

NEGOTIATING PAKISTANI ENGLISH AND STANDARD ENGLISHES:
CONFLICT OR COEXISTENCE?

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Abstract

The rise of Pakistani English (PakE) has generated debate over its role in relation to Standard Englishes. This study examines whether PakE represents a legitimate linguistic adaptation that reflects Pakistan’s cultural identity or whether it poses challenges to global intelligibility and English language standards. Using a quantitative cross-sectional design, data were collected from 80 sixth-grade students in public and private schools through a structured questionnaire and an English proficiency test. Findings show that while 51.2% of students expressed a preference for PakE over British English (48.8%), most participants regarded it as a potential threat to established standards. Notably, no significant influence of native language on PakE exposure was observed, indicating its wide reach. However, higher exposure to PakE correlated with reduced competence in Standard English. The study underscores the need for educational initiatives that balance cultural linguistic identity with international standards to ensure effective global communication.

INTRODUCTION

English has grown from the language of the British Isles to a global language spoken by millions in a variety of circumstances (Trudgill, 1984). This phenomenon led to the notion of “World Englishes,” which recognizes the legitimacy and practicality of Englishes created outside of historically native-speaking nations (Galloway & Rose, 2015; Schneider, 2007). These English dialects reflect regional identities, customs, and communication needs and emerged under specific sociolinguistic conditions (Falck et al., 2012).

The Three Circles Model by Kachru et al. (1985) classifies the worldwide variations of English and explains its globalization and importance. The Inner Circle includes English-speaking countries, including the US, Australia, and the UK. Singapore,

Nigeria, India, and Pakistan, which were colonized by English-speaking nations, use English in education, law, and administration (Haidar & Fang, 2019). Despite their unofficial status, Expanding Circle nations like China, Japan, and Russia teach and utilize English for international communication (Yano, 2009).

PakE is in the Outer Circle. After British colonial rule, it became an institutionalized variety with distinct lexical, syntactic, and phonological features (Asgher et al., 2023). Contact with regional languages like Urdu and Punjabi influences this variety, reflecting Pakistan’s societal, political, and linguistic environment (Asgher et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2024). It is easier to see PakE as a valid variation within the larger family of World Englishes

rather than as a subpar variant of Standard English when viewed through the prism of Kachru's concept (Kachru, 2005).

Language is considered the major code of communication (Aprianto & Zaini, 2019). People connect and interact by using different languages based on regional, cultural, and social norms (Yasir et al., 2021). Among all these languages, English stands out as a globally influential and dominant language (Low & Pakir, 2021). People communicate with each other by using English all over the world (Qureshi et al., 2023).

English prolongs all aspects of different fields, like the judiciary, education, media, politics, technology, business, medicine, science, and trade (Soomro, 2022). According to Zhang (2013), English is the most widely spoken, read, and taught language worldwide. 118 countries out of 195 use the English language for communication (Asgher et al., 2023). There is a large variety of English that is used all over the world, depending on the social, ecological, and cultural norms (Yasir et al., 2021). These varieties are different from the standard variety that is basically British English (Soomro, 2022), also called the Queen's English (Akram et al., 2017), and has broadened the English perspective internationally (Jilani & Anwar, 2018).

Pakistani English (PakE) emerged after Pakistan's independence in 1947 but has roots dating back to the 16th century when English was first introduced in the subcontinent by missionaries and British colonizers (Jadoon & Ahmad, 2022; Sarfraz, 2021; Siddiqui & Keerio, 2019). The British solidified their influence through education and governance, making English an official language by 1835 (Khan, 2012). After 1947, English continued to thrive in Pakistan, eventually evolving into a distinct variety known as Pakistani English (PakE).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The development of Pakistani English (PakE) as a unique linguistic variant has spurred controversy about its influence on Standard English. While some researchers claim that PakE undermines the integrity of Standard Englishes by adding lexical borrowings, grammatical irregularities, and code-switching, others see it as an adaptable and self-contained

linguistic form that improves communication in the Pakistani setting. The growing use of Urduized vocabulary, phonetic alterations, and semantic variances raises issues about intelligibility, worldwide acceptability, and a potential departure from Standard British English (SBE). The influence of American English on Pakistani journalistic writing also confuses the linguistic landscape. This study aims to investigate whether the emergence of Pakistani English is a threat to upholding international English standards or if it is a defensive adaptation that promotes cultural identity and efficient communication.

