



## SOCIAL DIALECTS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A STUDY OF PRIMARY LEVEL ESL LEARNERS

**Syed Tahir ul Amin**

*Assistant Lecturer, Department of English, University of Gujrat*

Email: [tahir-ul-amin@uog.edu.pk](mailto:tahir-ul-amin@uog.edu.pk)

**Raza-E- Mustafa (Corresponding Author)**

*Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat*

Email: [razaemustafa@uog.edu.pk](mailto:razaemustafa@uog.edu.pk)

### **Abstract**

*The study investigates how social dialects affect second language acquisition in primary level ESL learners. The research examines teachers' perceptions of how social dialects affect English language learning in the classroom. A quantitative research design was employed and data was collected through a structured questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed using frequency tables and graphical representations to identify trends and patterns. The findings indicate that social dialects have a significant impact on learners' progress and class participation. It has also been concluded that learners' social and linguistic background influence their confidence and overall performance. The study suggests the need for greater awareness of social dialect variation in primary ESL classrooms and recommends adopting inclusive and dialect sensitive teaching strategies to enhance effective second language acquisition.*

**Keywords:** Social Dialect, SLA, Pakistani Learners

### **1. Introduction**

According to Trudgill (1992) dialect is a speech variety spoken in a particular area of a country or by speakers of different social classes and it is distinguished by pronunciation, grammar or vocabulary which does not match the standard variety of the language. Trudgill (2003) further explains that a sociolect, on the other hand, is a social dialect (speech variety) spoken by different social classes like, working class middle class or upper-class. Similarly, the language of adolescents is different from the language of the elders. The use of vocabulary by young and elder speakers is quite different. Yule (2010) says that people belonging to different fields and professions possess their own language and vocabulary. We use different dialects in our society and these dialects are different from the dialects spoken in other societies. There are different dialects of Punjabi e.g. Majhi, Shahpuri, Hindko, Malwi, Doabi, etc. Punjabi that is used at home is also different from Punjabi that is used outside. These different dialects affect L2 acquisition. We cannot learn a second language because of some difficulties. Most of the students cannot understand English. It is easier for them to understand things in Urdu than in English. We can divide learners learning a second language at primary level in two different categories. According to Labov (1972) Social dialects affect differently these two types of learners. One is that who learn second language effectively and the other who learn second language slowly in the same speech community.

#### **1.1 Objectives**

- To highlight the role of L1 language in learning a second language.
- To provide a base for importance of teaching English as a second language L2 at the Primary level in Pakistan;



- To know the problems faced by L2 learners and teachers in the classroom.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- What are the problems faced by L2 learners and teachers in the classroom?
- How does L1 affect learners in learning a second language?
- What is the importance of teaching English as a second language at primary level?

### 1.3 Significance of the Study

This study is significant to increase awareness of the process of L2 acquisition and enhance efficiency in L2 acquisition. It is also important in a way to give some valuable suggestions for the improvement of second language teaching and learning process and to point out negative effects of first language suggesting some ways how to avoid these effects or to use them positively in classroom by involving the students in different activities. It points out how social dialects are helpful in learning L2 language and where they create problems/hindrances in learning L2. The language teachers as well as researchers would also get benefits from this research. They will be able to know the importance of L2 language and how L1 creates problems in L2 acquisition. The study will also be helpful for Curriculum planners, syllabus designers, teacher trainers and administrators.

## 2. Literature Review

Longman dictionary (2010) states that dialect is a form of speech peculiar to a particular region. It is different in vocabulary, pronunciation or grammar of the standard variety of language. In other words, variation of a language from region to region is called dialect. Here usually grammar of a language is same but difference occurs in vocabulary, pronunciation and grammar. Social dialects are spoken by the members of a particular group or stratum of a speech community. Second language acquisition is the process through which a person learns a second language and develops proficiency in it. It can be termed as a scientific discipline which studies that process. This process is often investigated with the expectation that information about it can be helpful in language teaching. Longman dictionary (2010) also states that in the beginning, the term second language acquisition was used by the researchers in the USA and they were interested in investigating the discourse of second language learners. They were also interested in knowing not only the development of syntax and phonology in second language learners but also other aspects of language development. After learning first language, we can term any language as a second language that we learn.

