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Abstract

This research discovers various factors contributing to the issue of Saraiki language attrition in D.I.Khan. It explores attrition as well as the status of the Saraiki language. In this research, mixed research methodology is used and a sample size comprising 40 students is chosen from the English Department of Government Degree College No.1, D.I.Khan. Uncovering the roots of the serious problem of Saraiki language attrition can be valuable as it provides the first step toward a solution. The findings exhibit that causes such as multilingualism, lack of prestige, socio-economic factors, lack of transference, lack of representation, etc. are at play. The research concludes that Saraiki language attrition is not a mere perception, but a tangible reality, that may possibly categorize Saraiki as an endangered language in Pakistan in upcoming decades.

Key Words: Saraiki, Attrition, Multilingualism, Prestige

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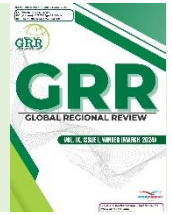
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Title

Exploring the Factors Contributing to the Attrition of Saraiki Language in Dera Ismail Khan

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Abstract

This research discovers various factors contributing to the issue of Saraiki language attrition in D.I.Khan. It explores attrition as well as the status of the Saraiki language. In this research, mixed research methodology is used and a sample size comprising 40 students is chosen from the English Department of Government Degree College No.1, D.I.Khan. Uncovering the roots of the serious problem of Saraiki language attrition can be valuable as it provides the first step toward a solution. The findings exhibit that causes such as multilingualism, lack of prestige, socio-economic factors, lack of transference, lack of representation, etc. are at play. The research concludes that Saraiki language attrition is not a mere perception, but a tangible reality, that may possibly categorize Saraiki as an endangered language in Pakistan in upcoming decades.

Keywords: [Saraiki](#), [Attrition](#), [Multilingualism](#), [Prestige](#)

Introduction

Many languages are facing extinction globally at a concerning pace (Abley, 2003; Crystal, 2000; Dalby, 2003). It is estimated that over half of the world's languages have become extinct in the past five hundred years (Sasse, 1992). While 42% of the remaining languages, 7,151, are seriously at risk of disappearing as per the latest edition of Ethnologue (Eberhard, Gary & Charles, 2022).

Language attrition can be defined as “the non-pathological decrease in proficiency in a language that had previously been acquired by an individual” (Köpke & Schmid, 2004, p. 3). In other words, attrition examines the loss of proficiency in a language, not due to cognitive decline, but as a result of reduced exposure and usage. This may occur in the case of migrations where the migrants might get little or no chance of speaking in their native language. Moreover, it has also been studied



that "a migrant having a strong motivation to integrate into the host society will experience more attrition than someone who is comfortable with remaining a foreigner" (Schmid, 2008, p. 12). Secondly, within a community, the inclination of people towards a language that is considered prestigious may also result in the attrition of their mother tongue. Shortly, Attrition is the diminishment of language competence.

Language attrition can be defined as both a process and a phenomenon. As a process, it involves the decrease in the usage of a first language by an individual due to the acquisition and use of a second language. While as a phenomenon it involves two stages — a stage before attrition (A) and a stage after attrition (B) — the difference between these two stages can be termed as the process of attrition, whereas the overall effect is known as the phenomenon of language attrition. However, it is difficult to define when someone can be considered an attriter, as it is not clear at what point B is significantly different from A.

Pakistan is a linguistically rich country. A variety of languages are commonly spoken here including Urdu, Punjabi, Saraiki, Pashto, and English among others. Saraiki is one of the few languages spoken across all four provinces of Pakistan. The majority of speakers are located in southern Punjab. Saraiki is an Indo-Aryan language that is also spoken in India along with Pakistan (Bashir, Hefright & Conner, 2019). It has about 26.219 million speakers according to the current edition of Ethnologue (Eberhard, Garry, & Charles, 2022). Due to the prolonged use of Saraiki in various parts of Pakistan, various dialects have emerged. Shackle (1976) identifies six distinct varieties of Saraiki: 1) Southern Saraiki is considered to be a fusion of Punjabi and Saraiki. It is primarily spoken in Rahim Yar Khan District. Apart from that its speakers are also present in Dera Ghazi Khan, Bahawalpur, and Muzaffargarh. 2) Northern Saraiki is significantly influenced by Pashto. It is spoken in the regions of Mianwali as well as Dera Ismail Khan. 3) Sindhi Saraiki combines the elements of both Sindhi and Saraiki. 4) Jhangi Saraiki is another dialect that is prevalent in the Jhang district of Punjab. It has unique phonological features like dental and retroflex implosives. 5) The Shahpuri dialect is often regarded as a dialect of Punjabi influenced by Saraiki. It is widely used in Sargodha and some regions of Jhang district in Punjab. 6) Central

Saraiki is the most widely spoken dialect of Saraiki. It is frequently used by the locals in Multan, Bahawalpur, and Muzaffargarh.

