

# Impact of Socio-economic Status on Language Learning Motivation of Secondary School Students

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## Abstract

*Many social factors are likely to affect the affective factors such as motivation indirectly affecting the learning of English as a second or foreign language. This study examined the influence of Socio-economic Status (SES) on students' Language Learning Motivation (LLM). We conducted a survey by using questionnaire to collect information about SES of the students and motivation. The respondents were students of secondary schools (Class X) affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education. The data analyses were done using SPSS by descriptive statistics, ANOVA and simple linear regression. SES comprises fathers' education, mothers' education, fathers' occupation, mothers' occupation and family income. LLM construct included integrativeness and attitude towards learning situation developed by Gardner (1985). The reliability of the questionnaire for SES and LLM was found to be  $\alpha=0.735$  and  $\alpha=0.608$  respectively. Results indicated that there is a significant relationship between SES and language learning motivation which reflects that increase in social status leads to increase in language learning motivation.*

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## INTRODUCTION

With the dawn of the technological age, importance of English language proficiency has gained more attention in recent years. It has become one of the most-used languages across the world. Globalisation and the introduction of e-commerce have reinforced the status and use of English as the *lingua franca* in international business communication (Seidlhofer, 2005). After this new status of the English language as a *lingua franca*, the number of people who used English for communicative purposes, even though none of them is a native speaker of English, has increased considerably (Graddol, 2006). Along with India, Nigeria, Philippines, Germany, France, Pakistan, Italy, Japan, Netherlands and South Africa are the other countries where English is a Second Language (L2) (Casey, n.d). Although the World Bank has no official language of the institution, English is its working language (Cisse, Menon, Marie-Claire, and Nmehielle, 2014, p. 431), which again establishes the dominance of English at a wider level. Scrase (2002), in his study, found that English language proficiency in a globalising India is an essential component of one's cultural baggage, a resource that can eventually open doors into the world of professional employment in India and abroad. India is the largest English speaking community outside USA and the UK (Bhandari, 2009). Consequently, English holds a consolidated position of a second language (L2) in India.

Wilson and Komba (2012) have found that there is a positive connection between English language proficiency and academic achievement. Another study examined the relationship between English proficiency and mathematics scores and it revealed English proficiency as a significant predictor of mathematics scores (Henry, Nistor, and Baltas, 2014). There are many other studies which have also studied English as a predictor in the achievement of different subjects at school level as well as at college level (Fakeye, 2014; Stephen, Welman, and Jordaan, 2004). For effective learning of English as a second language (ESL), several measures have been suggested by the researchers. Various factors like socio-demographic and socio-psychological variables influence learning English (Oxford, 1990). Researchers have found that socio-economic status (SES) gap is the main cause of inequality among students in schools and other educational systems (Cornoy, 2007; Shavit and Blossfeld, 1993). SES, however, does not only affect the language learning outcomes but also has an influence on their language learning motivation (Kormos and Kiddle, 2013). All these studies reflect that SES and motivation do not only affect language learning outcome individually but also has an impact and relate among each other.

Language is a multifaceted phenomenon, and hence involves complexities in its acquisition.

This view is supported by Atkinson (2011), where he says, “If language is many things, then so is its acquisition”. Though many theories have been proposed for second language acquisition (SLA), Ellis (1997, p. 87) assumes that SLA has been essentially a psycho-linguistic enterprise. Literature suggests that socio-psychological variables are associated with second language learning (Yazigy, 2015; Bernard, 2010; Cortes, 2002; Gardner, 2001). Motivation has been widely accepted by both teachers and researchers as one of the key factors that influence the rate and success of second/foreign language (L2) learning (Dörnyei, 1998). It provides the primary impetus to learn the second language. Motivation has been defined in various terms. Dörnyei (1998) stated that motivation is a key to learning. It is an inner source, desire, emotion, reason, need, impulse or purpose that moves a person to a particular action. Gardner and Lambert made a distinction between orientation and motivation. Accordingly, orientation refers to the purpose of learning a second language, which can be integrative or instrumental. Brown (2000) asserts that studies of motivation of second/foreign language learners often refer to a distinction between two types of motivation namely, instrumental *versus* integrative motivation. A learner is instrumentally motivated when she/he wants to learn a language “to pass an examination,

