

## English Language Learning and the Identity of Muslim Undergraduate Students in Pakistan

**Sameera Sultan,<sup>1\*</sup>**

Department of Education and Learning Sciences  
Faculty of Arts, Design, Education, and Social Sciences  
Iqra University, Gulshan Campus, Karachi, Pakistan

\* Corresponding Author

Email: [sameera.sultan@iqra.edu.pk](mailto:sameera.sultan@iqra.edu.pk)

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines how English language learning influences the identity of Muslim undergraduate students at a private university in Pakistan, considering its significance in national, religious, and global contexts. Using a qualitative research approach, data was collected through a survey of students from a well-reputed university in Karachi. A questionnaire developed by Yihong et al. (2007) measured identity changes using a five-point Likert scale across six categories: self-confidence, additive change, subtractive change, productive change, split change, and zero change. Grounded in bilingualism, identity formation, and sociolinguistics theories, this study explores language as a cultural and religious marker, shaping self-perception and community affiliation. Findings indicate that English proficiency enhances self-confidence and global identity but also creates tensions in maintaining Islamic and

cultural heritage. While most students experience additive identity changes—retaining both English and their native language—some undergo subtractive changes, weakening ties with their native culture and religious traditions. Hybrid identities emerge as students navigate between English, Urdu, and Islamic discourse, reflecting the complex role of language in shaping faith, values, and aspirations. English is perceived as a language of power and success. Yet, concerns over identity conflicts highlight the need for linguistic policies that balance English proficiency with preserving Islamic and national identity. Educators and policymakers must address these challenges to ensure a holistic bilingual education that fosters both religious and global engagement among students.

**Keywords:** *Language identity, Bilingualism, Global identity*

## INTRODUCTION

Language and identity are deeply interconnected. Language is more than just a means of communication; it carries identity and reflects distinctive worldviews (Mills, 2001). Each language embodies specific conceptualizations of the world, the purpose of life, and the essence of human existence (Edwards, 2010). Thus, a language represents identity, shaping individual and societal characteristics while providing speakers with a particular worldview. Research has clearly established that languages influence the identities of their speakers.

Bilingualism has become the norm in today's globalized world (Yihong, Yuan, Ying, & Yan, 2007). English, in particular, is widely recognized as the global language of science, technology, trade, business, and international communication (Crystal, 2003). Countries such as China, Japan, and various European nations have acknowledged the increasing significance of English in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, making it a mandatory subject to equip their citizens for active participation in international trade and research (Yang & Yu, 2024). English is no longer perceived as the language of specific nations; it is regarded as an essential skill for the global workforce.

While the primary motivation for learning English in many countries remains instrumental, research reveals that English language proficiency also shapes learners' identities in both native and non-native contexts (Teng, 2024; Dong & Chen, 2023; Teng, 2024). Bilingual and hybrid identities have become common phenomena in an increasingly interconnected world.

### ***Pakistani Context and Statement of the Problem***

Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country with more than 64 languages and various ethnic groups. Urdu is designated as the national language, while English has served as the official language since the country's inception. English is privileged in Pakistan and is widely used in the military, bureaucracy, legal system, and education sectors (Shamim, 2011; Rehman & Knight, 1996). Urdu is also highly regarded, particularly for its role in unifying Pakistan's linguistically diverse society. While Urdu symbolizes national identity, English is considered essential for academic and professional success.

The National Education Policy of Pakistan (2017) places significant emphasis on English, recognizing it as the language of science, technology, and global trade. Consequently, the policy strongly recommends English-medium instruction for science, mathematics, and higher education. English is also prioritized for research and academic advancement in the globalized world. Meanwhile, Urdu is reinforced as the country's lingua franca and a symbol of national identity. As a result, Pakistanis must attain proficiency in both English and Urdu to access greater opportunities within the country. Additionally, many individuals speak regional languages, further shaping their linguistic and cultural identities. This exposure to multiple languages with varying sociolinguistic statuses inevitably influences individual identity formation.

