems in the Pakistani education system. The researcher argues that in Pakistan, there is a lack of experienced staff and facilities in Pakistani educational institutions. Furthermore, research facilities and financial crises are major problems in the Pakistani education system.

Students often face problems when learning English as a second language. (Dharma & Selvi, 2011) This study explores the causes of the problems that high school students face in learning English. This study shows that environment is the major problem in ESL learning. Students lack proficiency when they are not provided with a suitable environment for ESL learning. This study also uncovers that rural students face more problems than urban students.

Another study, which was conducted on the attitude of urban students towards English in Indonesia by (Qimmahtum, Fadhil, & Swandari, 2023), argues that urban students have a positive attitude toward English. This study shows that students are often anxious to speak, but they consider mistakes as part of the learning process. The researchers explore that students feel motivated while learning the English language.

According to the study by Zulfikar, Dahliana & Sari (2019), which was conducted on the attitude of students of the Department of English, the attitude of students toward the English language is observed in this study. The findings of this study show that students from the Department of English have a positive attitude toward English as a language. The present study uncovers that students feel happy and enjoy learning English.

It is often seen that urban students have a positive attitude toward English, so in order to explore the attitude of rural students toward English, research is conducted (Rian, 2010). The researcher conducted this study in three rural areas of Japan. This study shows that rural students often have neutral attitudes or positive attitudes. Negative attitude was found less among students toward English. While there is a positive perception of learning English, the results show that rural students are not interested in this perception. This disinterest is due to the lack of practical use of English.

According to another study (Zulkefly & Razali, 2018) which shows the attitude of students towards learning English as a second language is shown. The researchers explore two factors that affect students' learning process. Firstly, the lessons are not tailored to their proficiency and interest level, resulting in students' disinterest in learning. Secondly, the individual attitudes of students play a vital role in learning the English language; those attitudes are positive in some cases, and in some cases, they are negative.

Along with the students, teachers at different levels have different attitudes toward English as a language of instruction. According to Khatri (2019), the teachers of public schools are aware of using English as a language of instruction and have a positive attitude toward It. In contrast, the teachers at the secondary school level face problems in implementing English as a medium of instruction. The researcher suggests that the implementation of English as a medium of instruction should be encouraged in classrooms to avoid these problems.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The researcher uses a qualitative approach for data collection in this study because researchers usually use qualitative research methods to understand complex social phenomena. This enables the researcher to explore in-depth information. As this study aims to explore the comparative attitudes and sociolinguistic perspectives of urban and rural Pashtu speakers toward English, it needs to be studied comprehensively, which suits the qualitative data collection method.

The researcher gathered primary data from 20 KPK students, including ten students from the urban areas of Peshawar and ten from the rural areas of Mardan. These participants are selected based on region, gender, and education level. The education level of all the participants was 11<sup>th</sup> grade. Furthermore, half of the total number of participants are females. This selection of an equal number of participants from both rural and urban areas represents equal response from both urban and rural areas. To ensure gender equality, the researcher selects an equal number of male and female participants.

The researcher gets the data by using two tools. The researcher first distributed a questionnaire among students, and after they had filled out the questionnaire, participants were invited to a semi-structured interview. These data collection tools allow the students to share their experiences and expectations. Open-ended questions in interviews allow participants to share their personal feelings and motivation. By getting this data, the researcher is able to get an idea about the attitude of urban and rural students towards English and their purpose in learning English. Similarly, there are yes/no questions in the questionnaire, which help get a comparative response from both urban and rural participants.

The researcher uses a thematic approach to analyze the collected data, which the researcher obtained from the interview. First of all, the researcher transcribes the audio recording of the interviews, which helps in a detailed examination of the responses given by the participants. After that, the researcher analyzes the responses to identify the common reason for learning the English language, while further analysis will explore the attitude of urban and rural students towards English and how they are different from each other.



#### **4. Results and Discussion**

Following are the results from the questionnaire.

