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**Folk linguistics and language Teaching: A Case Study of BS-English Students at the University of Bhimber, Azad Jammu and Kashmir.**

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**Abstract**

This study investigates students' perceptions of English language learning through the lens of folk linguistics. It explores the concept of folk linguistics, the prevalent beliefs associated with it, and how non-specialists perceive and interpret language. By examining the intersection of folk beliefs and language acquisition, the study highlights the potential benefits of integrating folk linguistic insights into teaching methodologies and learning practices. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected via structured questionnaires from a sample of 130 students learning English as a foreign or second language. The findings reveal that students prioritize practical language skills and associate English proficiency with future academic and professional opportunities. Their perspectives also reflect a comprehensive and experience-based understanding of language learning. This research deepens our understanding of learner attitudes and offers valuable implications for educators, curriculum developers, policymakers, and researchers aiming to enhance English language instruction and learner outcomes.

**Key Words:** folk linguistics, perspectives of students, beliefs, non-specialist, language interpretation

**Introduction**

This study explores the role of ordinary people in language understanding, focusing on their beliefs, perceptions, and experiences as users and informal commentators on language. It emphasizes how these non-expert views contribute valuable insights into the process of language learning and teaching, particularly through the lens of folk linguistics. The position of both learners and teachers is central to the discussion, with particular attention given to the influence of learners' attitudes on the success of language acquisition.

Folk linguistics examines how everyday people talk about and perceive language, even when their ideas differ from those of professional linguists. A related area, perceptual dialectology, investigates how non-linguists understand regional language differences and what they believe about the form, function, and distribution of languages. Unlike traditional dialectology, which uses formal linguistic methods to study dialects, perceptual dialectology focuses on public perception, offering a more socially grounded view of language variation. According to Mardan (2020d), this makes it an important part of both folk linguistics and sociolinguistics.

The study draws parallels between linguistic and other kinds of informal knowledge. Just as non-experts may confidently explain medical or geological phenomena based on personal experience, they also frequently express opinions about languages, dialects, and language use. These opinions,

though sometimes inaccurate, reflect meaningful social attitudes. For example, people may claim that English is extremely difficult to learn or judge certain accents as more pleasant or respectable than others. Professional linguists might challenge the accuracy of these beliefs, but folk linguistics values the beliefs themselves for what they reveal about social identity, cultural perceptions, and everyday language practices.

In most societies, people use language without consciously reflecting on how they acquired it. They may attribute language learning to natural exposure from parents or community members, without understanding the deeper cognitive or social processes involved. Yet, their beliefs about language acquisition—such as whether a foreign language sounds attractive or whether it is difficult to learn—are important indicators of how language is perceived and approached. These beliefs influence how learners engage with a new language and how teachers address learning challenges in the classroom.

The study also considers English as a case in point. Its global status has long been anticipated, as noted by Roman Dyboski in 1931, who foresaw its rise as an international language. Today, English is often associated with global mobility, access to knowledge, and economic opportunity. In countries like Pakistan, English is a required part of the educational curriculum, and students are familiar with its grammar and vocabulary through formal instruction. However, their attitudes toward English vary depending on cultural background, personal motivation, and socioeconomic conditions. These differing perspectives shape their approach to language learning and reflect broader beliefs about language utility and identity.

Ultimately, the purpose of folk linguistics is not to evaluate the truth of popular language beliefs but to understand the beliefs themselves. These beliefs offer a window into how people conceptualize language, its role in society, and its perceived value. By studying what ordinary people think and say about language, researchers and educators can better appreciate the social dimensions of language learning and develop more responsive, culturally aware approaches to teaching. This understanding is essential in creating more effective and inclusive language education practices.

## **Literature Review**

Language is not only a means of communication but a vital component of cultural identity and human cognition. While professional linguists approach language through empirical methods and structured analysis, ordinary people, too, engage with language in deeply meaningful ways. Their observations, interpretations, and beliefs about language form the core of folk linguistics. This field explores how non-specialists understand, describe, and make sense of language phenomena. Although their perspectives may not always align with scientific linguistic principles, they offer rich insight into how language functions in everyday life.

Folk linguistics is grounded in the belief that all language users possess a certain kind of linguistic knowledge based on their experiences, interactions, and social contexts. People often express opinions about accents, dialects, grammar usage, and language learning that reflect deeper cultural and psychological frameworks. These beliefs, while anecdotal, are socially and symbolically significant. They contribute to broader ideologies about language and its role in society. Preston (1996) highlighted the importance of folk perceptions in understanding sociolinguistic variation, arguing that such perceptions often shape language attitudes and usage more than formal instruction.

A particularly important subfield is perceptual dialectology, which examines how people perceive and evaluate language variation across geographical regions. Unlike traditional dialectology that maps linguistic features through fieldwork and analysis, perceptual dialectology relies on the subjective judgments of non-experts. For example, studies by Preston (1999) involved participants

labeling maps based on where they believed certain ways of speaking originated or where they thought people spoke "correctly" or "pleasantly." These studies revealed widespread stereotypes and biases linked to linguistic features, providing a social mirror to linguistic diversity.

Folk linguistic beliefs also play a significant role in language education. Both learners and teachers bring their language ideologies into the classroom, which can profoundly affect learning outcomes. Beliefs such as "you must master grammar before you can speak" or that "native speakers are always better teachers" influence how students approach language learning. These assumptions are often culturally inherited and may be reinforced by educational policies and materials. Wenden (1999) and Kalaja and Barcelos (2003) emphasized how learner beliefs shape language acquisition, affecting motivation, strategy use, and overall engagement.