Several studies have examined the impact of English language learning on students' identities in Pakistani higher education. For instance, Asif and Zhiyong (2020) investigated the effects of English Language Teaching (ELT) on students' linguistic identities by collecting data from university students and teachers in Punjab. Their findings revealed that students' perceptions of their competence and values had evolved due to English language learning. The study also highlighted increased code-mixing among students, who regarded English as a language of prestige. Similarly, Aslam and Javed (2024) found that Pakistani university students placed great importance on English language proficiency, considering it a prerequisite for academic and professional success. Manan and Hajar (2022) reported that English language learning led students to value English skills more while reducing their use of their mother tongue.

A study exploring the language identity of undergraduate students at a public university in Pakistan found that students struggled to associate themselves with both Urdu and English (Mushtaque & Zaki, 2019). This finding suggests that the students experienced a state of conflict regarding their linguistic identity. However, despite this struggle, they placed great importance on English and preferred to study in it. In contrast, Abdul Manan and David (2014) reported that Pakistani undergraduate students perceived their mother tongue as the primary marker of their identity in Pakistan's multilingual and multicultural society. Nevertheless, they prioritized mastering English and Urdu, recognizing them as the languages of power in Pakistan. Another study investigated identity-related experiences among students at a public sector university in the context of English language learning (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). The findings revealed that English language proficiency significantly influenced students' perceptions of both personal self-worth and

their perceived value in society. Low English proficiency was associated with negative self-perceptions (Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Anbreen (2015) confirmed this phenomenon, reporting that proficiency in English led Pakistani students to perceive themselves as more open-minded. However, their attachment to their mother tongue remained intact, resulting in the development of multiple identities.

While the studies above provide valuable insights, an in-depth examination of the holistic impact of English language learning on students' identities within the framework of globalized biculturalism remains an unexplored area. As the language of globalization, English fosters a unique identity that enables individuals to perceive themselves as members of the global community while simultaneously retaining their national identity through their mother tongue (Mills, 2001). This perspective has not been adequately addressed in the context of Pakistani society. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by investigating how English language learning influences the identity of students at private universities in Pakistan, considering the multifaceted role of English in both Pakistani society and the global landscape. Additionally, the study will explore whether students experience identity conflict due to their exposure to multiple languages.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

This study aims to examine how English language learning impacts the identity of undergraduate students at a private university in Pakistan, considering the diversified role of English in Pakistani society and the global context. Specifically, the study aims to address the following research question: *Given the diverse functions of English in both the national and international spheres, how does*

*English language learning influence the identity of undergraduate students at a private university in Pakistan?*

***Significance of the Study***

The nation's language policy has far-reaching implications for various domains, including education, economic development, and scientific progress. Therefore, language policies must be formulated based on research, and their impact must be regularly assessed to ensure their effectiveness and inform necessary revisions. Pakistani's language policies officially support both English and Urdu. Urdu serves as a crucial marker of national identity and social cohesion, while English is recognized as the language of science, technology, and global communication. The National Education Policy of Pakistan emphasizes the importance of English and Urdu, recommending English as the primary medium of instruction for science and higher education while promoting Urdu to foster national identity and facilitate communication within Pakistan's multilingual society. The impact of this policy requires further investigation to determine how effectively English equips students with the skills necessary to become scientists, technologists, and active participants in international affairs. English is expected to shape students' identities as researchers, professionals, and contributors to the global knowledge economy. Meanwhile, Urdu is intended to reinforce national identity and cultural values. There is a pressing need for empirical studies to assess whether these intended identities are being successfully cultivated through English and Urdu in the Pakistani context. Findings from this study will provide valuable insights for language policymakers, educators, and other stakeholders, enabling them to reflect on existing language policies critically and take appropriate measures to revise or enhance them for greater effectiveness.