According to some learners, the acquisition with an L2 is totally different from their L1 experience. They have to learn L2 in their teenage when they spend a few hours of the week in their studies and spend most of the time in enjoying, playing, singing, dancing along with other routine activities of life using their L1. Mustafa, Amin and Sheikh (2025) claim that behavior is a crucial component in learning a second language. If a child has a favorable behavior towards learning a second language, he will show interest and give priority to use second language in speech and writing most of the time. Fatima, Mustafa and Amin (2025) opine that a child can learn a second language rapidly and effectively if the teacher uses L1 also in the class to make concepts of the learners clear and to create their interest in learning a second language.



Therefore, L1 acts like a facilitator for the children who are learning a second language. There is another reality that some people can achieve proficiency in the written language but they show poor performance in spoken language. It is easy to learn vocabulary and grammar of L2 as compared to other features of the same language. When a child reaches at the age of twenty or above, it seems to him a difficult task to acquire another language as easily as he acquired first language. It has often been seen that the learners are quicker and more active. L2 learners when they are teenagers. The reason is that affective learning of an L2 requires a combination of factors.

### 2.1 Difference between L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> Acquisition

(Ellis, 1994 Based on Bley- Vroman 1988):

Features	L <sub>1</sub> Acquisition	L <sub>2</sub> (Foreign Lang.) Acquisition	VC's Objections
1) Overall Success	Children's proficiency in L1	Adults are unable to achieve proficiency completely	Proficiency is analyzed in terms of what a monolingual native speaker achieves.
2) General Failure	Fully proficient.	Full proficiency is difficult.	
3) Variation	Slight variation in achievement.	L <sub>2</sub> learners show variation in achieving proficiency	
4) Goals	Competence in language.	L <sub>2</sub> learners show satisfaction with a little success instead of full proficiency	
5) Fossilization	Unknown.	Back to previous achievement.	L <sub>2</sub> learners also have L <sub>1</sub> attrition
6) Intuitions	Child shows vivid knowledge in correction.	L <sub>2</sub> learners lack correction ability	Bilinguals are better than monolinguals
7) Instruction	No requirement	Essential or beneficial	All depends
8) Negative evidence	No need for correction	Correction essential	Correction is linked with acquisition ideas
9) Affective factors	No involvement.	Crucial role in learning achievements.	Measurement contrary to monolinguals



All students acquiring English or other language pass through these stages.

Stage – I	Stage – II	Stage – III	Stage – IV
Production (First 3 month of L2 exposure)	Initial progress (3-6)	Speech mergence (6 months – 2 years)	Fluency (2-3 years)
Focus on learners' comprehension	Focus on understanding 1-3 word phrases	Fully understanding. Use of simple sentences. More use of vocabulary. Making grammar errors	Full understanding. Effective communication ability. Better use of vocabulary • Few grammatical errors
Goals Oral responses Yes-no responses. Use of single words.	Use of phrases. Using names of things. • Choral responses Asking questions.	Recalling. Giving information. Explanations. Comparisons. Sequencing. Busy in dialogues.	Prediction. Narration. Description. Summarization. Giving options. Discussions.
Goals: Proficiency in writing. Drawings. Graphic designs.	Drawings. Copying. Groups and labels. Clear statements.	Writing everything. Drawing.	Creativity and Proficiency in writing.
Goals: Physical activities. Pointing. Circling. Selection of items Matching abilities.	• Pointing • Selecting • Matching • Construction Mine/ acting out responses	Demonstration. Construction. Acting. Cooperative group tasks	Demonstration. Construction. Role-playing. Cooperation. Group work and presentations.

Chomsky (1965) was of the opinion that the human brain has not enough rules to organize language. It is also a common belief that languages have a common structural basis. This is called universal grammar. Chomsky states that children have the ability to create and produce sentences even without imitating utterances of their elders just because of internalizing rules of language. Chomsky claims that children have an innate faculty which helps them in learning a language. (Mitchell and Myles, 2004). Chomsky believed that there are basic rules in common among all humans. He held that there was a universal grammar existed into the brain of all humans and so children produce their language according to the universal grammar as a support structure (Chomsky, 2000: 5). The Universal Grammar model claims that a lot of principles which are the common features of all languages and parameters and differences are built into the human mind and they control the shape human language can take (Chomsky, 1986a). The UG model emphasizes on learners' minds and if language



takes any form in the human mind is very significant. It was an established fact that learners have some kind of built-in syllabus for learning the grammar of a language.

