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**RESEARCH PAPER**

## A Sociolinguistic Correlational Study of University Students' Social Background and English Proficiency Development: Issues and Implications

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**ABSTRACT**

English is a worldwide medium of instruction, and it is gaining fundamental recognition in a wide variety of countries globally. In Pakistan, English is being used in most academic institutions as their medium of instruction. Different factors restrict or influence the students and instructors from speaking in English and gaining English proficiency. Therefore, this study analyses the major contributing factors impacting the English language proficiency of Pakistani university students. This study also provides theoretical background by reviewing the published articles and journals related to the English language education. Furthermore, this study employs a mixed-method approach and conducts both surveys of the students to gain insights into the student's perception of the factors that influence language proficiency. Moreover, the study also conducts semi-structured interviews with four English language professors to understand the teaching approaches. The findings of the results demonstrate that some key factors such as socioeconomic status, educational background, educational environment, and parental role influence the language proficiency of university students. To add further, this study is beneficial for policymakers to review the barriers that limit the use of the English language and ultimately decrease English language proficiency among students in Pakistan. It provides critical insights to educators and teachers to develop strategies that can positively influence students' English language proficiency.

**Keywords:** English Language Proficiency, Medium of Communication, Mixed Method Approach, University Students

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**Introduction**

Pakistan is a culturally and geographically multilingual society, with residents speaking various languages and coming from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Like Persian and Arabic, English is an external language in this country. Since 1947, English has been Pakistan's official language. In Pakistan, English remains to be the official media of education. The use of English for communication reasons has not been limited to the social upper class in the previous 20 years. The socioeconomic character of English language learners suggests that various linguistic components are emphasized, and the methodologies and tactics used in language instruction should be reconsidered. Acquiring a second or third language is a complex process involving multiple factors related to the Learner's cognitive makeup. The behavioural strategy for second language acquisition and the situations' social and economic variables guarantees an effective strategy that works in the classroom. A key predictor of student progress in second language acquisition is the socioeconomic component, including the family's academic qualifications, employment, and financial status. In other words, pupils with greater family socioeconomic levels function better academically than those with lesser family economic levels.

## Literature Review

The nation's governing class's legal, financial, and intellectual interests, along with societal prominence, accorded to English, making it a highly effective form of speech with a unique position, even more so than Urdu in socioeconomic realms. English is a barrier to entry for young generations of the privileged population into administrative roles and increases privileged youngsters' chances to enter the worldwide labour market. But it is confidential assistance. As a result, the kids of the ordinary man attend state Urdu-medium institutions, whereas the offspring of the affluent attend costly English-medium institutions. Its prevalence in Pakistan may be seen in every aspect of society, including university education, research and innovation, journalism, industry, and contemporary lifestyle. According to research done in Karachi (Ashraf, 2006), English is associated with influence and prestige in Pakistan. They also highlight how English language acquisition is frequently viewed in Pakistan as a socioeconomic progression method that influences learners' identities (Ashraf, 2006).

A parent's employment significantly impacts a student's academic success. It has a significant effect on pupils' academic success. Their parents' employment positively influences students' academic success. Wealth, parents' degrees and career, stuff kept at home, transportation, and workers were employed as markers of social background in Khaliq et al. (2016) investigation of the impacts of financial condition on academic accomplishment. Results were evaluated using proportions. The research demonstrated that family education, career, and household amenities affect classroom performance (Khaliq *et al.*, 2016). A correlation of students' financial background with overall English language results in the latest official test, based on Shamim (2011), found that students in the top third of the population financially regularly outscored students in the poorer revenue band. The favourable relationship between high family wealth and kids' greater rates of English proficiency might be explained by their initial Schooling in elite English medium institutions relative to children from poorer to wealthy families (Shamim, 2011).

Similarly, Akram and Ghani (2013) looked at the link between financial condition and language learning desire. Respondents in the research were 240 higher secondary grade individuals from various institutions in Punjab, Pakistan, 150 from the metropolitan regions, and 90 from the remote regions, who have been learning English as a required course for at least 12 years (Akram and Ghani, 2013). The findings revealed that greater socioeconomic Status (SES) students possessed a more favourable mentality toward English-speaking individuals than relatively low SES students because decreased SES youngsters had also not encountered English-speaking individuals. In contrast, high-SES teenagers have regular opportunities to commute to English-speaking regions (Akram and Ghani, 2013). Pupils from lower socioeconomic backgrounds have exhibited less curiosity in foreign cultures than students from better socioeconomic backgrounds. On the other hand, students from both low and high socioeconomic statuses are equally motivated to study English.