The study examines the impact of English language learning on students' identity. However, it does not explore the role of Urdu or other regional languages in shaping individual identities. The study investigates both the positive and negative effects of English on students' identity as Pakistanis. Due to time constraints, the study is limited to a single private university, and its findings may only be applicable to universities or educational institutions with a similar demographic composition.

### ***Review of Literature***

Language and identity are closely interconnected. Language is not merely a tool for communication; it is also a symbol of group affiliation and social identity (Mills, 2001; Edwards, 2010). Different languages represent distinct cultural and ethnic identities, carriers of unique worldviews and ideologies that shape individuals' perceptions of life. Consequently, language plays a critical role in identity formation. Self-identity refers to an individual's perceptions of themselves in relation to their linguistic and cultural group (Yihong et al., 2007). More broadly, identity is how a person understands and defines themselves with regard to the world, other people, time, and space (Kouhpaenejad & Gholaminejad, 2014). Language significantly contributes to this process, as individuals often derive their identity from their language, adopting its worldview, thought patterns, and communication styles.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bilingualism has become the norm; nations worldwide acknowledge the importance of English as the dominant language of science, technology, business, trade, and international relations (Kovacic, et al., 2009; Agai-Lochi, 2015). Consequently, many governments have integrated English into their educational policies, promoting English-medium instruction and emphasizing English proficiency as essential for technological advancement and

economic growth (Dearden, 2014). English has also become the most widely used language in higher education globally (Kovacic, et al., 2009), leading to its adoption as a foreign or second language in numerous countries.

Since language serves as a bearer of identity and worldview, English language learning inevitably influences a non-native speaker's identity. Existing literature has established that bilingual or multilingual individuals who are required to learn English for educational and professional success often develop hybrid or bicultural identities (Sung, 2019; Kim, 2003). Based on their literature review, Yihong et al. (2007) identified six possible types of identity changes resulting from exposure to a second language. The first type of change pertains to an individual's self-confidence and self-perception, which may improve due to L2 (second language) acquisition. Additionally, additive changes may occur, referring to the coexistence of two sets of linguistic, cognitive, and behavioral patterns associated with both languages. Thirdly, subtractive changes are also possible, wherein the mother tongue or first language (L1) is replaced by L2, resulting in the loss of both the native language and its cultural associations. Productive changes occur when proficiency in L1 and L2 positively reinforce each other, ultimately enhancing overall linguistic competency. Conversely, negative identity changes can also arise, particularly in the form of a split identity, where exposure to L2 leads to identity conflict, leaving the learner confused. This phase is often considered an intermediate stage of identity formation. Finally, Yihong et al. (2007) introduced the concept of zero change, referring to cases where exposure to L2 does not impact an individual's L1 identity.

Mills (2001) observed that bilinguals individuals, enabling them to commit to the cultures associated with both languages in shaping their identity. However, some bilinguals may remain monocultural



despite actively using both languages (Mills, 2001). As a result, bilingual identities can be complex, with exposure to different languages and cultures influencing individuals to adopt certain features of L2 culture in varying degrees (Mills, 2001). Given that English is the most widely used second language in today's globalized world, both ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners may develop specific perceptions regarding its status and value (Lamb, 2004). Unlike native speakers, ESL learners may not associate English with a particular ethnic or national group; they often perceive it as the language of science, technology, and global citizenship. Globalization has played a crucial role in shaping bicultural identities, where one aspect of an individual's identity is rooted in L1 and local culture, while another part is influenced by L2, particularly English, and the global culture it represents. However, this phenomenon has also led to identity crises, as individuals may struggle to fully identify with either their local culture or the Westernized global culture associated with English (Arnett, 2002). Considering the contemporary globalized context and the dominant role of English, numerous studies have sought to examine how English language learning impacts the identity of non-native speakers in both English-speaking and non-English speaking countries.

