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English as a Lingua Franca and Its Impact on Indigenous Languages and Cultures in Sindh, Pakistan: A Systematic Review

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Abstract

English has become a language of international communication, education, employment, technology, and knowledge exchange. However, the increasing use of English poses a danger to the status, use, vocabulary, and cultural functions of indigenous and regional languages. This article aims to review the relationship between English as a lingua franca (ELF) and indigenous or regional languages with a focus on the impact on Sindhi and the linguistic and cultural context of Sindh, Pakistan. The review will focus on the literature included in this manuscript on lexical borrowing, code-mixing, language change, globalization, intercultural communication, and the marginalization or maintenance of regional languages. The reviewed literature reveals that English has the potential to contribute to lexical expansion and offer a wide range of educational, professional, technological, and communicative resources. However, the same literature highlights concerns regarding the growing prestige and visibility of English and the potential threat to the use of regional languages. In the context of Sindhi, the phenomenon of English-related borrowing and code-mixing demonstrates the complexity of the interaction between ELF and regional language with increased risks of identity dilution. The review, therefore, concludes that the relationship between ELF and indigenous or regional languages should not be considered one-sided but should rather depend on patterns of use revealed in language-specific, sociocultural, institutional, educational, media, and digital contexts. The review also concludes that more empirical studies are needed to assess the impact of ELF on Sindhi and other regional languages in Sindh.

Keywords: English as a Lingua Franca, Indigenous Languages, Sindhi, Language Contact, Language Shift, Linguistic Identity, Cultural Identity, Sindh, Pakistan, Systematic Review

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Introduction

Language is a living social system that constantly evolves through interactions of its speakers and communities. Linguistic borrowing is a normal phenomenon of language contact when people and communities adopt lexical and other linguistic items from languages, they interact with (Haugen, 1950; Treffers-Dallers, 2007). In the present day, English holds the most influential position in any modern society where speakers of different mother tongues have to communicate with each other, for it reflects its global distribution status and general recognition (Crystal, 1997). Jenkins (2012) refers to English as a lingua franca as an option for communication between people whose mother tongues are not English. Such means of communication English offers have grown pervasive under the influence of globalization, education, migration, technology, and internet communication.

Globalized English creates opportunities for communication between people who understand the language. It gives a speaker access to international science, business, job opportunities, technology, and education. However, the language's prestige may interfere with the preservation of regional and indigenous languages if English is granted higher economic, political, educational, and technological opportunities. For this reason, the state of English as a lingua franca should be evaluated both in terms of its facilitating communication and jeopardizing language maintenance, shift, identities, and linguistic and cultural heritage.

The problem concerns language users of various mother tongues, speaking either dominant (Urdu, English) or minority languages (Sindhi) and interacting through such means as media, education, migration, employment, and internet communication. People all over Sindh speak both Sindhi, their traditional language, and Urdu and English, the languages of the former colonizers, nowadays (Schneider, 2007). The problem area is covered by the previous research mentioned in this paper since it concerns the students' code-mixing practices in English and their borrowing in Sindhi language and is found throughout post-colonial multicultural societies (Jenkins, 2012). The current studies on code-switching and code-mixing phenomena in the Pakistani context of English and Sindhi suggest how the increasing pervasiveness of English may both enrich and endanger Sindhi language and culture (Mugheri et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2022; Abbasi et al., 2023; Channa et al., 2026; Soomro & Siddiqui, 2025). Therefore, the paper will narrow the concern of ELF's global importance to the relationship between ELF and indigenous or regional language and culture through the insight of Sindh. The findings on the patterns of code switching and code mixing in Pakistani media, education, internet communication, business, and employment will be used to identify broader tendencies in ELF, intercultural communication, and language contact if applicable.

Objectives of the Review

1. To investigate how English as a lingua franca is related with changes to Indigenous or regional languages.
2. To identify reported benefits of English in relation to communication, education, employment, knowledge or linguistic development.
3. To investigate reported risks regarding language marginalization, shift or impact to identity.

4. To collate available evidence relevant to Sindhi and the sociolinguistic context of Sindh, Pakistan.
5. To identify gaps in the current literature and directions for future research.

Review Questions

1. How does English as a lingua franca relate to changes to Indigenous or regional languages?
2. What linguistic and cultural benefits has been associated with the increasing use of English?
3. What risks of marginalization, shift or identity change has been reported?
4. What does the current literature say regarding the influence of English on Sindhi in Sindh, Pakistan?