Language learning is deeply embedded in cultural and social experiences. In multilingual communities, people often prioritize learning languages based on their perceived utility, status, or emotional resonance. English, in particular, has gained prominence as a global language. It is often viewed as a gateway to education, employment, and international mobility. Dyboski (1931) predicted the rise of English as a global language, and today it is central in many non-native contexts, including countries like Pakistan, where English is taught as part of the formal curriculum.

In Pakistan, students often begin learning English at an early age, primarily through school instruction. Their engagement with English is shaped not just by the curriculum but by their socio-economic background, exposure to media, and family attitudes. Some may view English as a mark of sophistication and opportunity, while others may perceive it as a cultural threat or a colonial imposition. These differing perspectives affect how they learn and how successfully they acquire the language. Coleman (2010) and Rahman (2002) have documented the complexities of English in Pakistan, highlighting both its empowering and divisive effects.

Folk beliefs about language are not confined to the classroom. With the rise of digital media, people now share their linguistic experiences and opinions widely. Social media platforms, blogs, and online forums are rich sources of folk linguistic discourse. Here, language learners and users discuss pronunciation challenges, grammatical doubts, accent preferences, and language-related humour. Androutsopoulos (2006) noted how online spaces serve as arenas for linguistic performance and commentary, where folk perspectives are visible and dynamic.

Learners and teachers are central to the language learning process, and their beliefs can either facilitate or hinder progress. Learners may hold the belief that certain languages are inherently harder to learn or that they are not "language people," which can undermine their confidence and persistence. Teachers, in turn, may rely on outdated methods or undervalue students' linguistic backgrounds if they are unaware of the impact of folk beliefs. Barcelos (2003) argued that teacher beliefs, shaped by their educational histories, significantly influence classroom practices and student outcomes.

The ultimate goal of folk linguistics is not to validate or refute these beliefs in terms of accuracy but to understand their social and educational implications. By studying how ordinary people talk about and perceive language, researchers can gain insights into identity, ideology, and the dynamics of language change. These perspectives are especially valuable in designing inclusive language policies and pedagogical approaches that respect cultural diversity and learner identity. Language is not just a cognitive structure but a lived experience. Folk linguistics reveals the ways in which people navigate this experience, making sense of language through the lens of culture, identity, and emotion. While professional linguists provide structural analyses, folk linguistics offers a more humanistic and socially grounded understanding. As such, both perspectives are essential for a holistic view of language in society.

## **Research Methodology**

This study employed a quantitative research approach to investigate the experiences and views of students of the English language. This current study used a questionnaire to collect data on students' points of view regarding their attitude towards English as a foreign/second language at the university. One common method of gathering information about people's views and opinions from a large group is the questionnaire survey. A wide variety of questions in L2 research have made use of it.

To meet the desired results and to increase the quality of data a questionnaire with multiple choices, and closed-ended questions was used as the data collecting technique in order to get numerical information for the study topic. An overview of the experiences, attitudes, and views of a sample of participants about the teaching and learning of the English language was obtained through the use of the survey; as collecting information from such a huge population makes it a difficult task to analyse by the researcher and requires plenty of time. The questionnaire sample was extracted from an already existing online source, some questions were added by the researcher to expand the research and the data was collected from students of the Department of English who completely were different from Italian students from whom the data already had been collected, analyzed and uploaded. The participants were provided with ten different questions, some of them were extracted from already existing sources while reviewing the literature and others were added, to measure the attitude of the students about English as a second language.

Precisely, the study design included;

A quantitative method for finding trends and patterns in numerical data analysis.

A questionnaire-based survey research approach that guarantees a consistent and effective data-gathering procedure.

Closed-ended, multiple-choice questions to collect accurate, comparable data and facilitate statistical analysis.

Questions no 5,6,7 and 8 were added to make the study comprehensive and to know more about the perspectives of students and teachers. Questions no 1,2,3,4,9 and 10 were modified to some extent and excerpted from already existing literature, from Santipolo(2015). The questions were modified after considering the participants, their culture, understanding, age and the region, the place where they are studying so it is suitable for them. The questionnaire designed for the students comprised 10 questions given with 5 different. The respondents were provided with ten close-ended questions. To collect the data from teachers, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire as they better understand. The language used in the questionnaire was English only and straight enough to make sure everyone could understand and respond, and no other language such as Urdu was used. The researchers explained the complexities to each respondent.

## **Population and sampling**

All things (people, things, and events) that meet the requirements to be included in a study are referred to as a population by Burns and Grove (1993:779). The term "population" is used in statistics to describe the whole from which a statistical sample is taken. You can think of a population as any group of people who share some sort of trait. On the flip side, sampling is a crucial method in research that comprises picking a subset of a larger population to take part in a study. This approach is often necessary since it is difficult, if not impossible, to conduct a direct examination of a whole population owing to constraints in time, money, or other resources. Researchers can learn about the population as a whole and conclude its characteristics by carefully choosing a sample that is typical of it.

In the current study, the population includes the learners of the English language at the University of Bhimber, Azad Jammu & Kashmir. This study employed a convenient sampling method

selecting a sample of English language students from the larger population of English students at the university. Convenience sampling was chosen due to its practicality and accessibility, allowing for efficient data collection. The sample selection depended on the total population of English students at the university.