### **2.2 Interference of First Language in Second Language Acquisition**

The focus of the present study is to analyze what role the first language (L1) plays on the functioning of a second language (L2). After reviewing the above mentioned studies it has been concluded that the first language interferes in the acquisition of the second language. It was estimated in Cross cultural studies that Asian students (Chinese, Indian and Korean) had to face more difficulty in English phonological awareness tasks than native English speaking students and it was based on the following reasons:

- While learning second language (L2) alphabetical shapes and structures of first language (L1) would create interference;
- In schools, teachers might not appropriately make them do practices or exercises in the Acquiring (L2) language;

Medium of instruction and communication in schools or colleges are mostly held in first language. Therefore, they do not get enough exposure to acquire language. Monolingual and bilingual students were compared with respect to grammar awareness, reading comprehension and phonological awareness skills. The result showed that monolinguals students were better in English receptive vocabulary, reading comprehension and writing fluency. Although both the groups were equivalent in awareness of English grammar, phonology, expressive vocabulary, and writing quality. It was concluded that bilinguals in spite of the fact that they have proficiency in two languages (L1 and L2) cannot completely excel the monolinguals in reading-writing related skills. After analyzing the primary variables in a broader way, they proved their contribution in bilingual students' academic and career success (Ransdell, 2003).

It can also be concluded that if a learner undergoes training in learning second language successfully and he gets constant practice in various techniques and trainings, he can speak both languages fluently.

### **3. Research Methodology**

Research has been defined as an organized and a systematic approach to searching for answers to questions. It is the act of gathering new information. This study was conducted to determine effects of social dialect on second language acquisition at primary level. The data was collected properly from teachers of different schools of primary level and analyzed by descriptive statistics. On the basis of finding, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were proposed. The research was descriptive in nature. Researcher collected the data from the different teachers of English at primary level.

#### **3.1 Sampling**

A sample of 15 teachers of primary schools of Gujrat City was selected by using convenient sampling technique. Questionnaire was used as tool of research. On the basis of literature review, a self-constructed questionnaire was developed. All necessary information was collected through questionnaire that was organized and presented in Likert scale. The data collected through questionnaire for the teachers comprised of 15 items. Oral instructions about significance of the study were provided to the teachers to fill the questionnaire. After preparing copies of questionnaire for



teachers of English at primary level, were given to selected teachers carefully. The questionnaires were handed over to each respondent individually. The researcher gave instruction to fill out the questionnaire.

#### 4. Data Analysis

The following section carries the interpretive analysis, descriptive statistics and data visualization. The following table carries the item-wise proportion of responses based on Likert scale data.

**Table 1: proportion of each questionnaire items Based on Likert scale**

Sr No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
1	Do you think L1 affects learning of English as a second language?	0	0	5	85	10
2	Do you think first language influence seems to be strongest in 'acquisition poor' environment?	0	0	15	85	0
3	Do you think L1 influence is strongest in complex word order and word-for-word translation of phrases?	0	0	10	90	0
4	Do you think that the informal environment can be efficiently utilized by children for second language learning?	0	0	10	45	45
5	Do you think words from L1 should be used to teach English as second language in the classroom?	0	40	5	35	20
6	Do you think L2 acquisition is difficult after the age of 30 when L1 habits are more developed?	0	20	20	40	20
7	Do you think students cannot learn English as a second language because their teacher adopts an unprofessional attitude?	0	0	40	50	10
8	Do you think the formal classroom environment creates hindrance for children to acquire English as a second language?	0	30	0	70	0
9	Do you think while learning L2, alphabetical shapes and structures of L1 create interference?	0	20	35	45	0
10	Do you think the medium of	0	0	0	60	40



Sr No.	Statement	Strongly Disagree (%)	Disagree (%)	Neutral (%)	Agree (%)	Strongly Agree (%)
	instruction in schools/colleges is mostly in L1, reducing exposure to English?					
11	Do you think students can learn English as a second language better in childhood?	0	0	40	40	20
12	Do you think a learner's language is influenced by their friend group members?	0	20	0	80	0
13	Do you think old methods of teaching English as a second language create hindrance in learning?	0	20	15	65	0
14	Do you think hindrance created by L1 can be minimized by making L2 teaching activities in classroom?	0	0	5	80	15
15	Do you think L1 creates problems in learning English as a second language?	0	5	60	35	0

