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Undergraduates' Perception of English and Khowar as Languages of Instruction: A Survey of Chitral

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ABSTRACT

This study intends to investigate undergraduate students' perception of English as an International Language (EIL) and Khowar as mediums of instruction in the higher education institutions in Chitral, Pakistan. In wake of globalization, EIL has attained significance as instructional language; however, some academicians favor indigenous languages for instruction. The divergence of viewpoints necessitates contextualized research in Pakistan. Resonating with quantitative research paradigm, a 12-item questionnaire on Likert-Scale was administered online to 100 undergraduates in Chitral. The findings revealed that a huge majority of the learners favored English more than Khowar to be used as a medium of instruction at the higher education institutions. So, this study offers insights about the intricate language dynamics in Chitral. Further comparative research may be conducted to identify the effects of educational interventions and linguistic policy on the attitudes of learners and/or teachers across age, gender, and educational level towards and competency of EIL learners and Chitralis.

| **KEYWORDS** | Chitral, EIL, Khowar, Medium of Instruction, Perception |

Introduction

EIL holds a significant position globally, acting as an important force in education, technology, commerce and intercultural communication. Its far-reaching influence extends even to remote northern regions like Chitral in Pakistan, intersecting with the local and indigenous language of Khowar. When we speak of English as an international language, we are generally speaking referring to a paradigm for practice, research, and thought. It is crucial to stress that EIL does not allude to a certain type of English. Some academics mistake EIL for the word "International English."

Concerns regarding language ownership have also been highlighted by the globalization of English, which has resulted in a higher proportion of non-native speakers than native speakers (Crystal, 1997; Widdowson, 1994; Brumfit, 1995). For this reason, English is recognized as an international language that is used for political, cultural, and commercial exchange and is not specific to any one country. There is no denying that learning English has become vital in today's globalized world. English has become ingrained in every community since it is the sole "hypercentral language" in the globe (Cook, 2008). For better or worse, by choice or force, English has "travelled" to many parts of the world and been used for a multitude of purposes (Sharifian, 2009).

One of Pakistan's regional languages, Khowar, gets its name from combining two terms: "war," which means language, and "kho," which refers to the inhabitants of Chitral. According to Morgenstierne's (1932) explanation, Khowar thus symbolizes the lingual legacy of the Chitrali people, which is frequently linked to the term "Kho". Khowar's

linguistic heritage is rooted in the larger Indo-Aryan language family; however, it is categorized under the Dardic languages group. Its extensive lexicon, structural similarities to Indo-Aryan languages, grammatical forms, and sounds were highlighted by Morgenstierne's (1932) research. Khowar is mostly spoken by people in Ghizer, Gilgit-Baltistan; the Swat Valley and Chitral, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. It has about a million speakers. Additionally, this language is also spoken by groups in Xinjiang, China, and some parts of Afghanistan and India. Khowar is known by many names, including Patu, Arniya, Kashkari, and Chitrali. Its significance is highlighted by Rahman (2010), who notes that it is the second most spoken language in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and the third most spoken language in Gilgit-Baltistan (GB).

Even yet, the local populace is aware of the need to preserve Khowar's linguistic integrity. But they are also influenced by English as an important language and feel compelled to learn it at the same time. In addition, parents send their children—especially the girls—to English-medium schools and universities so they can pursue higher education (Liljegren & Akhunzada, 2017). This tendency has lessened the necessity and significance of Khowar both locally and among people residing outside of Chitral.

Literature review

The status of English as a worldwide language is well recognized (Graddol, 1997; Jenkins, 2000; McKay, 2002, 2004). Many people describe a global language as one with a large number of native speakers (Graddol, 1997; McKay, 2002, 2004). As a result, English is seen as a "globalizing medium in its own right" (Spybey, 1996, p. 108), influencing culture, language, and communication all over the world.

