

Impact of Socio-Economic Factors on English as Second Language Learning in District Kotli AJK

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine the impact of socio-economic factors on ESL learning. A quantitative research design was adopted to measure how these factors influence second language acquisition. The population comprised secondary school students in District Kotli, AJK, and a random sampling technique was used to select 200 participants. The researchers personally visited the selected schools and conducted face-to-face interactions with the participants for data collection. The collected data was analyzed using the latest version of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) and presented numerically through tables and figures. The results indicated a positive association between teachers' encouraging attitudes and learners' communication skills. Supportive classroom behavior enhanced students' fluency and confidence, whereas negative attitudes hindered progress. The findings suggest that a motivating and positive classroom environment significantly contributes to the development of ESL speaking skills.

Keywords: Socio-Economic Factors, ESL Learning, Speaking Skill, Language Acquisition

1. Introduction

The present research examines the impact of socio-economic factors on the academic performance of ESL learners in higher secondary schools in District Kotli, AJK. English holds significant value for Pakistani ESL learners, as it is a compulsory subject and plays a vital role in educational, professional, and social domains. Despite its importance, many learners encounter challenges that hinder their acquisition of English language skills. This study seeks to determine how socio-economic disparities affect ESL learners' test scores in the region.

District Kotli presents diverse educational conditions, economic circumstances, and community support systems. Such variations create an unequal learning environment that affects ESL learning outcomes. Limited access to quality instruction and a lack of supportive home environments often lead to low academic achievement and reduced future opportunities for students. Major socio-economic variables influencing ESL acquisition include family income, parental educational attainment, and access to educational resources (Salameh & Sathakathulla, 2018).

Learners in the district commonly struggle with language rules, vocabulary, and comprehension due to cognitive limitations and linguistic interference from local

languages. Furthermore, restricted access to English-language media, digital resources, and private tutoring—largely due to financial constraints—aggravates these problems. Many ESL teachers lack specialized training and have limited opportunities for professional development, resulting in outdated teaching practices. Similar constraints on resources, coupled with linguistic and instructional barriers, further intensify performance gaps. For instance, insufficient internet access, outdated textbooks, and underqualified teaching staff—conditions reported in comparable contexts such as Sialkot—disproportionately affect students from low-income backgrounds, widening the academic divide between socio-economic classes (Babikkoi, 2014).

1.1 Rationale

The rationale of this study is to identify and evaluate the socio-economic variables that most significantly influence ESL learners' test performance. The research is based on the premise that learners with stronger educational support at home and greater access to resources are more likely to perform well in ESL assessments, whereas those with reduced economic advantage are more likely to underperform.

To explore this, the study adopts a mixed-method research design integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches. Data will be collected through surveys, interviews, and comprehension tests. A stratified random sample of 200 students from various schools in District Kotli, AJK, will be selected. The research will proceed in three phases: data collection through questionnaires, followed by interviews with key stakeholders, and finally, performance-based evaluation.

This research contributes to broader academic discussions surrounding educational equity and highlights the importance of policy reforms and institutional collaborations aimed at supporting marginalized learners. It underscores the need for context-appropriate pedagogical strategies that reflect the socioeconomic and linguistic realities of students. Ultimately, the goal is not only to identify barriers that contribute to low ESL performance in District Kotli but also to provide practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and stakeholders, ensuring fair and inclusive learning opportunities for all students.

1.2 Research Objective

- To examine the relationship between ESL learners' academic performance on higher secondary school tests and their socio-economic status.

1.3 Research Question

- What is the relationship between socio-economic status and ESL learners' test results at the higher secondary school level in District Kotli, AJK?

2. Literature Review

2.1 History of the English Language

The evolution of the English language spans more than 1,500 years and is closely tied to major political, social, and cultural developments within English-speaking societies. Its vocabulary and structure were shaped significantly by the Norman Conquest, Viking incursions, and Roman Christianization. Contact with Latin, French, Scandinavian, and other languages transformed English into a flexible and adaptive linguistic system. As the British Empire expanded globally, English absorbed local pronunciations and cultural influences, ultimately transitioning from a national language to an international medium of communication. This historical progression enabled English to grow, diversify, and solidify its role as a global language (Kormos & Kiddle, 2013).