Literature Review

Language is of great importance. It not only facilitates communication but also preserves cultural heritage, cultural identities, historical records, cognitive processes, emotional connections, and diversity. Loss of language proficiency and the resultant cultural loss have been avidly discussed.

Nazir, Aftab, and Saeed (2013) studied the shift away from the Punjabi language in the Sargodha region. They identified lack of power, lack of prestige, lack of institutional support, and linguistic shame as the contributing factors. The findings depict Punjabi language is being replaced by Urdu and English. There is enough usage of the Urdu language among Young female speakers (85% with parents, 85% with friends, and 95% at the market) and young male speakers (65% with parents, 70% with siblings, 65% with friends, and 70% at the market), resulting in a significant decline in proficiency of their mother tongue (Punjabi). Moreover, 85% of elder female speakers and 60% of elder male speakers tend to use Urdu with their children — showing a lack of parental language transfer.

According to Park (2018), language attrition is caused by exposure to linguistic diversity in a social setting. This happens when individuals come into contact with other languages. According to him, in many countries, English is used as a medium of instruction. In other cases, it is used by people as a lingua franca to converse and conduct business, trade, or social interactions. Moreover, English functions as an official language in many countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Kenya, which means that people use it regularly at work and school. This dominant use of EIL can potentially harm one's L1, and subsequently his/her national, and cultural identities. This is especially the case in countries like India where English has established itself as a nativized variety. In such cases, learners' second language L2 (EIL) might overshadow their first language (L1). This may lead to a reduction in the use of their native language.

Harlig & Burghardt (2020) have researched the methods to prevent attrition in a second language.

They suggested that L2 attrition can be prevented by retention which is comprised of two parts: maintenance and production. While talking about production, they argued that it happens not by mere articulation of utterances for practice but by engaging in meaningful communication with others. In their view, a language can be retained by not cutting off the language input and by living in the environment where the target language is spoken. They suggested L2 can be retained by interacting with other speakers, listening to the radio or watching television and movies, and reading fiction, non-fiction, and graphic novels. Moreover, technology-mediated resources such as podcasts, blogs, Twitter, Instagram, audiobooks, etc. can also be utilized to improve L2 retention.

Riaz, Gill, and Shahbaz (2021) carried out a study on the decline of the Saraiki language proficiency in Dera Ghazi Khan and its influence on the culture of the district. They got an average of 80% wrong responses from respondents while asking them the meanings of common words from the central dialect of Saraiki, indicating a low level of understanding among the participants. They pointed out that linguistic diversity, colonialism, globalization, and decline in intergenerational language were the main causes. Furthermore, they declared bilingualism to be the root cause of attrition. According to them, the creation of a global village has necessitated having the knowledge of a global language which resulted in the promotion of bilingualism and multilingualism and eventually the attrition of regional languages. Finally, while talking about the impact of attrition on a particular culture, researchers assert that loss of language leads to loss of identity as language and cultural identities are intertwined.

Adnan Bitani (2023) observed the socio-linguistic changes that took place in Dera Ismail Khan due to the influx of Pashtuns from war-torn Afghanistan. As the Pashto became dominant, it greatly impacted the local Saraiki language and culture. The article highlights the replacement of Saraiki folk music with Pashto music. Ghulam Abbas Darvi, an award-winning Saraiki singer, is teaching his son to continue the singing tradition in Pashto due to its widespread popularity. Moreover, marketplaces also reflect Pashtun preferences, e.g. Peshawari sandal has almost replaced *kheri*, which

makes the Pashtun language economically dominant. Overall, the article shows the interplay between migration, language shift, and cultural transformation in D.I. Khan.