According to Crystal (2003), a language becomes global or international when it has a major impact on the daily lives of many different countries in a variety of fields such as news, politics, commerce, the internet, and other areas of daily life. There are two main ways in which this is accomplished. First, a language must first become an official and/or national language, used for communication in all spheres, including the government, courts, media, and educational institutions. Second, according to Crystal (2003), a language needs to be given top priority in a nation's foreign language education program, serving as the main language of instruction for both adults and children in educational institutions. According to Clupper (1997), a language gains international recognition when nations embrace it and choose it over others in a variety of contexts such as the media, politics, and business. However, for a language in order to continue to be used and spoken globally, its speakers and users need to hold positions of power in the political, military, and economic spheres. This explains why English has remained a universal language for so many years.

Al-Jarf (2008) investigated the views of Saudi Arabian college students on the English and Arabic languages in the twenty-first century. It also examined their opinions regarding the use of Arabic and English in university instruction. According to the findings, 96% of the students believe that English is a superior language since it is utilized more frequently worldwide and in disciplines like science, technology, research, and technical words. However, 82% of respondents believe that teaching Arabic is more suited for topics like education, history, Arabic literature, and religion. They gave a wide range of justifications for their preference for English, including employment prospects, social factors, education, and technology. The investigation came to the conclusion that because English is taking over in higher education, Arabic is in jeopardy. This is because there aren't enough plans or policies in place to safeguard and advance Arabic, the language's adoption in the Arab world is moving slowly, and there aren't enough technical resources available in Arabic.

Ali (2015) ascertained Malaysians' perceptions of English. To do this, it is necessary to understand the opinions of members of the English education community regarding matters pertaining to the language. This covers issues such as language ownership, Islamic connections, and the rivalry between these two English and Bahasa Malaysia. The official language of Malaysia in educational settings. Muslim participants view English favorably because it facilitates the sharing of their faith and fosters interactions with multilingual individuals. However, there are continuous discussions concerning Malaysians' the use of English as a common language in schools. These discussions will likely go on until the issue of Malaysians' poor English proficiency is resolved.

Wang (2015) investigated the perceptions of Chinese university students and instructors towards China English (CE), a recently developed form of English spoken in China. It also investigated the motivations underlying their viewpoints. The findings demonstrated that while educators and students were generally opposed to adopting CE in the classroom, their views changed when particular aspects of CE were brought up. Upon investigating the reasons behind their feelings, it was discovered that their concerns went beyond the comprehension of CE by non-Chinese speakers. These concerns included that only primary English speakers are proficient in this language and the unfavorable perception of Chinglish, which is a combination of Chinese and English. These results may have implications for English instruction in settings where new types of English are becoming more common.

Tauchid, Saleh, Hartono and Mujianto, (2022). finds out that how university students from Indonesia and Japan felt about the usage of English in various contexts. They examined in which way these students today view English, the many forms of English, strategies for communicating with others from various cultural backgrounds, and the self-perception of English speakers. The findings demonstrated that the two student groups' current perceptions of English, its various forms, methods for expressing with individuals from different cultures and the same way English speakers view themselves were all similar. This indicates that Japanese and Indonesian students have comparable perspectives on English. Lee & Lee's (2019) study examined the impact or perceptions of EIL among Korean students majoring in the language and those who do not. It also examined the factors that influence their perceptions of English. The results indicated that learners of English prefer various forms of the language and methods of communication with individuals from other cultures more than learners of other languages. They learn English in diverse ways outside of the classroom, such as by utilizing digital technologies, and their teachers' differing approaches to teaching EIL are the main causes of the differences in their perspectives on the subject. This indicates that pupils are more likely to enjoy EIL when taught by teachers in a classroom. Additionally, when pupils use digital resources to learn English independently without the teachers' assistance, it also increases their liking of EIL.

Lai (2008) wanted to understand why Taiwanese university students learn English, how their reasons for learning English change over time, and what they think about English language as a global language today. The findings show that most leaners learn English because they think it's useful or because they want to connect with other cultures. However, the way they understand the idea of connecting with other cultures is different from how it's usually understood. Their reasons for learning English change because of different things like teachers, what they study, tests, their friends, and their experiences. Another important finding is that even though most students and teachers know the idea of EIL, they're not sure how to use it in the classroom.