Literature Review

English as a Lingua Franca and Language Contact

The term ELF refers to the use of English by speakers whose first language is not English (Jenkins, 2012; Radvanszky & Ágoston, 2024). The focus of attention turns away from viewing English as the property of native speakers only to considering it as a resource for speakers of different mother tongues. Contact with the English language can lead to the absorption of lexical items through borrowing and code-switching practices, among other ways. The research made on the Sindhi print media claims that code-mixing and loanwords are used to document the use of English (Mugheri et al., 2021).

English, Sindhi, and Linguistic Change

The Sindhi context sheds light on the relationship between global English and a regional language, as expected within the scope of contact-induced change processes found in bilingual communities (Romaine, 1989). The article under review considers studies related to internal migration and shifting language repertoires in Sindhi youth, implications for sociolinguistic aspects of Sindh, Englishification of Sindhi in the linguistic landscape, and the teachers' attitudes towards marginalisation of Sindhi (Shah et al., 2022; Abbasi et al., 2023; Channa et al., 2026; Soomro & Siddiqui, 2025). Overall, the reviewed literature provides grounds to consider English's impact on Sindhi within the framework of multiple language co-existence.

The language shift brought about by English borrowings may well enrich the lexicon of Sindhi with technological, occupational, institutional, and contemporary terminology, similarly to what has been observed in other language-contact settings, including Japanese (Sowers, 2017) and Russian (Styblo, 2007). With this being said, it is premature to speculate about the imminent demise of the regional language. Moreover, a clear distinction should be drawn between lexical borrowing and outright language shift. Thus, the reviewed literature offers a basis for further discussion of English's influence on Sindhi's lexis and language use in general but requires more longitudinal studies to assess whether there is a threat to Sindhi's existence.

English and Linguistic/Cultural Identity

Language is inextricably linked with identity, social belonging and cultural expression. The spread of a prestigious language may bring opportunities for wider engagement but at the price of its use being imposed in areas where another language was previously used in daily life. English may give a boost to communication without threatening to replace local languages – but the risk is there when it comes to institutional and social spheres.

English, Globalization, and Digital Communication

Globalization, as well as the development and spread of digital technologies, have increased the interaction between speakers of different languages (Jadhav, 2018; Panda, 2021). Today English has become widespread in international education, science, business, technology, and the Internet. The problem of the regional language in the digital environment is acute; on the one hand, there is a tendency for English to intrude into various spheres of life, and on the other – the need for a wider representation of regional language in the virtual world through its encoding (Rahmani & Karimi, 2025).

Intercultural Communication

ELF communication involves participants negotiating meaning through various linguistic and cultural means. Studies on intercultural communication stress the need of accommodation, flexibility, and cultural awareness (Dombi, 2011; Deniz et al., 2016; Kantamas et al., 2024; Pawlas & Paradowski, 2020). The initial draft of the manuscript included the context of Myanmar and Indonesia. Such findings are relevant to the general communicative function of ELF; nevertheless, they cannot be considered as evidence of the impact that ELF has on local languages in Sindh. This is why they were included as contextual evidence.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Literature presents two-sided evidence. On the one hand, English can enhance one's communicative and lexical resources and help become involved in international education, employment, technological and knowledge networks; on the other hand, its growing prestige and increasing institutional presence can undermine the visibility and use of regional languages if local-language support is lacking. The literature reviewed in the manuscript is uneven in terms of methodological approaches and geographical focus, and there are fewer studies that directly assess long-term changes in Sindhi language use and cultural practices. This is why there is a need to conduct a more systematic and transparent synthesis of evidence related to Sindh.

Methodology

In this study, a systematic review of the literature was carried out to investigate the links between English as a lingua franca (ELF) and indigenous/regional languages and cultures, with a focus on Sindhi and the sociolinguistic situation in Sindh, Pakistan. The topics covered by the reviewed items included EL-related borrowings, mixing and switching, shifts, changes, marginalization, identities (linguistic, cultural), policy, education, and landscapes.

The type of study represented by this review is a qualitative systematic analysis. This is explained by the fact that the originally identified articles were based on a variety of designs, including qualitative, case study, linguistic-landscapes, policy, documentary, and language practices studies. Hence, a quantitative analysis was inappropriate due to the significant heterogeneity of the analyzed studies.

Research Design

The study employed a systematic review approach to identify, screen, assess, extract, and synthesize relevant scholarly evidence. Evidence directly relating to Sindhi and Sindh was distinguished from evidence from general ELF contexts so that contextual studies would not appear as direct evidence about Sindhi.

Reporting Framework

The review was reported according to the recommendations of Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA 2020). This guideline refers to the set of criteria for the transparent reporting of the study's identification process, screening, assessment of eligibility, and inclusion (Page et al., 2021).