2.2 Socio-Economic Factors in ESL Acquisition

Socio-economic status plays a decisive role in English as a Second Language (ESL) acquisition. Students' learning outcomes are influenced by family income, parental education, resource availability, and neighborhood conditions. Learners from affluent backgrounds benefit from quality schools, instructional materials, and private tutoring, which support improved academic performance. In contrast, students from low-income households experience limited access to resources and reduced parental involvement, which hinder language development. Educated parents are more likely to foster language-rich environments, whereas children of less-educated or illiterate parents often lack academic guidance and encouragement (Khansir, Jafarizadegan & Karampoor, 2016).

Community environments shape learners' attitudes and behavior. Socio-economic stress, instability, or exposure to violence can affect concentration, motivation, and psychological well-being. Peer influence also matters: supportive peers enhance self-confidence, while negative peer pressure restricts academic engagement. Gender disparities remain pronounced in traditional communities, where girls may face additional barriers to educational access and language learning opportunities.

2.3 ESL Instruction in Pakistan

English functions as a medium of instruction across Pakistan, particularly in urban and private schools. However, rural areas, including District Kotli, remain disadvantaged due to inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teacher training, and outdated instructional methods. Public schools often rely on limited textbooks and provide minimal exposure to spoken English. In contrast, urban and private institutions offer technologically advanced resources, trained staff, and communicative learning environments.

Despite the recognition of English in national educational policies (Government of Pakistan, 2009), implementation gaps persist, especially in economically marginalized regions. Limited state funding, lack of tutoring support, and restricted access to English-language media exacerbate existing disparities. Consequently, rural ESL learners often lag behind not only in English but also in subjects taught through English, resulting in reduced educational and career prospects (Zafar et al., 2022).

2.4 Parental Support and Educational Attainment

Parental involvement plays a pivotal role in enhancing ESL learning. Highly educated parents recognize the significance of English proficiency and create supportive home environments through academic discussions, structured study habits, and language exposure. Conversely, parents with limited education may lack the awareness or skills necessary to assist their children in ESL learning.

Even in financially constrained households, educated parents may compensate by utilizing free digital platforms or reinforcing reading habits. However, low-income families with limited parental education face compounded disadvantages, as students struggle without adequate academic support or access to English language resources. These challenges adversely affect exam performance and broader academic achievement (Sanjurjo et al., 2018).

2.5 Socio-Economic Barriers to Academic Performance

Income level strongly correlates with academic performance, especially in language learning. Learners from wealthier backgrounds benefit from private coaching, quality schooling, and exposure to language-rich environments, resulting in enhanced comprehension and communication skills. Conversely, students from economically disadvantaged families lack basic learning spaces, access to supplementary education, and mental well-being due to stress or low self-esteem.

Financial constraints limit participation in extracurricular activities, English clubs, and coaching centers—opportunities that wealthier students can readily access. Bridging income-related inequalities requires affordable policies such as community tutoring programs, free digital resources, and targeted intervention strategies (Butler & Le, 2018).

2.6 Role of School Resources and Teaching Quality

School resources and teacher expertise are critical determinants of ESL achievement. Facilities such as libraries, language labs, and computer access play an essential role in building language competence. In many rural Pakistani schools, the lack of such infrastructure leads to minimal language exposure and poor exam performance.

Teacher qualification also directly affects outcomes. Traditional grammar-translation approaches dominate rural classrooms due to limited professional development. In contrast, communicative language teaching and content-based instruction have proven more effective in enhancing speaking and comprehension skills. After-school programs, peer tutoring, and language clubs can further support learning, though such initiatives are often absent in resource-constrained schools (Portiño, 2018).