**Interpretation**

- Based on q1: There is a highly uniform consensus — 95% believe that the first language (L1) influences the acquisition of English (L2). This indicates that learners are strongly cognizant of L1's impact on English acquisition.
- Based on q2 :Mostly (85%) think L1 interference is more with less exposure to English. Students acknowledge that poor learning environments for learning English enhance L1 impact.
- Based on q3: The majority (90%) concur that grammar and translation problems occur as a result of L1 impact. They observe difficulty when L2 sentence structures contrast with L1.
- Based on q4: 90% concur that informal environments (e.g., playground, home) facilitate children's learning of English more. Students think outside-formal-classroom exposure boosts language acquisition.
- Based on q5: Teachers are split — 55% think so, but 40% don't. This implies no obvious consensus: some welcome limited use of L1 as a teaching device, others believe it takes away from English exposure.
- Based on q6: The majority (60%) concur that age influences L2 learning because of ingrained L1 habits. Students view older people encounter more challenges in acquiring English.
- Based on q7: Approximately 60% concur that teachers' unprofessional behavior (e.g., unsatisfactory teaching methods, unmotivated) affects English learning. Students perceive teacher quality as most important.



- Based on q8: Most (70%) think that the formal setting limits language learning, perhaps because of rigid instruction and less practice with communication.
- Based on q9: Approximately 45% concur and 35% are neutral weak agreement that L1 and L2 writing system differences can lead to confusion. This reflects some awareness but not a high degree of consensus.
- Based on q10: All participants concur (100%) that L1-dominant teaching restricts English exposure. This is perhaps the most robust finding — participants unequivocally perceive L1-dominant education as a hindrance.
- Based on q11: 60% concur that early exposure facilitates learning English. Moderate consensus for the critical period hypothesis for language acquisition.
- Based on q12: 80% concur that peer pressure influences learning English. This demonstrates learners see social interaction as a significant learning factor.
- Based on q13: 65% believe that using old techniques (grammar-translation, memorization) prevents one from learning English. Students like contemporary, communicative approaches to teaching.
- Based on q14: 95% believe that interactive L2 classroom activities aid in minimizing L1 interference. It shows extremely supportive of English teaching based on activity.
- Based on q15: Most participants (60%) are neutral, while 35% agree. This shows uncertainty — learners recognize some L1 influence but not as a major barrier overall.

**Based on all question:**

- **Strong Agreement (≥80%):** Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4, Q10, Q14 → Strong belief that L1 influences L2 and environment significantly.
- **Moderate Agreement (50–70%):** Q6, Q7, Q8, Q11, Q12, Q13 → L1 habits, teacher attitude, and teaching style equally important.
- **Mixed/Uncertain Views:** Differing views on L1 use in the classroom, alphabet interference, and general L1 issues. ##Weighted Mean Score (Likert Scale 1–5)

Sr. No	Statement	Weighted Mean	Total Agree	Net Agreement
10	Do you think the medium of instruction in schools/colleges is mostly in L1, reducing exposure to English?	4.40	100	100
4	Do you think that the informal environment can be efficiently utilized by children for second language learning?	4.35	90	90
14	Do you think hindrance created by L1 can be minimized by making L2 teaching activities in classroom?	4.10	95	95
1	Do you think L1 affects learning of English as a second language?	4.05	95	95
3	Do you think L1 influence is strongest in complex word order and word-for-word translation of phrases?	3.90	90	90
2	Do you think first language influence seems to	3.85	85	85



Sr. No	Statement	Weighted Mean	Total Agree	Net Agreement
	be strongest in 'acquisition poor' environment?			
11	Do you think students can learn English as a second language better in childhood?	3.80	60	60
7	Do you think students cannot learn English as a second language because their teacher adopts an unprofessional attitude?	3.70	60	60
6	Do you think L2 acquisition is difficult after the age of 30 when L1 habits are more developed?	3.60	60	40
12	Do you think a learner's language is influenced by their friend group members?	3.60	80	60
13	Do you think old methods of teaching English as a second language create hindrance in learning?	3.45	65	45
8	Do you think the formal classroom environment creates hindrance for children to acquire English as a second language?	3.40	70	40
5	Do you think words from L1 should be used to teach English as second language in the classroom?	3.35	55	15
15	Do you think L1 creates problems in learning English as a second language?	3.30	35	30
9	Do you think while learning L2, alphabetical shapes and structures of L1 create interference?	3.25	45	25