1.2 Research Questions

1. Does Emerging Pakistani English act as a safeguarding linguistic adaptation, or does it threaten the integrity of Standard English?
2. Is exposure to Pakistani English shaped by Urdu and regional languages?
3. How does exposure to Pakistani English affect Standard English's acceptance and comprehensibility among 6th-grade students?

1. Literature Review

Pakistan is recognized as the third biggest country in Asia, where the English language is widely spoken, and the variety of English used in this area is known as Pakistani English (PakE). Pakistani English is a widely used non-native and independent type of English language globally (Khan, 2020). Qureshi et al. (2023) stated that Pakistani English is a non-native kind of English that came into existence by the combination of Pakistani local languages and British English. Soomro (2022) mentioned that PakE is an institutionalized sort of English that has emerged in the cultural and linguistic context of Pakistan. The combination of American and British English with various South Asian linguistic and cultural elements is present in Pakistani English. It gained international recognition and respect in the 1970s and 1980s, and both tourists and migrants inside Pakistan's borders spoke it (Mielke et al., 2021). "Penglish" and "Paklish" are the two informal terms that are mostly referred to as Pakistani English (Zeb & Bashir, 2019).

The colonial heritage of English on the subcontinent, where it was first used for administrative and educational purposes, provides the foundation for the development of Pakistani English (Kachru et al., 1985). It developed throughout time into a regional form that reflected Pakistan's cultural, religious, and geographic variety (Asgher et al., 2023; Hussain et al., 2024). Its vocabulary and grammatical structure have been significantly impacted by sociolinguistic elements, including code-switching and Urduization (Jamison, 2001; Syed, 2019).

Current literature has examined the phonological, syntactic, morphological, and semantic differences between Pakistani English (PakE) and Standard British English (SBE). These variations are not random; rather, they are a reflection of identity development and cultural adaptation (Asgher et al., 2023; Jamison, 2001). A distinctively Pakistani lexicon has resulted from the lexical integration of Urdu terminology and informal idioms (Khan, 2020; Qureshi et al., 2023). Furthermore, American English is becoming more and more prevalent in Pakistani journalism, indicating a growing departure from conventional British standards (Anwar & Qureshi, 2019).

There is a vital role of media in Pakistani English's spread. Exposure to local media correlates to grammatical patterns conflicting with SBE standards (Shahzada et al., 2012). Educational environments also reflect this linguistic transition, as indicated by code-switching in classrooms and Urdu-influenced English in academic writing (Talaat & Anwar, 2010). However, Mukhopadhyay and Kundu (2023) underlined the necessity to reconcile local language identities with international norms to promote global communicative competency.

Despite its prevalence, perceptions toward PakE remain divided. Some studies (e.g., Syed (2019) and Zeb and Bashir (2019)) emphasize its role in representing cultural identity, while others raise concerns about intelligibility and global acceptance. Qureshi et al. (2023) argue that vocabulary borrowing enriches the variety, but it may pose challenges in international contexts if proficiency in standard forms is compromised.

