

FACTORS INFLUENCING ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY OF ORDINARY LEVEL STUDENTS (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO SELECTED SCHOOLS IN GAMPAHA DISTRICT)

S.A.H.N. Solangaarachchi*

Department of Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka

Abstract

English proficiency of the majority of Sri Lankan Ordinary Level students is not at a satisfactory level for many years. According to the latest government statistics, 34.22 percent of students have failed English as a subject in the G.C.E. Examination and this happens every year. Therefore, this study is significant as it aims to identify the factors (socio economic, psychological, linguistic factors and teaching strategies) influencing English language proficiency of O/L students with special reference to Gampaha district. According to the outcomes of the study, it reflects that each factor (socio economic, psychological, linguistic factors) has a significant, strong positive relationship with English language proficiency and the learners' exposure, level of motivation, the teaching strategies received by the learner have an impact on learners' English language competency. Therefore, this study provides recommendations, specially, for the relevant parties; institutions and government to implement effective solutions.

Keywords: *English language proficiency, Linguistic factors, Psychological, Socio-economic, Teaching strategies*

*Corresponding author: Tel.: +94 (71) 425 8481; Email: hashinisolangaarachchi@gmail.com;

Introduction

English is taught as a second language in Sri Lankan school educational system from grade three to grade thirteen. Reading, writing, speaking and listening are all the four components of English language proficiency. According to the latest and previous government statistics, it's revealed that English proficiency of the majority of O/L students in Sri Lanka aren't at a satisfactory level for many years. Because of that, Sri Lankan English education needs to closely examine the factors influencing English language proficiency of O/L students in Sri Lanka. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to identify significant factors that may influence on English language proficiency of O/L students in Gampaha district.

Material and Methods

The researcher has used a survey method to gather information about the study from the O/L students in selected schools in Gampaha District. Study Design: This is a descriptive cross-sectional study. Five schools (National, 1AB and, 1C schools) in Gampaha district were selected as the study setting. Both male and female students in grades 10 and 11(G.C.E. O/L scheme) in selected schools mentioned above in 2022 academic year were selected as the study population. The data has been collected from 101 responders in Gampaha district using a self-administrative structured questionnaire created from Google data form. Simple random sampling method was used to select the study population. The collected data were analysed using SPSS software 26 version. As the data analysing techniques, Chi-square test, Cronbach's alpha, Pearson's correlation coefficient, multivariate analysis were done to evaluate and examine the significance, relationship of the factors (socio-economic, psychological, linguistic) influencing English language proficiency of O/L students.

Results and Discussion

In the study population, 55.45% were female students while 44.55% were male students and 58.42% students studied in grade 11 and 41.58% of the students studied in Grade 10.

Considering psychological factors, 68.3% of the study population agreed with the statement that they have negative confidence while learning English. 67.3% of the study population stated that they get stressed when learning English.

Considering linguistic factors, over 61.4% students agreed that they have issues with pronunciation while speaking and 63.4% of the study population

agreed with the statement that they cannot identify the words accurately when listening to English. Furthermore, the majority of students (65.3%) agreed that they have main issues in grammar and vocabulary while 53.5% agreed with the statement on having issues with punctuation.

Considering socio-economic factors, 69.3% of students agreed with the statement using mother tongue most of the time and that leads them to have a poor oral proficiency in English. Considering the outcomes of the hypothesis testing, it revealed there's a significant relationship between students' socio-economic background and English proficiency.

When considering the influence of teaching strategies on students, 63.4% of the study population stated that if group works and impromptu speeches are encouraged in the classroom, their English oral proficiency isn't at a satisfactory level. 70.3% of the students agreed that they are encouraged to do writing activities in the classroom. Also, 66.3% agreed that all the tenses and the relevant grammar lessons are covered in the classroom by teachers. 71.3% students stated that audio sessions, recorded English conversations aren't used in their classroom to improve listening.

Table 1:

Reliability Analysis: Measuring the reliability of the factors influencing English language proficiency.

