

UNEQUAL SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTANI STUDENTS

Naila Umar^{*1}, Nazia Anwar²

^{*1}MPhil Scholar, Department of English, University of Gujrat,
²Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat,

¹nailaumar21786@gmail.com, ²nazia.anwar@uog.edu.pk

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19915346>

Keywords

Socioeconomic status, Second Language Acquisition (SLA), English language learning, Sociolinguistics.

Article History

Received: 11 February 2026

Accepted: 21 March 2026

Published: 30 April 2026

Copyright @Author

Corresponding Author: *

Naila Umar

Abstract

This study investigates the relationship between socio-economic status and second language acquisition (SLA) in Pakistani students and focuses on a case study of the University of Gujrat. To learning English, the study examines factors like family background, native language use at home, and access to learning resources that affect students' experiences. These factors have a significant effect on the exposure of students to the second language and acquisition of the language in general. The methodology followed was quantitative and data gathered using a questionnaire. The sample was a sample of 73 undergraduate students in various departments of the University of Gujrat. The methods, in SPSS, which was used in the analysis of the data collected, were frequencies and percentages. In the family life, most students have been introduced to English both in the academic and personal setting. This exposure helps to build up their confidence enormously and enhances their language competence. Furthermore, the findings show that socioeconomic status and native language of the students play an important role in the acquisition of English as a second language. Not only is there formal education related to the process of second language acquisition, but also social and home environment, as that study points out. The current research is founded on a chosen sample of the population surveyed and therefore might lack a comprehensive range of the Pakistani students. In general, the research highlights the significance of contextual and socioeconomic variables in the determination of the English language learning outcomes among students.

1. INTRODUCTION

Socioeconomic status refers to the position of an individual or family based on elements like income, educational background and occupational status. In this aspect, socioeconomic status is considered by comparing the financial and social statuses of an individual or family against others with consideration of their income, education and type of occupation (Gibbins et al., 2009). Learners are affected by their socioeconomic status (SES). The socioeconomic status of the parents, family income

and access to learning resources are some of the factors that affect development and access to learning opportunities among students. High socioeconomic students tend to get more academic support learning resources and language-rich environments than students, who have low-income families, may have issues that do not allow them to achieve academically. Language learning is affected by the language environment at home.

The socioeconomic background of students is heavily relied on in educational setting. Students with higher incomes have a better education, schools, private tutoring, computer learning tools and language-enriched environments. This gives them the means to exercise and enhance their language. Conversely, among low-income families, there is less access to educational resources, less access to academic support, and less exposure to the English language beyond the classroom. Such a disadvantage can be a contributor to poor academic development and lower their competence to become proficient in a second language. The other important factor influencing SLA is the native language. Language use in the family is an important aspect in the development of linguistics in learners. When students are exposed at home, or even in the other social situations in which they have contact with other people, they are more likely to be more fluent, more confident, and more competent in communication. Continuous use of English assists learners to gain confidence and enhance fluency. On the other hand, students who are disposed towards the usage of their first language (L1) at home might not have opportunities or access to this language in other non-formal education settings. Thus, they will likely have significantly lower confidence and fluency, as they still have little exposure to L2.

In Pakistan, English plays one of the key roles in the education system within the country, particularly in the higher education level. It is the language of instruction in the universities and a significant language of communication (academic, professional and social). Academic achievement, along with increased employment opportunities, frequently is associated with English proficiency. Nevertheless, even though it is a significant element, English is a subject that most Pakistani university students find it hard to learn and use. The main reason this issue occurs is due to a language barrier between the language taught in the academic establishments and the more familiar languages spoken by the families and communities of students. Majority of the students find it more convenient to speak their native or regional languages in their daily lives, which does not allow them to be exposed to English and thus develop good language skills. The relationship between SES and SLA has received

comparatively little research and the majority of the past researches are on school-based learners and some have been conducted in the West. Literature that explores this relationship across Pakistani universities, especially by looking at various influencing factors concurrently, is lacking. The current literature mostly considers SES as a single variable without delving into the interaction of SES with other critical factors like family background, home language use, and access to learning resources. This brings out a gap in the comprehension of the complexity and interrelationship of acquiring the second language in particular local settings.