Azhar et al. (2014) investigated the effects of family schooling and financial position on students' educational accomplishments. Two hundred fifty individuals were chosen arbitrarily from various faculties as respondents, and the study results were applied to all University of Sargodha undergraduates (Azhar *et al.*, 2014). Participants were chosen from M.A. 3rd level based on age, roll number, and field data. Individuals' information is obtained via a survey with three fundamental factors. Student accomplishment was kept as a dependent factor, whereas family literacy and financial position as independent factors (Azhar *et al.*, 2014). According to the research, pupils with good financial situation are superior to individuals with economic difficulties. Similarly, family literacy improves the success of their children.

Similarly, Anbreen (2015) investigated the formation of foreign language students' identities in international linguistic classes. It looks at the impact of English as a second language on Pakistani pupils' identification and cultural status. This study included forty (40) individuals learning English at Lahore College for Women University in Punjab (Anbreen, 2015). The respondents were asked to fill out a survey and assessed in an interview. Identities are dynamic and changeable, according to the findings. This study advises teachers and legislators to adopt measures to strengthen students' identities, recognizing them as true Muslims, ethical nationals, and harmonious members of the international community (Anbreen, 2015).

Maselko et al. (2018) also looked at financial status indicators and prevalent mental diseases, significantly impacting university students' cognitive capacities. Their findings show that having fewer assets, food insecurity, and family credit are linked to worsening depressive symptoms. The relationship between investments and psychiatric ailments is sequential, with no proof of a cut-off point impact, implying variability in the relationship between SES and depressive side effects. Initially, a trend was detected with women's academic achievement, but this relationship was reduced as additional SES factors were added to the analysis (Maselko et al., 2018). Wealth, food deprivation, and debt factors collectively account for 14% of the variation in depressive symptoms, greater than found in research from high-income countries (Maselko et al., 2018). These results support using numerous SES measures to understand better the complicated link between financial factors and psychological health.

## Material and Methods

Research design is a framework in which the analysis is performed (Schoonenboom and Johnson, 2017). Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed are the three research designs that investigators adopt in their research. In this analysis, the investigators adopted a mixed research design. Mixed methods research is useful for bridging the gap between quantitative and qualitative results. Moreover, mixed methods research offers analysis participants a platform and assures those research findings are dependent on their own experiences. Most researchers adopt inductive, deductive, and abductive research approaches in their analysis (Janiszewski and van Osselaer, 2021). In the current analysis, the analysts adopted the abductive research approach. Furthermore, abductive is appropriate for the present analysis objectives. Too, an abductive strategy is applied in the current analysis to develop concepts and analytical outcomes, similar to inductive and deductive procedures.

Researchers adopted primary or secondary data collection procedures to obtain material for their analysis (Trinh, 2018). In the current study, the researchers adopted the primary data collection method. Moreover, the researchers have collected data by employing a survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews in this analysis. The first primary method for data collection in this analysis is a survey questionnaire. One hundred university students were chosen to fill out the survey questionnaires for this analysis. The participants in this analysis were asked for permission to participate in the questionnaire, and their availability was also considered. All survey participants were also given a consent form to ensure that their personal information was kept confidential and was used only for this analysis. The questionnaire surveys in this study were created using five Likert scales ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. For the next step of this analysis, the survey data were obtained and kept in password-protected devices.

Moreover, survey questionnaires were sent to university students in their emails. Also, the researchers have used another primary method for data collection in this analysis: semi-structured interviews. In this analysis, four interviews have been conducted with English teachers about their teaching methods and methods to improve their students' language learning. Two interviews were conducted with government university teachers, and the remaining two were conducted with private university teachers.

