

Influence of Socio-cultural Environment on the English Language Proficiency of Secondary School Students

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ABSTRACT

Learning cannot prosper without conducive learning contexts. According to Vygotsky, learning is the outcome of social interaction between the individual and society. In the context of educational achievements of learners, various sociocultural components, homely conditions, classroom environment, social interactions etc. can play an essential role for learning. Even learning a language as a discipline requires appropriate learning backgrounds to develop the skills needed to garner the particular knowledge. The present study has embarked upon the idea of finding the relationship between the Sociocultural determinants and English language proficiency among the Bengali-medium secondary school students of North-24-Pargana. However, this study examines whether the sociocultural determinants influence the English language proficiency of the students, especially their reading and writing abilities. It has employed a quantitative approach to investigate the relationship. Descriptive analysis and correlational analysis were performed to analyse the collected data. A T-test was also conducted to compare two different groups of students. The population of the study was class-x students of Bengali-medium rural and urban co-ed schools of West Bengal. A sample of 200 class-x students were randomly selected using a simple random sampling technique. Four co-ed secondary schools were randomly selected from North-24-Pargana district, two each from urban and rural areas. From each school 50 students including 25 boys and 25 girls were randomly selected. Tools used for this study are culturally adopted self-constructed Sociocultural Scale designed for students to collect data and Reading and Writing Ability Scale to measure their English language proficiency ability. The result shows that socio-cultural environments have a significant impact on the performance of English proficiency of the secondary school students. Gender difference does not influence on the achievement of English proficiency. But, urban students having more convenient environment like academic resources, parental consciousness, accessibility to different learning materials and so on perform better than those of rural students.

Keywords: *English Language, Sociocultural Environment, Proficiency, Secondary School Students, Urban & Rural, Boys & Girls*

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Among all the soft imperial powers English has emerged as the most powerful and dominant tool to impose the cultural hegemony of western civilization. A language acts as a 'vector' carrying social norms, cultures, habits, education, religious faiths and beliefs. In today's world, with the emergence of social media, technology and modern education influencing individuals' thoughts English language has been instrumental in all these platforms. Under the disguise of its utilitarian purpose, English has been used as a device of 'linguistic coercion' (Phillipon, 1992). Although it is undeniably true that English has remained a gateway to higher education and elite status. It carries a cultural significance with it. As a result, it has created a "myth of superiority" which encapsulates parents' views about the English language more highly than any other local languages. The omnipresence of English across all sectors of society such as scientific research, social sciences, social media platforms forces non-native speakers to participate spontaneously in English-driven global discourse. The concept of English being a standardized language often degrades local English dialects like Indian English and emphasizes on western cultures choking indigenous forms of expression. Unlike colonial times when English was imposed upon the natives, nowadays English has become a self-selected medium of expression chasing global mobility and making it a 'milder' entity accepted open-handedly rather than being resisted.

In spite of all these, learning English in an Indian context demands various factors including sociocultural differences, parents' awareness, learning environment in school, students' psychological readiness etc. To match up the speed of global advancement, students should prioritize learning English language skills, especially reading, writing, speaking and communicative skills. But students mostly from weaker sociocultural backgrounds suffer most in navigating English as a second language.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Learning language, especially English language acquisition has become a subject vividly influenced by diverse sociocultural and social linguistic backgrounds in today's globalized world (Hossain, 2023). Urban students perceive English language learning more positively than rural students do. English language acquisition is profoundly influenced by the social context of the individual learner. According to Gardner's social educational model, the four major components such as social milieu, individual differences, learning acquisition context and outcomes affect students' second language acquisition (Amiri & Karfa). Social and cultural factors might shape students, psychological insights, and attitudes towards English as a foreign language. Psychological factors like motivation, interest, attitude, self-confidence, anxiety, aptitude, etc. also determine English language acquisition (Abdulrahman, 2023). English proficiency also depends on students, motivation, culture in the classroom, conducive environment for speaking and using English and parents, learning environment (Salsabila, 2024). Socio-economic status plays an essential part in achieving language learning success (Bipasha & Islam, 2025). Sometimes negative home conditions like authoritative parenting styles negatively affect learning outcomes (Hu & Abidin, 2025). On the other side, neglectful parenting positively affects second language learning, whereas parenting styles function as a bridge between family socioeconomic background and English acquisition outcomes (Xu et al, 2024). Muhammad (2024) asserts that parents' educational status, their awareness about education, their relationship conflicts and views about gender discrimination have an impact on English proficiency. Students' cultural identity also plays a significant role in influencing their perspectives towards learning English (Aminulloh & Paranata, 2025). Cultural elements are such determinants that strongly decide EFL learners' learning ability. Even without parents, direct assistance in language learning, the presence of cultural elements