**Interpretation:**

**Ranked Findings by Agreement Strength Strongest Agreement (Weighted Mean: 4.0+)**

**1: Medium of Instruction (4.40)**

100% agree: Using L1 as the dominant language in schools lessens English exposure .Clear consensus: Widest agreement on this factor

**2: Informal Learning Environments (4.35)**

90% agree: Children can successfully employ informal settings for language learning. Practical implication: Natural, informal environments are prized for learning language

**3: Minimizing L1 Hindrance (4.10)**

95% teachers concur that classroom activities minimize L1 interference. Optimistic view: Teachers feel they can proactively resist L1 influence

**4: L1 Impacts ESL Acquisition (4.05)**

95% teachers concur that first language impacts English acquisition. Theoretical agreement: Strong awareness of linguistic transfer. Moderate to High Agreement (Weighted Mean: 3.5-3.9)

**5: Difficult Language Structures (3.90)**

90% agreement that L1 influence is greatest in word order and direct translation. Specific insight: Teachers identify where interference takes place most.



**6: Acquisition-Poor Environments (3.85)**

85% agreement that L1 influence grows in language-poor environments. Context is important: Environment boosts first language impact.

**7: Childhood Advantage (3.80)**

60% agreement that children are better at learning English in early years. Split but slanting positive: Most view childhood as a plus.

**8: Teacher Professionalism (3.70)**

60% agreement that unprofessional teaching blocks learning. Quality focus: Teaching ability is seen as critical. Mixed Opinions (Weighted Mean: 3.25-3.60) .

**9-12: Controversial Topics**

Age factors: 60% perceive adult language learning as harder. Peer influence: 80% concur friends impact language, but net agreement is lower (60%). Teaching methods: 65% perceive old methods as creating barriers. Classroom environment: 70% view formal settings as inhibiting, but net agreement falls to 40%. Most Divided Opinions.

**13: Using L1 in Teaching (3.35)**

55% agreement only on using L1 words to teach English. Net agreement only 15% - reflecting strong contrasting views. Key controversy: Should L1 be included or excluded?

**14: L1 Creates Problems (3.30)**

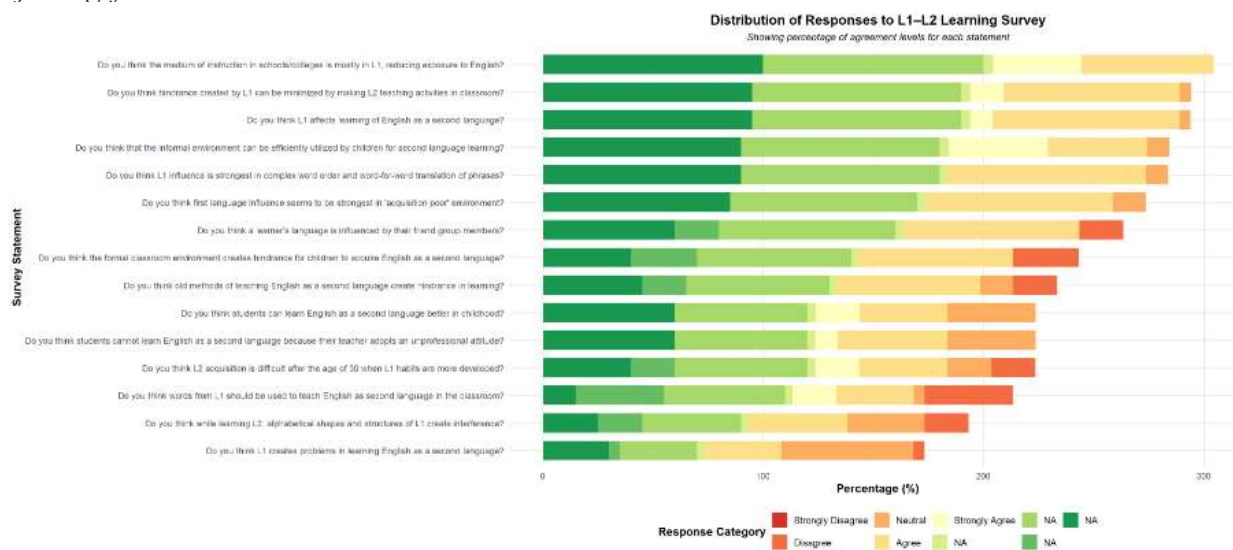
35% consensus that L1 by nature creates learning issues. Surprising result: Most teachers perceive L1 as not problematic.