to use it in one’s own job, to use it in holiday in the country, as a change from watching television, because the educational system requires it” (Wilkins, 1972, p. 184). On the other hand, integrative motivation is defined as “learning a language because the learner wishes to identify herself/himself with or become integrated into the society” of the target language (Gardner, 1983). Therefore, a learner is motivated when she/he learns a language because she/he wants to know more of the culture and values of the foreign language group... to make contact with the speakers of the languages... to live in the country concerned (Wilkins, 1972, p. 184).

Researches in the field of language education have indicated that “attitude to language is a construct that explains linguistic behaviour in particular” (Mamun, Rahman, Rahman, and Hossain, 2012, p. 200). Studies done by Kara (2009), Hohenthal (2003), and Gardner (1985) show that learners’ attitudes, apart from opinions and beliefs, towards learning strongly affect their learning behaviours and consequently on their performance. Moreover, attitude is “a convenient and efficient way of explaining consistent patterns in behaviour” (Mamun *et al.*, 2012, p. 201) where the learner’s attitude towards the language was found to be one of the vital factors influencing the language acquisition (Fakeye, 2010; Kara, 2009).

A large body of research has demonstrated a relationship between attitudinal motivational variables on one hand, and proficiency in a second language on the other (Tremblay and Gardner, 1995; Dörnyei, 1994; Clement, 1980; Gardner and Lambert, 1972). Different researchers have opined their views on socio-psychological variables (Dörnyei, 2005; Williams and Burden, 1997; Ellis, 1994; Gardner, 1985, 2010). According to the socio-educational model of Gardner (1985), there is a difference between language learning motivation (LLM) and classroom learning motivation. LLM comprises integrativeness (I) and attitude towards the learning situation (ALS). I is derived from cultural context and includes socially relevant variables, attention on the individual being interested in learning the language in order to interact with valued members of the other community and/or to learn more about that community (i.e., an integrative orientation and favourable attitude towards the community). Whereas attitude towards the learning situation derives from the educational context, and includes all variables that can be linked directly to the educational system and the experiences associated with the educational environment (Gardner, 1985, p. 15). The second class of motivation is classroom motivation, specifically the language classroom.

Numerous studies have established the relationship between motivation, attitude and English performance (Tahaine and Daana, 2013; Khodadady and Ashrafborji, 2013; Al-Tamimi and Shuib, 2009; Adepoju, 2008). In conclusion, studies suggest the maintenance of motivation to language achievement, persistence in language learning, which all have a significant impact on successful second language acquisition. Consequently, it becomes important to explore the level of motivation existing among students and also the situations or variables which tend to affect the students' motivation level.

Socio-economic background is one of the factors affecting students' SLA and advancement in language learning (Collier, 1988). SES is a multidimensional construct, measuring the SES of an individual based on three variables namely, education, occupation of the head of the household and income of the family (Ensminger and Fothergill, 2003; McLoyd, 1998; Kuppaswamy, 1976). According to Parson, Hinson and Deborah (2001), "SES is the term used to distinguish between people's relative position in the society in terms of family income, political power, educational background and occupational prestige". Saifi and Mahmood (2011) defined SES as "a combined measure of an individual or family's economic and social position relative to others based on income, education and occupation".

According to Noble, Norman and Farah (2005) and Brooks-Gunn and Duncan (1997), SES factors are generally found to be more strongly associated with children's long-term cognitive ability, achievement and language learning.