Al Lami (2020) finds out how prospective Iraqi teachers perceive English as an international language. It also seeks to determine the significance of EIL in the eyes of teacher trainers. The findings indicate that there is a low awareness of English as a dominant language in Iraq. For the most part, they feel that proficiency in English is limited to native English speakers. English's status as a global language is complicated by this antiquated notion. That is why it's critical to alter the resources and methods of English instruction in schools. It is imperative that educators acknowledge the global significance of English, and adapt their pedagogical approaches accordingly.

As this perception of undergraduate students and teachers about English as international language (EIL) is different from places to place and culture to culture and its impact on the local regional languages as well. So, English as International Language (EIL) also affected Khowar, a language from the northern region of Pakistan, and specially the perception and attitude of the undergraduates who are studying at different universities.

According to recent census of 2023, Chitral (previously only one district and now divided into two) has the population of approximately five lac people only. Chitral has been home to more than fourteen languages, while the Khowar language has the greatest number of speakers. Meanwhile, the number of languages spoken in Chitral reflects the linguistics diversity of the place. Khowar language is used as the lingua franca. In the recent past, the increased prevalence of EIL has also significantly influenced the local languages in Chitral. We have tried to address and understand that how this linguistic transformation affects the usage and perception of EIL on Khowar language among the undergraduate students. Of course, in this globalized world English has gained prominence in every filed of life, including the academic fields. With English gaining prominence as the language of instruction, it is important to investigate undergraduate students' perception and attitudes to use EIL as a medium of instruction and its impact on Khowar language.

Research Methodology

Research Setting

This research was conducted in Chitral, a beautiful part of Pakistan with a mix of different cultures and languages, especially Khowar. We're focusing on undergraduate students in Chitral where students are dealing with both English and Khowar in their studies and daily communication. We want to understand what undergraduate students think about these languages. By choosing undergraduate students of Chitral, we aim to get a good picture of how language works in this diverse place. It's like looking at a painting of language choices and what young people like in terms of language. This helps us see how the big global language trends affect local languages in Chitral.

Research Design

To find out how undergraduate students in Chitral perceive EIL in comparison to the Khowar language, a quantitative study design was selected (Trochim & Donnelly, 2008). The choice to select written questionnaires as a means of gathering data for this investigation was informed by a number of factors, including Creswell's (2013) claim about research design. Keeping in view the limitations of the study, questionnaires were chosen over alternative data collection techniques because of their usefulness, effectiveness, and capacity to generate a sizable sample size. Merriam and Grenier (2019) also highlights how well-suited questionnaires are for obtaining structured data, especially in situations where participants might feel better at ease sharing their opinions in writing. Questionnaires were

found to be the most practical and economical solution, given the logistical difficulties and resource constraints associated with holding in-person interviews or focus groups with a sizable number of participants in far-off places like Chitral. As a result, a 12-item online-questionnaire was selected as the main technique of gathering data through using WhatsApp as a source medium for this study, making it possible to effectively gather information from a substantial sample of one hundred undergraduate students in Chitral.

The questionnaire was divided into two parts: first part concerned the students' perception of EIL as a medium of instruction; the second part dealt with their perception of Khowar as a medium of instruction. Each part comprised six statements. The questionnaire was circulated to 130 individuals, and was filled in by 110 participants. Out of the returned questionnaires, 100 questionnaires were found complete in all regards and used as data for analysis. The responses were collected on five-point Likert-Scale, ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree; however, the responses were late on reduced to three categories, namely, agree, neutral and disagree, to simplify the presentation of data.

Validity and Reliability

Concerning reliability, Pearson *r* was calculated for the data; the tool was found reliable with Pearson *r* = .741. The validity of the survey was ensured by asking two experts of the field to review the tool and suggest amendments. Furthermore, the tool was prepared in the light of literature available on the construct of perception. The questionnaire was piloted to 10 students to ensure readability and comprehension of the statements.