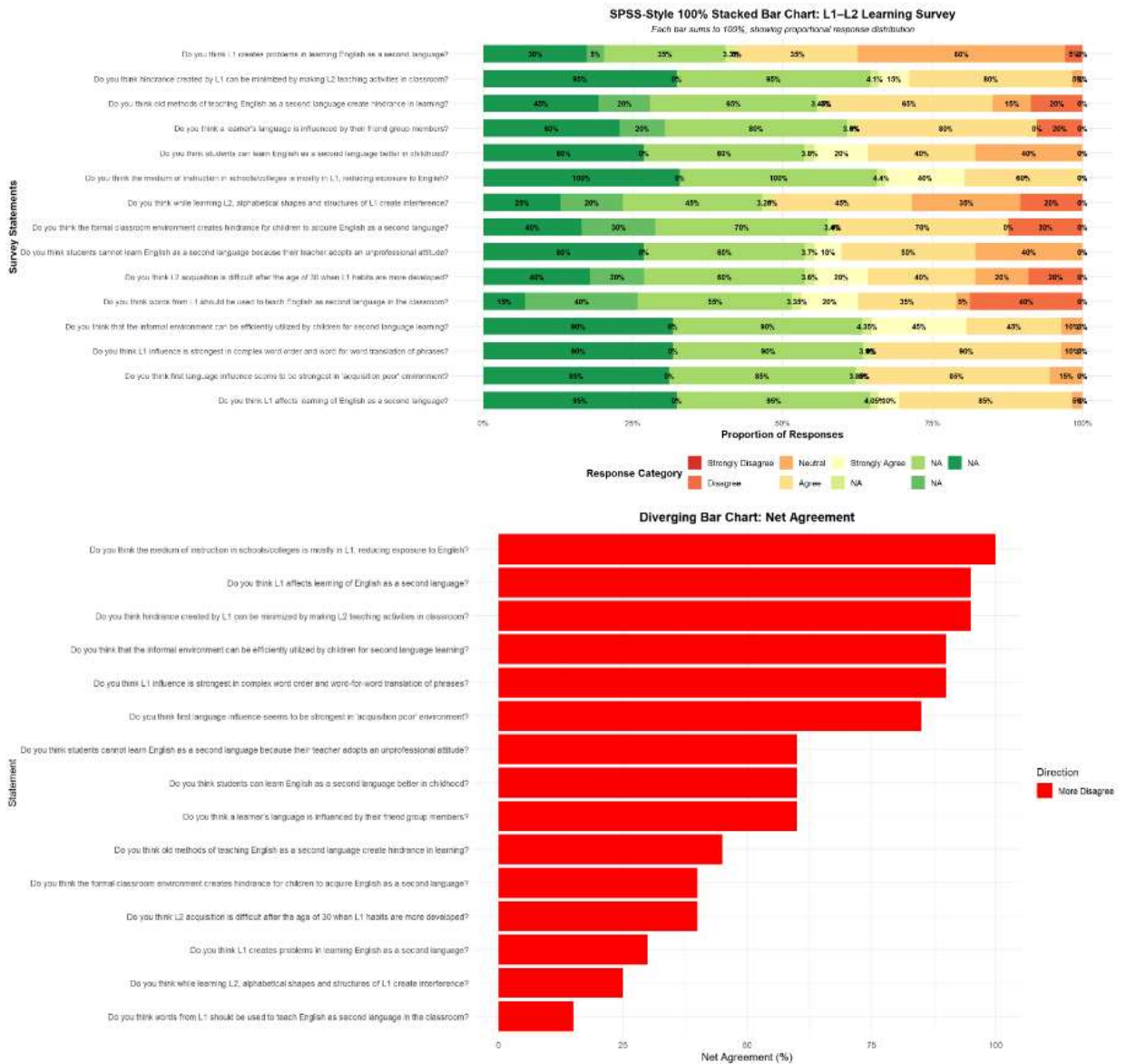
**15: Alphabet Interference (3.25)**

45% consensus on writing system interference. Ranked lowest: Least bothered about script difference.