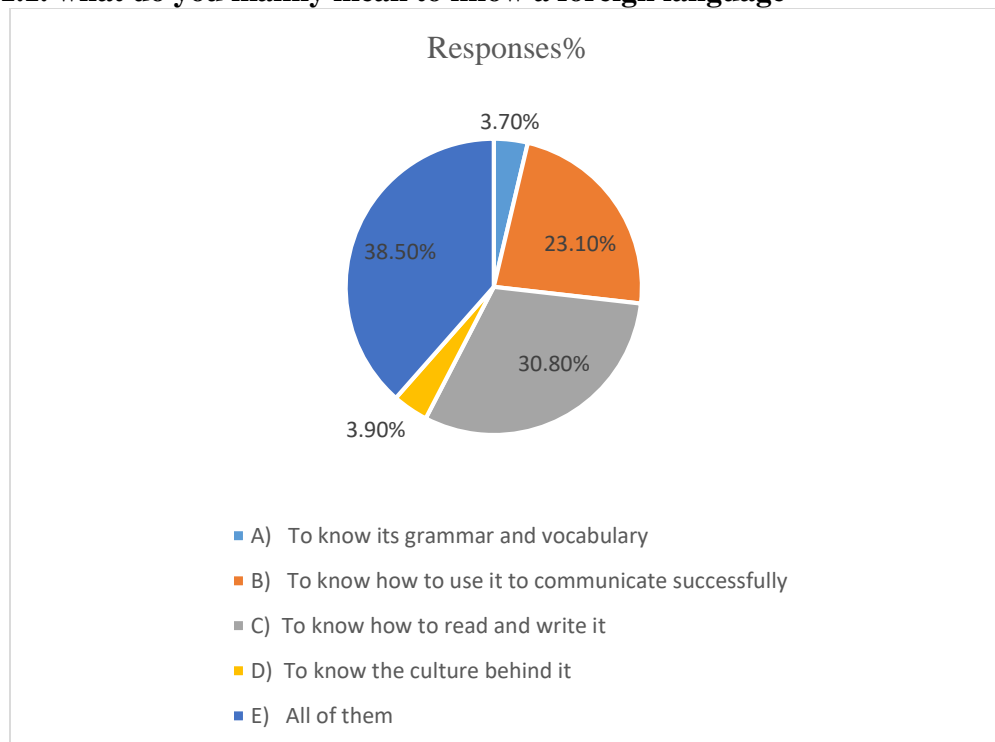
### Participants

The targeted number of students was 130, including both males and females. The students were in 1st year of university, specifically, adult learners aged around 18-19, though Urdu is their native language they have studied English as a part of their curriculum, more like a subject in their schools and colleges which makes fourteen years while they barely speak English in their daily routine, there is an influence of language, speaking few words but not the real communication.

### Data Analysis

This section presents the analysis of data using basic statistical tools to quantify the findings. The data was statistically examined to provide a general overview of the students' attitudes toward English language learning. After collection, the data were manually organised and analysed by the researcher. Since the responses were gathered in a physical (offline) setting, the researcher worked with hard copies of the questionnaires. Each response was carefully counted, and mathematical calculations were performed using Microsoft Excel, which proved suitable for this case study. To represent the findings visually, pie charts were created to illustrate responses to the closed-ended questions. Percentages and averages were calculated to identify trends and patterns in the data. This process was conducted thoroughly and repeated multiple times to ensure accuracy and reliability in the interpretation of results.

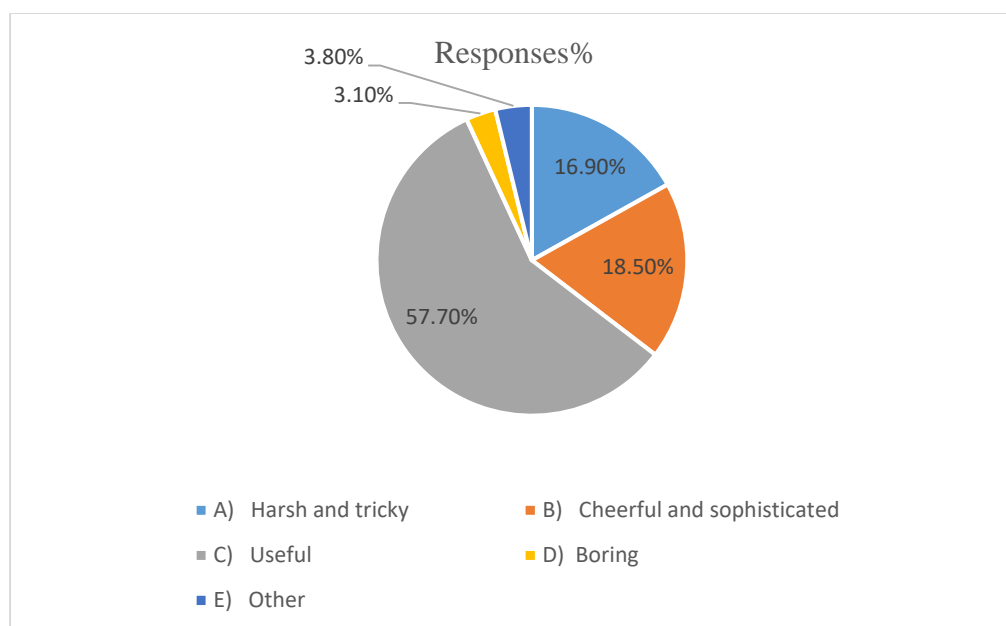
#### 1.1. what do you mainly mean to know a foreign language