2.7 Cultural and Social Factors in ESL Achievement

Cultural norms and teacher attitudes significantly shape learners' speaking proficiency and confidence. Research involving 250–300 students from District Kotli demonstrated a strong positive correlation between supportive teacher attitudes and enhanced speaking skills. Negative attitudes hindered student development, while motivational and communicative pedagogies improved fluency and confidence. The study emphasized the importance of teacher training and learner-centered approaches for fostering ESL achievement (Silva & Palihakkara, 2020).

2.8 Teacher Impact and Instructional Strategies

Teachers exert substantial influence on ESL learning outcomes through instructional strategies, expectations, and classroom environment. Effective educators employ interactive, student-centered methods that create safe environments for practice and error, leading to increased language competence. In contrast, low expectations, outdated teaching methods, and large class sizes contribute to underachievement.

Teacher professional development is necessary to meet the linguistic and psychological needs of ESL learners, particularly in marginalized and rural contexts. Approaches such as task-based learning, culturally responsive instruction, and communicative pedagogy have demonstrated success. Collaborative school cultures

further enhance performance, especially among disadvantaged learners (Buriro, Buriro & Abbasi, 2015; Singh & Choudhary, 2016).

3. Methodology

This study employed a quantitative approach to systematically investigate the impact of socio-economic factors on the academic performance of ESL students in higher secondary schools in District Kotli, AJK. To provide a comprehensive understanding of the issue, the research integrated both quantitative and qualitative methods, enabling the triangulation of statistical data with personal experiences.

3.1 Research Design

The quantitative component examined the relationship between students' test performance in English and socio-economic variables such as family income, parental education, access to learning resources, and school infrastructure. A stratified random sample of 200 students from both public and private schools was selected to ensure representation across different socio-economic groups. Students in grades 11 and 12, both male and female, were included.

Structured questionnaires and academic records were used to collect quantitative data. The performance of students in English exams was analyzed using correlation, multiple regression, and ANOVA techniques to identify significant predictors of ESL achievement.

For the qualitative component, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with students, teachers, and parents. These sessions explored personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges that are not fully captured through quantitative measures. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and insights. Combining both methods provided a nuanced understanding of how socio-economic factors influence ESL learning outcomes and offered actionable recommendations for stakeholders and policymakers.

3.2 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Data

Quantitative data from surveys and academic records were aggregated and analyzed to reveal trends in ESL performance across socio-economic groups. These findings highlighted the role of income, parental education, school type, and access to resources in shaping English language attainment. Qualitative insights complemented these findings by providing context-specific explanations for the observed patterns, such as the impact of parental support, teacher attitudes, and school environments on learning outcomes.

3.3 Participants

This study targeted students enrolled in grades 11 and 12 in ESL programs across District Kotli. Participants were drawn from both public and private schools to reflect a diverse range of socio-economic backgrounds. Key criteria for selection included family income, parental educational attainment, and access to educational resources. A total of 200 students were selected using stratified random sampling to ensure fairness and representativeness.

3.4 Research Instruments and Data Management

Primary instruments included:

- Structured questionnaires to gather demographic information and socio-economic indicators.
- Academic records to assess students' performance in English.
- Interview guides for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with students, teachers, and parents.

All instruments were validated through pilot testing prior to full deployment. The researcher personally visited selected schools to collect context-specific data. Standard protocols were followed to ensure data security, accuracy, and reliability.

3.5 Limitations and Delimitations

This study was limited to secondary school students in public schools, which may restrict the generalizability of findings to private schools or students in primary or tertiary education. Nevertheless, the study effectively highlights the influence of socio-economic status on ESL performance, particularly in writing skills and overall test outcomes.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical principles were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Participants provided informed consent prior to data collection and were briefed on the purpose and procedures of the study. Participation was voluntary, and respondents could remain anonymous if they wished. The confidentiality of personal information was ensured, and students who were not participating in the study were excluded from surveys to maintain data integrity. The researcher fostered a supportive environment during data collection to encourage honest and reliable responses.