Additionally, the data analysis technique is crucial for establishing the data's reliability and validity (Ali and Bhaskar, 2016). In addition, the STATA tool was adopted for the statistical assessment of the primary data received from the survey questionnaire in this study. The information from the questionnaire was coded and entered into SPSS analyses. Pearson correlation and regression analysis were the statistical techniques performed in the investigation. In addition, another data analysis technique that the investigators have adopted in this analysis is thematic analysis. The thematic analysis approach has been used to analyze the data received from semi-structured interviews, and themes will be produced dependent on the responses of university English professors. This method assists in evaluating the Learner's social background and the development of English proficiency among Pakistani university students.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1**  
**Correlation Analysis**

|                                  | Socio-Economic Status | Schooling of the student | The educational level of parents | Mass Media | Environment | English language proficiency |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------------|------------|-------------|------------------------------|
| Socio-Economic Status            | 1                     |                          |                                  |            |             |                              |
| Schooling of the student         | 0.761                 | 1                        |                                  |            |             |                              |
| The educational level of parents | 0.845                 | 0.841                    | 1                                |            |             |                              |
| Mass Media                       | 0.751                 | 0.825                    | 0.825                            | 1          |             |                              |
| Environment                      | 0.536                 | 0.507                    | 0.569                            | 0.572      | 1           |                              |
| English language proficiency     | 0.485                 | 0.496                    | 0.543                            | 0.541      | 0.619       | 1                            |

Table 1 illustrates the findings of a variable correlation investigation that evaluated the correlation between the dependent and independent variables. The table shows that English language proficiency has a positive and moderate correlation with socioeconomic status ( $C=0.485$ ). Furthermore, the results illustrate that English language proficiency has a favourable and moderate correlation with the student's Schooling ( $C=0.496$ ). Moreover, the outcomes show that English language proficiency strongly correlates with parents' educational level ( $C=0.543$ ). Furthermore, the result revealed that English language proficiency strongly correlates with mass media ( $C=0.541$ ). Also, the findings revealed that English language proficiency has a positive and strong correlation with the Environment ( $C=0.619$ ).

**Table 2**  
**Model Summary**

| Multiple R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Standard Error | Observations |
|------------|----------|-------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 0.666      | 0.444    | 0.414             | 0.524          | 100          |

Table 2 reveals the model summary outcomes, which shows that 44.4 percent of the variability in English language proficiency can be anticipated or approximated by socioeconomic status, Schooling of the student, educational level of parents, mass media and Environment. In contrast, the remaining variability will only be analyzed by other factors not included in the existing regression framework.

**Table 3**  
**Anova**

|                   | df | SS          | MS        | F         | Significance F |
|-------------------|----|-------------|-----------|-----------|----------------|
| <b>Regression</b> | 5  | 20.69404098 | 4.1388082 | 15.039995 | 0.00           |
| <b>Residual</b>   | 94 | 25.86755902 | 0.2751868 |           |                |
| <b>Total</b>      | 99 | 46.5616     |           |           |                |

Table 3 depicts the ANOVA outcomes, which reveals whether the regression model is substantial when no statistical inaccuracy impacts the outcomes since the significance value is 0.000, suggesting that the regression model is significant when the significance value is below 0.05 or 5%.

**Table 4**  
**Coefficient Analysis**

|   | Coefficients | Standard Error | t Stat | P-value |
|---|--------------|----------------|--------|---------|
| <b>Intercept</b>                        | 1.154        | 0.279          | 4.13   | 0.00    |
| <b>Socio-Economic Status</b>            | -0.014       | 0.084          | -0.174 | 0.86    |
| <b>Schooling of the student</b>         | 0.021        | 0.099          | 0.211  | 0.83    |
| <b>The educational level of parents</b> | 0.112        | 0.121          | 0.926  | 0.36    |
| <b>Mass Media</b>                       | 0.087        | 0.096          | 0.909  | 0.37    |
| <b>Environment</b>                      | 0.394        | 0.086          | 4.542  | 0.00    |

As seen in table 4, the main outcomes of the regression, as identified by the coefficient analysis. As per the results, socioeconomic status has an insignificant impact on English language proficiency, with a p-value of 0.86, higher than 0.05. Moreover, the Socioeconomic Status value of the coefficient is (C=-0.014). Furthermore, the student's Schooling has an insignificant impact on English language proficiency since the p-value for the Schooling of the student variable is 0.83, which is more significant than 0.05. Moreover, the value of the coefficient of Schooling of the student (C=0.021).