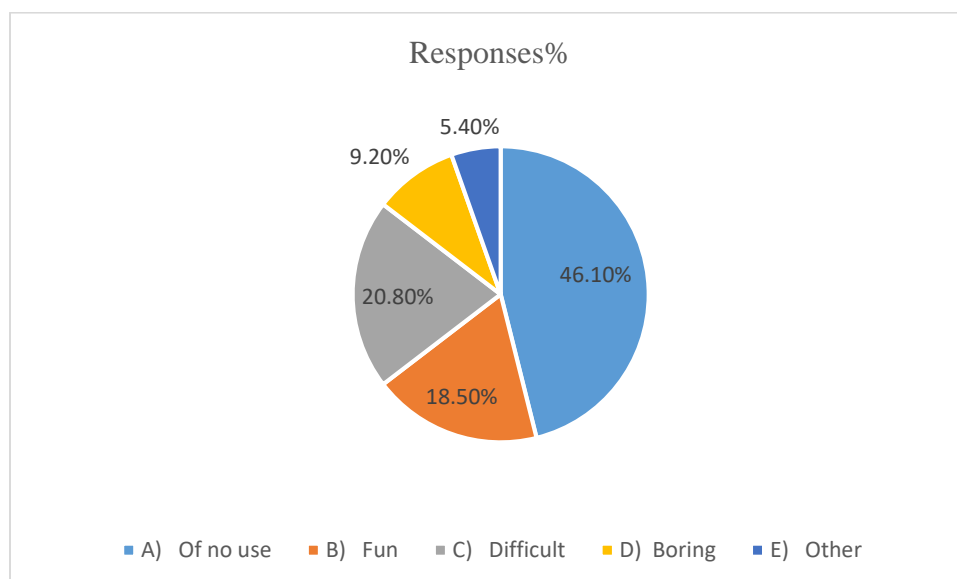
The first question that was about knowing of a foreign language, the respondents gave different answers as, with 38.50% choosing every part to know it, such as grammar, vocabulary, culture, communication skills and the skills which include reading and writing. To know how to use it to

communicate successfully (23.10%), to know how to read and write it (30.80%), to know the culture behind it (3.90%),

## 1.2. The English language to you is mainly

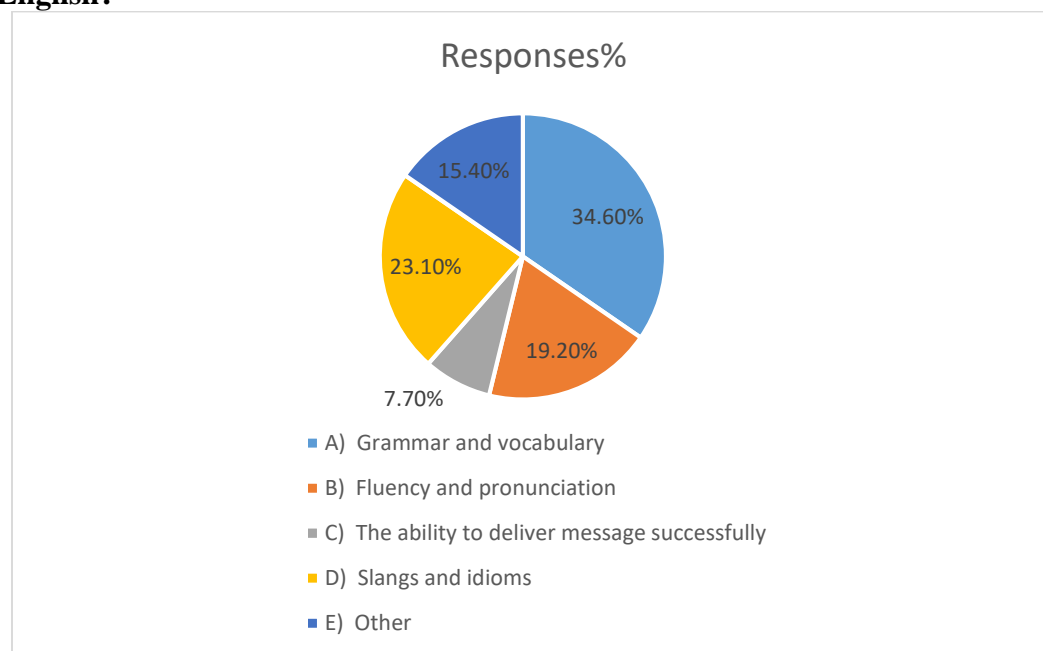


From the results, it could be evaluated that for the majority of the student's English language is useful, which is (57.70%) while (3.80%) of students did not respond to any of the options given in the question. For (16.90%), it is harsh and tricky, it is cheerful and sophisticated for (18.50%) students and boring for (3.10%) students.