The research gap that the study will seek to fill is the relationship between Socioeconomic Status (SES) and Second Language Acquisition (SLA) among the students at the University of Gujrat. It discusses the role of such variables as family background, use of native language at home and availability of learning resources in influencing the experience and learning outcomes of students learning English. The research is a quantitative research design that utilizes data gathered on 73 undergraduate students in various academic fields. This study attempts to understand how socioeconomic and linguistic conditions interact to influence acquisition of second language in a university setting. This research will also contribute to the body of SLA research and will be broadly relevant with context-specific findings of a Pakistani institution. Besides, it highlights the necessity to consider social and linguistic aspects of formulating the successful language learning strategies and policies. It also underscores the necessity to provide facilitating learning conditions that have the potential to assist students of different socioeconomic statuses to enhance their proficiency in the English language and succeed in their studies.

1.1 Research Questions:

1. How does the socioeconomic status of UOG students influence their learning second languages?
2. How do practices in the language of the household affect second language English learners?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Socioeconomic Status and Second Language Acquisition

It is generally accepted that SES plays a significant role in second language learning. Rahman (2002) found that social class and English ability are related mainly in school, a fact that has been observed in the Pakistani context, as students from high socioeconomic standing were more exposed to the language outside the classroom than those from low SES background. Access to digital resources, individualized instruction, as well as the teaching environment that is conducive to second language learning, are also often helpful supports for these students. Likewise, it was pointed out by Shamim (2011) that learners who attend government schools are rarely exposed to English in their social and domestic context. Their limited exposure adversely affects their capacity for second-language learning, due to lack of opportunity. Such disparities in language performance are brought about by the uneven access people have to linguistic resources that stem from class, socioeconomic inequality and other factors, according to the research. The home environment is not only an economical consideration when it comes to learning a second language, however. Family language practices, most notably the use of the first language (L1), as well as language in general and the attitudes towards English, exert a significant influence on a learner's exposure to and interaction with the target language. Ellis (1997) has noted that L1 and L2 differences lead to negative transfer and learning problems, while Cummins (1979) argued that strong first language skills can facilitate second language learning through cognitive transfer. In addition, as Hoff (2006) suggests, the volume and quality of language input provided in the home environment affect the broader processing of the language. Furthermore, Gardner (1985) has stated that learners' motivation to learn a second language comes from their parents' attitudes and support. These criteria imply that the home language environment shapes the extent to which learners are able to engage with the second language and socioeconomic position influences the pool of resources provided.

2.2 Socioeconomic and Linguistic Variables in Pakistan

Language and social aspects have great effects on second language acquisition in Pakistan. Rahman (2002) states students belonging to high social class (SES) would tend to attend English medium schools and would be exposed to more exposure to the language outside the classroom. Meanwhile, these students receive very little chance to practice English and are frequently using their mother tongue. Shamim (2011) described learners' difficulties with fluency, vocabulary and confidence as a result of weak exposure to English and financial limitations. Students from various socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds also attend universities in the public sector, which faces even more significant challenges. For much research, the studies have limited mainly to individual socio-economic status and language characteristics and have focused on school learners. There is little data on the interplay of these components at the university level, particularly in public universities. To bridge this gap, the present study has explored the role of SES level and home language environment on the second language acquisition of students who are from the University of Gujrat.

3. Theoretical framework

Two important theoretical views are used in this work, as well: the Theory of Cultural Capital by Bourdieu (1991) and the Input Hypothesis by Krashen (Krashen, 1985). These models establish a comprehensive platform of comprehending the impacts of socioeconomic status (SES) on second language acquisition (SLA), particularly in students of English in universities. The theory of Bourdieu is on how social and economic resources define the access to linguistic and educational capital and the theory of Krashen (1985) is mainly focused on the significance of the language input in the process of acquisition. The combination of these theories provides a multidimensional perspective of the interaction of external and internal factors to influence the learning results of language.