Methodology

The research utilizes mixed methodology combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data is sourced from secondary materials like books and articles, while primary data is collected via questionnaires with closed-ended questions. The researcher analyzes the secondary data by applying thematic analysis, and primary data is assessed through percentage methods, with results displayed using bar and pie charts. The population of this research is the D.I. Khan region. The sample comprises forty students (Saraiki Speakers) from the BS English department at Government Degree College No.1, D.I. Khan. The sample is evenly divided among the four semesters (2nd, 4th, 6th, and 8th), with ten students (both males and females) from each semester to ensure that the results of the study are not biased towards any one semester.

Discussion

In this section, the data collected from the questionnaire is analyzed. Later, this analysis is used to derive results pertaining to the research topic.

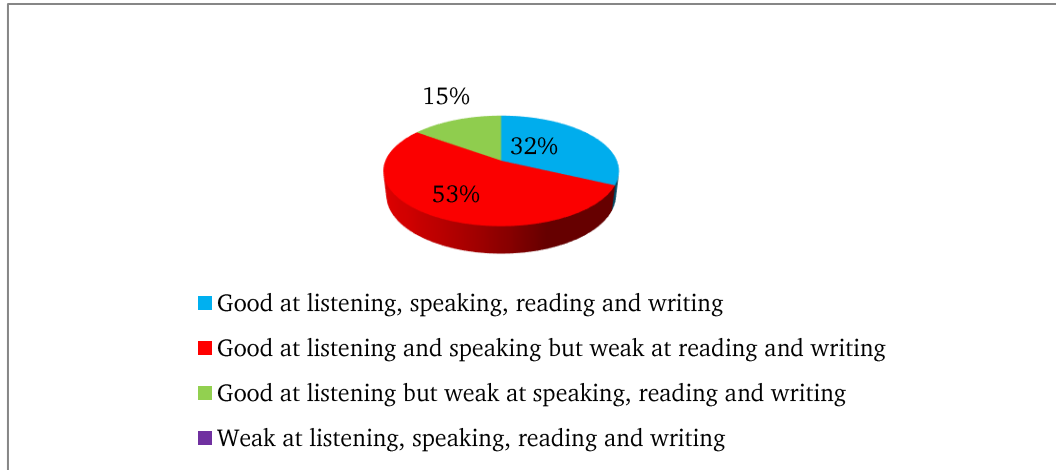
Saraiki Language Proficiency

Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are equally important for the sustainability of a language, as each skill reinforces the others, contributing to the overall proficiency of the language.

When the participants were asked in the questionnaire about their proficiency in the Saraiki language, 53% declared themselves to be weak at reading and writing while 15% admitted that they were weak in speaking along with reading and writing. This may be due to the lesser availability of reading material in Saraiki as well as fewer opportunities to express themselves in Saraiki in their writings. The results show relatively better Listening and speaking skills of participants. Overall, these stats show that the majority of the participants are inept in the Saraiki language.

Figure 1

How proficient are you in Saraiki?