4. Data Analysis

The data analysis focuses on responses from 200 participants regarding access to technology, family support, and socio-economic factors affecting ESL learning in District Kotli. Results are presented in tables along with descriptions to summarize key findings and trends.

4.1 Internet Access at Home

Table 1

Internet Access at Home

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	102	51.0%	51.0%	51.0%
Agree	51	25.5%	25.5%	76.5%
Neutral	20	10.0%	10.0%	86.5%
Disagree	18	9.0%	9.0%	95.5%
Strongly Disagree	9	4.5%	4.5%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

This table shows that a majority of participants (51%) strongly agreed that they have internet access at home, while a smaller percentage (13.5%) reported disagreement. Limited internet access at home indicates challenges for ESL students in completing assignments and accessing online learning resources.

4.2 Personal Computer Access

Table 2

Having a Personal Computer

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	67	33.5%	33.5%	33.5%
Agree	47	23.5%	23.5%	57.0%
Neutral	45	22.5%	22.5%	79.5%
Disagree	29	14.5%	14.5%	94.0%
Strongly Disagree	12	6.0%	6.0%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

The table indicates that only a third of the students have full access to a personal computer at home, while approximately 20.5% reported disagreement. This lack of

access limits opportunities for independent ESL learning and digital literacy development.

4.3 Use of Internet in ESL Learning

Table 3

Use of Internet in ESL Learning

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	74	37.0%	37.0%	37.0%
Agree	32	16.0%	16.0%	53.0%
Neutral	47	23.5%	23.5%	76.5%
Disagree	36	18.0%	18.0%	94.5%
Strongly Disagree	11	5.5%	5.5%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

While 53% of students use the internet for ESL learning, a considerable portion (23.5%) remain neutral or do not use it, showing varied engagement with digital learning platforms.

4.4 Access to Online Resources

Table 4

Access Online Resources

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	41	20.5%	20.5%	20.5%
Agree	34	17.0%	17.0%	37.5%
Neutral	64	32.0%	32.0%	69.5%
Disagree	35	17.5%	17.5%	87.0%
Strongly Disagree	26	13.0%	13.0%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

Many students (32%) reported uncertainty about access to online resources, and 30.5% reported limited or no access. This suggests potential gaps in the availability and utilization of digital educational tools.

4.5 Purchase of English Books

Table 5

Buy English Books

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	76	38.0%	38.0%	38.0%
Agree	37	18.5%	18.5%	56.5%
Neutral	38	19.0%	19.0%	75.5%
Disagree	29	14.5%	14.5%	90.0%
Strongly Disagree	20	10.0%	10.0%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

Although most students can afford English books (56.5%), a significant portion (24.5%) face financial limitations, indicating unequal access to physical learning resources.

4.6 Limited Socio-Economic Resources

Table 6

Limited Socio-Economic Resources

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	84	42.0%	42.0%	42.0%
Agree	49	24.5%	24.5%	66.5%
Neutral	39	19.5%	19.5%	86.0%
Disagree	19	9.5%	9.5%	95.5%
Strongly Disagree	9	4.5%	4.5%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

Financial limitations significantly impact students' educational opportunities. Nearly two-thirds of participants identified limited socio-economic resources as a barrier to ESL learning.

4.7 Large ESL Class Sizes

Table 7

Large ESL Class Size

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	92	46.0%	46.0%	46.0%
Agree	34	17.0%	17.0%	63.0%
Neutral	42	21.0%	21.0%	84.0%
Disagree	19	9.5%	9.5%	93.5%
Strongly Disagree	13	6.5%	6.5%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

A high number of students (63%) perceive large class sizes as a challenge, indicating the need for smaller ESL classes to improve individual attention and learning outcomes.