Ethical Consideration

Prior to commencing research, official permission was sought from the authorities concerned and the respondents. The researchers contacted the heads of different department at University of Chitral, and the principals of Govt. Degree Colleges (Boys, Girls), and briefed them about the research. The respondents were assured that their responses and personal information would be used for the study only and would not be shared with any third party. Complete privacy of the data was ensured during and after the investigation.

Participants

Trochim and Donnelly (2008) state that random sampling minimizes bias and ensures representativeness by choosing participants from the sample of the population so that every member has chance or participation of being chosen. The sample for this study included 100 undergraduate students in Chitral, Pakistan, who are studying at undergraduate level in different universities. For this study, we have employed random sampling technique. We ensured representation from different regions and diverse backgrounds. This is because we want to include a variety of perspectives from various parts of Chitral, considering its cultural and geographical diversity. This helps in obtaining a representative sample and minimizes bias.

Results and Discussion

The results of the study suggest the EIL is more favoured as a language of instruction than Khowar. The participants further expressed their cognizance of the importance of EIL. They expressed a higher level of ease for learning with EIL than with Khowar. Moreover, they well-aware of the benefits they could acquire owing to proficiency in EIL. Despite all the positive attitude towards EIL, they did not undermine the due

importance of their mother tongue, Khowar. They supported Khowar as an instructional language for preserving cultural heritage and their identity.

Table 1
Perception of EIL as a Medium of Instruction

No	Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
S1	English has a higher status than Khowar in Chitral.	60%	10%	30%
S2	English should be used as a language of instruction at the undergraduate level.	77%	9%	14%
S3	You feel comfortable using English as a language of instruction in your academic courses related to science and technology	67%	13%	20%
S4	It's important to be proficient in English for undergraduate students for academic success.	73%	22%	5%
S5	Use of English as a language of instruction contributes to global opportunities for undergraduate students.	91%	1%	8%
S6	English is more suitable than Khowar as a language of instruction for courses in arts and humanities.	50%	5%	45%

The findings of the first statement suggest that every three out of five respondents (60%) believe that English enjoys a higher status than Khowar in Chitral while slightly less than one-third of them (30%) believe that Khowar has a higher status in Chitral. A few students did not cast their vote in (dis)favor of English (Table 1). Regarding S2, two-third (77%) students believe that English should be used as language of instruction at the undergraduate level while some of them (14%) manifested their disagreement with the statement. However, nine students remained undecided regarding use of EIL as an instructional medium. Likewise, a wide majority (67%) of students expressed comfort with English as the language of instruction in academic courses like science and technology while one-fifth (20%) of them did not feel comfortable with the English as language of instruction (Table 1: S3). Surprisingly, some (13%) remained neutral on this statement.

As regards S4, an overwhelming number (85%) of students acknowledged the significance of acquiring proficiency in English for academic success while 12% students showed their disagreement with the statement. Next, every nine out of ten (91%) of the respondents believed that English as an instructional language might help the learners seek global opportunities. In other words, the undergraduates may secure good opportunities at global platforms with the help of proficiency in English (Table 1: S5). S5 is an extension of S4; therefore, the response rate does not reveal a huge difference, indicating consistency in the participants' responses. Lastly, almost half (49%) of the respondents preferred English to Khowar as a language of instructions for arts and humanities. Similarly, Forty-two students expressed an opposite viewpoint. However, some students (9%) did not (dis)agree with the statement (Table 1: S6). On the whole, the consistent frequency of responses indicates the undergraduates' predisposition towards using English as a language of instruction at higher education institutes.