Variable	Cronbach Alpha value
Psychological factors	0.726
Strategies and activities used by teachers for speaking	0.790
Strategies and activities used by teachers for writing	0.714
Strategies and activities used by teachers for listening	0.824
Strategies and activities used by teachers for reading	0.854
School background	0.820

Source: Sample Survey 2022

Note: This tables shows the reliability of the data set for each variable.

All the factors including dependent and independent variables have very good reliability. (Cronbach's Alpha value => 0.7 indicates a high level of reliability in the study.

Table 2:

Estimation of Coefficients.

Correlations-Pearson's Correlation Matrix					
		English proficiency	Grammar	Speaking English at home	income
English proficiency	Pearson Correlation	1	.905**	.802**	.655**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	101	101	101	101
Grammar	Pearson Correlation	.905**	1	.857**	.679**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000
	N	101	101	101	101
Speaking English at home	Pearson Correlation	.802**	.857**	1	.717**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	101	101	101	101
Income	Pearson Correlation	.655**	.679**	.717**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	101	101	101	101
** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

Note: This table shows the relationship between each two variables which affect to English proficiency.

Correlation Analysis- There's a significant relationship between socio-economic background with English proficiency ($p < 0.05$). and it's a strong positive relationship (Pearson's correlation value is 0.655 and 0.802 respectively).

Table 2.1*Estimation of Coefficients*

Coefficients^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T value	Significance
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	.923	.310		2.980	.004
	Grammar	1.017	.123	.767	8.258	.000
	Socio-economical cultural factors	1.365	.102	.802	13.349	.000
	Teaching strategies for listening	.261	.090	.280	2.908	.004
	Teaching strategies for writing	.385	.083	.424	4.653	.000
	Psychological factors	.677	.079	.655	8.622	.000
	Teaching strategies for speaking	.214	.075	.276	2.859	.005

Note: This table shows the significant relationship between each two variables which affect to English proficiency.

Considering linguistic factors, there's a significant relationship between grammar with English proficiency ($p < 0.05$). Also, there's a significant relationship between oral proficiency and speaking English at home. Furthermore, there's a significant relationship between English proficiency and psychological factors ($P < 0.05$).

Table 3:*Hypothesis Testing*

No	Hypotheses	p-value	Decision
H1	There is a significant relationship between socio-economic background (income and occupation of parents) and English proficiency	0.000	H0 rejected
H2	There is a significant relationship between psychological factors and English proficiency	0.000	H0 rejected
H3	There is a significant relationship between speaking English at home with oral proficiency	0.000	H0 rejected

Note: This table consists of Pearson's Chi- square test to examine the significance of hypotheses in the study.

If the p value is less than 0.05 significance level, the null hypotheses would be rejected and it shows there's a significant relationship between independent variable and dependent variable.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study is carried out as a comprehensive investigation on the factors influencing English Language proficiency. According to the outcomes of the study, it's proved that psychological factors can have a great impact on students' English speaking. This study suggests to implement a motivational enhancing program to reduce students' anxiety when learning English to improve their performance. There's a significant improvement in English proficiency of O/L students when they speak English at home. This study suggests to conduct a series of consulting sessions at the school level to educate students about the importance of using English practically. Among the teaching strategies used by teachers, the material based teaching strategy has a significant impact on the English proficiency of students. Therefore, this study suggests to implement more practical teaching strategies and effective activities into the subject curriculum (new practical teachers' guide). These findings are identified by this study.

References

- Aloysius, M. (2015). Title: Problems of English teaching in Sri Lanka: how they affect teaching efficacy (Phd). University of Bedfordshire.
- Astuti, S. P. (2015). Teachers' and students' perceptions of motivational teaching strategies in an Indonesian high school context.
- Dilini, T. V. S. (2021). *Factors that determine the acquisition of English as a second language among adult learners in Sri Lanka* (Master's thesis, NTNU).
- El-Omari, A. H. (2016). Factors affecting students' achievement in English language learning. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*,6(2), 9.
- Sittarage, N. P. K. (2018). English Language Education in Sri Lanka Link with the Learners' Motivational Factors. *Humanising Language Teaching*, 20(4).
- .