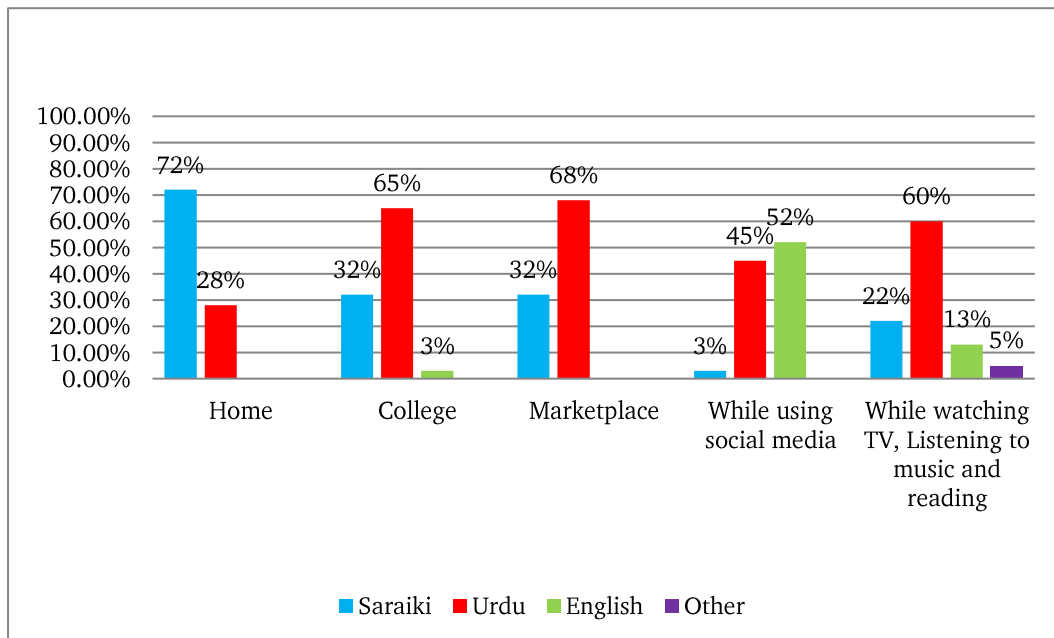


Language Use in Different Social Contexts

The participants were asked *which language they mostly use at home, college, and marketplace* and Figure 2 clearly shows the decreasing use of Saraiki. At home, 72% of participants speak Saraiki and 28% speak Urdu (despite the fact that their mother tongue is Saraiki). In college and the marketplace, only 32% of participants use Saraiki. The reason

may be that Urdu is preferred in educational institutes while in the marketplace the dominance of Pashtoons might force Saraiki speakers to use Urdu as lingua franca. Similarly, when participants were asked *which language they mostly prefer while using social media, while watching TV, or while reading* they showed a far lesser tendency towards Saraiki as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2

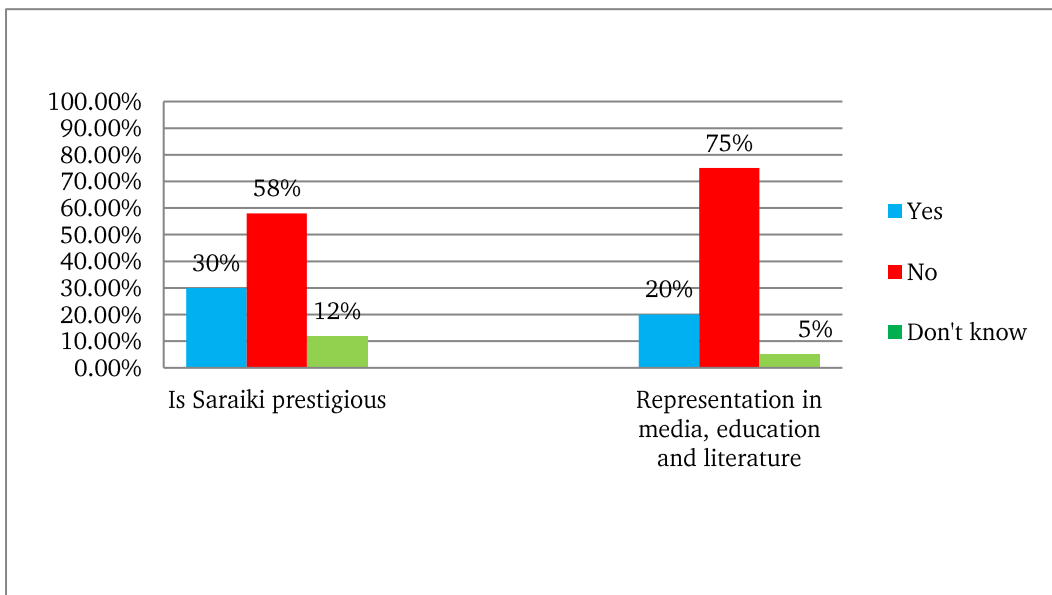


Opinion on Saraiki

Figure 3 shows the responses of participants regarding the prestige and representation of the Saraiki language. When they were asked *whether Saraiki is a prestigious language*, the majority of

them (58%) declared that it was not. Moreover, when they were asked *whether Saraiki is adequately represented in education and literature*, 75% observed that it was not while 20% replied in affirmative.