Table 2
Perception of Khowar as a Medium of Instruction

No	Statements	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
S7	Khowar should be used as a language of instruction at the undergraduate level.	30%	20%	50%
S8	You feel comfortable using Khowar as a language of instruction in your academic courses.	60%	15%	25%
S9	Khowar is more suitable than English as a language of instruction for courses in arts and humanities.	46%	6%	48%

S10	It's important to be proficient in Khowar for undergraduate students for academic success.	16%	17%	67%
S11	You will be more willing to learn academic subjects in Khowar if courses were offered in this language.	54%	25%	21%
S12	Use of Khowar as a language of instruction preserves local cultural identity and heritage.	77%	10%	13%

Table 2 reveals findings about the learners' perception of Khowar used as a medium of instruction. Only almost one-third (30%) of the partakers agreed to employing Khowar as a medium of instruction at undergraduate level; however, a huge number of learners displayed their discontent with the statement (S7). Compared with S2, the findings reveal that the respondents are almost consistent in their viewpoints. The results on S8 reveal that 35 participants were comfortable with Khowar in their study courses related to the fields of science and technology, whereas more than half of the participants expressed their discomfort in the same scenario. Compared with S3, the findings are a little dissimilar. As regards S9, the response rate in favor of the statement was slightly less than that in disfavor: Forty-six respondents viewed Khowar to be more suitable than English as a medium of instruction for courses in the field of arts and humanities; however, forty-eight disagreed with the statement (Table 2).

Concerning proficiency in Khowar (S10), very few students responded affirmatively to the statement. On the other hand, four-fifth (79%) of them disagreed with statement. Put differently, the majority did not consider proficiency in Khowar as important for academic success. Only one-tenth of them responded neither positively nor negatively. However, more than half (54%) participants manifested their interest in learning other courses if offered in Khowar. On the other hand, 21% of the learners showed disinterest for such an offer. Surprisingly, one-fourth (25%) of them expressed neutrality, the maximum neutral response rate among all statements (Table 2). The last statement (S12) concerned Khowar as a symbol of cultural identity and heritage. A huge majority (77%) of the participants favored Khowar as an instructional language for preserving cultural identity of its speakers and heritage. Only a small number (13%) disagreed with the statement. Overall, the response rate of consensus fluctuates in this section, indicating diversity of reasons for supporting Khowar as a medium of instruction.

Discussion

The findings of this study clarify the complex dynamics pertaining to linguistic attitudes and preferences among students in Chitral, which is useful information for researchers. Different opinions about how important Khowar is compared to English highlight how difficult it is to navigate linguistic identity in a mixed culture. Although most students tend to value English because they believe it is useful everywhere, there is a sizable minority that supports Khowar because they are deeply proud of their culture and worry that it is being lost. Resonating with Inayati, Saputro and Kebble (2021), the overwhelming preference for English as the language of teaching, especially in undergraduate level of education, emphasizes how important English competence is seen to be for success in both the classroom and in the workplace. Nonetheless, the unease expressed by a portion of the student body highlights the difficulties linked to language assimilation and the possible marginalization of minority languages in educational environments. The results also highlight the complex nature of language attitudes, as students acknowledge the value of Khowar in preserving local cultural history while still appreciating the advantages of English for international communication. This illustrates a

sophisticated view of language as a means of achieving both cultural identification and personal empowerment.

When comparing our results with the earlier research, it is evident that English competence is crucial for both academic and professional success. Resonating with results of different studies (Al-Jarf, 2008; Ali, 2015; Tauchid, Saleh, Hartono & Mujianto 2022), the participants exhibited a positive attitude towards EIL. However, not all studies reported such positivity of perception regarding English. For instance, Wang (2015) observed an opposing attitude of the university students towards English in China (i.e. Chinglish) owing to lack of comprehension of Chinglish by non-Chinese. A similar finding was inferred by Al Lami (2020) in Iraq where teachers believed that proficiency in English is restricted to native speakers only.

Likewise, Tajeddin, Atai, and Pashmforoosh, (2020) observed difference between the teachers' perception and practice of EIL. Despite recognizing the importance of EIL, the Iranian teachers accentuated the native-speaker variety of English in the classroom. A similar discrepency was observed in the current study as well: the participants supported both EIL and Khowar as language of instruction but for different reasons. EIL was favored for its high status, importance and the benefits associated with it, whereas Khowar was preferred as an instructional langauge for preservering cultural identity of its speakers and heritage.

