

EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL BACKGROUNDS ON ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING: A STUDY OF TADJIK AND KYRGYZ STUDENTS

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Abstract: This study investigates the influence of social backgrounds on English language learning, specifically comparing Tadjik and Kyrgyz students in a language center. The paper focuses on the role of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family support in shaping students' English proficiency, learning preferences, and classroom experiences. Data was collected through surveys and interviews with 10 students, and the analysis explores the pedagogical implications of these social factors. The findings suggest that students' backgrounds significantly affect their learning styles, attitudes toward language acquisition, and overall language performance, urging educators to consider these factors in language teaching strategies.

Keywords: English language learning, social background, Tadjik students, Kyrgyz students, language teaching, educational equity.

Introduction:

Language learning is a complex process influenced by various social, cultural, and economic factors. Among these, students' social backgrounds play a crucial role in shaping their learning experiences and language acquisition outcomes. This study examines the influence of social background on English language learning, focusing on two distinct student groups: Tadjik and Kyrgyz learners enrolled in a language center. By investigating the impact of ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family support, this research aims to highlight the ways in which social contexts shape students' proficiency, learning preferences, and overall engagement in the classroom. Ethnicity can influence students' language learning in multiple ways, such as their exposure to English, cultural attitudes toward language acquisition, and interactions with peers and instructors. Additionally, socioeconomic status plays a significant role in determining students' access to educational resources, such as private tutoring, technological tools, and quality learning materials. Family support, including parental encouragement and involvement in academic activities, further contributes to students' motivation and confidence in learning English. These factors collectively affect students' language learning strategies, engagement with the curriculum, and overall performance.

In multilingual and multicultural educational settings, understanding the social backgrounds of students is essential for developing inclusive and effective teaching strategies. Educators who consider these influences can tailor their instructional approaches to meet the specific needs of learners from diverse backgrounds. This study employs surveys and interviews with 10 students to examine how social factors impact their English language learning. The findings will provide valuable insights into the pedagogical implications of these influences and

offer recommendations for educators to create more equitable learning environments. By addressing these social determinants, this research seeks to contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language acquisition and promote educational equity in language learning contexts.

Literature Review:

Social Factors in Language Learning: The role of social background in language acquisition has been widely studied. Factors such as ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family involvement have been found to significantly affect students' language learning experiences.

Cultural and Ethnic Differences: Research by Fuller (2014) and Deumert (2011) suggests that learners from different ethnic groups may face challenges in acquiring certain linguistic features due to the influence of their first language (L1). Differences in phonological, syntactic, and semantic structures between L1 and English can create obstacles in pronunciation, grammar acquisition, and comprehension. Moreover, cultural attitudes towards language learning and the perceived importance of English in different communities shape learners' motivation and engagement.

Socioeconomic Status and Motivation: Motivation plays a central role in language learning. Learners from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often have more access to resources such as private tutoring, high-quality educational materials, and immersive language experiences. In contrast, students from lower-income families might face additional barriers, including limited access to technology, fewer learning opportunities outside the classroom, and increased academic pressure due to financial constraints. Research indicates that these disparities can impact students' confidence, persistence, and overall language acquisition outcomes.

Understanding these social factors is essential for educators to develop inclusive and effective teaching strategies. By addressing challenges related to ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family involvement, language instructors can foster a more equitable learning environment that supports all students in their language learning journey.

Methodology:

The study employed a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative and qualitative data to assess the influence of social factors on language learning.

Participants: The study involved 10 students enrolled in an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course at a language center in Kuvasai city. Six students are Tadjik, and four are Kyrgyz. Their language level is B2(upper-intermediate). So far the students have had formal instruction for 3 years in learning English, they have been

taught by GTM which means that they are good at prescriptive grammar and receptive skills than productive ones. In addition, they have adequate repertoire of vocabulary. The target class is EAP, they are going to take CEFR exam after finishing the course. The target learners prefer learning by visual aids or listening to more audio materials which make them learn faster and efficiently. Learners' L1s are Uzbek and Tadjik as well as their home languages. Students are motivated

intrinsically that they learn the language in order to get CEFR certification to have a chance to enter university.

Data Collection: Data was collected through two main methods:

Surveys: A questionnaire was administered to gather information about learners' language background, socioeconomic status, and learning preferences.

Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore students' attitudes toward English learning and the role of their social backgrounds.