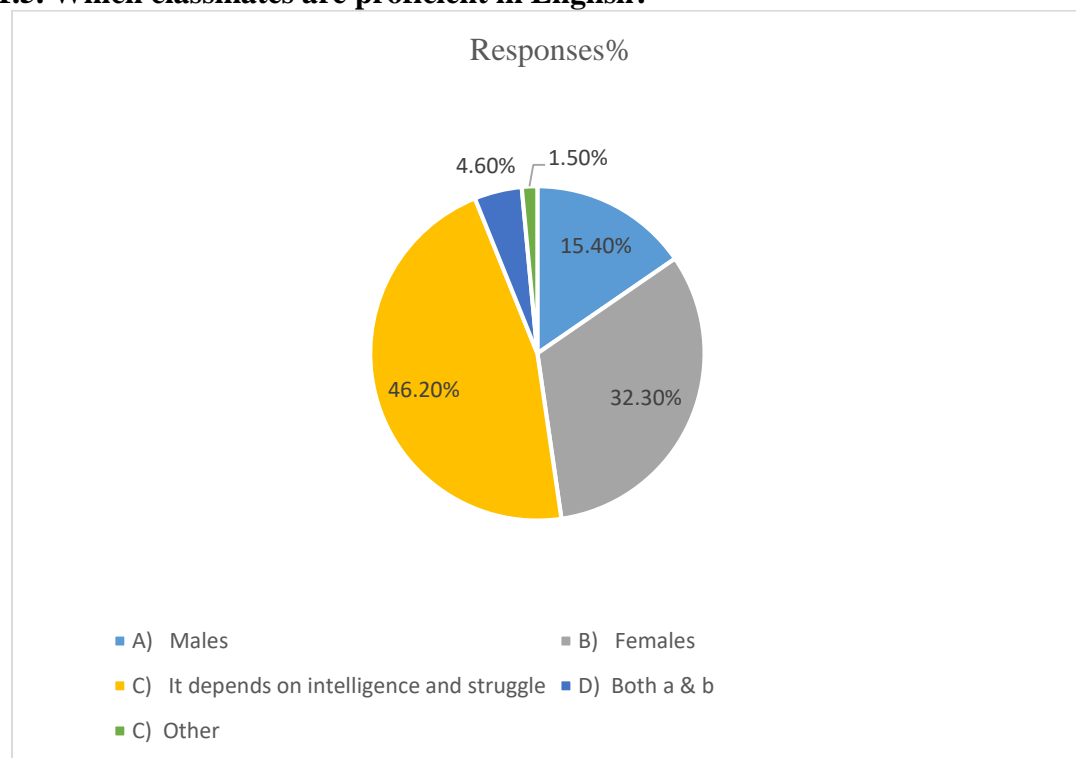
It gives us insights into the methodology and teaching instructions which are being used in the classrooms, as 46.10% of students do not seem to be satisfied with the way English is taught in classrooms. For (18.50%), it is fun, difficult (20.80%), boring (9.20%), and (5.40%) do not seem to be responding to any of the options given.

#### 1.4., What do you think which factor is more important factor when you are learning English?



For (34.60%) of students, it is grammar and vocabulary which is significant while you are learning English. (19.20%) Students seem to focus on fluency and pronunciation. The demand for slang and idioms is also there (23.10%) . While (7.70%) students believe to can deliver the message successfully. And (15.4%) have not responded to any of the questions given.

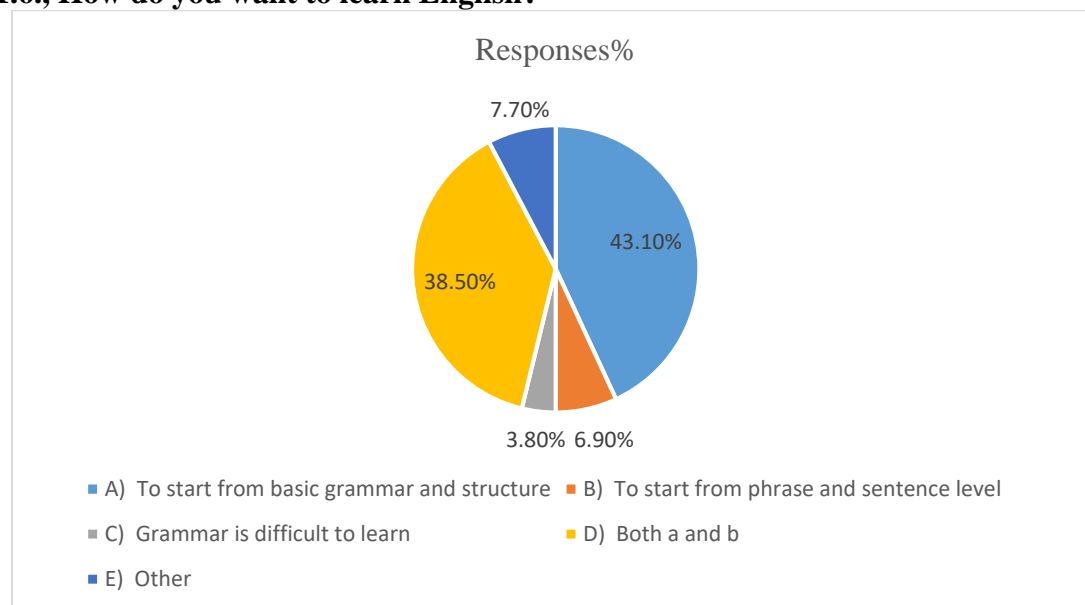
#### 1.5. Which classmates are proficient in English?