Figure 3

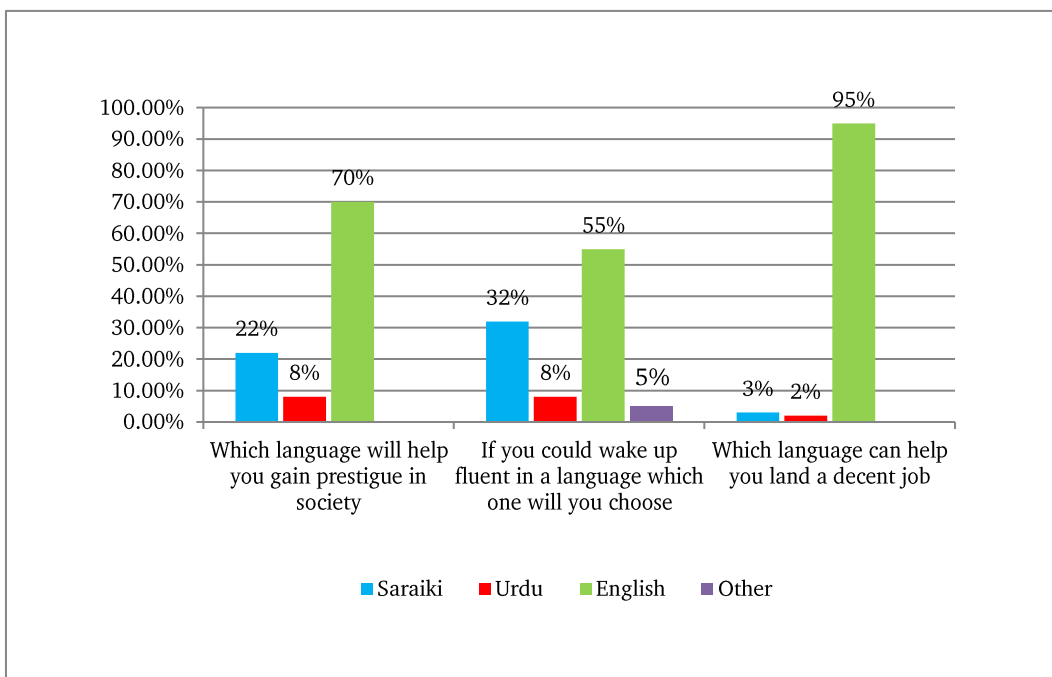


Socio-Economic Value

Participants were asked about the language *that would help them gain social prestige*. The results showed a notable shift, with 70% of them opting for English, 8% choosing Urdu and 22% selecting Saraiki. Additionally, when asked *which language*

they would prefer to be fluent in, 55% expressed a desire to master English. Moreover, 95% of them were of the view that English could help them land a decent job, while just 3% went for Saraiki. It might be because of the fact that test interviews conducted for a decent job demand proficiency in the English language.

Figure 4



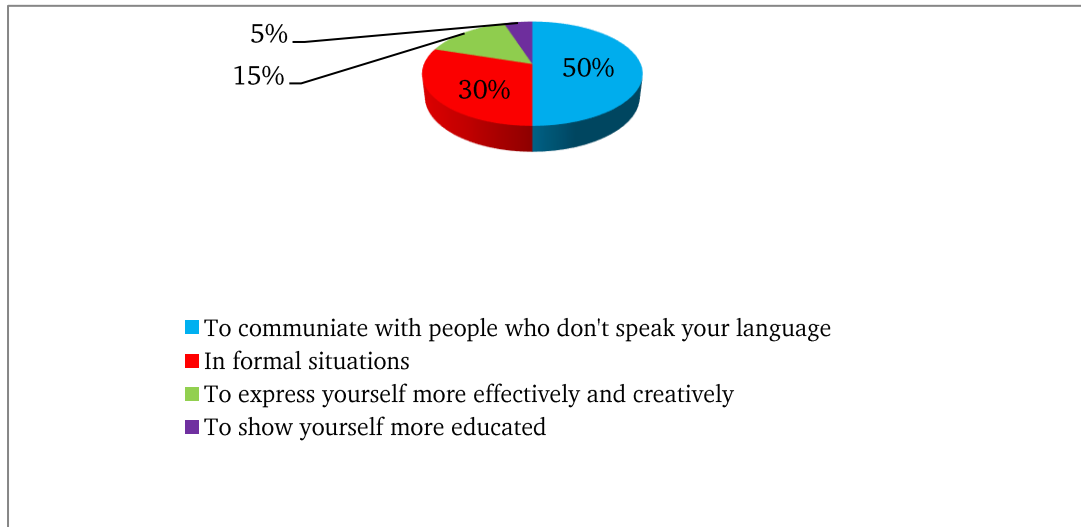
Language Switching

Figure 5 shows different situations in which the participants switch to other languages. 50% declared that they do so *while communicating with a different language speaker*. Mostly, they might do so while communicating with Pashtuns whose strength has greatly increased in D.I.Khan over the past few decades. 30% of participants switch to

other languages in formal situations, depicting the requirement of educational institutions or offices to use other languages such as English or Urdu. Similarly, 15% switch to other languages in order to express themselves more effectively and creatively, perhaps due to unfamiliarity with, or absence of, a broader range of vocabulary and expression, in the Saraiki language, necessary for more precise expression.