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in EFL learners, homely conditions significantly increase their learning capability (Diouani,2021). Cultural context and its differences can yield different learning perspectives of the learners. Language preferences and usage deeply rooted in cultural backgrounds affect how students adopt language learning (Alisoy,2024). In some cultures, rote learning is emphasized whereas in some others, communicative function of English language is reiterated.

Statement of the Problem:

The demand for English language proficiency is increasing in developing countries like India. It pervades its presence in almost every domain of human life – education, health, employment, science and technology etc. However, Bengali-medium rural and urban students have long been confronting difficulties in achieving English proficiency. Their exposure to English language is limited and confined within the classroom. Due to home environment, parental indifference, limited learning resources, economic depravity, and several socio-cultural environments, learners experience challenges in proceeding further to develop reading or writing skills. Especially in rural context, several intervening influences being prominent hinder their learning motivation.

Even though several researches have been conducted to identify the relationship between socio-cultural environments and English language proficiency, limited studies have focused on how socio-cultural environment affects reading and writing skills under the broader name of English proficiency skills among rural and urban Bengali-medium class-x students of West Bengal board. Therefore, the current study has tried to find out the influence of socio-cultural environment on the English language proficiency of secondary school students.

Objectives:

1. To explore the level of English language proficiency among secondary school students.
2. To understand the nature of Sociocultural Environments.
3. To find out the relationship between Sociocultural Environment and English Language Proficiency.
4. To find out the relationship between English language proficiency of urban and rural students and their respective sociocultural backgrounds.
5. To find out the relationship between English language proficiency and the sociocultural environment based on gender - girls and boys.

Hypothesis:

- **Ho1** - There is no significant relationship between English Language Proficiency and Sociocultural Environment.
- **Ho2** - There is no significant difference between girls and boys in English Language Proficiency.
- **Ho3** - There is no significant difference between rural and urban students in English Language Proficiency.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The present study has adopted a quantitative approach including descriptive and correlational research design to examine the relationship between English language proficiency and

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sociocultural environments among the class-x students of North-24-Pargana. The study has focused on the existing conditions of the variables.

Population of the Study

Bengali-medium class-X students belonging to urban and rural areas of West Bengal are the population of the study.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample of the study includes 200 urban and rural students from four Bengali-medium secondary schools with equal representation of boys and girls. The sample was collected using simple random sampling.

Tools of Data Collection

The present study has adopted a standardized Sociocultural Environment Scale for students to collect data about their social and cultural backgrounds. Besides this, two other scales such as Reading and Writing Test Scales were used to collect students' English language proficiency data. While the Reading Test comprises of 15 items covering the dimensions like pronunciation, speed, comprehension and understanding punctuation marks, the Writing Test consists of 18 multiple choice questions from grammar and 2 questions from writing.

Validity and Reliability of the Tools

Face validity of sociocultural environment scale, reading test scale and writing test scale has been found by asking experts belonging to the field of Education and English. Concurrent validity has been found by correlating Reading and Writing Test scores and students' English marks in last final examination. It was found to be 0.68 and 0.70 respectively. The concurrent validity of sociocultural environment scale has been found by correlating sociocultural environment test scores and socio-economic status scale. It was found to be 0.73.