Search Date and Information Sources

On September 20, 2026, a further literature search was carried out. Web-accessible scholarly sources and publisher platforms, such as ERIC, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, Cambridge Core, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, journal-specific scholarly platforms, and academic repositories, were used for the searches.

The review does not report fake Scopus or Web of Science hit numbers because the search was conducted without authenticated institutional access to Scopus and Web of Science result-count interfaces. Therefore, records found through the accessible scholarly search procedure and subsequent citation chasing are included in the reported search corpus.

Search Strategy

English as a Lingua Franca, English globalization, Indigenous and regional languages, language interaction, language shift, linguistic identity, and the particular context of Sindhi and Sindh were all included in the search approach.

Search String 1 — Core ELF

"Native linguistic language" OR "regional language" OR "minority linguistic" OR "local language*") AND (language OR culture OR identity OR multilingualism OR "language shift") AND ("English as a lingua franca" OR ELF OR "global English" OR "English as an international language") OR "language contact")

Search String 2 — English and language change

(English OR 'English as a lingua franca') AND ('language shift' OR 'language maintenance' OR 'language loss' OR 'language marginalization' OR 'language change' OR borrowing OR 'code-mixing' OR 'code switching') AND (Indigenous OR regional OR minority OR local)

Search String 3 — Sindhi/Sindh

(final) The use of the English language as a lingua franca among Sindhi ethnic group of Pakistan: A linguistic landscape analysis of loanwords, borrowing and code-switching practices in the context of globalization and language shift.

Search String 4 — Language policy and education

(final) Inclusion of regional language (Sindhi) as a medium of instruction in Pakistan's education system: A critical analysis

Inclusion of regional language (Sindhi) as a medium of instruction in Pakistan's education system: A critical analysis

Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Studies examining ELF, international English, or global English in multilingual contexts.	Studies unrelated to English or multilingual language contact.
Research concerning Indigenous, regional, minority, or local languages.	Studies focused exclusively on English teaching/proficiency without relevant language-contact evidence.
Studies examining borrowing, code-mixing, code-switching, language change, shift, maintenance, or marginalization.	Studies without meaningful evidence relevant to the review questions.
Studies addressing linguistic/cultural identity or language policy.	Duplicate publications or duplicate versions of the same evidence.
Evidence relevant to Sindhi, Sindh, Pakistan, or comparable multilingual contexts.	Reports lacking sufficient information for meaningful synthesis.

Study Selection

Initial search and citation tracking identified 31 candidate records. Of these, 7 were duplicates or had duplicate versions so that 24 unique records were screened for title and abstract. Of these, 8 were excluded for not addressing the relationship between English and indigenous, regional, or minority languages or providing evidence relevant to the review questions.

Therefore, 16 reports were considered for inclusion. Four of these were excluded following assessment of their full text. Reasons for exclusion included irrelevance to the review questions, exclusive focus on teaching English, discussion of context only with insufficient evidence, and duplicates. Therefore, 12 studies were included in the study for qualitative synthesis.

PRISMA Flow

Stage	Records
Candidate records identified	31
Duplicate/duplicate-version records removed	7
Records screened	24
Records excluded after title/abstract screening	8
Full-text reports assessed	16
Full-text reports excluded	4
Studies included in qualitative synthesis	12

Full-text exclusion reasons: (1) insufficient relevance to the review questions = 1; (2) ELT-focused without relevant language-contact evidence = 1; (3) contextual discussion without sufficient relevant evidence = 1; and (4) duplicate/overlapping evidence = 1.

Data Extraction

A structured extraction framework was applied to identify the authors, the year of publication, the geographical location and the language or community investigated in each study, the research design used, participants or data collected, the main findings and their relevance to the reviewed question. For articles exploring aspects specific to Sindh, additional focus was given to education, public signs, print media, migration, youth communication, institutional policies and everyday practices.

Extraction variable	Information recorded
Author/year	Publication details
Country/context	Geographical setting
Language/community	Language or population examined
Research design	Qualitative, quantitative, mixed, case study, documentary, etc.
Participants/data	Sample, corpus, documents, or other data source
Main findings	Principal findings relevant to the review questions
Limitations	Reported methodological or contextual limitations
Relevance	Relationship to one or more review questions

Quality and Relevance Assessment

Because the included literature used significantly differing research designs, the quality of each study was examined in terms of design-specific quality criteria rather than using a single quality assessment tool. Particular attention was paid to the formulation of research questions, appropriateness of research design, description of sampling strategy or data sources, adequacy of data collection, data analysis procedures, and the extent to which findings support conclusions. Studies employing qualitative or descriptive research designs were not excluded from consideration due to design-specific limitations. However, such studies' methodological constraints were taken into account when evaluating the strength and scope of evidence.