No.	Questions	Urban Response		Rural Response	
		YES	NO	YES	NO
1	In your view, Is English important in daily life?	90%	10%	80%	20%
2	In your opinion, do students have different attitudes towards English?	70%	30%	60%	40%
3	Do you feel comfortable if the teaching medium is English in the classroom?	90%	10%	60%	40%
4	Do you often use English in your social interaction?	85%	15%	45%	55%
5	Do you think that learning English is important for opportunities in future?	85%	15%	75%	25%
6	Do you believe that English is essential for communicating with people from diverse background?	70%	30%	65%	35%
7	Do you think that learning English can increase chances for successful future?	75%	25%	65%	35%
8	Do you perceive English as a medium for communication with the global community?	75%	25%	70%	30%
9	Do you feel shy while speaking English?	65%	35%	90%	10%

##### **4.1.Results from interview**

Similarly, after filling out the questionnaire, the researcher conducts an interview to know that why there is a difference in the attitude of urban and rural students towards English. In the interview, the researcher found that the availability of resources is different in urban and rural areas, so they have different attitudes toward English. 85% of the participants from urban areas believe that they have enough available resources, such as internet access and language academies, while 75% of the participants from rural areas believe that there are not enough resources in their region, which influences their attitude toward English.

Family support is also a crucial factor; 95% of urban participants believe that family support helps create a positive attitude toward English, while only 40% of participants from rural areas stated this due to the difference in priorities. Furthermore, 90% of urban students are exposed to social media and online resources, while only 25% of rural students are exposed to social media and online resources. Similarly, 95% of urban students agree that there is a strong emphasis on English in college, while 90% answered that there is a poor emphasis on English in their college.

##### **Discussion**

The present study is conducted on the comparative attitudes of urban and rural college students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa toward English. The main objective of the study is to compare the attitudes of urban and rural students toward English. The data suggests that urban students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa have a more positive attitude towards English than rural students. Urban students accept the importance of the English language. Data shows that English has a greater

influence on the urban region of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa than rural regions due to high exposure to language education and online resources. Urban students of KPK are more comfortable with English as a medium of instruction in the classroom, which shows their positive attitude toward English. On the other hand, rural students have little exposure to English and online resources about language education, so many participants stated that they are less comfortable with English as a medium of instruction in the classroom.

This study suggests that the main purpose of learning English for urban students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is to avail themselves of future opportunities and communicate with people from diverse backgrounds. Urban students of KPK think that with English, they can get the best career opportunities, which is not possible for them without learning English. On the other hand, rural students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa also acknowledge the importance of English, but their rural environment doesn't provide such opportunities to be proficient in English.

The current study also uncovers the facts about the use of English in a social setting. The data suggests that the urban students of KPK use English more in social settings, while rural students of KPK hesitate to use English in public gatherings. This difference is due to the high use of English in urban settings and less use in rural settings. Data suggests that in rural settings, people usually use the local language, so this is the reason for the less comfort of rural students with English.

The primary objective of this study is to uncover why rural and urban college students in KPK view the English language differently. The researcher explores multiple reasons for the difference in attitude between rural and urban students. The present study uncovers that the main reason for the different attitudes is the availability of language resources. Data suggests that urban areas of KPK have English language academies and libraries, while the situation is not the same in rural areas of KPK. This unavailability of resources decreases students' motivation to learn English.

The researcher explores that family support is another factor that results in differences in attitude. Family support plays a significant role in shaping the attitude of students toward the English language. This study uncovers that rural college students of KPK receive very little encouragement for learning English, while urban college students of KPK are encouraged by their parents to learn English and use English for communication. Rural families of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa restrict their children from using the local language for communication.

The present study suggests that rural college students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are very little exposed to social media and communicate with the international community very little. On the other hand, urban college students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are exposed more to social platforms and communicate with the international community than rural students. This little exposure of rural college students of KPK to social media platforms is another factor that differentiates their attitude towards English as compared to urban college students of KPK.

## 5. Conclusion

The present study is conducted to explore the comparative attitude of urban and rural students of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa toward English and their purpose of learning English. This study uses a qualitative method of data collection. The current study uses language attitude theory as a theoretical framework. The findings of this study suggest that urban students of KPK have a more positive attitude toward English than rural students of KPK. This difference in attitude is due to the limited exposure of rural students to resources. Similarly, both urban and rural students of KPK acknowledge the importance of English for future opportunities, but urban students try to learn while rural students are closer to local languages.