A big proportion of students believe that effort and intelligence play a big role in the language learning process, which is 46.20%. The votes for males are less (15.40%), while there is a majority

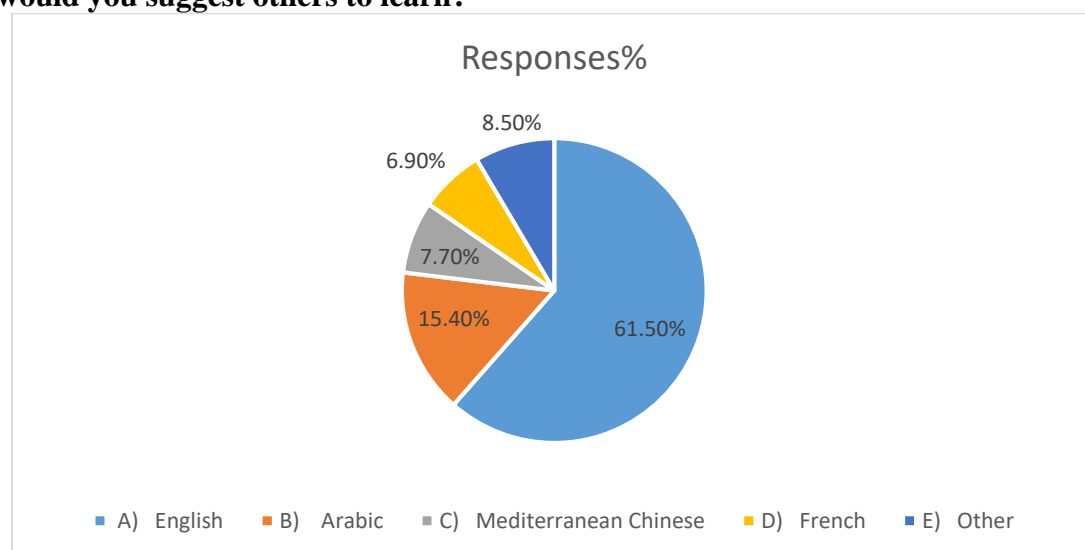
which believes that females are better (32.30%). And (4.60%) chose the option (D), which says both males and females are good. Last for (1.50%) of students, it is something else.

### 1.6., How do you want to learn English?



It shows that (43.10%) of students prefer to start language learning from the root principles, which is quite a big ratio. A smaller proportion of students believe that grammar is difficult (3.80%). On the other hand, 38.50% is also a great number of students who chose both options a&b.

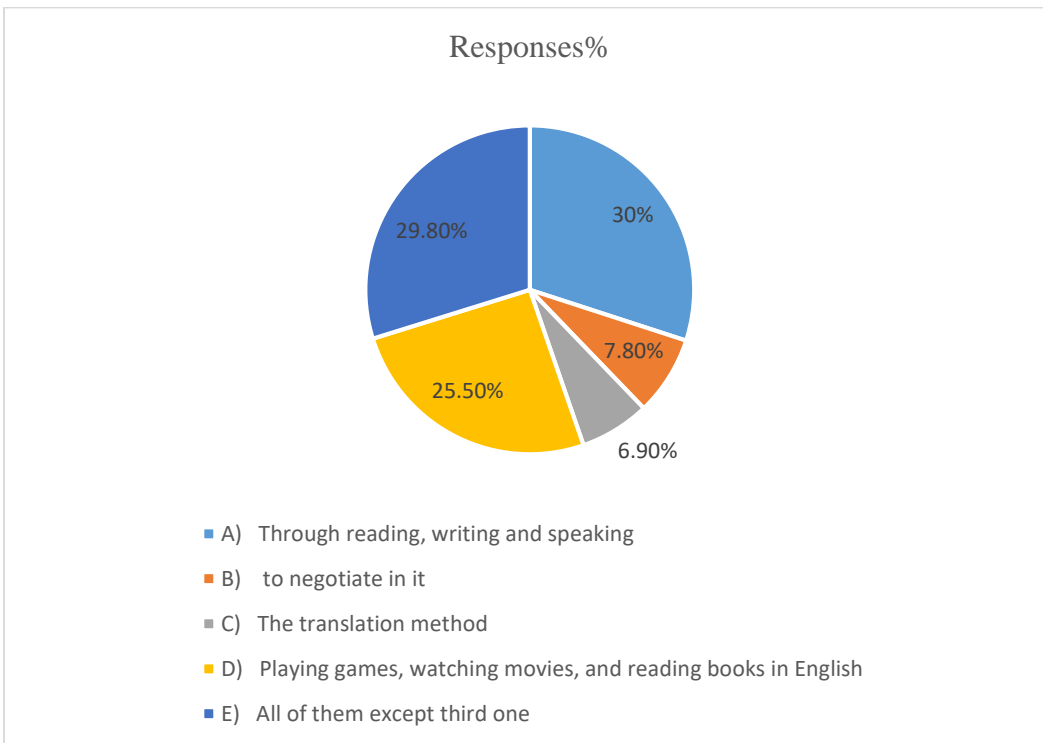
### 1.7. Among so many languages as French, Mandarin Chinese, English and Arabic, what would you suggest others to learn?



The responses show that (61.50%) students suggested English, however, there are suggestions for other languages, Arabic (15.40%), French (6.90%), Mandarin Chinese (15.40%), too but English is highly suggested. There is a small proportion (8.50%) which did not suggest anything.