Socio-demographic variables like age, gender, SES, birth order, etc., and socio-psychological variables like motivation, attitude, anxiety, and self-concept have been found influencing learning ESL. This means that all these variables possess self-explanatory importance in learning English. Then it also becomes necessary to examine the factors influencing these socio-psychological variables affecting learning English indirectly. Literature suggests that LLM and SES are very crucial and have a role to play in learning English and need to be explored. Although many studies have examined either the SES' influence on the learning of English or the relationship between motivation and learning English. Like Coleman report (1966) established the relationship between SES and school achievement, Gayton (2010) explored the relationship between SES and LLM. When it has been established that motivation has a role in second or foreign language learning, then it also becomes vital to probe into the procedure of high or low level of motivation development. Hence, the need arises to look into things which have a relationship with motivation or influencing motivation indirectly affecting learning the

language. Majority of the researches have focused on LLM and SES as a different factor affecting language learning and not SES influencing LLM. Therefore, this study tries to explore the relationship between SES and LLM.

### **AIM AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The aim of the study was to study the level of LLM among the students and to investigate the relationship between SES and the students' LLM at secondary level. Attempt was made to fit a regression model of relationship between students' LLM and the SES to predict association level between independent and dependent factors; variance shared by SES variable. Simple linear regression analysis was conducted to explore the answer for the following research question:

(a) To what extent is there a significant relationship between students' LLM and SES?

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

The study was both cross-sectional and field investigation in nature, of ex-post-facto research design. The study targeted the students of Class X of residential and non-residential secondary schools affiliated to Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) in Jhunjhunu district, Rajasthan. Out of all the thirteen cities comprising 46 CBSE affiliated schools of Jhunjhunu district, one city was chosen by simple random method and all the nine schools of that city were included in the sample. The data comprised

a sample of 823 students. A survey was conducted using a questionnaire to collect information about SES and LLM of the respondents. The questionnaire was divided into two sections. One part had questions on SES components: parents' education, parents' occupation and family income which were categorical in nature. The sample for this study mainly belonged to urban areas, Kuppuswamy's SES scale (1976) was adapted for this study because his scale is an important tool to measure socio-economic SES of families in urban areas (Vijaya and Ravikiran, 2013). In line with this, the researcher considered these three factors as a composite measure of SES. Each variable of SES had four categories. The other part of the questionnaire was on five-point scale ranging from 1-strongly disagree and to 5-strongly agree. There were nine variables comprising integrative orientation (3 items), favourable attitude towards learning English (2 items) and attitude towards learning situation (4 items) measuring LLM. The items/statements for measuring these variables were adapted from Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB). Face validity and content validity were assessed by experts and changes were made accordingly. The reliability of the questionnaire for SES and LLM was found to be  $\alpha=0.735$  and  $\alpha=0.608$  respectively. Factor analysis (FA) was conducted to explore the factors. FA also indicated that

instruments possessed construct validity, including sample size adequacy and co-relational matrix. Further convergent and discriminant validity were also assessed through Average Variance Extracted (AVE) method proposed by Fornell and Larcker (1981). The findings of convergent and discriminant analysis indicated that instrument possessed construct validity. FA explored three factors {integrative orientation (IO), favourable attitude (FA) and attitude towards learning situation (ALS)} which was further developed into LLM index. Here, LLM is a construct made up of composite measure of these three variables. SPSS has been used for various statistical data analysis (frequency distribution, reliability, factor analysis and linear regression).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Analysis was carried out in two stages, frequency distribution (Table 1), and the formulation of linear regression (Table 2) of the dependent variable — students' SES and LLM measured by the continuous variables, and SES index (composite measure of *fathers' education, mothers' education, fathers' occupation, mothers' occupation and family income*) and LLM index (composite measure of *IO, FA, and ALS*).

### A. Statement of Test Hypothesis

$H_0$ : There is no statistical significant relationship between students' SES and LLM.

Table 1 presents the demographic data of the respondents. About 64.15 per cent of the respondents belonged

to middle class of SES, whereas 27 per cent of the total respondents belonged to high class of SES and only 8.9 per cent belonged to low class of SES. Out of the total respondents, 37.9 per cent had high level of LLM, 30.7 per cent and 31.3 per cent had average and low levels of LLM respectively.