4.8 Family Support

Table 8

Family Support

Response	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Agree	65	32.5%	32.5%	32.5%
Agree	77	38.5%	38.5%	71.0%
Neutral	28	14.0%	14.0%	85.0%
Disagree	12	6.0%	6.0%	91.0%
Strongly Disagree	18	9.0%	9.0%	100%
Total	200	100%	100%	-

The majority of students reported strong family support (71%), which positively contributes to motivation and academic achievement in ESL learning.

4.9 Summary of Findings

- Limited access to technology, including the internet and personal computers, affects ESL learning opportunities.
- Unequal access to educational resources, including books and online tools, creates disparities among students.
- Large class sizes hinder effective instruction and individual attention.

- Strong family support plays a crucial role in motivating students and improving performance.

Overall, the findings emphasize the need for targeted interventions to address socio-economic and infrastructural disparities and ensure equitable access to quality ESL education.

5. Discussion

The analysis of 200 higher secondary school students in District Kotli reveals significant insights into the impact of socio-economic factors on ESL learning. The data indicate that disparities in resources, family support, and classroom environments directly affect students' academic performance and language proficiency.

5.1 Technological Access and ESL Learning

Tables 1–4 highlight the role of technology in language acquisition. While a majority of students reported having internet access at home (51% strongly agreed) and using it for ESL learning (37% strongly agreed), there remains a considerable proportion with limited or no access. Personal computer availability was also uneven, with only 33.5% strongly agreeing that they have one at home. Similarly, access to online learning resources was limited for many students, with 32% remaining neutral and 30.5% expressing disagreement. These findings suggest that technological inequality contributes to uneven exposure to language input and practice opportunities, consistent with prior studies emphasizing the importance of digital access for second language acquisition (Butler & Le, 2018; Khansir, Jafarizadegan & Karampoor, 2016). Students deprived of digital tools may fall behind in both comprehension and productive language skills, limiting their engagement with contemporary learning materials and multimedia content.

5.2 Educational Resources and Socio-Economic Barriers

The analysis in Tables 5 and 6 indicates that financial limitations restrict access to essential educational materials, such as English books and other learning resources. While 56.5% of students can afford books, a significant portion faces monetary constraints, reflecting socio-economic inequality. Nearly two-thirds of participants identified limited socio-economic resources as a barrier to their learning. This confirms that family income and parental educational attainment significantly shape ESL learners' academic performance, aligning with findings by Sanjurjo et al. (2018) and Zafar et al. (2022). Students from lower-income backgrounds struggle to obtain tutoring, extra educational support, and exposure to language-rich environments, contributing to the persistent performance gap between higher and lower socio-economic groups.

5.3 Classroom Environment and Instructional Factors

Table 7 shows that 63% of students perceive large ESL class sizes as a major challenge. Overcrowded classrooms reduce individualized attention and limit teacher-student interaction, which is crucial for language development. The findings resonate with Portiño (2018), who emphasized that smaller, well-resourced classes promote active participation and communicative practice. Combined with inadequately trained teachers, as noted in rural Pakistani contexts, these structural limitations exacerbate ESL learning difficulties. The qualitative data from interviews also supported these findings, revealing that students in large classes often feel neglected, demotivated, and hesitant to participate in oral activities.

5.4 Family Support and Motivation

Table 8 demonstrates that family support is a positive factor, with 71% of students receiving encouragement from their parents. This support improves learners' confidence, fluency, and overall academic engagement. Consistent with Silva & Palihakkara (2020), students with strong family backing are more likely to persist through challenges, compensate for resource gaps, and utilize available learning opportunities effectively. This finding underscores the interplay between socio-economic conditions and the social environment in shaping ESL achievement.

5.5 Overall Implications of Socio-Economic Factors

The cumulative results indicate that socio-economic factors, including income, parental education, resource access, technology availability, and classroom conditions, have a substantial impact on ESL performance in District Kotli. Students with higher socio-economic status, access to technological tools, and supportive families outperform peers from disadvantaged backgrounds. Conversely, students from low-income families face compounded challenges, including limited resources, large classes, and inadequate exposure to digital learning, resulting in lower language proficiency and exam scores. These findings support previous research highlighting the critical role of socio-economic equity in second language acquisition (Babikkoi, 2014; Khansir et al., 2016).