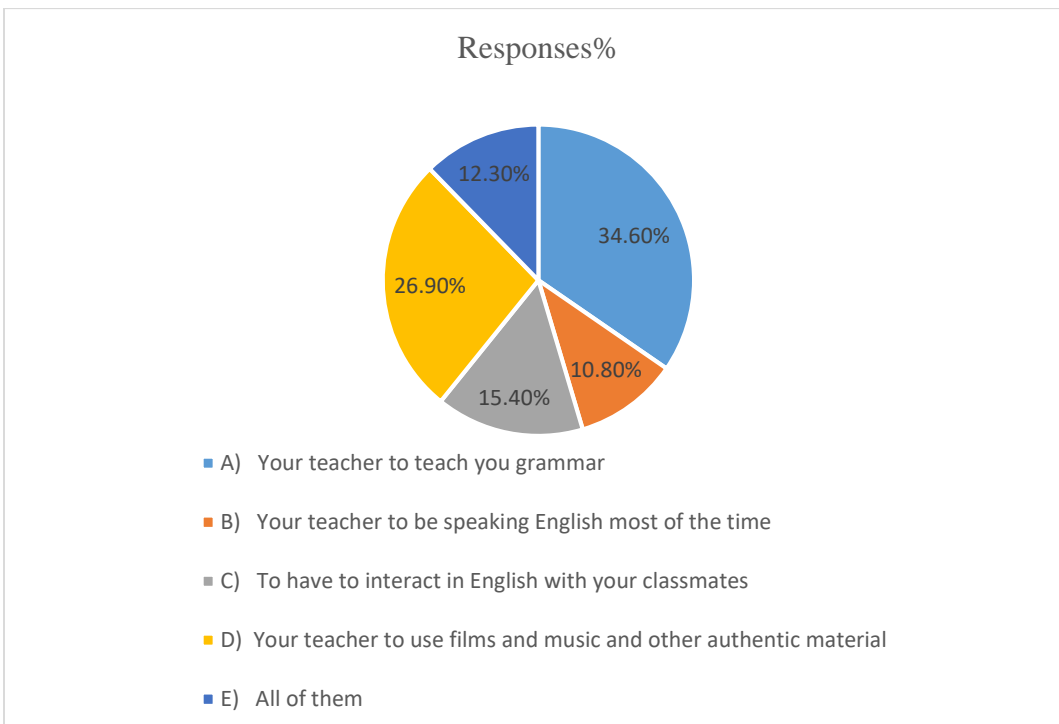


### 1.8., What do you believe which method is best for learning English?



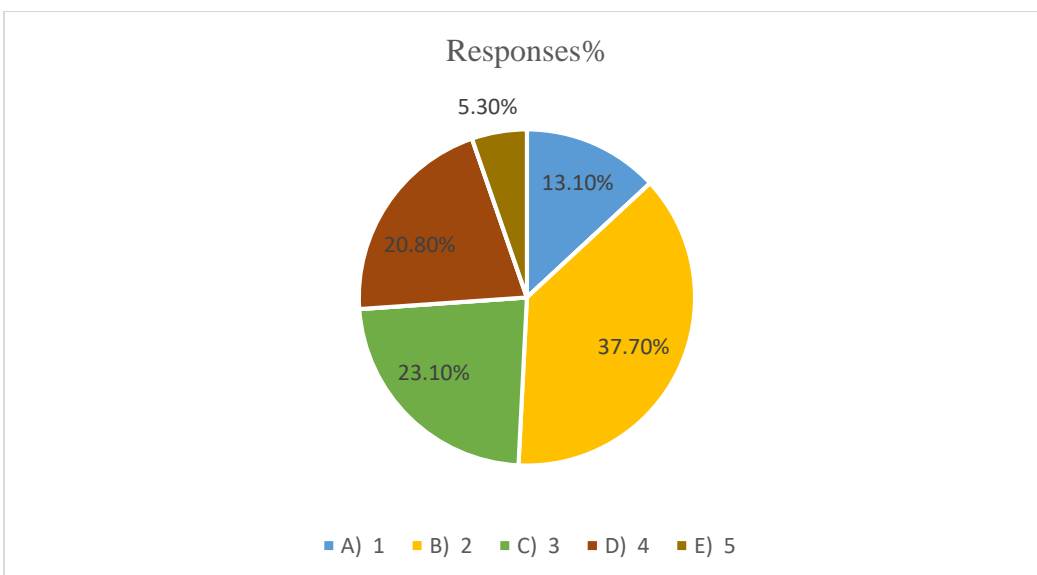
The results describe the percentage of the best method for learning English according to students. A massive percentage voted for option (A), which is reading, writing, and speaking, (30%) students chose option (E), which shows the inclusion of every method except the translation one. The third big percentage is (25.50%), which includes methods like games, movies and book reading. Well, there is a small percentage of students who chose the translation method too (6.90%).

### 1.9., what are your expectations from your teachers in an English class



From the results it is clear grammar teaching is (34.60%), for teacher to be speaking English most of the time is (10.80%), to have to interact in English with your classmates is (15.40%), teacher to be using films and music and other authentic material is (26.90%) and (12.30%) students chose all of them.

#### 1.10., On a scale from 1 to 5, how much are you satisfied with your English Classes?



(13.10%) Students rated their English classes as follows: 1 out of 5 (37.70%), 2 (23.10%), 3 (20.80%), 4 (20.80%), and 5 (5.30%).