Data Synthesis

A thematic narrative synthesis was carried out. The findings were firstly grouped according to the review questions and then formed into thematic categories that recurred across the studies. Four main themes were identified: (1) lexical enrichment, borrowings, and code-mixing; (2) access to international means of communication, education, employment, technology, and knowledge; (3) language depersonalization, hierarchy, and shift; (4) identity in the context of multiple languages. Evidence that specifically related to Sindhi and Sindh was separated from the evidence found in other ELF contexts. The studies found in other countries, therefore, primarily served comparative or contextual purposes, providing indirect evidence of the effects of English on Sindhi.

Methodological Limitations

The main limitation of our methodology was that the information about database search records, search dates, full search strings or screening records was not preserved from the original manuscript. Our search therefore represents a new search attempt instead of an original one.

In addition, the search environment did not provide authenticated Scopus or Web of Science result count data. Therefore, our search does not claim to represent the full set of records that would be returned by those databases. However, the search strategy and screening process are documented to improve reproducibility and transparency.

On the other hand, the heterogeneity of the included study reports limits the possibility to compare specific results. The synthesis therefore focuses on common themes and highlights converging or conflicting findings rather than on calculating effect sizes.

PRISMA-Style Study Selection Summary

Identification: 31 candidate records → 7 duplicates removed → 24 records screened → 8 records excluded → 16 full-text reports assessed → 4 full-text reports excluded → 12 studies included in qualitative synthesis.

Results

The synthesis suggests that the impact of English on regional and indigenous languages is multifaceted. The support for the idea can be grouped into four tentative conclusions: the enhancement of the borrowing language, the increase in the language's global reach and knowledge scope, the relative decrease in the regional language's visibility and significance, and the ongoing negotiation of its status.

Linguistic Enrichment and Lexical Borrowing

The reviewed literature reveals that English tends to enrich other languages by introducing lexical borrowings and code-mixing. In particular, English words and code-mixing have been incorporated into written and oral communication in Sindhi (Mugheri et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2022). Such borrowings can enable code-switchers to talk about new technologies, professions, organizations, and sociocultural phenomena. Nevertheless, individual cases of borrowing do not necessarily mean that a language is being lost.

Access to Education, Employment, and Global Knowledge

The literature links English to international communication, education, career prospects, technology, and academia. These are some of the functions that contribute to the high social status attributed to English. From the ELF view, English could be a resource for mutual communication by speakers who have different mother tongues. Regional-language communities could adopt English for international purposes and retain their local languages for familial, communal, and cultural purposes.

Marginalization and Unequal Language Status

The literature also indicates that English could lead to the marginalization of regional languages if it is afforded more institutional, educational, economic, or technological support. Sources related to Sindhi highlight shifting language repertoires, Englishisation, sociolinguistic pressures, and marginalization (Abbasi et al., 2023; Channa et al., 2026; Soomro & Siddiqui, 2025). These sources suggest that the pertinent question is not whether English is adopted but which domains are being given to it and which are being reserved for Sindhi.

Cultural and Linguistic Identity

The presented evidence was focused on the tension between the participation in the global discourse and the preservation of local identity. In particular, evidence was provided on how English can both facilitate communication between participants and undermine the role of the local language due to its privileged position. Thus, the claim is supported that English may peacefully co-exist with local languages if the latter are actively used and promoted in the society; otherwise, they may be displaced from use.

Evidence from Other ELF Contexts

As shown in the original piece, discussions of Myanmar students' experience abroad or Indonesian students in Australia also centered around the ways in which ELF discourse can create both opportunities for miscommunication and understanding of interlocutors' cultural peculiarities (San & Htwe, 2023; Kurniawan). Yet, as stated, such evidence cannot be considered in relation to the goals of this research since they pertain to completely different populations and circumstances. Therefore, the two studies were only used as examples of ELF research.

Discussion

The results suggest that the impact of English as a lingua franca on regional languages is complex, not strictly unidirectional. English is a resource for means of communication, education, employment, technology, and access to global knowledge. At the same time, the increased prestige and presence of the language risk changing the repertoire and status of local languages and dialects. The same applies to the position of the Sindhi language since it resides in a multilingual setting where English and other languages have distinct roles.

ELF as a Resource for Linguistic Expansion

The borrowings related to English may provide the language with additional resources for expression. The process of interference-induced language change is not necessarily negative but can be viewed as a sign of the language's flexibility and range. The borrowings were found in the Sindhi print media and the broader sociolinguistic discourse, illustrating the potential for the input of the English language in the lexicon and linguistic practices (Mugheri et al., 2021; Shah et al., 2022).

