

**The Effects of Sociolinguistics Factors on Learning English: A Case Study**Abolfazl Mosaffa Jahromi¹ & Mahmoud Mobaraki^{2*}¹ Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Jahrom University, Iran² Assistant Professor, Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Humanities, Jahrom University, Iran**Corresponding Author:** Mahmoud Mobaraki, E-mail: mmobaraki@jahromu.ac.ir**ARTICLE INFO**

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KEYWORD*gender, ESL, sociolinguistics factors, age, parents' occupation***ABSTRACT**

There are some factors like educational, psychological, administrative, sociolinguistics and etc. which affect on the learning of a second language. We probed age, gender and parents' jobs as three sociolinguistics factors in relation to learn English as second language by Iranian students. The authors tried to know whether the three mentioned factors have influence on learning English or not. To answer this question, a statistical population of all secondary school students in Shiraz, one of the cities in Iran, was selected for this field research. First, five secondary school were selected by cluster sampling method from all the existed secondary schools in Shiraz. And then, Ninety girls and ninety boys were chosen to participate in this investigation. A questionnaire of fifteen-items was designed to collect data. The researchers applied Split- half reliability and obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.9. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), t-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics applied for the data analysis. The result showed that in spite of previous researches, gender and age have no meaningful significant effect on the use of English by Iranian students. On the other hand, this field study came to conclusion that fathers or mothers' occupations have an important role in the students' use of learning English at school. So, we can infer from the conclusion that families with lower social and occupational status should compensate this shortage with different and exciting motivations for their children to learn English better at school.

1. INTRODUCTION

The most important and widespread language used in the world is English. It is used for communication among native as well as nonnative speakers. Even though it does not have the greatest number of speakers in the world, it is the most widely used language in the world, and it will be used by more people in the future [1].

In Iran, people aim to learn English with different purposes in mind. One may learn it so as to travel to foreign countries, another one want to be an English teacher while others may want to be tour leaders or to have economical communications with other countries, or to be able to pass TOEFL or IELTS exams in order to get their PhDs. It is worth mentioning that despite many other countries such as Japan, which English was promoted to a high status of the vehicle of internationalization [2], it was kept as a vehicle to educational advancement in Iran [3]. English has been predominantly efficient in educational system of Iran. This system requires all of the students to have a basic knowledge of English.

Selinker [4] put forward five processes as being central to second language learning: (a) language transfer, (b) overgeneralization, (c) transfer of training, (d) second language learning strategies, and (e) second language communication strategies. But other factors such as sociolinguistics factors are worth mentioning to study in second language learning. Sociolinguistics is the study of the relationship between language and society, of language variation, and of attitudes about language. It also studies how language varieties differ between groups with different social backgrounds like different ethnicity, religion, status, gender, level of education, age, etc., and how people can be categorized into different social classes. The authors try to know whether the sociolinguistic background of a child influences the child's understanding and speaking of English language in the classroom and school environment or not. So, in this study, some of these factors like gender, age and parents' occupation are under investigation.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A lot of researches have investigated on the role of social interaction, social activity and social context in language learning. We will review the related literature about the sociolinguistics factors under investigation in this article.

Gender is not something we are born with, and not something we have, but something we do [5, 6] - something we perform [7]. Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex and it exaggerates biological difference. People tend to consider gender as a natural phenomenon - as social and thus fluid - while sex is basically given by biology [8, 9].

The previous scientific researches revealed that there are natural and biological differences between girls and boys which have an effect on their learning [10]. It is largely contended that biological differences between males and females determine gender by causing enduring differences in competencies, aptitudes, and personalities. For instance, left-brain style dominance is assumed to lead men to be more "rational" and more "logical" while their relative lack of brain lateralization should lead women to be more "emotional".

There is considerable argument among researchers about the linguistic styles of men and women and about the degree to which the boys and girls are treated differently by adults, and some scholars state that the similarities far outweigh the differences [11, 5, 12, 6]. Maccoby [13] indicated that when children are three years old, they have a very clear knowledge of their gender that whether they are classified as male or female but it is not clear how much differential treatment children need to learn how to do their designated gender. They generally need to know that male and female are supposed to be different, and this difference is everywhere around them [14].