Based on the theory of cultural capital by Bourdieu, it is worth noting that success in education is not just connected with the intellectual capacity of a person but also the accessibility of the cultural resources

within a person. Cultural capital refers to knowledge, skills, educational attainment and modes of language that are valued by a particular society. According to Bourdieu (1991), individuals with higher socioeconomic statuses have cultural capital that meets the expectations of schools. In the case of the second language acquisition, cultural capital plays a role since the influence of cultural capital is connected to their experience and involvement or otherwise with the target language. Students with higher SES receive more resources: books, digital, and personal tutoring, and education in English medium. They use such resources to further connect and have access to English in real contexts and they study it with a higher quality of language. Furthermore, these students are often exposed to English orientated settings, which strengthen their communicative competence and confidence. On the other hand, low socioeconomic students might lack such forms of cultural capital. The development of language learners as second language learners can be curtailed by lack of available learning materials, exposure to English speaking environments, and lack of educational opportunities. Consequently, such students can develop problems in attaining the same degree of competence as their relatively advantaged peers. In line with this, the theory by Bourdieu can be useful in explaining why disparities in socioeconomic status led to disparities in access to linguistic resources, which eventually impact second language acquisition.

The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985) offers cognitive and linguistic explanations to the learning of the second language. According to this theory, learners learn language when their input is comprehensible input, or language a bit higher than the level of proficiency they have at that time, referred to as $i + 1$. Learning must take place through an input that is understandable and meaningful. Krashen (1985) also emphasizes that a less anxiety learning atmosphere in which the learners feel at ease and motivated to engage with the language is a necessity. The amount and the quality of the input are key aspects in this respect. The more learners are exposed to rich and meaningful input in English, whether through the media or in school and social life, the higher the chances of them attaining high levels of English proficiency. Socioeconomic status

has some such indirect yet important impacts in this regard. High SES students are often exposed to English more often through the digital platforms, books, television, and social networks where English is often used. This increased exposure enables them to get understandable input, and therefore learn the language more readily. In the case of students with lower SES origins, however, they might not have much exposure to language beyond the classroom. They might only interact with the language in formal education environments which might not offer enough or relevant input to successful acquisition. Consequently, they can slow in the acquisition of language skills. The Input Hypothesis by Krashen (1985) can therefore account for why differences in the outcomes of language learning could be due to the socio-economic factors with impact on exposure. This combination of the Bourdieu's (2003) Theory of Cultural Capital and the Input Hypothesis Theory created by Krashen (1985), makes the correlation between SES and SLA understandable. The theory by Bourdieu (1991) interprets the socioeconomic conditions that define access to cultural and linguistic resources whereas the model by Krashen (1985) emphasizes the role of exposure to comprehensible input during language acquisition. All of the theories together suggest that the success of acquiring a second language is not the outcome of the learner, but rather influenced by his social environment and the resources at his disposal. To their advantage, higher socioeconomic status students have a higher propensity to not only gain more cultural capital but also receive meaningful language input. Conversely, students with lower socioeconomic status might end up being constrained in both aspects which could lead to differences in language proficiency. Depending on this kind of integration of views it is applicable to the students of the University of Gujrat as they have diverse socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds to consider the integrated theoretical view. This study aims to provide an explanation, using these frameworks, of how the difference in access to resources and language exposure can contribute to the differences in the process of acquiring the English language by university students. Lastly, the method provides a more refined and precise insight into the role of socioeconomic and linguistic factors

in the development of second language learning by readers.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The current study has used a quantitative research design to study the relationship between the SES and second language learning of University of Gujrat students. The survey approach was used because it enables patterns and correlation among variables to be more readily uncovered and systematic gathering of data of a broader sample of participants. This method is especially helpful to investigate how the socioeconomic status affects the second language acquisition in students.