A simple linear regression was conducted to evaluate how well independent variable (SES) contributes to the regression equation when the variance contribution ( $R^2$ ) of the factor in the regression model has been accounted. The output revealed a correlation between independent and dependent factor,  $r = 0.261$ .

The model summary highlighted  $R^2 = 0.068$ ,  $F(1, 821) = 10.89$ ,  $p < 0.001$  indicating statistical predictive capability of SES on students' LLM. The F test is significant, which means that the model fits the data and establishes that there is a relationship between independent and dependent factor. The variance shared by SES is only 6 per cent on LLM. SES with a coefficient value of  $B = 0.996$ ,  $*p < 0.001$ , is statistically significant to influence the students' LLM. This states that there is a positive relationship between SES and LLM and for every unit increase in SES, LLM is increased by 0.996 points.

**Table 1**  
**Demographic Data of Respondents (Frequency Distribution)**

Variables	Characteristics	Frequency	Per cent	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std dev.
SES	Low (5–7)	73	8.86	5	20	11.55	3.008
	Middle (8–13)	528	64.15				
	High (14–20)	222	27.0				
LLM	Low (16–29)	258	31.3	16	42	32.0522	3.60500
	Middle (30–34)	253	30.7				
	High (35–42)	312	37.9				

**Table 2**  
**Relationship between SES and LLM (Results of Linear Regression)**

Model		$R^2$	F	Unstandardised Coefficients		t	Sig.
				B	Std. error		
1	(Constant)	0.068	60.199*	64.351	1.531	42.019	0.000
	SES			0.996	0.128	7.759	0.000

Model 1: Predictors: (constant),  
SES dependent variable: LLM.  
 $*p < 0.001$

The results of simple regression revealed that SES possessed a predictive capability. The findings of linear regression (Table 2) revealed that the SES contributed towards students' LLM. Although the value of  $R^2$  has been very low, i.e., only 6 per cent but it is statistically significant. There was another study done by Gayton (2010) on SES and LLM, including mobility as another variable, where teachers were the respondents and they were interviewed. The method applied was content analysis and it revealed that SES being positively correlated with LLM makes a significant contribution to LLM in contexts when English is an L1 and an L2. Further, Angateeah, Gonpot and Sukon (2014) studied the impact of SES and affective variables on mathematics achievement, in which they found that SES had a positive influence on attitude. Ariani and Ghafournia (2015) explored the probable interaction between Iranian language students' beliefs about language learning and their SES, and revealed that both were connected. Majority of the studies have investigated the relationship among affective variables like motivation, attitude, anxiety, etc. (Yazigy, 2015; Jain and Sidhu, 2013; Shinge, 2005). These studies establish that affective variables are related among each other and influence each other. This study has only examined the influence of SES on LLM and not the interaction among LLM and other attitudinal variables. The findings

of this study reveal that there is a positive relationship between SES and LLM with predictive capability though not high but being statistical significant. This study used objective indicators to measure SES. The SES measure with subjective indicators and interaction among LLM and other affective variables (attitude, anxiety, etc.) might provide different results.

### CONCLUSION

The findings from this study throw light on the significant impact of SES on LLM among secondary school students in learning English as an L2. Though there have been studies on relationship between SES and learning English and also between affective variables and learning English, little has been researched on the relationship between SES and LLM. This study establishes that SES affects indirectly learning English through affective variables which need to be explored. The study has found a significant relationship between SES and LLM even though there has been low effect size ( $R^2$ ) value (6 per cent) and  $r = 0.261$  being statistical significant, the study establishes the important role of SES in LLM. However, the study had its own limitation and could not study the interaction of LLM with other attitudinal variables which could have better explained the results and also supported for the low  $R^2$  achieved in this study. Therefore, it is suggested to probe into the variables which affect learning

English as a second language directly or indirectly. The outcome of this would certainly help curriculum developers, textbook writers and practicing teachers in framing their objectives according to the students' needs and demand for learning ESL.

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