The test-retest reliability scores of Reading and Writing Test Scales were found to be 0.88 and 0.91 respectively (N = 20), which were significant at 0.01 level of significance. The test-retest reliability score was found to be 0.85 (N=20) significant at 0.01 level of significance.

Procedure of data collection

Data was collected from rural and urban area schools of North-24-Pargana district. The population of the study is the Bengali-medium rural and urban students of class-x of West Bengal board. The researcher had randomly selected 2 co-ed schools from urban and 2 from rural areas run by West Bengal board. From each school 25 girls and 25 boys were randomly selected from class-x by lottery method. As a result, total number of samples selected was 200.

Statistical Techniques Used

The study has used descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and t-test to analyze the data. Mean and standard deviation have been used to describe the Sociocultural Environment of the students and English Language Proficiency of them. Pearson correlation used to identify the relationship between the two variables.

Delimitations

The study has delimited the area of research to only one district (North-24-Pargana) out of 23 districts of West Bengal. The researcher has also selected only two skills namely Reading and

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Writing as the proficiency ability of the secondary school students excluding communicative skill, listening skill and other utilitarian aspects of English language learning. Only class-X students have been selected as they have reached the end of secondary section.

RESULT AND INTERPRETATION

Table no.1 - Overall Descriptive Statistics and Normality Testing

Descriptive Statistics										
	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	Std. Error	Kurtosis	Std. Error
English Language Proficiency Score	200	113	28	141	95.11	26.42	-.428	.172	-.544	.342
Socio-Cultural Environment Score	200	76	39	115	78.10	14.30	-.210	.172	-.362	.342

Table no-1 represents the descriptive statistics and normality of data using Skewness and Kurtosis. It clearly indicates that the total sample of the study is 200, where simple random sampling was used to select the participants from rural and urban areas, including 100 male and 100 females. In terms of variable, English Language Proficiency has (Mean=95.11 and SD=26.42), whereas the Skewness value is -.428 and Kurtosis value is -.544. Therefore, it is observed that the data is normally distributed. On the other hand, Socio-Cultural Environment has Mean =78.10 and SD=14.30, whereas the Skewness value is -.210 and Kurtosis value is -.362. Therefore, it can be concluded that the data is normally distributed (Field, 2018). **Field, A. (2018). *Discovering statistics using IBM SPSS statistics* (5th ed.). SAGE Publications.**

H₀1: There is no significant relationship between English Language Proficiency and Sociocultural Environment among secondary school students.

Table no: 2 Correlation Matrix

Correlations Matrix			Total Sample (Reading and Writing)	Total Sample (SCF Score)
English Language Proficiency Score	Pearson Correlation	1		.580**
	Sig. (2-tailed)			.000
	N	200		200
Socio-Cultural Environment Score	Pearson Correlation	.580**		1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		
	N	200		200

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

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The **table no- 2** displays the correlation matrix between English Language Proficiency Score and Socio-Cultural Factor Score. The result indicates that a strong, significant positive relationship exists between English Language Proficiency and the Socio-Cultural Environment ($r = 0.58, p < .05$) of secondary school students. Therefore, it is concluded that the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

H₀2: There is no significant difference between girls and boys in English Language Proficiency among secondary school students.

Table no.- 3 Descriptive Statistics of English Language Proficiency of Boys & Girls

Group Statistics					
	Sex	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
English Language Proficiency	Boy	100	96.38	26.30	2.629
	Girl	100	93.84	26.61	2.661

The **table no.3** shows the descriptive statistics of boy and girl students with respect to English Language Proficiency. Boys have Mean = 96.38 and SD = 26.30, whereas girls have Mean = 93.84, and SD = 26.61.