Figure 5

In which situation do you mostly switch to other languages?



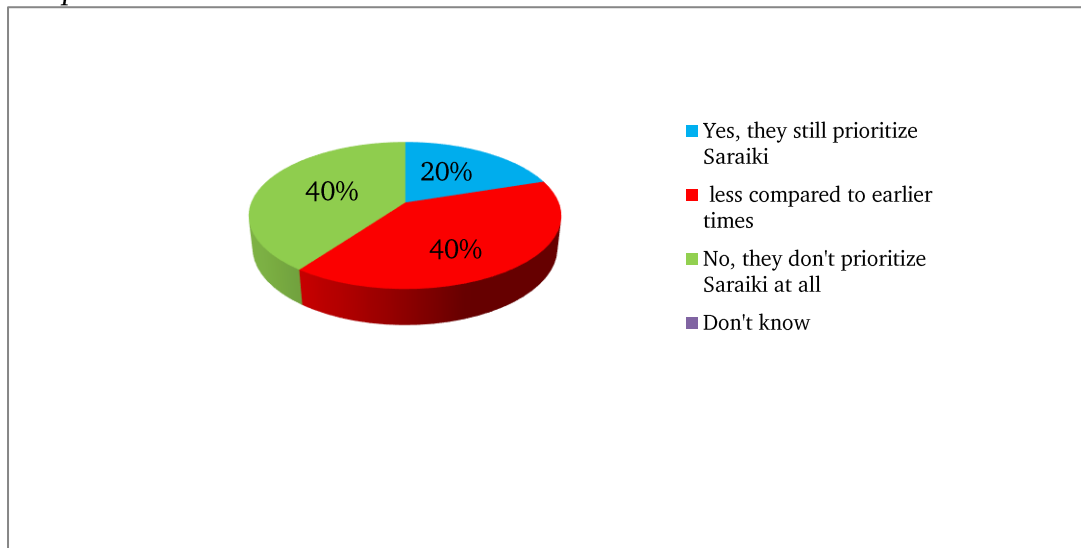
Intergenerational Transfer

When the participants were asked *whether they think Saraiki is still prioritized by parents for their children* 40% agreed that they do not prioritize,

while 40% agreed that parents do so less compared to earlier times. On the other hand, 20% were of the view that they still transfer it to their children (as shown in Figure 6).

Figure 6

Do parents still prioritize Saraiki for their children?

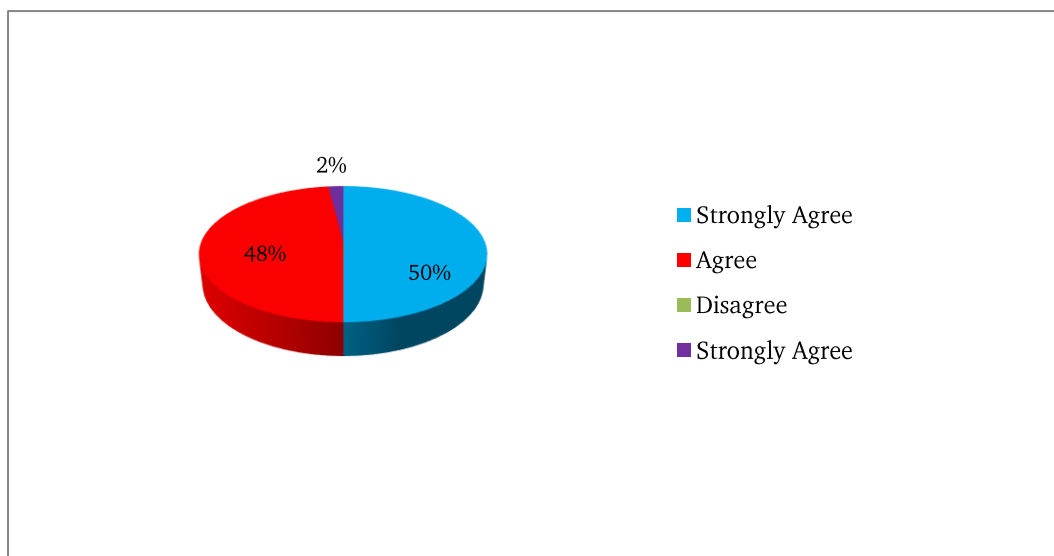


Similarly, 50% of participants strongly agreed and 48% agreed that Parents don't transfer Saraiki to their children because they consider it an

unsophisticated language that belongs to rural and uneducated people (as shown in Figure 7).