Deborah Tannen [13] argued about the way research denoted that the different ways in which boys and girls use language influences classroom performance. Boys find out how to compete for position in a group; they are more active and their language learning is more group-oriented. On the other hand girls interact more intimately, and cooperate more friendly in the groups [13]. Thus, classrooms in which discussion is promoted in large groups are more pleasant to boys than to girls. In another study, Tannen [13] mentioned research that

revealed that this active social play where boys compete carries over in learning styles. Boys are more likely to enjoy the "verbal sparring" and the challenge and response of debate that girls might consider "hostile".

In addition, Tannen [12] stated that there are gender differences in the way individuals think about talking in class. She claimed that boys believe it's their responsibility to keep the discussions going in the classroom and to dominate the conversation if necessary to do this. However, girls keep track of their individual contributions and commitments, departing intentionally in order not to dominate the conversation. As a teacher, Tannen realized that when she divided her classes into smaller groups, learners reacted differently than they might in the larger groups. Girls who were more likely to be silent in the large group talked more freely in the smaller groups; she claimed that by adjusting classroom activities to take account of the learners' different conversational styles can ensure more equal educational opportunities for all learners [12, 15].

Female students do better being taught with manipulating, male students try to discover things without seeing or touching them objects [10]. Generally speaking, boys produce fewer words than girls. Girls prefer to visualize the words mentally in their everyday language. According to Jensen [16] boys tend to need more physical space to learn, particularly at younger ages. Boys seem to keep their brains motivated by physical movements while lessening heedless behavior. On the other hand, while learning, girls do not usually need to move as much. It is often more difficult for boys to have relationship to each other, while cooperative learning is good for all children. They are more tasks oriented than sensitive to social interactions. Both boys and girls benefit from learning in teams and group work; although boys tend to form more controlled teams while the girls prefer looser organizations [10, 16]. In concluding, reviewing the related literature revealed that experts researching on how gender affects learning have found that boys and girls are different by nature and they learn and behave in different ways. Differences in how the two genders learn are most pronounced at the younger ages and transcend personality and cultural constructs.

The variable of gender in learning a language should not be missed in second language learning. Researches have reinforced this fact that female

students mainly use a system that is based around memorizing words and associations between them, whereas boys rely primarily on a system that governs the rules of language [17]. Although most of the researchers have agreed that girls have higher-level of language abilities than boys, up to now no one has clearly come up with a biological basis that may account for their differences which suggest that language processing is more sensory in boys and more abstract in girls. It could have major suggestion for teaching children and even provide support for supporters of single gender classroom.

Researches in language learning claim that the children who starts learning English soon, they can learn better. It certainly seems to make sense that the earlier you start, the longer you will have to learn, and the more progress you will make compared with someone who started later. However, there is evidence that this is not the case, particularly if the second language comes to take the place of the first language, which has never been allowed to develop properly. Some others claim that age is not detrimental to language learning and people of any age can be accomplished language learners.

By considering the variables age, research has shown that age is an important factor in language learning. Language learning depends on a number of hypotheses. The critical period hypothesis is one of the prominent hypotheses. This hypothesis is premised on the belief that there is a certain age during which learners can learn a second language easily and achieve native-like competence. Proponents of this theory explained that the difficulty of acquiring first language after puberty is based on neuropsychological factors. The sensitive period hypothesis has been sometimes used as an alternative term to the critical hypothesis means that certain periods are naturally suitable for the development of each of the aspects of language components. This simply implies that parents and all care givers must harness the pearls of this sensitive period to assist children in their language learning abilities. Failure to do so could affect such children's phonologically, syntactically, semantically, morphologically and pragmatically.

Another concept which should be considered. This theory addresses the lateralization of the brain. The brain has the capacity for language development at a certain period which humans undergo unconsciously and their brains lose plasticity and at such age certain linguistic features cannot be mastered [18]. Neurologically, losses of plasticity or lateralization and cerebral maturation which occur at certain ages

have been proved to affect learners' abilities to learn both pronunciation and grammar [19]. It can be said therefore that the earlier children are exposed to a second language the better.