According to the finding, the participants recognized the importance of EIL, which resonates with the results of different studies (Al-Jarf, 2008; Clupper, 1997; Spybey, 1996). Furthermore, the students in Chitral chose English as their language of instruction. This preference is consistent with findings from Malaysia (Ali, 2015), Korea (Lee & Lee, 2019), Indonesia and Japan (Tauchid, Saleh, Hartono & Mujianto 2022) and Saudi Arabia (Al-Jarf, 2008), where English was likewise regarded for its opportunities and importance on a global scale. Nonetheless, the unease shown by certain students in Chitral about English as language for teaching in stark opposite to the predominantly favorable opinions of English proficiency in Saudi Arabia and Malaysia.

Next, the students favored EIL to be used for teaching science and technology. The finding is consistent with that of Al-Jarf (2008) and Ali (2015). The Arab and the Malaysian students too viewed English to be suitable as an instructional language for science and technology. Moreover, consistent with Al-Jarf's (2008) findings, the participants agreed that indigenous language (i.e. Khowar) should be used for the subjects of arts and humanities. However, the response was not one-sided; half of the participants disagreed with the statement, indicating the use of English for such subjects as well.

In addition, the participants preferred EIL for benefits associated with it. They believed that being proficient in English may enable them to secure unlimited opportunities not only in academics but also in other spheres of life. This is consistent with the results of different studies (Al Jarf, 2008; Crystal, 2003; Lai, 2008; Liljegren & Akhunzada, 2017).

Furthermore, some studies raise a concern about the possible marginalization of indigenous languages in English-dominated educational environments, like Arabic (Al-jarf-2008) and Bahasa Malaysia (Ali, 2015). Resonating with Irham (2023), the above findings provide a distinctive viewpoint on the maintenance and advancement of Khowar. In contrast to the primarily utilitarian view of English shown in other contexts, the sizable minority supporting the use of Khowar demonstrates deep-seated cultural pride and concerns about language erosion. Furthermore, the finding subtle examination of the

complex relationship between linguistic pragmatism and cultural preservation is consistent with the conclusions drawn from the literature survey. Both stress the value of using indigenous languages to preserve local cultural history while still appreciating the advantages of English for international communication. To combine the advancement of English competence with the documentation or preservation of local languages and cultural traditions, context-specific interventions are necessary, as demonstrated by the unique opportunities and problems found in Chitral.

Conclusion

So, addressing the consequences of these discoveries calls for a comprehensive strategy that strikes a balance between preserving indigenous languages and cultural practices and promoting English literacy. Revisions to the curriculum, programmed for training teachers, and policy changes that support linguistic diversity and inclusive teaching methods should all be part of this strategy. Chitral's educational institutions may foster an environment that supports both academic success and cultural preservation by embracing language pluralism and cultural sensitivity. This will enhance the educational experience for all students.

Finally, the study investigated how undergraduate students in Chitral saw EIL in comparison to Khowar, as their mother tongue. We found that a large portion of students recognize the importance of English for chances in the global arena, they also strongly regard Khowar as an essential component of their cultural identity. This dual viewpoint draws attention to the intricate interactions that exist in Chitral between linguistic pragmatism and cultural preservation.

Recommendations

It's crucial to recognize our study's limitations, though. First of all, because our sample was restricted to undergraduate students, it might not accurately represent the viewpoints of other demographic groups like professionals or older persons. Therefore, an extended study may be conducted to investigate the phenomenon comprehensively. Furthermore, as the main focus of our study was on attitudes and perceptions, future research might go further into the actual language use patterns and skill levels of the people of Chitral. Subsequent studies may investigate the effects of educational interventions and linguistic policy on the attitudes towards and competency in the Chitral language. Furthermore, comparative research between various age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds may offer a more thorough comprehension of the linguistic dynamics in the area. Additionally, researching how media and digital tools influence language attitudes and learning environments may provide insightful information for creating inclusive, culturally relevant language education programmed in Chitral.

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