Data Analysis: The survey data were analyzed quantitatively using descriptive statistics to identify trends in learning preferences and challenges. The interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify key themes related to social factors influencing language learning.

Results:

The analysis revealed several key findings related to the influence of social factors on English language learning:

Subgroup 1

There are 4 Kyrgyz students in the class who come from the city centre. They have begun learning General English as well as the grammar, however, some students considered it difficult and time-consuming. In other words, they preferred explicit and deductive way of learning. All of the learners are Muslims and come from literate families which has also triggered them to gain high knowledge and to be competent at foreign languages. Their parents have created a comfortable atmosphere to study, but often with pressure from parents. The Kyrgyz students have also learnt other foreign languages, which can show the high pressure by their parents to be well-educated. Being under pressure made the learners learn the language hard and they achieved this level so far. They have had basic knowledge and understanding about the language with the help of their siblings who are also educated and bilingual. One interesting feature of the language use by the Kyrgyz students is the hard pronunciation of consonants in L2: /t/, /w/, /r/, /c/, /v/ and /g/ in the words such as water, under, good, because, valley. Although they are competent at grammar use, they do have a poor pronunciation, because they did not have enough practice in productive skills. The learners prefer learning the language only with more theories rather than practicing it. For example, rather than being involved in interactive games and groupworking they prefer to learn with rules, theories: deductive way of teaching. Despite having sufficient knowledge in grammar, omitting the copula verb "be" in their speech can be seen frequently, this can be because there is no such alternative in their L1¹. In addition, monophthongization which is common in English has also been seen which is another feature for Kyrgyz people. It is observed usually in words such as "because", addition of the [j] after /e/ sound. Although all of the Kyrgyz students come from middle-class families their priorities are all about studying, being educated which means they invest more in it. Diversity of the

¹ Fought, C. (2011). Language and ethnicity. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociolinguistics* (pp. 238–257).

subgroup's ethnicity is widespread mainly in the eastern parts of the region because it borders with the Kyrgyz Republic. To tell the truth, as the nation is not marginalized in terms of educational sphere but can be seen as impolite in character.

Subgroup 2

There are 6 Tadjik students in the class coming from both higher and middle income families who also live in the eastern part of Kuvasai, where there is much attention to education. The students L1 is Tadjik and also the majority of the population in Kuvasai accounts for Tadjik people as it is close to Tadjikistan. Attention towards language learning is higher by their families that their parents have done their best to support learning foreign languages. The students also know Arabic which has an effect on the pronunciation of some consonants, producing them hard and fully in the mouth, and most of them are backward, such as can, have/has, good. So the impact of both Arabic and Tadjik can be seen in their speech. Originally all students come from Tadjik families who came and settled in Kuvasai. When it comes to learning preferences, half of them prefer visual way while the rest benefit more from audios or listening to the lectures. The students whose family is middle class have more self motivation in order that they can enter universities and get well-paid job in the future while other ones learn languages because of their parents' desires. The Tadjik learners are good at speaking that they do not feel hesitation in expressing their opinions. However, [th] is pronounced as s/z frequently which is one of the features of AAVE. This could be because of not having the same alternative in their L1. In addition, vocabulary repertoire includes mainly nouns which could be because they have basically worked with visual aids. Similar to the Kyrgyz students, this subgroup also omits a copular verb "be" frequently in their speech and writing because of the same reason as Kyrgyz students. Tadjik students are more sociable than the other subgroup which can make the learning process more interactive. The nation is widespread mainly in the southern part of the region and not diverse all around the city. They are considered to be wealthy in terms of socioeconomic status, of course it is native people's view.

Discussion:

The findings highlight the significant role that social factors, particularly ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family background, play in shaping language learning experiences. The differences in learning preferences between Tadjik and Kyrgyz students suggest that a one-size-fits-all approach to teaching English may not be effective. Instead, teachers should consider incorporating diverse teaching methods that cater to students' preferred learning styles, such as visual aids, listening activities, and grammar-based instruction.