Furthermore, the parents' educational level has an insignificant influence on English language proficiency because the p-value for the educational level of parents parameter is 0.36, which is greater than 0.05. Moreover, the coefficient value of the educational level of parents (C=0.112). In addition, mass media has an insignificant effect on English language proficiency since the p-value for the mass media variable is 0.37, which is higher than 0.05. Furthermore, the coefficient value of mass media (C=0.087). In addition, Environment has a significant effect on English language proficiency, as the p-value for the Environment variable is 0.00, which is less than 0.05. Moreover, the coefficient value of Environment (C=0.394) shows that one unit of variation in the Environment causes a shift in English language proficiency of 0.394, indicating a favourable effect.

### Interview Results

The study conducted a semi-structured interview with four professors, including two teachers from the government sector and two from the private sector. The researchers attempted to gain insights into the language learning methodologies they employed in their respective classrooms. The interview helped the researchers understand the professors' attitudes and opinions. The responses of the professors are presented;

According to the first professor, socioeconomic status significantly impacts the students' socioeconomic status and English language proficiency. He argued that class differences are a barrier to language acquisition and proficiency. The upper-class students seemed more eager to learn English and gain significant proficiency, indicating that learning and social status are correlated.

The second professor pointed out an imminent difference in vocabulary and grammar proficiency of the students passed out from the private and government schools, which indicates that the English medium schools background students have better overall English proficiency. He argued that the significant difference is because of the different teaching methodologies employed in these institutions. He proposed that English medium schools use English through the communicative approach, which influences the student's English language proficiency.

According to the third professor, parents' figures have a significant impact on the English language proficiency of the students. He argued that parental role and developing an attitude to a foreign language such as English is of prime importance. The students' attitude reflects their parents' attitude, which provides insights that the parents have a key role in shaping the students' attitude, which enables them to gain language proficiency.

Similarly, the fourth professor agreed that the parental factor influence and childhood environment significantly impact the students' English language proficiency. He stated that parents have an active role in the language acquisition process of their kids. The active role means parents encourage their kids to learn a foreign language to develop proficiency. Thus, parents' upbringing has a significant role in developing attitudes toward learning a foreign language such as English.

All the professors provided insights about the factors that can impact the English language proficiency of Pakistani students. They agreed that the students face social, cultural and institutional hindrances in their journey to gain language proficiency. The author's responses agree with the previous research studies conducted in this context, indicating that significant barriers must be overcome to attain language proficiency among students.

The study aims to explore the factors that impact the English language proficiency of Pakistani students. The study determines to what extent schooling of university students, socioeconomic status, parental influence, childhood environment, and English language proficiency are related. The study's findings reveal that socioeconomic status, educational background, and parental influence are strong predictors of students' language proficiency and are key variables influencing language proficiency. The study will utilize the survey questionnaire and interview to gain the primary data to validate its hypothesis. The survey and the semi-structured interview reveal a significant relationship between the determinants of language proficiency. The study findings suggest that social and economic statuses are barriers to gaining English language proficiency. At the same time, parental influence can be a useful tool that helps establish attitudes toward learning English and gaining proficiency among students. The study findings also reveal that students' educational background is a key predictor of language proficiency. Those taught in the English medium schools are better-adapted methodologies that help the learners get immersed in the target. Moreover, socioeconomic status and weak educational background are barriers that discourage foreign language learning because of their discouraging beliefs.

## **Conclusion**

The study demonstrated the relationship between the key factors that impact English language proficiency among Pakistani university students. Overall, all the research questions were addressed. The study results indicate that a certain barrier hinders the English language proficiency of university students. Their sets of factors can influence the student's proficiency, one set of factors is the socioeconomic background and learning environment, which can significantly impact language proficiency. Moreover, the second key factors are parental influence and educational background, which indicates those students encouraged to use English in communication in their childhood are more proficient in the Language curriculum and understanding than those studied in government institutes

and lack parental support. Thus, the study indicates that socioeconomic status and educational background strongly predict the student's positive outcomes towards language proficiency. Other factors, such as parental influence and media, can positively impact language proficiency. In a nutshell, the study provides insights to the policymakers and educators to dilute the barriers among the students to produce a learning atmosphere that replicate English language proficient students. Thus, English proficiency is necessary for Pakistani students as it is positioned as the pre-eminent language of communication.

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