Despite an increasing body of descriptive and ethnolinguistic studies on Pakistani English, the following research gaps are evident:

1. Most previous studies are qualitative or corpus-based and do not empirically assess how exposure to PakE affects English proficiency, particularly in school-age populations. The present study addresses this by providing quantitative data to show a correlation between PakE exposure and Standard English proficiency in sixth-grade students.
2. Existing literature largely focuses on adult language users (e.g., university students, journalists). The present study fills a gap by focusing on primary-level students, offering insights into early language acquisition and attitudes toward linguistic variation.
3. While some studies mention the role of education in language variation, few offer data-driven analysis on how educational environments shape preferences for PakE versus Standard English. The present study contributes by comparing public and private school settings and their role in language exposure.
4. Although concerns about intelligibility and acceptability are noted (Azam et al., 2024; Zhang, 2013), there is little empirical data on how users perceive these threats. The present study provides empirical support to the theoretical debate by reporting data on whether most participants view PakE as a threat rather than a protective adaptation.
5. While Kachru's Three Circles Model has been referenced widely, few studies systematically examine how this applies to young learners' perceptions and performance. The present study bridges this by framing student attitudes within this sociolinguistic framework.

2. Materials and Methods

3.1 Research Design

The present study employed a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to evaluate how the Standard English of sixth graders is affected by Emerging Pakistani English. The researchers obtained necessary approvals from the District Education Officer and school authorities, followed by training elementary school teachers to assist with the study. Parental and student consent was secured,

and ethical approval was granted by the University of Okara. A pilot study validated the tools, after which a structured questionnaire and English proficiency test were administered. Matched groups were formed, and individual assessments were conducted in a calm setting. Finally, data were analyzed using SPSS to explore the relationship between Emerging Pakistani English and Standard English usage.

3.2 Study Participants and Sample Size

The population of the present study comprised of all public and private schools in Okara (Pakistan). 20 public and private schools were selected randomly for the study. The list of selected schools is given in the table 1 below.

Table 1 The list of Selected Public and Private Schools

Sr. no.	Public Schools	Private Schools
1	Govt. Girls High School, 23/2.L, Renala	White Rose School Renala
2	Govt. Girls High School, 24/2.L, Renala	Maa School System Renala
3	Govt. Model High School, Renala	Dar-e-Arqam School Renala
4	Govt. Millat High School, Renala	Allied School Renala
5	Govt. Girls High School, Renala Khurd	Rose Valley School Renala
6	Govt. MC High School, Okara	The Smart School Renala
7	Govt. High School New Campus Okara	The Educators Renala
8	Govt. Islamia High School, Okara	Faran School Renala
9	Govt. Satluj High School Okara	Dar-e-Arqam School Okara

80 6th grade students were selected randomly from the above selected schools (Public and Private) for the present study. The equal representation of participants based on different demographic characteristics such as school type, age, class etc., were ensured in the present study. Thus, the total

sample size consisted of 80 students with 40 students each from public and private schools. The mean age of study participants was 11.1±0.8 years (that ranged between 10 to 12 years). The overall demographic characteristics for all the study participants are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Demographic characteristics of the study participants

Variable	Sub-variable	Number (n)	Frequency (%)
Gender	Male	45	56.3%
	Female	35	43.8%
Age (years)	10	26	32.5%
	11	24	30.0%
	12	30	37.5%
School Type	Public	48	60.0%
	Private	32	40.0%
Native Language	Urdu	18	22.5%
	Punjabi	49	61.3%
	Pashto	9	11.3%
	Saraiki	2	2.5%
	English	2	2.5%
English Use at Home	Yes	43	53.8%
	No	37	46.3%

English Use at School	Yes	39	48.8%
	No	41	51.2%
Media consumption in English	Yes	31	38.8%
	No	49	61.3%
Preferred English Variety	PakE	41	51.2%
	Standard English	39	48.8%

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for the present study’s participants in given in Figure 1.