Considering the collected and investigated data from those both groups, it is clear that there are some similarities and differences in some cases which can be integrated. To begin, indirect instruction can be suitable for the target group as a modern teaching instruction that as the learners have sufficient amount of knowledge in English as well as motivation, teacher can play a role as a supporter or facilitator. In terms of approaches, the balance should be kept between top-down and bottom-up approaches during the classes in order to suit every student's needs in language learning. As the students prefer visual, auditory and theory-based ways of learning it is better to create and select materials on them, such as theories and rules explained in the form of

videos or podcasts so that everyone can benefit from the input. Classroom practices should be devoted to more pedagogical tasks due to the aims of the target learners. Namely, the materials should focus more on improving productive skills. Because the learners already have had enough knowledge on grammar and vocabulary. Instructional patterns should be arranged according to the vocabulary repertoire and whether the learner is extrovert or not. Other skills, especially in listening, selecting audio materials should be based on American English as the majority of students are exposed to it when they have conversation with each other. In addition, in order to reach the correct grammar, some teaching materials should focus on nouns and verb, in particular, copular 'be', subject and verb agreement due to their frequent unconscious mistake on the grammar feature. Like the approach used to explain the topic, in the class the assessment with analytic rubric should also be based on their learning styles to get them more engaged in it. Group discussions, pair and share, I do, We do, You do can also be relevant considering the size of the group as well as interests. 'Schooling is so implicated in the needs, interests, and imperatives of the dominant institutions and social groups that it is often difficult to see the full effect of their influence in the classroom...' (Canagarajah, 1999) points out that teaching places are paying attention to factors that help meet the needs of students ignoring the results.² For that reason, results or achievements should also be considered so that whether the implications work well or not. The data gathered above can help assess their language proficiency. In other words, as the learners pronounce some letters harder with the impact of their L1, it should not be considered as a mistake in speaking. In addition, considering students' learning preferences, the given materials to assess their language proficiency should not focus on only one style or ability, for example, writing formal letters. Instead, multiple tasks are offered to check reliably. Also, while evaluating their productive skills it is suggested to pay attention to equity in terms of ethnicity or social status. In other words, not assessing higher social class students with higher scores regardless of their performance is not suggested as it is unfair.

Description of using context

The students are applicants now and they are finishing secondary school entering university. They will be using English for formal academic purposes at university which requires the language to be standard in order to communicate in formal contexts. The students may use non-standard language as well with each other. At least the purpose is understanding and intelligibility, not proficiency checking. As it will be a state university, during the classes the learners can be allowed to use code-switching in some cases. It means the context will be multilingual, different learners will bring different home languages. As it is suggested by [1] in a multilingual context men and women have different standard languages within a community. It means the target students need to adapt the language according to the interlocutor's gender. In terms of race, as it is in Uzbekistan, the majority is Asian and could be some White people at the university. There will not be any strict policy, as long as the learners can speak standard language. The target group profile includes subjects of the same race, Asian, but with different ethnicity, Kyrgyz and Tadjik. For that reason, these topics can be appropriate to consider while here is no much concern in terms of gender and sexuality considering the context and location. The students can feel safe as there is no discrimination on sexuality, race or ethnicity. However, in terms of gender there could be some relevant points about the target group. One of them is that,

² Schilling, N. (2011). Language, gender, and sexuality. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociolinguistics*.

as mentioned by Tannen (1986), there is a difference between girls and boys on the use of the target language in both subgroups.³ For instance, girls have conversations based on more feelings, emotions which develop more interactive skills using more adjectives, backchanneling or tails. On the other hand, boys tend to dominate the conversation by interrupting that develops more competitive skills. In our case, in Uzbekistan, arguments about race could not be relevant since there are not multi-raced inhabitants which result in teaching taking into account their race and other factors. 'Gender and language use' by Mesthrie., et al (2009) discusses differences between men and women in terms of L2 use, for that reason it can be relevant in clarifying distinct features and later can help how to create materials or how to assess according to these factors in detail. Without knowing the needs or differences, teaching L2 can be useless. In his article called 'Language, gender and sexuality' Schilling (2011) gives information about how males and females use the language as well as common stereotypes among cultures and nations. For that reason, this can provide a further insight into how these subjects in the target subgroups use English and for what reasons. As Fuller (2014) in the article 'Languages, dialects and varieties' included relevant details for the target profile. Because the target group uses different varieties of English as mentioned before, it can help to have a clear understanding about language varieties affected by social factors across different regions as well as communities. So it functions as an evidence for target learners' use of language.