**Conclusion:** Teachers demonstrate complex awareness of L1 influence, with highest consensus on environmental and controllable aspects. The greatest benefit: though teachers are aware of L1 influence, they do not mostly view it as a “problem” but as an aspect to be anticipated and worked around with suitable pedagogies.

*Note: Weighted Mean computed on 1-5 scale (Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). Net Agreement indicates the difference between agreement and disagreement after adjusting for neutral stands.*



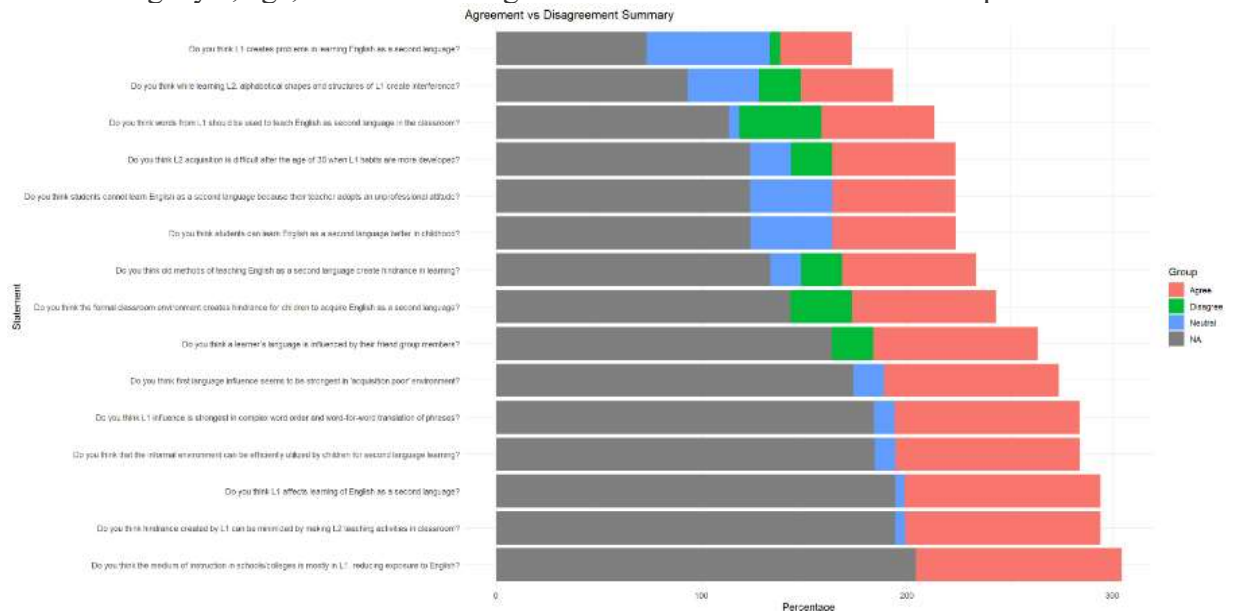


Overall Average Response Proportions		
	Response	Average Percentage
	Strongly Disagree	0.00
	Disagree	10.33
	Neutral	17.33
	Agree	60.33
	Strongly Agree	12.00
Metric	Value	
Average Weighted Mean	3.74	
Highest Agreement (%)	100.00	
Lowest Agreement (%)	35.00	

**Interpretation:**

- The overall trend of answers is that students by large majority acknowledge the impact of their L1 on English learning. With more than 72% agreement and no