An Iranian study examined the difference between English and non-English major students in their attitudes toward native English speakers and self-identity change (Mokhtarnia & Ghafar-Samar, 2015). The findings indicated that the English major students exhibited less prejudice toward their L1 and its associated culture, whereas non-English major students demonstrated a subtractive identity change. Another Iranian study investigating the language identity of EFL learners reported a moderate level of language

identity (Rezaei, Khatib, & Baleghizadeh, 2014), meaning that the participants felt a moderate attachment to their first language. Similarly, Rezaei and Latifi (2020), in their study on Iranian EFL learners' identity, found that while students' identities did not undergo significant changes, their ability to compare and appreciate both Persian and English cultures was enhanced.

Yihong, et al. (2007) analyzed the identity changes of Chinese university students resulting from learning English. The study reported that students with strong English proficiency exhibited higher levels of self-confidence. However, the majority of students experienced zero identity change due to their predominantly instrumental motivation for learning English. Some students displayed productive or additive identity changes (Yihong et al., 2007). Similarly, Kanno (2000) investigated the relationship between bilingualism and identity among Japanese children. The study found that these children used their L1 to assert their Japanese identity while utilizing L2 to engage with the globalized world. The study concluded that identity is a complex construct, and bilingual individuals may use their different languages to define distinct aspects of their identity.

in South Africa, it was revealed that they were more inclined toward L2, viewing it as a tool for assimilation into the dominant linguistic community (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). However, these immigrants were also acutely aware of their subtractive bilingualism and lamented the loss of their mother tongue. Besser and Chik (2014) made an important observation regarding the role of socioeconomic status in shaping identity in L2. Their study found that a child's identity in L2 depended significantly on the quality of access they had to English. Students from affluent families, who could afford high-quality English-medium schools were more likely to develop bicultural identities compared to students from lower-

income backgrounds, who had limited access to English and expressed greater concerns about their future (Besser & Chik, 2014). Henry and Goddard (2015) observed that English becomes an integral part of an individual's identity when it holds a prestigious and dominant societal position. Most EFL learners appear to develop bi-cultural, or hybrid identities influenced by English in both positive and negative ways. Mills (2001) highlighted the negative impact of English on identity, noting that it can lead to identity confusion and conflict. In such cases, individuals may experience an unsettling sense of belonging to neither language nor its associated culture. Thus, research consistently suggests that learning English as a second or foreign language significantly impacts an individual's identity.

## RESEARCH METHODS

A survey was conducted to investigate the research problem. The survey methodology allowed the researcher to access a large number of participants, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the identity changes associated with English language learning. The following sections detail of the methodology employed in this study.

The study adopted the questionnaire Yihong, et al. (2007) developed to examine student identity changes resulting from English language learning. The questionnaire was designed based on established theories of bilingualism and qualitative data collected from students at four universities. The self-identity change construct in the questionnaire was measured using a five-point Likert scale, where 1 = strongly agree, 2 = agree, 3 = neutral, 4 = disagree, and 5 = strongly disagree. To ensure accessibility and comprehension, the questionnaire was initially prepared in both English and Chinese.

The self-identity changes questionnaire comprises six categories. The first category, self-confidence, assesses students' perceptions of the impact of English on their self-esteem and confidence. The additive change category refers to the harmonious coexistence of both languages, wherein each language is compartmentalized based on specific contexts and situations. The third category, subtractive change, describes an identity shift in which L1 becomes undesirable and is replaced by L2, both linguistically and culturally. Productive change occurs when proficiency in both L1 and L2 reinforces and complements one another. The fifth category, split change, reflects identity conflict, where the speaker struggles to relate to either language fully. Finally, zero change indicates the absence of any noticeable identity transformation. The reliability of this instrument was found to be satisfactory in the study conducted by Yihong et al. (2007), making it a suitable tool for measuring self-identity changes in the present research.