## **Finding and Discussion**

The findings of this study reveal several key insights into the attitudes of students at the University of Bhimber toward English language learning. Overall, the students demonstrate a strong desire to learn English, perceiving it as highly useful for academic, professional, and personal development. This utility-driven motivation suggests a pragmatic orientation toward language learning.

Despite this enthusiasm, students expressed dissatisfaction with current teaching methodologies. A significant concern is that English classes are not engaging or effective, with students emphasizing the need for more focused instruction, particularly in grammar. Grammar emerged as a central expectation from teachers, indicating a preference for structure and rules over communicative immersion. Unlike the widespread belief that speaking English in class is essential, Bhimber students place greater importance on mastering grammar, with speaking considered a secondary need.

Students also highlighted the value of reading, writing, and exposure to English through music, films, and other media. Their academic background in English literature naturally necessitates comprehensive reading and writing, which in turn reinforces the demand for a strong grammatical foundation. The repeated emphasis on grammar and vocabulary suggests that foundational gaps remain, possibly due to the inefficacy of traditional translation-based methods. These methods, often rooted in translating from Urdu to English, fail to align with the linguistic structure of English, thereby limiting students' ability to internalize core grammatical concepts like tenses, articles, and parts of speech.

Interestingly, students rejected gender-based stereotypes about language proficiency. They attributed language acquisition success to individual effort and cognitive ability rather than gender, signaling a more progressive and merit-based perspective.

When comparing these findings with other international studies, both similarities and cultural distinctions emerge. Santipolo (2015), studying Italian secondary school students, found that while most students regarded English as useful and somewhat enjoyable, they expressed less interest in grammar, favoring immersive and communicative teaching. This contrasts with Bhimber students' strong focus on grammar instruction. Italian students prioritized cultural knowledge and classroom interaction in English, while Bhimber students emphasized grammatical competence as a gateway to academic and professional achievement. This divergence may stem from different educational systems and sociocultural contexts. Italy, with its established cultural identity and developed infrastructure, was never colonized by Britain, whereas Pakistan, a postcolonial state, faces systemic challenges, limited access to English resources, and fewer global opportunities. These factors likely shape learners' perceptions of English.

A similar perspective was observed by Ahmed (2015), who studied business students in Malaysia. His findings closely mirrored those in the present study: students valued reading, writing, speaking, and grammar as essential skills, and recognised English as a tool for accessing job opportunities and academic success. The resemblance between students in Malaysia and Pakistan may partly be attributed to their shared colonial past and similar trajectories in reclaiming national identity post-independence.

Pazaver and Wang (2009) further enrich this discussion through their study of Asian students in an ESL course in Canada. Despite originating from similar cultural and educational backgrounds, the students held diverse views on grammar-focused instruction. Chinese students, for example, reported having learned extensive grammar in their home country and were now inclined to focus on speaking and communicative skills. Conversely, some students still regarded grammar as essential, especially for writing and clear communication. This complexity highlights that even within homogeneous groups, perceptions of language learning evolve based on prior exposure, needs, and learning environments.

In our study, students at Bhimber emphasized grammar learning more strongly than their Chinese counterparts. The likely reason is the absence of an English-speaking environment. Without real-life exposure, Bhimber students view grammar as a necessary substitute for natural acquisition. This underscores the importance of contextual learning—students immersed in English-dominant settings rely less on formal grammar instruction, while those in EFL contexts feel the need for explicit grammar teaching to compensate for the lack of environmental exposure.

Bernat and Lloyd (2007) examined gender-based beliefs about language learning among EFL learners and found that both males and females generally held similar views, except for two areas: the link between intelligence and multilingualism (perceived stronger among females) and willingness to speak with native speakers (higher among males). However, in the present study, Bhimber students attributed language proficiency to personal effort and intelligence, not gender, again reinforcing a belief in individual agency over sociocultural stereotypes.

In summary, this discussion highlights the centrality of grammar in the perception of English learning among Bhimber university students, shaped by their educational background, societal context, and limited exposure to immersive English environments. Cross-cultural comparisons reveal both shared goals and culturally driven differences, underscoring the need for context-sensitive pedagogical approaches.

## **Conclusion**

This study attempted to integrate folk linguistics with the domains of language learning and teaching by exploring students' perceptions of English, which functions as a foreign or second language in their context. There exists a direct and significant relationship between teachers' attitudes and students' attitudes in enhancing learning outcomes. When teachers hold a positive attitude toward the language they teach, it naturally motivates students. Similarly, when students show genuine interest in learning, the process becomes faster and more effective.

The findings indicate that students exhibit a strong enthusiasm for learning English and consider it highly valuable. However, their preferred methods of learning and the aspects they focus on differ somewhat from those of their teachers. Teachers in the study demonstrated a sense of professionalism, purpose, and dedication to their work. The perspectives of the students are shaped by their educational, economic, and cultural backgrounds. English is included in the curriculum, but it is generally taught by non-native speakers. English is more commonly used by the elite class, who typically attend well-resourced private schools with better exposure to the language. In contrast, students in government institutions—and the teachers who serve them—often lack access to sufficient resources and opportunities for language exposure, which places them at a disadvantage. This research employed a folk linguistic approach to uncover how people perceive and relate to language in their everyday experiences. By examining the beliefs of students and teachers, the study aims to support both groups in improving the teaching and learning experience. Furthermore, it provides valuable insights for school administrators and future researchers by identifying gaps and opportunities that can lead to more effective language instruction and educational reforms.

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