Pedagogical Implications: Teachers should be aware of the impact of students' backgrounds on their language proficiency and learning strategies. For example, students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds may benefit from more advanced materials and tasks, while students from lower-income families might require additional support and encouragement. Considering the collected and investigated data from those both groups, it is clear that there are some similarities and differences in some cases which can be integrated. To begin, indirect instruction can be suitable for the target group as a modern teaching instruction that as the learners have sufficient amount of knowledge in English as well as motivation, teacher can play a role as a supporter or facilitator. In terms of approaches, the balance should be kept between top-down and bottom-up approaches during the classes in order to suit every student's needs in language learning. As the students prefer visual, auditory and theory-based ways of learning it is better to create and select materials on them, such as theories and rules explained in the form of videos or podcasts so that everyone can benefit from the input. Classroom practices should be devoted to more pedagogical tasks due to the aims of the target learners. Namely, the materials should focus more on improving productive skills. Because the learners already have had enough knowledge on grammar and vocabulary. Instructional patterns should be arranged according to the vocabulary repertoire and whether the learner is extrovert or not. Other skills, especially in listening, selecting audio materials should be based on American English as the majority of students are exposed to it when they have conversation with each other. In addition, in order to reach the correct grammar, some teaching materials should focus on nouns and verb, in particular, copular 'be', subject and verb agreement due to their frequent unconscious mistake on the grammar feature. Like the the approach used to explain the topic, in the class the assessment with analytic rubric should also be based on their learning styles to get them more engaged in it. Group discussions, pair and share, I do, We do, You do can also be relevant considering the size of the group as well as interests. 'Schooling is so implicated in the needs, interests, and

³ De Oliveira, L. C. (2014). Teacher education for social justice: Perspectives and lessons learned.

imperatives of the dominant institutions and social groups that it is often difficult to see the full effect of their influence in the classroom...' (Canagarajah, 1999) points out that teaching places are paying attention to factors that help meet the needs of students ignoring the results.⁴ For that reason, results or achievements should also be considered so that whether the implications work well or not. The data gathered above can help assess their language proficiency. In other words, as the learners pronounce some letters harder with the impact of their L1, it should not be considered as a mistake in speaking. In addition, considering students' learning preferences, the given materials to assess their language proficiency should not focus on only one style or ability, for example, writing formal letters. Instead, multiple tasks are offered to check reliably. Also while evaluating their productive skills it is suggested to pay attention to equity in terms of ethnicity or social status. In other words, not assessing higher social class students with higher scores regardless of their performance is not suggested as it is unfair.

Cultural Sensitivity: The study also underscores the need for cultural sensitivity in the classroom. Teachers should be mindful of the specific challenges faced by students from different ethnic groups and create an inclusive environment that fosters collaboration and mutual respect.

Recommendations for Future Research: Future studies could explore the long-term effects of social factors on language proficiency and the role of family support in language learning. Additionally, research could investigate the impact of gender differences on language acquisition within specific cultural contexts.

Description of learning context: The students have been studying in the private language centre situated in the city centre since february in a group with formal instruction. The class is EAP that they are going to take CEFR exams after finishing the course. The students attend the classes 3 times a week for half an hour. The learning context is multilingual, their L1 is Uzbek, home languages are Tadjik and Kyrgyz which require a teacher to be fit in this context, ability to be linguistically responsive using code-switching and non-standard language in appropriate cases. However, sometimes students may anyway speak in their L1 or home languages because when their listener can not understand what he or she is speaking in the conversation. About 60 % of the learners come from high-income families that requires a teacher not to marginalize the rest when giving examples to explain the topic or paying less attention to them to help, equity should be priority.

Conclusion:

This study confirms that social factors, including ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and family support, significantly influence English language learning. Educators must adopt inclusive and flexible teaching practices that account for these variables to ensure that all students, regardless of their background, have an equitable opportunity to succeed. By understanding the distinct needs of students from diverse social backgrounds, teachers can create a more supportive and effective learning environment. consideration of not only level but also social factors, gender, status, attitude of people towards the language can be important factors that can help meet learners' needs. Namely, without discriminating race, ethnicity, gender as well as socioeconomic status a teacher should reach equity during the class in comprehension of the

⁴ Schilling, N. (2011). Language, gender, and sexuality. In R. Mesthrie (Ed.), *The Cambridge handbook of sociolinguistics*.

language. For example, if there is a learner from a low-income family or a 'unicorn' they should not be marginalized because of their conditions. Instead it is a teacher's job to create a friendly atmosphere or a small society in the class that could accept other students too and make all students understand this situation. At the same time the other students should not misunderstand your additional help to that distinct student who requires extra aid to learn.

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