Table no. - 4 Independent Samples t-Test

Independent Samples Test		Levine's Test for Equality of Variances						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
English Language Proficiency	Equal variances assumed	.323	.570	.679	198	.498	2.540	3.741
	Equal variances not assumed			.679	197.971	.498	2.540	3.741

On average, male participants scored higher in English Language Proficiency ($M = 96.38, SD = 26.30$) than female ($M = 93.84, SD = 26.6$). This difference was not significant $t(198) = .68, p > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted.

H₀3: There is no significant difference between rural and urban students in English Language Proficiency among secondary school students.

Table no.- 5 Descriptive Statistics of English Language Proficiency of Rural and Urban Students

Group Statistics					
	Location	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Reading and Writing	Rural	100	89.86	29.14	2.91
	Urban	100	100.36	22.31	2.23

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In **Table no- 5**, the results reveal the descriptive statistics of rural and urban students with respect to their English Language Proficiency. Rural students yield Mean = 89.86 and SD = 29.14, where urban students' Mean = 100.36, and SD = 22.31.

Table no. 6 - Independent Samples Test

		Levine's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means				
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
English Language Proficiency	Equal variances assumed	10.848	.001	-2.861	198	.005	-10.500	3.670
	Equal variances not assumed			-2.861	185.385	.005	-10.500	3.670

On average, rural participants scored lower in English Language Proficiency ($M = 89.86$, $SD = 29.14$) than urban participants ($M = 100.36$, $SD = 22.31$). This difference was significant $t(198) = -2.861$, $p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected.

Findings of the Study

School students bear various socio-cultural backgrounds when they enter into the school premises. As we know that school is a society in miniature, students individually represent distinctive socio-cultural components (Rashid & Rahman, 2020). There are several categories of backgrounds individual student belongs to, such as – urban and rural, rich and poor, parental concerns about education and vice-versa, various professions of parents etc. Different socio-cultural contexts can influence students differently in their academic achievement and language learning acquisition. As Vygotsky's socio-constructivist theory interpreted language acquisition through the social interaction of a child in society, researchers have started to focus on the social and cultural contexts of the language learners. Socio-cultural settings of learners play a significant role in fostering learning interest, motivation etc. (Paul & Kauchak, 2005).

The results show (Table-2) that there is a significant positive correlation between English proficiency and sociocultural environment ($r = 0.58$, $p < .05$) among the secondary school students. The result proves that if students, whether boys or girls, can be provided with better sociocultural environment, they must yield a better language proficiency skill and vice-versa. So, the null hypotheses (H_0) is rejected. The study finds that students enjoying better parental education and guidance, strong economic status, access to digital platforms for learning English, regular language tuition, teachers' approach, spontaneous participation in English-enriched cultural programs perform better. This was also reiterated by the findings of Sefiu (2023). Table-3 shows the mean and SD score of the boys in English language proficiency ($M = 96.38$ and $SD = 26.30$) are better than that of girls ($M = 93.84$, and $SD = 26.61$). This accentuates that boys having better sociocultural environment perform slightly better

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performance. Table-4 explores that the difference was not significant $t(198) = .68, p > 0.05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_02) is accepted. The study also intends to explore the English language proficiency of rural and urban students from secondary schools against the backdrop of sociocultural environment. Table-5 shows that urban students (Mean = 100.36, and SD = 22.3) perform better than that of rural ones (Mean = 89.86 and SD = 29.14). Table-6 displays that the difference was significant $t(198) = -2.861, p < .05$. Therefore, the null hypothesis (H_03) is rejected. Therefore, it is said that urban students with higher sociocultural backgrounds enjoys better knowledge, experience, opportunities, language learning resources and teachers' support and thereby produce better outcomes in English language proficiency skills than rural students. On the other hand, rural students face limited learning opportunities, parental indifference, lack of funding, limited access to language learning resources etc.

CONCLUSION

This study unmistakably expresses a positive and strong influence of sociocultural environment on the English language proficiency. Sociocultural environment encompassing the role of students, parents and teachers is one of the important factors to decide language acquisition ability. The results are supposed to pose as a cornerstone for future researchers to conduct further researches and suggest recommendations based on the perceived results.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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