The effect of age on second language learning attracted the attention of Matsuoka and Smith [20], they discovered that age has been regarded as an important factor in learning second languages successfully as well as in acquiring first language. In this review article, previous studies regarding age and language learning are examined, and the ways in which age may affect the process of learning a second language are discussed. For instance, some previous research (e.g. [21]) evidenced the strong negative correlation ($r > - .7$) between age of learning / arrival and accuracy or native-like proficiency, which means the younger learners are, the more native-like they become. This correlation supports the critical period hypothesis. Some studies have revealed that adult learners whose age of learning/arrival is after puberty are not successful in learning a native-like proficiency in a second language, which again supports the critical period hypothesis; whilst other have shown cases where adult learners reached a native-like proficiency, thus refuting the critical period hypothesis. Finally, some pedagogical implications are drawn, using previous interdisciplinary studies in areas such as neuropsychology and phonology. These implications may help adult learners wanting to enhance their proficiency in second language.

Ilugbusi, Falola & Daramola [23] investigated the relative effects of demographic variables on age and found that age had influence on level of students' level of anxiety. Osakinle [22] in her study found that age had significant influence on adolescents' knowledge and practice while location (rural and urban) had no impact on knowledge and practice of adolescents.

Gachathi [24] expressed that the prestige of appointed occupation is a component of socioeconomic status that have both income and educational attainment. To him, occupational status reflects the educational attainment required to obtain a job and income levels. When parents have a better occupation, they make adequate provision for their children education. They provide economic, social, psychological and emotional support to their children, and this would make it possible for the children to perform well in their educational attainment.

Parents' occupation significantly influence students' achievement [25]. He used the data from three different colleges in Gujarat district. The result indicated that children of government employees secured more marks (60.02%) than the private job holders, because of the certainty and reliability of the government jobs. Parents with government jobs are more secured, and their families are at peace relatively compared to those who work in the private organization. They are always in frustration and lack of confidence at been permanent. Likewise, occupation of the mother has an influence on students' scores. The result of this study indicated that the maximum percentage of marks that is 64.5% is of students who mothers were government workers. So this seems that both fathers and mothers profession have a significant influence on students' academic achievement. The influence of parental occupation continues to attract the attention of many researchers. In line with this assertion Qaiser, Hassan, Ishtiaq, Muhammad, Farid & Zaibun [26] conducted a study on effect of parental socioeconomic status on the academic achievement of secondary school students in Karak district, Pakistan. One thousand five hundred students were selected from 60 government boy's high school in Karak district as a sample of the study. They classified parents into four classes based on their occupation; class 1, class 2, class 3, and class 4. The result indicated that those students who their parents belong to class 1 scores high grade than the other classes in comparison. Likewise, the students belong to class 2, are better than those from Class 3, and then followed by class 3, to class 4 respectively. Therefore, it is important to note that parents' occupation plays a significant role on students' academic performance. The study indicated that parents with prestigious occupation provide necessary facilities needed for the enhancement of their children education. They also give them support and encouragement toward the attainment of educational achievement. On the other hand, students from less prestigious occupations lack so many advantages as compared to those from the parents with high prestigious occupation. They face a lot of challenges both at home and school which hinder them from participating fully in classroom activities, and result in poor academic performance. Parents with lower or less prestigious occupation are always battling with how to satisfy their basic needs in the life as such they pay little attention to their children education. Therefore, the influence of parents' occupation cannot be overemphasized, even though; other socioeconomic status variables such as income, education do affect students' schools performance.

Research by Adeyemi and Kalane [27] claimed that a large number of students are draw backed in the learning process because of socio-economic factors or home background. They added that students from these backgrounds have no access to television, computers and other technological instruments to help their learning. Even at school, many students are ill-motivated and learn the language only to pass their examinations. This most often result in both teachers and students resorting to code-stitching which hampers effective communication in the target language [27].

Bamisaye [28] (2006) is of the opinion that the middle class demonstrates an elaborate linguistic code, facilitating the verbal development of subjective intent and sensitivity to the implication of separateness and differences, providing a complex conceptual hierarchy for the restricted code of the lower working class is distinguished by the rigidity of its syntax. The limited use of appropriate syntax in a teaching-learning process by a student is traceable to the influence of the socializing agents in the domain of the students.