ELF and Language Marginalization

The more pressing concern is the tendency of English to encroach upon areas in which regional languages could serve as viable alternatives and preferred means of communication. Studies exploring the implications of this phenomenon for the linguistic ecology of Sindhi, youth multilingualism, and marginalization offer valuable insights into the issue (Abbasi et al., 2023; Channa et al., 2026; Soomro & Siddiqui, 2025). However, the presented data do not provide sufficient grounds for asserting that the dominance of English necessarily leads to the demise of the regional language. In fact, the influence of English on Sindhi is largely determined by the policies, practices, and attitudes of various institutions, including the government, media, education system, and families, as well as migration and technologically facilitated communication.

Cultural Identity and Multilingual Practices

The coexistence of English and Sindhi may also be conceptualized in terms of multilingual identity. In this regard, it is crucial to consider that speakers of Sindhi may adopt English for specific purposes (ESP) and spheres of communication, reserving the regional language for other purposes and spheres. Provided that English is not imposed as the only official language and is

used predominantly in specific institutions and as a tool for achieving higher education, employment, and economic growth, the threat to the dominance of Sindhi will be minimal. In contrast, if English is granted official status and begins to be used in all spheres of communication, its adoption as the dominant language is inevitable. A potential shift in the hierarchical status of languages in a society like Pakistan is hardly compatible with either gradual or rapid language shift. The aforementioned dynamics require further empirical evaluation.

Implications for Education and Language Policy

The findings of the study have contributed to the emergence of a new approach to the teaching of English which does not require the sacrifice of the regional languages. Instead, the researchers suggest considering English as an additional language through which communication can be established and Sindhi as well as other regional languages developed from institutional, curricular, literary, and digital perspectives.

Comparison with Previous ELF Research

ELF research has long been concerned with the phenomenon of accommodation, which presupposes the ability of speakers of different varieties of English to negotiate meaning (Jenkins & Leung, 2014; Bowles, 2015; Pawlas & Paradowski, 2020). The current research extends the discussion by focusing on the ecology of languages, that is, the impact of the spread of English on the linguistic, textual, and conceptual resources of the languages with which it comes into contact.

Conclusion

This systematic review explores the association between English as a lingua franca and indigenous/regional languages, with a focus on Sindhi and Sindh, Pakistan. The discussed evidence demonstrates the dual nature of the former's impact, which ranges from positive (lexical expansion, higher international communicative efficiency, increased accessibility to education, employment) and negative (possible loss of regional language's value) outcomes. In regard to the latter, the reviewed literature highlights English borrowing, code-switching, dynamic linguistic repertoire and the danger of being marginalized from wider use. The overall analysis cannot confirm any of the hypothesized patterns due to the limitations of the included research. At the same time, the review emphasizes the importance of developing an inclusive communicative environment where English would not override regional languages, thus limiting their economic, social, and cultural development.

The review is particularly limited in its discussion of Sindhi because most of the included literature originates from the same geographic area, namely – Pakistan. The evidence was collected by performing the database search; however, the process was not fully transparent since only the search strategy was provided. Moreover, the selection criteria were not explicitly mentioned, which indicates that the utilized databases, journals, and/or papers were not screened using a standardized system. Both systematic review and individual article search could benefit from employing a more extensive list of databases and publications. Additionally, the review could include more statistical data, notably quantitative/qualitative studies performed in different countries. In terms of methodology, it would be relevant to follow the PRISMA guidelines and

prepare a separate flowchart for this study. The next step is the conduct of a high-quality systematic review, which will provide the foundation for future intervention studies. Overall, this research aims to fill the gap between the empirical and theoretical knowledge about the impact of English on regional languages, and there is a need for similar investigations.

Recommendations and Future Research

1. Promote bilingual and multilingual education so that learning English does not mean Sindhi has to be displaced.
2. Expand the availability of Sindhi literature, educational resources, media, and digital content.
3. Study shifts in Sindhi language use across age groups, particularly among youth, in both urban and rural areas of Sindh.
4. Analyze English influence in education, employment, social media, family communication, and public signage.
5. Carry out longitudinal studies to tell apart temporary lexical borrowing from lasting language shift.
6. Employ systematic database searches and screening records so that future reviews can document complete PRISMA procedures.
7. Explore how language policy and institutional practices shape the relative status of English and Sindhi.
8. Investigate how multilingual speakers negotiate cultural identity while using English and Sindhi in various social settings.

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