Figure 7

Parents don't transfer Saraiki to their children because they consider it an unsophisticated language.



Conclusion

The study investigates the partial or total loss of a language (L1, L2, etc.) or linguistic ability in a speaker who is physically healthy. Secondly, it unveils various causes leading to the declining proficiency of the Saraiki language in Dera Ismail Khan. Among them the first is multilingualism. Here in D I Khan Urdu (national language and lingua franca) and English are used by Saraiki speakers in various settings like home, educational institutes, marketplaces, etc. Due to the decreasing usage of Saraiki, the speakers may forget words, grammar rules, and other aspects of language resulting in its attrition. Secondly, the prestige of a language significantly influences its adoption. If a language is viewed as less prestigious, people may avoid using it in social gatherings, potentially leading to language attrition. This is evident in the case of Saraiki, as 58% of participants do not consider it prestigious. Alternatively, they opt for languages like English, Urdu, etc., to gain prestige and a competitive edge in the global economy. Thirdly, parents less frequently transfer Saraiki to their children because of stigmas of 'unsophisticated

language' or 'language of uneducated people' attached to it. A language survives as long as it is passed on but parents prefer other languages like English or Urdu to help their children excel academically. Fourthly, the lack of quality literature in Saraiki leads people to other languages resulting in attrition of their native language. Lastly, insufficient representation of Saraiki in media and education is also a source of its attrition as it leads to reduced exposure, limited cultural representation, weakened community identity, etc. To ensure the long-term preservation of the Saraiki language, it is essential to start initiatives aimed at its development, like the production of adequate literature in the Saraiki language, including it in the educational syllabus (where the Saraiki speaking population is predominant), promoting Saraiki folklore and music through cultural events, giving it adequate representation in media and especially social media which is booming these days. Additionally, it is crucial for parents, to impart the language to their children as their mother tongue. Implementing these measures is indispensable for the long-term sustainability of the Saraiki language.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

1. What language do your parents speak?
 - Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - Pashto
 - Other

2. What is your first language? (A first language is the language that a person learns first)
 - Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - Pashto
 - Other

3. With the increasing influence of Urdu and English, do you think Saraiki is still a language that parents in cities are prioritizing for their children?
 - Yes, they still prioritize Saraiki.
 - Yes, they still prioritize Saraiki, but less compared to earlier times.
 - No, they don't prioritize Saraiki at all
 - Don't know

4. Should parents transmit Saraiki to their Children?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

5. Is Saraiki a prestigious language (having high status or importance)?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

6. Should Saraiki be used as a medium of instruction?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

7. Do you think initiatives are being taken for the preservation and development of Saraiki in D I Khan?
 - Yes
 - No
 - Don't know

8. Do you believe that the Saraiki language is adequately represented in media, education, and literature in D I Khan?
- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
9. Which language do you think will help you gain prestige in society?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
10. If you could wake up fluent in a language which language would you choose?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
11. Which language do you use at home?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
12. Which language do you mostly use in college?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
13. Which language do you mostly use in marketplace?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
14. Which language do you mostly prefer while using social media? (Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening)
- Saraiki
 - English
 - Urdu
 - Other (please specify) _____
15. What language do you find most enjoyable to watch TV, listen to music, and read in?

- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
16. Which language can improve your chances of getting a decent job?
- Saraiki
 - Urdu
 - English
 - Other (please specify) _____
17. In which situations do you mostly switch to other languages?
- To communicate with people who do not speak your language
 - In formal situations (College, Classroom)
 - To express yourself more effectively and creatively
 - To show yourself more educated
18. Have you personally witnessed a decrease in the use of Saraiki language in D I Khan over the years?
- Yes, I have
 - Not at all
 - To some extent
19. Saraiki is usually considered a less sophisticated language than Urdu or English, and it is stigmatized as a language of rural or uneducated people. This is also one of the most important reasons why parents in cities don't want to transfer Saraiki to their children nowadays.
- Strongly agree
 - Agree
 - Disagree
 - Strongly disagree
20. How proficient are you in Saraiki language?
- Good at listening, speaking, reading and writing
 - Good at listening and speaking but weak at reading and writing
 - Good at listening but weak at speaking, reading and writing
 - Weak at listening, speaking, reading and writing