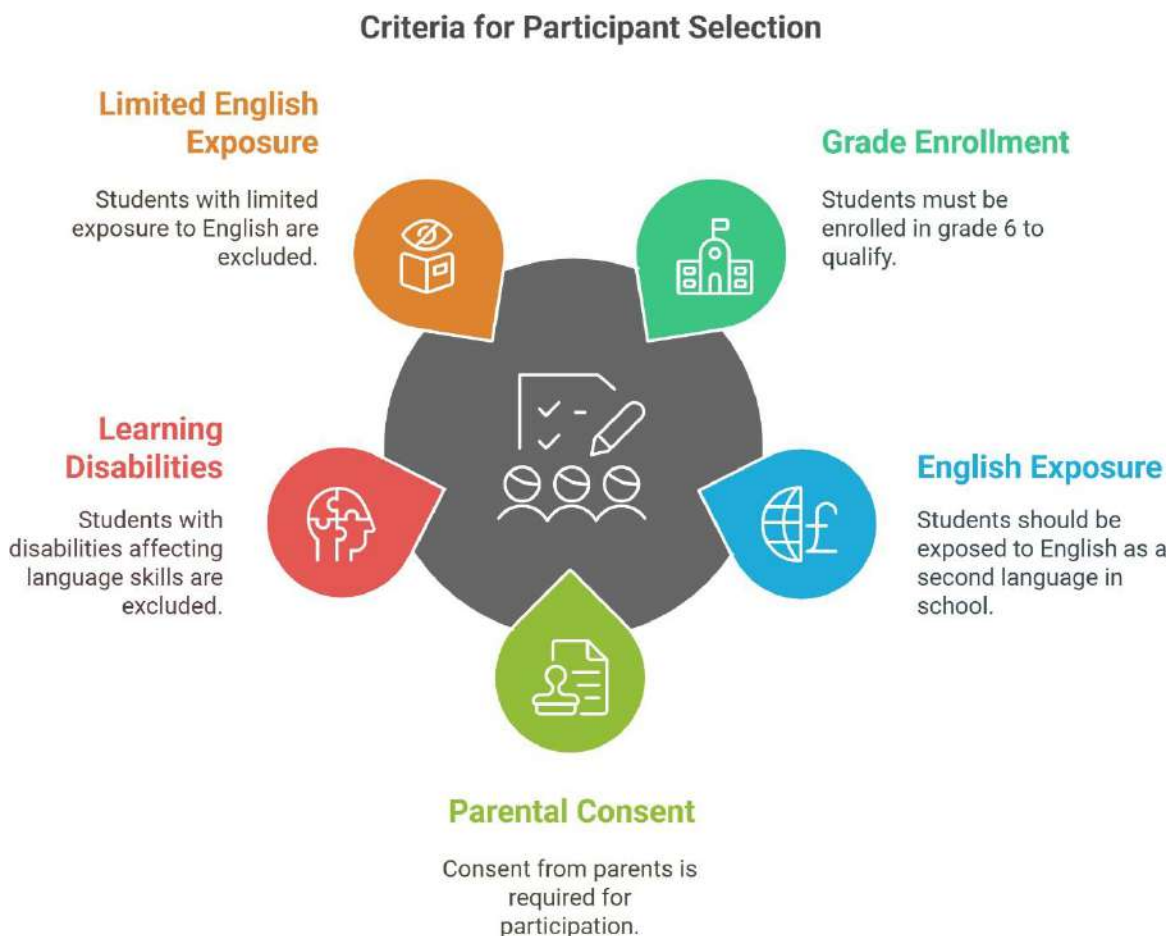


Figure 1: Inclusion and exclusion criteria of study participants

3.4 Instruments

3.4.1 Structured Questionnaire

A structured questionnaire consisting of demographic information (e.g., native language, type of school, gender, and age), language exposure (e.g., use of English at home, school, and consuming media), preferred variety of English use (Standard or PakE), and perceptions and attitudes was used to

evaluate attitudes, language preferences, and exposure of students to Standard English and PakE.

3.4.2 Standardized English Proficiency Test

The researchers design a standardized English proficiency test of 40 marks based on Cambridge A2 Key for Schools (Liu, 2025) for evaluating the

standard English proficiency of study participants. The breakage of marks with details is given in Figure 2.