4.2 Participants

The sample size consisted of 73 undergraduate students, who were pursuing various departments of the University of Gujrat. Convenience sampling approach was used because the participants were available to the researcher. The reason why this method was considered appropriate is due to time and resources. Learners with various academic backgrounds brought a rich diversity of attitudes towards second language learning and socioeconomic background that led to an increased diversity on second language learning perspectives as reflected in the perspectives of the learners.

4.3 Research Instrument

A structured self-report questionnaire was selected to gather information on the English as a second-language students' experiences, home language of the students, and their socioeconomic status. The questionnaire consisted of 17 closed-ended questions related to age, gender, and department, among other demographic variables, in addition to questions concerning English exposure, access to learning materials, and language use at home. A focus on the utilization of closed-ended questions facilitated the data collection and quantitative analyses.

4.4 Data Collection Procedure

The data were gathered in form of an online poll using Google Forms. The questionnaire was distributed among the students through academic organizations and social media connections. The

respondents were told about the purpose of the research before filling out the questionnaire and their involvement in the study was totally voluntary. Data analysis was conducted using 73 responses that had been completed.

5. Data Analysis

Collected data were analyzed with the help of SPSS (Statistical Package, to the Social Sciences). The responses were divided using descriptive statistics, including percentages and frequencies. The findings were well-organized and presented in the form of tables. This analysis helped in identifying trends according to socioeconomic position which was related to second language learning. This section examines the results of a structured questionnaire of 73 undergraduate students in the University of Gujrat. The data obtained were subjected to analysis through SPSS (Statistical Package of the Social Sciences) with the frequencies and percentages used as descriptive statistics. The findings are grouped into four broad categories demographic information, socioeconomic background, home language environment, and second language acquisition (SLA) experience. Such a classification makes it feasible to study the interaction of socioeconomic and linguistic factors in influencing English language learning among students in a systematic manner.

5.1 Demographic Information

5.1.1 The Gender Distribution of the Respondents

Gender

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Male	29	39.7	39.7
Female	44	60.3	60.3
Total	73	100.0	100.0

Figure 1: Gender Distribution of the Respondents

The students are fairly represented in the distribution between the male and female students. This fair participation can serve to make sure that the findings are not skewed to one group of gender, and reflects an enormous diversity of learning experiences. Such a visual enhances the accuracy of the results and creates a more complete picture of the process of acquiring the second language by university students.

5.1.2 Age of Participants

According to the age profile of respondents, most respondents are within the conventional undergraduate age group. Students are actively pursuing higher education with English as a common mode of instruction and thus this phase is an important academic one. This level of students is pertinent to the study of second language acquisition since they use English in many of their academic activities such as reading, writing assignments, presentations, and exams.

5.1.3 Departments of Study

Department

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
BBA	8	11.0	11.0
Civil Engineering	1	1.4	1.4
CS	9	12.3	12.3
English	29	39.7	39.7
HND	7	9.6	9.6
Management Science	1	1.4	1.4
Mathematics	2	2.7	2.7
Physics	3	4.1	4.1
SE	9	12.3	12.3
Sociology	4	5.5	5.5
Total	73	100.0	100.0

Figure 2: Department of Study

The sample consisted of academic departments that were English and non-English speaking. This difference suggests the significance of studying English among students enrolled in different disciplines and language learners. English is also a significant academic need of the entire university faculty irrespective of the field.

5.2.1 Parental Educational Background

Parents's education

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
No formal education	13	17.8	17.8
Primary	16	21.9	21.9
Matric / O-Level	12	16.4	16.4
Intermediate / A-Level	13	17.8	17.8
Bachelor's	11	15.1	15.1
Master's	8	11.0	11.0
Total	73	100.0	100.0

Figure 3: Parents' Educational Background

The findings showed that the educational backgrounds of the parents were different among the respondents. A good number of students said their parents were less educated yet some students said they had parents who were highly educated. This variation is an indication of differences in the socioeconomic position and can possibly affect the type and amount of academic assistance students obtain at home. Higher education levels among parents increase the chances of them promoting and supporting their children (including their English learning) in their educational activities.

