

The Relationship of Socioeconomic Status with Language Learning Motivation

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Abstract: *Language learning motivation is an important factor in language achievement. The study of socioeconomic status with other individual differences is a neglected area in language learning motivation research in Pakistan. The Socioeconomic status (SES) is also an important element in learning as the students with high SES tend to demonstrate a more positive attitude and motivation towards learning a language as compared to the students with low SES in Pakistan. The present study highlights the importance of SES and motivation in language learning. The data have been collected from different intermediate level students and analyzed with SPSS XIV. The results have produced some interesting findings.*

Key Words: *SES, Attitudes, Motivation, Individual Differences, English Language Learning.*

Introduction

The importance of motivation in human activity has been recognized in the field of social psychology and education for decades (Noels, Pelletier & Vallerand, 2000 cited in Akram 2007). Motivation is a desire to achieve a goal, combined with the energy to work towards that goal. Many researchers consider motivation as one of the main elements that determine success in developing a second or foreign language; it determines the extent of active, personal involvement in L2 learning. (Oxford & Shearin, 1994)

It has been observed that students' language performance is related to their socioeconomic variables. Socio-economic factor is usually determined by means of a composite measure which takes account of income, level of education and occupation of the parents of the learners. Some researchers have examined the relation between learners' language performance and SES variables. According to Akhtar (2010), the home environment has direct focus on parents. Because they are responsible to built and manage it. Home environment influenced by many factors such as parent education, job, attention and income. All these factors together called Socio-economic Status (SES).

Measures of SES, such as family income or maternal education, can suggest different factors responsible for a relation between variables (Hoff-Ginsburg & Tardiff, 1995 cited in Schuele C. Melanie 2001). Thompson (2008) says that age of acquisition, motivation, language family, literacy, and socioeconomic status of the learner are a few of the many factors that need to be considered when studying how individuals acquire a new language. It has been observed that all the learners are not given the equal opportunities due to their SES, the learners face learning inequalities in their language learning career.

Yuet (2008) opines that last but certainly not least; the socio-economic background of students has a role to play in their motivation to learn. She is of the view that main reason is low-income parents may often be so preoccupied with the basic necessities of life that they have little time to consider how to promote their children's cognitive development. They might also have poor reading skills and so can provide few reading experiences for their children. In addition, students from poor socioeconomic background may have lower aspirations for educational and career achievement too.

Ghani (2003) has found that SES has an overwhelming effect on English learning success in Pakistan. She measures the language proficiency of the learners in three ways: by administering a past Cambridge First Certificate exam (1995) and a cloze test (Lapkin and Wsain 1977) and from the scores they had obtained in the most recent intermediate annual examination in English which the subjects had taken (covering composition, grammar, translation and set texts).

Brustall (1975 cited in Ellis 1994), in her study of primary and secondary school learners of L2 French, found also a strong correlation between socio-economic status and achievement, students from middle SES got higher rank than the students with lower SES. Burstall (1980) in his British Primary French Research project indicated a strong relationship between students' SES and their achievement in French: students with higher socioeconomic status scored high mean score and the students of low socioeconomic status scored low mean score in French language proficiency.

According to Shamim (2011), a comparison of learners' socio-economic status with their English language scores in the most recent public examination revealed that learners in the higher income bracket (upper third of the population) consistently outperformed learners in the lower income bracket (lower two-thirds of the population). The positive correlation of high family income with students' higher levels of proficiency in English may be attributed to their earlier education in private English medium schools compared to students in the lower income bracket.

In Pakistani context, there have been a few research studies (Ghani 2003, Shamim 2011) into the relationship between learners' SES and English language learning. Therefore the present study aims to provide relevant data and explore the extent to which socioeconomic differences have an impact on students' language proficiency.

Method

Participants

The participants were 240 students of intermediate level in different colleges of Punjab, Pakistan, 150 (63 male and 87 female) students belong to the urban areas and 90 students (57 male and 33 female) belong to the rural area, who had studied English as a compulsory subject for 12 years.

Instruments

A questionnaire used by Akram (2007 adapted from Gardner's AMTB 1985) was adapted to examine these students' attitudes and motivations toward learning English. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of the demographic information particularly about the socioeconomic status of the parents of the learners and the second part consisted of 97 items regarding attitude and motivation. A language achievement test (resembling FCE) was also used to know their language proficiency.

Results and Discussion

As the present study aimed at investigating the relationship of socioeconomic status with attitudes and motivation toward learning English, the researcher has analyzed the data through SPSS (version 14). All statistical tests, conducted to investigate the relationship of socioeconomic status with attitudes and motivation toward learning English, have been mentioned. The analysis presents cross tabulations, correlation and MANOVA. The final results of the present study are following.

There is still no standard instrument available to determine SES in Pakistan. The subjects were categorized in two classes: lower SES class and higher SES class, with the experts' opinion from Bahauddin Zakariya University and The Islamia University of Bahawalpur. This comprised father's occupation and salary. The classification of occupations was made keeping in view the realities of Pakistani society rather than the western societies where standard classification exists i.e. farmers, street vendors, drivers and white washers counted as lower class; school teachers, small businessmen etc treated as middle class; doctors, pilots, army officers and civil servants were regarded as higher or elite class.