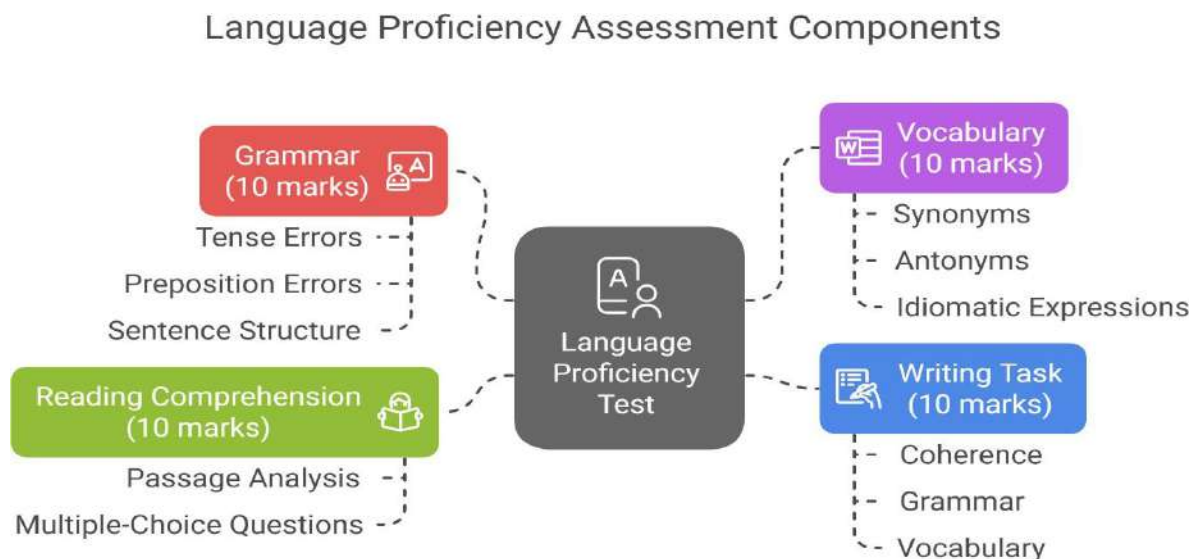


Figure 2: Standardized English Proficiency Test

3.5 Validity and Reliability

Prior to the conduction of the study, a pilot study was conducted with 20 students to avoid the study instrument being complicated and inexact; the goal was to make it simple, trustworthy, and valid. The internal reliability of the instrument was considered good, with Cronbach’s $\alpha=0.839$. Necessary modifications were made based on feedback and pilot data analysis. Test- retest reliability was also measured, which was found suitable for the conduction of the study.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

The written consent was obtained from the participants’ parents/guardians and verbal assent from students involved in the study. Students were assured that their privacy will be kept confidential by keeping their responses and personal data anonymous. Moreover, they were allowed to leave the study at any stage without consequences. Moreover, the research instruments were designed in such a way that they are stress-free and age-appropriate for study participants.

3.7 Statistical Analysis

Both the inferential and descriptive data were calculated using SPSS. T-test and ANOVA were used to compare the participants responses based on 2 and 3 demographic sub-variables, respectively. Correlation analyses were also conducted to find the effect of exposure to PakE on standard English proficiency.

3. Results

Regarding the first research question, the results presented in Figure 3 showed that despite having more preference for PakE (51.2% as compared to 48.8% of Standard English), most of the study participants considered PakE as a threatened to Standard English. While 18.75% of the study participants considered PaKE as a safeguarding linguistic adaptation, 18.75% remained neutral in this regard (Figure 3). Regarding the research question 2, no significant impacts of native languages such as Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, English, and Saraiki were found on the adoption of Pakistani English, despite English being as home language having a more exposure score to Pakistani English as compared to other languages (Figure 4). For

Research question 3, ANOVA showed that higher exposure to Pakistani English was associated with

lower English proficiency in the present study (Figure 5).