## References

- Abdelrady, A. H., & Akram, H. (2022). An empirical study of ClassPoint tool application in enhancing EFL students' online learning satisfaction. *Systems*, 10(5), 154.
- Ahmad, N., Akram, H., & Ranra, B. (2022). In quest of Language and National Identity: A Case of Urdu language in Pakistan. *International Journal of Business and Management Sciences*, 3(2), 48-66.
- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2023). Application of ClassPoint tool in reducing EFL learners' test anxiety: an empirical evidence from Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Computers in Education*, 1-19.
- Akram, H., & Abdelrady, A. H. (2025). Examining the role of ClassPoint tool in shaping EFL students' perceived E-learning experiences: A social cognitive theory perspective. *Acta Psychologica*, 254, 104775.
- Akram, H., & Oteir, I. N. (2025). A longitudinal analysis of physical exercise in shaping language learners' emotional well-being: a comparative analysis between L1 and L2 students. *BMC psychology*, 13(1), 1-10.
- Ali, S. S., Rahman, G., & Ullah, S. (2020). Language attitude of Pashto speakers towards English. *Sjesr*, 3(3), 192-197.
- Amjad, M., Hussain, R., & Akram, H. (2021). Structural and functional taxonomies of lexical bundles: an overview. *Harf-o-Sukhan*, 5(4), 358-367.
- Dharma, B. W., & SELVI, K. (2011). CAUSES OF PROBLEMS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AS PERCEIVED BY HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS. *I-Manager's Journal on English Language Teaching*, 1(4).
- Hashim, H. U., & Yunus, M. M. (2018). English as a Second Language (ESL) learning: Setting the right environment for second language acquisition. *Tadris: Jurnal Keguruan Dan Ilmu Tarbiyah*, 3(2), 207.
- Jenkins, J., & Leung, C. (2013). English as a lingua franca. *The Companion to Language Assessment*, 1605-1616.
- Khan, T. J., & Khan, N. (2016). Obstacles in learning English as a second language among intermediate students of districts Mianwali and Bhakkar, Pakistan. *Open Journal of Social Sciences*, 04(02), 154-162.
- Khatri, K. K. (2019). Teachers' Attitudes Towards English as Medium of Instruction. *Journal of NELTA Gandaki (JoNG)*, 2.
- Li, S., & Akram, H. (2023). Do emotional regulation behaviors matter in EFL teachers' professional development?: A process model approach. *Porta Linguarum: revista internacional de didáctica de las lenguas extranjeras*, (9), 273-291.
- Li, S., & Akram, H. (2024). Navigating Pronoun-Antecedent Challenges: A Study of ESL Academic Writing Errors. *SAGE Open*, 14(4), 21582440241296607.
- Mahboob, A. (2004). Pakistani English: morphology and syntax. Kortmann Et Al.(Eds. 2004).
- Mansoor, S. (2005). Language Planning in Higher Education: Case Study of Pakistan. *Oxford University Press*.
- Memon, G. R. (2007). Education in Pakistan: The Key Issues, Problems and The New Challenges. *Journal of Management and Social Sciences*, 3(1).
- Qimmahtum, R., Fikri Fadhil Khairy, M., & Swandari, N. (2023). Student attitude towards English language learning in an urban senior high school in Batu: A survey. *KnE Social Sciences*.
- Rahman, T. (2002). Language, Power and Ideology. *Economic and Political Weekly*, 37(44).

- Ramzan, M., Akram, H., & kynat Javaid, Z. (2025). Challenges and Psychological Influences in Teaching English as a Medium of Instruction in Pakistani Institutions. *Social Science Review Archives*, 3(1), 370-379.
- Ramzan, M., Awan, H. J., Ramzan, M., & Maharvi, H. (2020). Comparative Pragmatic Study of Print media discourse in Baluchistan newspapers headlines. *Al-Burz*, 12(1), 30-44.
- Ramzan, M., Azmat, Z., Khan, M. A., & un Nisa, Z. (2023, June). Subject-Verb Agreement Errors in ESL Students' Academic Writing: A Surface Taxonomy Approach. In *Linguistic Forum-A Journal of Linguistics*, 5(2), 16-21.
- Ramzan, M., Khan, M. A., & Sarwar, M. (2023). Style Shift: A Comparative Cultural Analysis of Pride and Prejudice and Unmarriageable. *University of Chitral Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 7(2), 22-29.
- Ramzan, M., Qureshi, A. W., Samad, A., & Sultan, N. (2021). Politics as Rhetoric: A Discourse Analysis of Selected Pakistani Politicians' Press Statements. *Humanities and Social Sciences Review*, 9(3).
- Rian, J. P. (2010). Attitudes toward English and English learning at three rural Japanese middle schools: A preliminary survey. *Asian EFL Journal*.
- Shamim, F. (2017). English as the language of development in Pakistan: Issues, challenges and possible solutions. *The British Council*.
- Zulfikar, T., Dahliana, S., & Sari, R. A. (2019). An exploration of English students' attitude toward learning English. *English Language Teaching Educational Journal*, 2(1), 1.
- Zulkefly, F., & Razali, A. B. (2018). Malaysian Rural Secondary School Students' Attitudes towards Learning English as a Second Language. *International Journal of Instruction*, 12(1).