### ***Participants***

The study was conducted at a private university in Karachi, recognized by the Higher Education Commission (HEC) of Pakistan. Data collection targeted students from the Computer Science department. 400 first-year BS students were selected using convenience sampling, allowing researchers to approach willing participants for data collection. The students were divided into sections, typically 8 to 10. Each section received an email containing the questionnaire, requesting students to complete it at their convenience, considering their demanding academic schedules. It is important to note that students at the selected university come from various regions within Karachi and primarily belong to the upper-middle class. Consequently, the findings of this study can only be generalized to populations with similar demographic characteristics. Most individuals from the upper-middle class in

Karachi can afford English-medium schools, where students receive intensive exposure to English through English-medium instruction. Therefore, this specific group was chosen as its members were likely to have undergone extensive exposure to the English language, a prerequisite for examining potential identity changes. All participants' responses were included in the t-test analysis.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

An online version of the questionnaire was developed, with minor modifications to ensure cultural appropriateness for Pakistani students. Three faculty members were requested to distribute the online questionnaires to their students via the university's Learning Management System (LMS). Students were given four days to complete the questionnaire at their convenience. A total of 315 students responded. Data analysis was conducted using SPSS Version 22 and Mplus. After data cleaning in SPSS, Mplus performed confirmatory factor analysis (CFA). The Cronbach's Alpha test was conducted to assess the reliability of the data. Descriptive statistics were computed to provide further insights, including information about the educational board from which students had completed their matriculation and intermediate education. Most students complete their education under the Karachi Board in Karachi, while some elite schools offer the Cambridge International curriculum. Students from other regions of Sindh or other provinces of Pakistan also pursue higher education in Karachi, enrolling under their local educational boards, such as the Sindh Board or the Federal Board. An independent samples t-test was conducted to compare students' responses from the Karachi board and the Cambridge board to analyze potential differences in identity changes. The results of the confirmatory factor analysis are presented in the following section.

### ***Confirmatory Factor Analysis***

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is a widely used statistical technique for assessing how well empirical data align with a hypothesized measurement model. CFA enables researchers to evaluate the extent to which observed data fit a predefined theoretical framework, which is typically based on an extensive review of the literature. The relationship between observed and latent variables is predetermined based on theoretical or empirical research, and CFA is employed to validate this relationship (Suhr, 2000). CFA was conducted on the Self-Identity Changes Questionnaire for this study to assess its validity and reliability. The analysis was performed using Mplus, a statistical software package considered more reliable for structural equation modeling compared to other alternatives.

**Table 1: Fit Indices for Self-Identity Change Questionnaire**

Index	Shorthand	Obtained Value	General Rule for Acceptable fit*
Chi-square (Values/Degrees of Freedom)	X <sup>2</sup>	2.38	< or =3
Root mean square error of approximation	RMSEA	0.06	<0.08
Standard root mean square residual	SRMR	0.07	<0.08
Tucker-Lewis Index	TLI	0.77	> or =0.95
Comparative FitIndex	CFI	0.72	> or =0.95

*\*General rules for acceptable fit are taken from Schreiber, et al. (2006).*

The fitness of the measurement model is typically evaluated using various indices, including the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR) (Schreiber, Stage, King, Nora, & Barlow, 2006). The CFA results demonstrated that the Self-Identity Changes Questionnaire is a valid instrument. Three of the model fit indices – Chi-square (2.38), RMSEA (0.06), and SRMR (0.07) – met the established criteria for an acceptable model fit. Although the CFI (0.72) and TLI (0.77) did not meet the ideal threshold of 0.95, a model is considered acceptable if at least three key fit indices fall within the acceptable range. Given these findings, the measurement model used in this study is deemed reliable.

### ***Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients for CFA***

Table 2 presents both the standardized and unstandardized coefficients obtained from the Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the Self-Identity Change Questionnaire. The coefficients indicate the strength of the relationship between observed variables and their respective latent constructs.