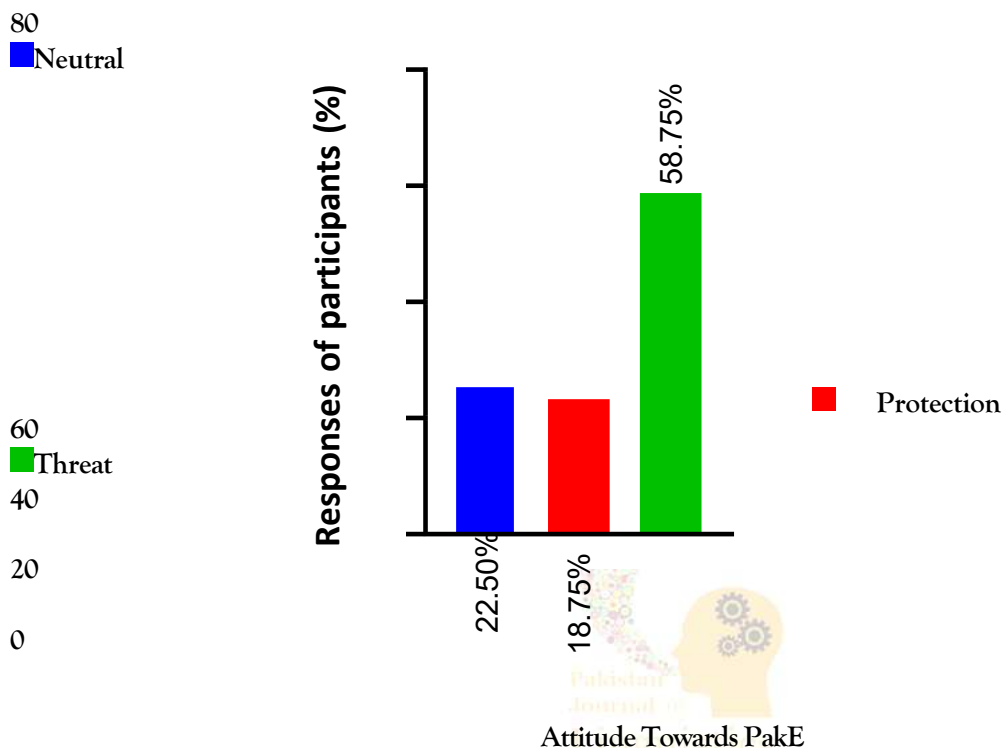


Figure 3: Attitude of study participants regarding PakE as a safeguarding linguistic adaptation or a threat to the integrity of Standard English