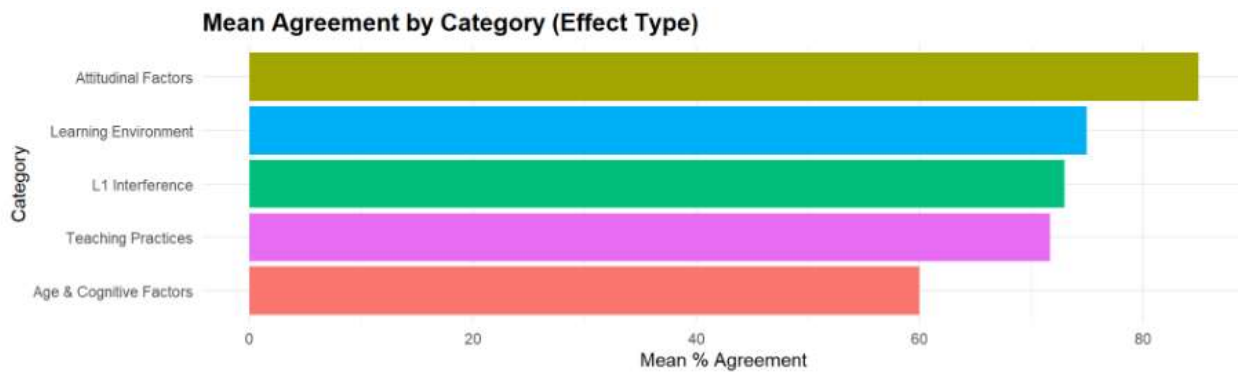
dominant disagreement, it can be reasoned that L1 is generally seen as a significant factor that affects English language learning. Yet, a minority of neutral and disagreeing responses point towards contextual factors such as teaching style, age, and surrounding environment to also mediate this impact.



### Groups questions into 5 conceptual categories

Since we have only proportion data (not individual level response), we can still analyze which category has the strongest perceived effect.

Category	Possible Meaning (Effect)	Questions	
<b>A. L1 Interference</b>	How L1 habits, grammar, or structure hinder English learning	Q1, Q3, Q9, Q10, Q15	
<b>B. Learning Environment</b>	Impact of formal/informal environment, teachers, friends	Q4, Q7, Q8, Q12	
<b>C. Teaching Practices</b>	Influence of teaching methods and use of L1 in ESL	Q5, Q13, Q14	
<b>D. Age &amp; Cognitive Factors</b>	How age or mental habits affect L2 learning	Q6, Q11	
<b>E. Attitudinal Factors</b>	General perception or openness toward English	Q2 (belief in L1 strength)	
Category	Mean Agree	Mean Disagree	Mean Neutral
L1 Interference	73.00	5.0	22.00
Learning Environment	75.00	12.5	12.50
Teaching Practices	71.67	20.0	8.33
Age & Cognitive Factors	60.00	10.0	30.00
Attitudinal Factors	85.00	0.0	15.00



## 5. Conclusion

This study reveals that teachers understand the influence of a student's first language (L1) not as a simple problem, but as a complex reality of the classroom. Their perceptions paint a picture of a profession that is both pragmatic and optimistic.

Most importantly, teachers believe that their own actions and the environment they create are the most powerful factors. They see attitudes, professionalism, and engaging classroom activities as the primary tools to help students succeed in learning English. They are confident that a positive and well-run classroom can effectively minimize the challenges posed by the first language. At the same time, they are less concerned with factors they cannot change, like a student's age or ingrained language habits. While they acknowledge these can pose challenges, they do not see them as the main barriers to learning.

In short, the data shows that teachers place their faith in good teaching. They believe that a skilled, professional educator, using dynamic methods in a supportive environment, holds the key to helping students navigate the natural influence of their first language and achieve success in English.

## References

- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the theory of Syntax*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Fatima, M., Mustafa, R. E., & Amin, S. T. (2025). Students' Perception of Teachers' Code-switching in Pakistani English Language Classroom. *International Journal of Social Sciences Bulletin*. 3(6), 848-855. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.16596607>
- Howatt, A. (1984). *A History of English Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Labov, W. (1972). *Sociolinguistic Patterns*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (4<sup>th</sup> ed.). (2010).
- Mustafa, R. E., Amin, S. T., & Sheikh, M. G. (2025). Gender and Language Attitudes towards Punjabi: A Domain-Based Analysis. *Journal of Media Horizons*. 6(2), 1124-1130. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15780637>
- Skehan, P. (1998). *A Cognitive Approach to Language Learning*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (1992). *Sociolinguistics: An Introduction to Language and Society*.
- Trudgill, P. (2003). *A Glossary of Sociolinguistics*. Oxford University Press.
- White, L. (2003). *Second Language Acquisition and Universal Grammar*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Yule, G. (2010). *The Study of Language*. (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). Cambridge University Press.