5.2.2 Availability of Learning Resources at Home

Data suggests that students have widely different access to learning materials. Several participants said that they had low availability, but others said they had enough access, e.g., through books, internet facilities, and digital learning resources. The

5.2 Socioeconomic Background

As these variables are often used to measure the socioeconomic conditions of students, socioeconomic status was analyzed according to such indicators as parental education and access to educational resources.

variations are a reflection of socioeconomic disparity that can affect students' ability to practice and develop their English beyond the classroom. Classroom instruction is a key to learning English because limited access to resources limits exposure to the language.

5.3 Language used at Home

The native language context of students greatly impacts their contact with English and the development of their language at a broader level. Based on the findings, most students speak in the language they grew up speaking at home. The use of English is hardly used in everyday family communication. As a result, students have limited exposure to English out-of-classroom interaction, which could potentially affect their confidence, fluency, and impromptu usage of the language.

Home language

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Punjabi	51	69.9	69.9
Sindhi	2	2.7	2.7
Balochi	2	2.7	2.7
Urdu	15	20.5	20.5
Other	3	4.1	4.1
Total	73	100.0	100.0

Figure 4: Language Used at Home

The results showed almost all students speak in their native language at home. English is barely spoken in day-to-day family communication. As such, students are rarely exposed to English outside the classroom which may affect their confidence, fluency, and informal usage of the language.

5.3.1 Family Members’ Utilization of English

They also found most families had family members who rarely spoke English in the household. This limited use hinders opportunities for use outside of the classroom and reduces day-to-day contact with the language. Consequently, English is still mainly confined to academic settings such as classrooms, assignments, and tests rather than being used in daily communication.

5.4 Second Language Acquisition Experience

It discusses how the students are exposed to English outside of the classroom and their comfort level with the language.

5.4.1 Exposure to English outside the Classroom

The findings suggest many students lack exposure to English beyond the classroom. Thus, language acquisition essentially derives from formal education. Such lack of exposure to everyday English can delay the growth of communicative ability and opportunities for effective and practical use of the language may be reduced by the absence of real-life English exposure.

5.4.2 Confidence in Using English

The findings reveal that there is a variation in confidence of students in their English use. A very significant percentage of the respondents in the survey indicated low confidence regarding their speech and communication ability in English although some indicated moderate confidence. This low confidence is probably a reaction to low exposure, lack of any practice opportunities and the prevalence of the native language in everyday communication. Nevertheless, students study with English in spite of these challenges, which proves their necessity and wish to communicate with this language in schools.

6. Findings and Discussion

Based on this research, the results reveal that the socioeconomic status of the students of the University of Gujarat can have a significant influence on the second language learning strategies. These findings indicate that the degree of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds of students affects the degree of exposure to English, the degree of availability of materials and the degree of language learning achieved. As a result, with increased access to instructional resources, digital resources and responsive learning environments, higher SES students are better placed to take advantage of using English in non-academic contexts. It is also noted in the study that home language environment is important to second language learning. The results indicate that, on the whole, homes do not use

English much, as family members speak their native tongue. This limited exposure to English in the home environment means that students are limited in the few opportunities they get to informal practice which is critical to the development of fluency and communicative confidence. Our findings support the fact that the acquisition of the second language is highly influenced by the availability of the input and the conditions of language use. Students receiving most of their instruction in classroom do not have practical exposure and these experiences affect their confidence and their ability to master the English language in real-life settings. On the other hand, students who experience English outside of classrooms in social or learning environments, acquire relatively higher levels of language proficiency. As a consequence, the findings are consistent with the theoretic positions of Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Bourdieu's Cultural Capital Theory, which emphasize the relevance of resource accessibility and language use in successful language acquisition. The study demonstrates that differences between university students' acquisition of second languages are influenced both by linguistic exposure restrictions as well as the socioeconomic inequalities afflicting them.