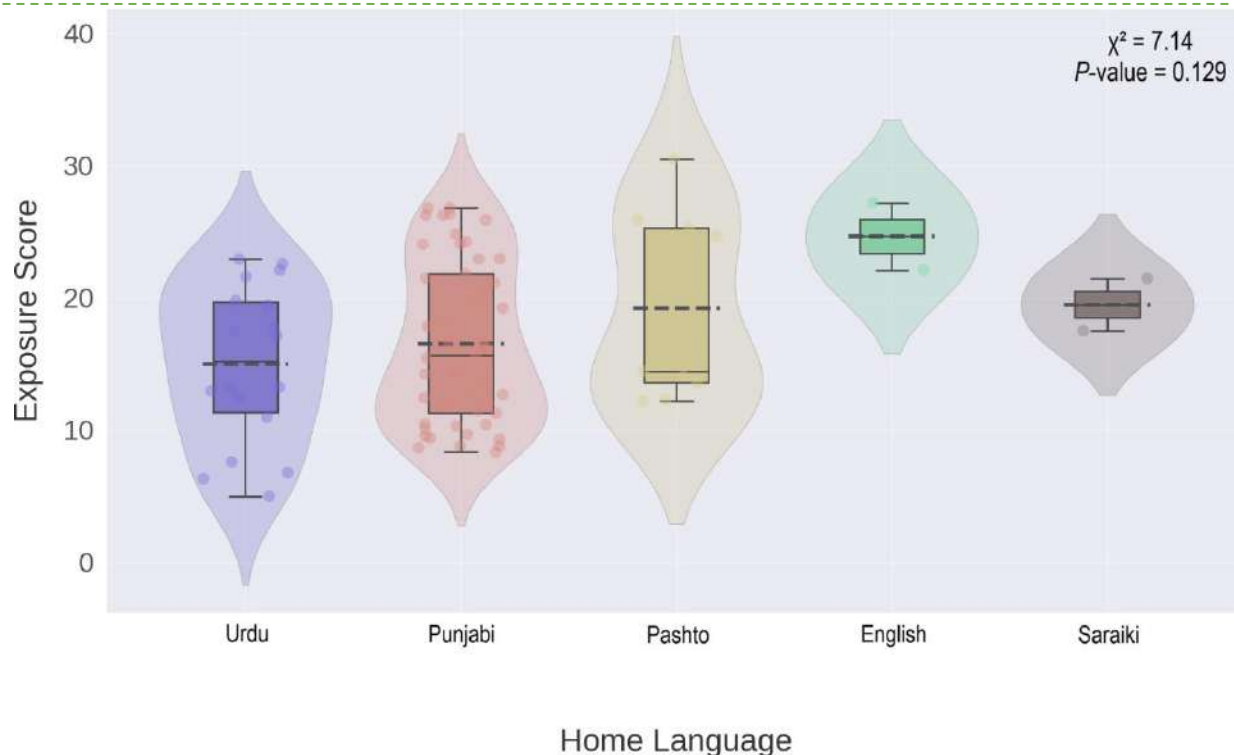


Figure 4: Chi-square analysis showing no significant effect of native languages on exposure to PakE.