**Table 2: Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients for CFA (Self-Identity Change Questionnaire)**

Observed Variable	Latent Variable	Standardized Coefficient	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error
C1	C	0.53	1.00	0.05
C2	C	0.73	1.14	0.05
C3	C	0.39	0.89	0.06
C4	C	0.53	0.83	0.05
AB1	AB	0.45	1.00	0.10
AB3	AB	0.46	0.94	0.10

AB4	AB	0.33	0.95	0.09
SB1	SB	0.39	1.00	0.05
SB2	SB	0.43	1.19	0.06
SB3	SB	0.76	1.91	0.05
SB4	SB	0.69	1.72	0.05
PC1	PC	0.39	1.00	0.06
PC2	PC	0.65	1.70	0.07
PC3	PC	0.52	1.11	0.06
ZC1	ZC	0.22	1.00	0.06
ZC2	ZC	-0.19	-0.59	0.06
ZC3	ZC	-0.89	-4.29	0.08
ZC4	ZC	-0.56	-2.72	0.06

The results indicate that the p-value for all coefficients was 0.00, which is less than the threshold of 0.05. This finding confirms that the relationships between the observed and latent variables are statistically significant. The standardized coefficients provide insights into the relative strength of these relationships, while the unstandardized coefficients offer absolute measures of association.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### *Educational Boards of the Students*

Table 3 presents the distribution of students based on their matriculation and intermediate educational boards. The data indicate that students come from diverse educational backgrounds, including local boards in Sindh, Cambridge, and other provincial or federal boards.



**Table 3: Educational Boards of the Students**

<b>Matriculation and Intermediate Board</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Matriculation	Cambridge board	88	29
	Any board in Sindh	190	62
	Any other Province board	25	8
Intermediate	Karachi Board	157	51
	Any other Sindh board	52	5
	Federal Board	17	5
	Cambridge board	77	25

The findings reveal that the majority of students completed their matriculation from a board in Sindh (62%), followed by Cambridge board (29%), while a small proportion (8%) came from other provincial boards.\*\* Similarly, for intermediate education, the Karachi Board had the highest representation (51%), followed by Cambridge Board (25%). Other students came from different boards in Sindh (5%) or the Federal Board (5%). Each educational board follows a distinct curriculum, although all adhere to the National Curriculum set by the Federal Ministry of Education. English is a mandatory subject across all boards. However, the Cambridge board generally provides more exposure to English-

medium instruction, potentially influencing students' language identity differently.

### ***Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Identity Change Questionnaire***

Table 4 presents the descriptive statistics for the key variables measured in the Self-Identity Change Questionnaire.

**Table 4:** *Descriptive Statistics of the Self-Identity Change Questionnaire*

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
Confidence	2.3	0.63
Additive Bilingualism	2.4	0.70
Subtractive Bilingualism	3.6	0.70
Productive Bilingualism	2.1	0.60
Zero Change	2.5	0.77

The results indicate that productive bilingualism is the most prominent impact of English language learning among students, with the lowest mean score ( $M = 2.1$ ,  $SD = 0.60$ ). This suggests that students actively use both English and their native language in communication without losing proficiency in either. Additionally, confidence ( $M = 2.3$ ,  $SD = 0.63$ ) and additive bilingualism ( $M = 2.4$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) were also significant outcomes of English learning. This implies that exposure to English has enhanced students' linguistic skills and increased their self-confidence in using the language. Conversely, subtractive bilingualism ( $M = 3.6$ ,  $SD = 0.70$ ) was the least significant impact, as indicated by the highest mean score. Since 3 in the instrument represents a neutral response, this suggests that English learning has not led to a notable loss of proficiency in students' native languages. The findings further highlight that English learning influences students' identities in

multiple ways. Many participants experienced both productive and additive bilingualism and increased confidence, confirming language identity transformation's complex and multifaceted nature.

### ***Descriptive Statistics for Self-Identity Change Subscales***

Table 5 presents the descriptive statistics for individual items in the Self-Identity Change Questionnaire. The responses reflect various aspects of students' identity transformation due to English language learning.