3. METHODOLOGY

There are three hypotheses to answer the research question:

Hypothesis 1: Parents' occupation will not significantly impact on students' use of English.

Hypothesis 2: Gender will not significantly impact on students' use of English.

Hypothesis 3: Age of students will not significantly impact on their use of English language.

To test these hypotheses, a statistical population of all secondary school students in Shiraz, one of the cities in Iran, was selected for this field research. First, five secondary school were selected by cluster sampling method from all the existed secondary schools in Shiraz. And then, 90 female students and 90 male students were chosen to participate in this investigation. A questionnaire of fifteen-items was designed to collect data. It covers socio-demographic and socio-linguistic background of the students. Before applying the test to our target statistical samples, the questionnaire handed out to a small group (40 students) in Jahrom secondary schools, another city of Fars Province in Iran, with similar characteristics to experimental group to find out the face and content validity of the instrument. The researchers applied Split- half reliability and

obtained a reliability coefficient of 0.9. One way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA), t-test and Pearson Product Moment correlation statistics applied for the data analysis.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Three research hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Following tables show the results:

Hypothesis 1: Parents' occupation will not significantly impact on students' use of English.

Table 1. One-way ANOVA of parents' occupations and secondary school students' use of English.

	S	DF	Ms	Fcal	Ftable
Between Groups	97.14	3	12.14	1.72	0.42
Within Groups	482.60	86.62	2.08	1.72	0.42
Total	579.74	89			

$P < 0.05$

Table 1 shows that Fcal (1.72) is greater than Ftable (0.42) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. It implies that parents' occupations have significant impact on secondary school students' use of English.

Hypothesis 2: Gender will not significantly impact on students' use of English.

Table 2. t-test of gender and secondary school students' use of English.

	N	Mean	SD	Df	t-cal	t-table
Male	45	6.55	0.91	81.13	0.22	0.39
Female	45	8.02	0.99	81.25	0.22	0.39

$p > 0.05$

Table 2 shows that t-cal (0.22) is less than t-table (0.39) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, gender does not significantly impact on secondary school students' use of English.

Hypothesis 3: Age of students will not significantly impact on their use of English language.

Table 4. Pearson's Correlation of age and secondary school students' use of English.

Variable	N	Mean	SD	r-cal	r-table
Age	90	5.69	0.56	0.104	0.073
Use of English	90	7.21	0.952		

$p > 0.05$

Table 4 shows that r-cal (0.104) is more than r-table (0.073) at 0.05 level of significance. The null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, students' age significantly impacts on secondary school students' use of English.

The results show that parents' jobs have influence on students' use of English. What this simply express is that parents who have higher education and whose socio-economic status can be classified as middle or high can help and motivate their children, hence the effect will be conspicuously seen in their children performance. Parents should take advantage of this finding to speak, interact more often with these learners. These parents have been able to afford all educational materials; they have access to television, computers and other technological gadgets that could aid their language learning. These actions of parents are translated into adequate use of English in the classrooms. This findings support the view of Bamisaye [29] that the middle class demonstrates an elaborate linguistic code, facilitating the verbal development of subjective intent and sensitivity to the implication of separateness and differences, providing a complex conceptual hierarchy for the restricted code of the lower working class is distinguished by the rigidity of its syntax. The place of the family in the language education of their children cannot be relegated to the background. It will remain a pivotal on which children can always learn and make great progress whether in language learning and development.

It was also revealed that sex and students' use of English has no strong relationship. The implication is that both male and female learners of English have equal chances of learning and acquiring tools of language. Both male and female students should strive and be encouraged to use English language at home and in classrooms. This finding is against those of mentioned in literature review section.

It was reported that students' age significantly impact on secondary school students' use of English which means the younger learners are, the more native-like they become as Matsuoka and Smith (2008) and other cited researchers claimed. This correlation also supports the critical period hypothesis.

5. CONCLUSION

The results show that the problems which students in English language among secondary school students encounter were not due to sex, age, but to other variables such as the learners' parents' job and socio-economic background. Therefore, it is very important for all parents spend the time by providing learning materials and other resources that could help their

children's language skills. It is recommended that parents and all authorities concerned with the education of children should give adequate attention to the needs of children so that they can be their best while learning.

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