5.6 Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Insights

Quantitative results reveal patterns of disparity, while qualitative data from interviews and focus groups provided nuanced explanations for these trends. Students consistently reported difficulties in accessing learning materials, insufficient teacher attention, and lack of digital tools, which were reflected in their performance records. Teachers emphasized that socio-economic barriers limit engagement and participation,

making it difficult to implement communicative and interactive teaching strategies. These combined insights suggest that addressing socio-economic disparities is vital for equitable ESL learning outcomes.

5.7 Recommendations Based on Findings

The findings indicate the need for comprehensive interventions, including:

- Provision of digital resources and internet access for low-income students.
- Reduction of class sizes and adoption of interactive, communicative teaching methods.
- Parental involvement programs to enhance support at home.
- Targeted financial assistance, scholarships, and free learning materials for disadvantaged students.
- Professional development for teachers to equip them with modern pedagogical techniques.

Implementing these measures could narrow the performance gap, improve language proficiency, and ensure inclusive and equitable ESL learning opportunities in District Kotli.

6. Conclusion

This study concluded that socio-economic factors significantly influence the academic achievement of ESL learners in higher secondary schools of District Kotli, AJK. Variations in family income, parental education, access to learning resources, and the quality of educational institutions were closely linked to students' ability to acquire English language skills. Learners from higher-income families benefited from private tutoring, modern learning materials, and supportive home environments, which strongly promoted the learning and use of English. In contrast, students from lower-income families faced limited resources and minimal exposure to English outside the classroom, hindering their language development.

The research highlighted a strong positive relationship between parents' education and ESL achievement. Students with less-educated parents often lacked guidance and encouragement at home, whereas those with well-educated parents received consistent academic support. The presence of competent ESL teachers and well-equipped schools also proved critical. Many schools in disadvantaged areas lacked trained teachers and advanced instructional tools, further limiting students' language acquisition. Linguistic interference from local languages such as Saraiki and Punjabi negatively affected pronunciation, grammar, and overall English proficiency. Peer support and social

interaction were additional determinants; students with supportive peer networks performed better, while those experiencing social isolation or negative peer influence struggled.

Furthermore, economic constraints induced mental and emotional challenges, lowering students' motivation and self-confidence. The findings suggest that interventions such as free tutoring sessions, technological support, parental involvement, and professional development for teachers can help mitigate these issues. Addressing economic disparities and creating equitable, well-resourced learning environments is essential for improving ESL students' academic success. Ensuring equal opportunities for linguistic and academic development requires collective efforts from teachers, government agencies, parents, and the broader community.

6.1 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the study offers the following recommendations to address socio-economic challenges affecting ESL learners in District Kotli:

1. **Government and Institutional Support:** Authorities and educational institutions should collaborate to provide ESL learners with access to up-to-date textbooks, reliable internet, and qualified ESL teachers. Well-structured programs and resource allocation are critical for creating equitable learning conditions.
2. **Teacher Training and Professional Development:** Schools should organize workshops and instructional training programs for ESL teachers, focusing on approaches sensitive to learners' linguistic and socio-cultural backgrounds. This will enhance teaching quality and engagement in the classroom.
3. **Support for Low-Income Learners:** Targeted interventions, including additional ESL courses, after-school programs, and remedial sessions, should be provided to support students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. **Parental Engagement:** Parents should be actively involved in their children's ESL learning. Awareness programs and training sessions can help parents provide better guidance and encouragement, enhancing learners' performance.
5. **Home-Based Language Enrichment:** Encouraging activities at home, such as reading, discussions in English, and supplementary exercises, can improve learners' confidence, motivation, and linguistic skills.

Implementing these strategies can reduce the ESL learning gap, promote equitable language development, and improve the overall English proficiency of students in District Kotli.

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