**Table 5:** *Descriptive Statistics for items in the Self-Identity Change Subscales*

<b>Subscale items</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>
I feel terrific when I find my command of English is better than that of others.	2.4	0.94
English has a great impact on my self-confidence.	1.90	0.78
When I have difficulties in English, I begin to doubt my own ability.	2.9	1.17
Whenever I have overcome a difficulty in English, I can feel my own growth.	1.9	0.78
I can easily switch between Urdu and English according to situational needs/change of scenario.	2.0	0.90
I prefer to listen to the original English dialogue when watching English movies, just, as I enjoy	1.71	0.83

the original Urdu dialogue when watching Urdu content.		
I have an English name (or nickname) in addition to my Urdu name. They are used in different situations.	3.5	1.17
With the improvement of my English proficiency, I feel my Urdu is becoming less natural.	3.43	1.01
After learning English, I feel my behaviors have somewhat become Westernized.	3.29	1.01
After learning English, I have developed dislike for some Urdu (or Pakistani) conventions.	4.04	0.99
After learning English, I have begun to reject some traditional Urdu (Pakistani culture) ideas.	3.96	0.98
With the improvement of my English proficiency, I can better appreciate the beauty of Urdu.	2.15	0.88
After learning English, I find myself more sensitive to changes in the outside world.	2.59	0.90
After learning English, I have become more understanding and can better communicate with others.	1.83	0.73
No matter which language is used for expression, I remain myself.	1.63	0.73
I have not felt any change in myself after learning English.	3.27	1.15
An instrument is an instrument. It is impossible for me to change into another person after learning a language.	2.50	1.15

For me, it is meaningless to talk 1.15 1.20  
 about personal changes after  
 learning English.

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The table above presents item-wise response trends. A t-test was conducted to examine differences in identity change between students from Karachi Board and those with Cambridge educational backgrounds.

### ***Comparison of Identity Change Between Karachi Board and Cambridge Board Students***

To analyze whether students from Karachi Board and Cambridge Board experienced self-identity change differently due to English learning, an independent samples t-test was conducted.

**Table 6: Results of T-Test for Identity Change**

Variables	Mean Difference	SD	t-value	Sig
Confidence (C)	-0.15	0.08	-1.75	0.08
Additive	0.19	0.09	2.14	0.03
Bilingualism (AB)				
Subtractive	-0.09	0.09	-0.96	0.33
Bilingualism (SB)				
Productive	-0.10	0.08	-1.24	0.21
Bilingualism (PC)				
Zero Change (ZC)	0.12	0.10	1.13	0.25

The t-test results indicate no significant difference in identity change between students from Karachi Board and those from the Cambridge Board. A considerable difference would require a p-value below 0.05; however, the obtained significance values exceed this threshold. Additionally, Levene's test was found to be

insignificant, confirming the assumption of equal variances.

## **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that English shapes the students' identities in multiple ways. As bilinguals, they develop a hybrid linguistic identity. Prior research by Sung (2019) and Kim (2003) suggests that bilingual individuals who learn English as a compulsory subject in education often adopt bicultural or hybrid identities. The data reveal that students predominantly exhibit productive bilingualism, as learning English also strengthens their motivation to enhance their Urdu proficiency. Moreover, students reported that English language competency boosts their confidence and self-image. English is the language of science, technology, and global communication, so it is essential for academic and professional success. Consequently, students feel a sense of accomplishment and increased self-assurance when effectively communicating in English. In Pakistan, English is associated with social prestige, and individuals with strong English proficiency are often perceived as cultured and accomplished. This perception reinforces students' confidence when they excel in English. Thus, in the Pakistani context, a hybrid identity emerges as a blend of ethnic heritage and English proficiency, symbolizing a cultured, educated, and confident individual.

The study also found no significant difference in identity change between students from different educational boards. This may be attributed to the widespread recognition of English as a crucial factor for academic and professional success across all educational backgrounds. However, for their cultural and ethnic identity, students continue to rely on their mother tongue. Additionally, the compulsory inclusion of Urdu in both local and Cambridge curricula reinforces its significance as the national language, ensuring that

students maintain a connection to their linguistic and cultural heritage.