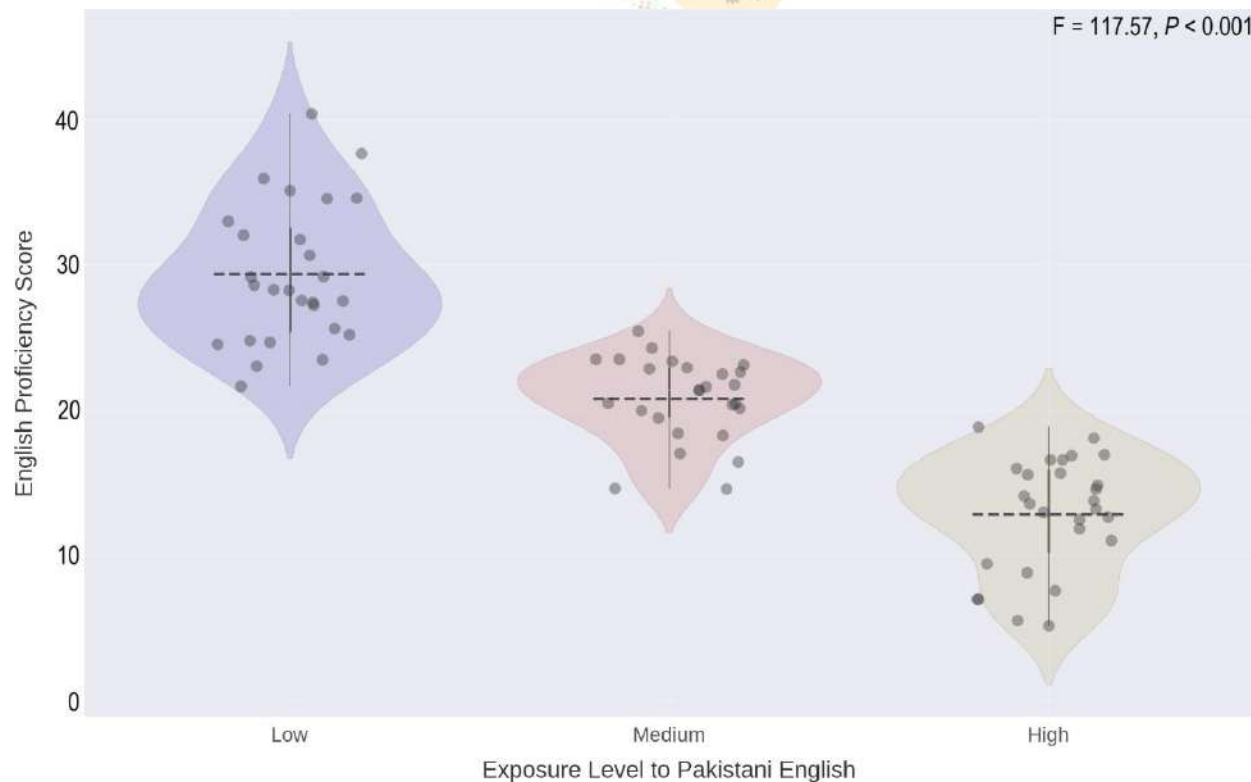


Figure 5: Distribution of English proficiency score by PakE exposure score

4. Discussion

The results of the present study provide important new information about the growing popularity of PakE and how it affects Pakistani sixth-grade children's use of standard English. Although the study population preferred PakE slightly more (51.2%) as compared to standard English (48.8%), the majority of the study population (58.75%) thinks that the use of PakE does not act as a safeguarding linguistic adaptation, but it threatens the integrity of standard English. So, the present study is in line with the study of Asgher et al. (2023) and Syed (2019), who reported that PakE's phonology, grammar, lexis, and semantics differ noticeably from Standard British English as a result of regional influences and Urduization.

Although it is a known fact that the linguistic environment of a school-going child is significantly shaped by native languages including English, Saraiki, Pashto, Punjabi, Urdu, and Saraiki (Abd El-Hack et al., 2022), in the present study no significant impact of any native language was observed on the exposure to PakE. The results of Shahzada et al. (2012), who found that exposure to Pakistani media and newspapers fosters a common variation of Pakistani English regardless of native language, are consistent with these outcomes, which implies that PakE is widely diffused across languages.

The use of American English-based grammar and lexis together with localized innovations has undermined the Pakistani population's adherence to standard British English (Anwar & Qureshi, 2019). In the case of the present study, proficiency in standard English decreased significantly ($P < 0.001$) with an increase in exposure to PakE. So, the present research's results were in line with Anwar and Qureshi (2019). The current research also indicated problems regarding intelligibility and international acceptance, since the lower results were recorded on the standardized English proficiency examinations of students having a strong PakE preference. Similar issues were also expressed by Qureshi et al. (2023) about the PakE's usage.

This analysis reinforces previous studies (Jadoon & Ahmad, 2022; Khan, 2012) by demonstrating that Pakistan's social, historical, and linguistic evolution is inextricably related to the foundation of PakE. As

described by Qureshi et al. (2023), and Ali and Parveen (2023), Pakistan has developed a distinct linguistic identity as a consequence of hybridization caused by subsequent Americanization trends, colonial influences, and regional languages.

It is critical not to underestimate the challenges to international understanding standards. If not addressed critically, the variances caused by PakE may cause challenges in academic, professional, and diplomatic circumstances, as Zhang (2013) described, "English is a lingua franca for international communication." According to Mukhopadhyay and Kundu (2023), in order to ensure students' global competitiveness, educational programs must find a balance between strengthening Pakistani-specific features and increasing fluency in Standard English.

Understanding that language change is an inevitable and dynamic process is crucial (Kelih et al., 2025). In order to meet local communication needs, English dialects have evolved throughout Asia, and PakE also represents the sociocultural background of its speakers (Ashraf, 2023). According to Azam et al. (2024), rather than being seen as a danger, PakE might be accepted as a legitimate variation that strengthens cultural identity while maintaining functional intelligibility on global platforms.

To have a clearer understanding of the changing link between PakE and Standard English, future studies should use bigger and more varied sample sizes from various academic levels and geographical areas. Additionally, long-term research might also look at the effects of continuous exposure to PakE on the development of competency in international English standards.

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