The results of MANOVA analysis show that there is statistically significant relationship between learners' socioeconomic status and their motivation to learn English. Moreover, the univariate analysis of variance shows significant differences between higher SES and lower SES students in their parental encouragement i.e. higher SES students have stronger parental encouragement as their parents facilitate them in their buying English books and other helping material, in English class anxiety the lower SES students have been found more anxious than the higher SES ones because they don't have enough confidence and courage, in their attitude toward learning English also the students belonging to higher SES have shown more positive attitude toward

English learning, in attitude toward English people also the higher SES students have shown more positive attitude than the lower SES students in that lower SES students have not come across English people whereas the high SES students find frequent chances to travel to English speaking countries. The lower SES students have not shown equal interest in foreign languages as the higher SES students. Both the higher SES and lower SES students have equal motivational intensity in learning English. Almost all the learners particularly the male had considerably stronger integrative reasons for learning English related to future jobs, university study and travel abroad. This is explicable given the nature of Pakistani society, with the wide expectation that, despite the prominence of women in a few professions such as teaching, women are not destined to pursue careers in which English would be a relevant feature (Ghani 2003).

Conclusion and Recommendation

As far as attitude or motivational issues are concerned, it is true that children of higher SES bring an 'enriched' cultural capital but this does not significantly affect their motivation (Yuet 2008). The study is in line with the findings of Yuet (2008) who says that learners are instrumentally motivated and intend to take exams in order to obtain a language certificate. The present study contradicts Verma and Tiku (1990) who conducted a research on the effect of SES and general intelligence and found that SES and intelligence in combined form do not have any differential effect. The relation between SES and language learning motivation has identified strong evidence of language learning differences. It has been found that students from lower socioeconomic groups acquire language at a slower rate than students who belong to high socioeconomic groups. These differences of language learning appear to relate to family income, and socioeconomic status. It is a bitter fact that persistent poverty and low social status are the most detrimental to students' language performance. The recommendation of the study is that the relationship of socio-economic status and academic achievement of the students studying at private institutions may also be studied to generalise the results.

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Appendix

Pearson Correlation of 12 ID Variables with each other and with English Proficiency

Correlations

	Parental Encouragement	Degree of Instrumentality	Degree of Integrativeness	Attitude toward English learning	Attitude toward English people	English Class Anxiety	Ethnocentrism	Cultural Identity	Need for Achievement	Interest in Foreign Languages	Motivational Intensity	Desire to learn English	Total score of test
Parental Encouragement	1	.172**	.053	.136**	.006	-.104	-.011	-.020	.058	.057	-.179**	.061	.106
Sig. (2-tailed)		.008	.412	.035	.924	.107	.866	.762	.367	.382	.005	.348	.101
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Degree of Instrumentality		1	.582**	.332**	.214**	-.047	.059	-.032	.143**	.255**	.086	.232**	.451**
Sig. (2-tailed)			.008	.000	.001	.470	.366	.626	.027	.000	.186	.000	.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Degree of Integrativeness			1	.378**	.278**	.100	.213**	.059	.051	.356**	.181**	.254**	.517**
Sig. (2-tailed)				.000	.000	.122	.001	.363	.430	.000	.005	.000	.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Attitude toward English				1	.432**	-.074	-.172**	-.363**	.213**	.344**	.335**	.489**	.525**
Sig. (2-tailed)					.000	.254	.008	.000	.001	.000	.000	.000	.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Attitude toward English people					1	.432**	.007	-.103	.081	.220**	.230**	.251**	.467**
Sig. (2-tailed)						.000	.708	.110	.214	.001	.000	.000	.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
English Class Anxiety						1	.281**	.273**	-.240**	.065	-.198**	-.170**	-.005
Sig. (2-tailed)							.000	.000	.000	.394	.002	.008	.942
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Ethnocentrism							1	.278**	-.172**	.167**	-.144**	-.141**	-.045
Sig. (2-tailed)								.000	.008	.009	.026	.029	.485
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Cultural Identity								1	-.211**	-.107	-.177**	-.316**	-.115
Sig. (2-tailed)									.001	.098	.006	.000	.076
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Need for Achievement									1	.158**	.322**	.335**	.175**
Sig. (2-tailed)										.014	.000	.000	.007
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Interest in Foreign Languages										1	.265**	.321**	.169**
Sig. (2-tailed)											.000	.000	.014
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Motivational Intensity											1	.534**	.389**
Sig. (2-tailed)												.000	.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Desire to Learn English												1	.338**
Sig. (2-tailed)													.000
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240
Total score of test													1
Sig. (2-tailed)													
N	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240	240

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Father's job * Monthly Income Crosstabulation

		Monthly Income				Total
		5000-9999	10000-14999	15000-19999	20000 and above	
Father's job	Farmer	18	20	4	9	51
	Govt. job	26	26	21	23	96
	Businessman	16	15	28	19	78
	Private job	5	5	5	0	15
Total		65	66	58	51	240

Bar Chart