The results align with Mill's (2001) observations on bilingual identity, which suggest that bilingual individuals often develop complex identities. In this study, students demonstrated a strong inclination toward additive bilingualism. In Pakistani society, both Urdu and English hold significant prestige but serve distinct roles. Many students may also speak a regional language, further contributing to their multilingual identity. The findings indicate that students recognize the importance of all these languages and strategically use them based on the communicative context. Moreover, students do not appear to experience an identity crisis or conflicting linguistic identities. Instead, they seem to have compartmentalized their identities, associating Urdu with national identity and English with empowerment, financial success, and academic advancement. These results are consistent with the findings of Rezaei et al. (2014) in an Iranian context, where students also did not undergo a drastic identity shift but exhibited a tendency toward productive bilingualism. Similarly, the study aligns with Yihong et al. (2007), as both the Chinese students in their research and the Pakistani students in this study reported increased confidence due to their English proficiency and primarily learning English for instrumental purposes.

Bilinguals residing in English-speaking countries often report experiencing subtractive identity changes (Vandeyar & Catalano, 2020). However, subtractive bilingualism does not appear to be a significant concern for the students in this study, as they do not reside in an English-speaking environment and primarily learn English for instrumental purposes. Nonetheless, the neutral responses from many students regarding subtractive changes

suggest that if they were to immigrate to an English-speaking country, they might experience such identity shifts.

It is also essential to consider the socioeconomic background of the participants. The students in this study belong to the upper-middle class, and most attend schools where Urdu and English are regarded as essential and prestigious languages. The attitudes of schools and teachers, who present English as a tool for academic and economic success as well as global communication, lead students to value English primarily for instrumental purposes rather than as a defining factor of their cultural identity.

Henry and Goddard (2015) observed that learning English often results in a complex hybrid identity. Similarly, Besser and Chik (2014) found that identity changes are influenced by the quality of an individual's English language instruction, with students from higher-quality English-medium schools exhibiting stronger bicultural tendencies. However, the findings of this study differ. While O- and A-level school students undoubtedly receive better English instruction, the t-test results indicate that identity changes among Cambridge and Karachi board students are similar. A possible explanation for this phenomenon is that students in this study, particularly those specializing in computer science, may prioritize technical skills over language proficiency, reinforcing the instrumental role of English rather than its influence on cultural identity.

The findings of this study align with those of previous research conducted in Pakistan. While the students in this study highly value English and report increased confidence as a result of improved proficiency, they do not exhibit a diminished sense of identity related to their mother tongue. Similar results have been observed by Abdul Mannan and David (2014), Shammi and Rashid (2019),



and Anbreen (2015), who also found that English proficiency enhances self-confidence without necessarily leading to an identity shift. However, Mushtaque and Zaki (2015) reported cases of identity crises among students—a phenomenon that was not observed in the present study.

## CONCLUSION

This study explored the impact of English language learning on students' identity at a private university in Pakistan. Data were collected using the Language Self-Identity Change questionnaire. The results indicate that students exhibit a dynamic identity, with English language learning influencing them predominantly positively, particularly in fostering productive and additive bilingualism. One key factor contributing to this phenomenon is the instrumental motivation for learning English, coupled with strong ties to their mother tongue. This study recommends that students be provided with a clear purpose for learning English. As a global language, English is crucial in enabling individuals to establish a globalized identity, facilitating their integration into international professional communities and access to information. While students have demonstrated a tendency towards subtractive bilingualism, this should be mitigated by reinforcing connections with their mother tongue and emphasizing the cultural value of their native language. A culture cannot thrive without its language. Furthermore, while most students reported increased confidence due to their English proficiency, ensuring that those with lower proficiency do not develop an inferiority complex is essential. Institutions should invest in English language improvement programs while maintaining a balanced perspective on the significance of both English and the native language for academic, professional, and social success in Pakistani society. Finally, this study recommends a more in-depth qualitative investigation to

explore the multifaceted nature of students' identity changes resulting from English language learning.

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