7. Conclusion

The study argues that SES and the language environment of the home play a vital role in the SLA of the students of the University of Gujrat. The study's results also have a large effect on the second language acquisition (SLA) because of the socioeconomic background of students. From the analysis of the data from 73 undergraduate students, it can be concluded that socioeconomic status has a significant impact on learners' English contact, learning materials and L2 acquisition. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds have better access to higher-quality educational aids such as books, digital devices and a better learning environment, which opens up language teaching to them to be involved further than they can learn English outside of the classroom. In comparison, students of low socioeconomic status often lack the resources to practice and enhance their language. The result is an unequal, unfair learning climate; and, to a certain extent, impaired students' academic

achievement and language development. It also showed that one of the most important aspects of second language acquisition is the home language environment. The results indicate English is seldom spoken in the everyday life of households, where the dominant languages often refer to that in the native or regional area. This, in its turn, puts the students at a disadvantage in informal language practice that students, as one example, undergo as key factors to acquire fluency, confidence and communicative competence.

Moreover, results of the study show a clear difference between theoretical and practical application of English in real life context. The medium of instruction in higher education is English, and English is a widely spoken language, but lots of students have difficulties with its use in other areas of life. Such disconnection reduces their confidence and helps them to be less able to speak fluently in the real world. It implies that classroom learning of a second language is insufficient. Overall, the findings emphasize the complex nature of the second language learning process, depending on the social-linguistic interactions. It is not based on formal education as its most holistic determinant, but is also guided by the socioeconomic status and the state of affairs in the home of the learners. Therefore, institutions of learning should intervene in order to fill the gaps. These outcomes can be greatly enhanced by the greater access of language learners to learning resources, more interactive language activities and, most importantly, by the opportunities provided to the learners to practice the English language outside the classroom. Such initiatives can serve as a relief between the different generations of English learners who might worship on different economic levels and to a more even-handed and functional second language teaching in universities.

8. REFERENCES

- Bourdieu, P. (1991). *Language and symbolic power*. Harvard university press.
- Coleman, J. S. (1988). Social capital in the creation of human capital. *American journal of sociology*, 94, S95-S120.
- Creswell, J. W., & Creswell, J. D. (2017). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Sage publications.

- Cummins, J. (2014). Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. In *The New Immigrant and Language* (pp. 72-101). Routledge.
- Ellis, R. (1997). Second language acquisition. *The United States: Oxford*, 98, 37.
- Gardner, R. C. (1985). Social psychology and second language learning: The role of attitudes and motivation. (*No Title*).
- Hoff, E. (2006). How social contexts support and shape language development. *Developmental review*, 26(1), 55-88.
- Holmes, J., & Wilson, N. (2022). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Routledge.
- Krashen, S. D. (1985). The input hypothesis: Issues and implications. (*No Title*).
- Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (2006). *How languages are learned*. Oxford University Press.
- Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools: Translating research into action*. Ascd.
- Norton, B. (2013). *Identity and language learning: Extending the conversation*. Multilingual matters.
- Rahman, T. (2002). Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India. (*No Title*).
- Saville-Troike, M. (2008). *The ethnography of communication: An introduction*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Shamim, F. (2011). English as the language for development in Pakistan: Issues, challenges and possible solutions. *Dreams and realities: Developing countries and the English language*, 14(1), 291-310.
- Spolsky, B. (1989). *Conditions for second language learning* (Vol. 990). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Trudgill, P. (2000). *Sociolinguistics: An introduction to language and society*. Penguin UK.
- Vygotsky, L. S., & Cole, M. (1978). *Mind in society: Development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard university press.
- Wardhaugh, R., & Fuller, J. M. (2021). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Yule, G. (2022). *The study of language*. Cambridge university press.

