

The Role of Cultural Capital in Learning of English in a Government School in Hyderabad District

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Abstract

This study aims to demonstrate the influence of parents' attitudes on students' English language proficiency in Government Secondary School Halepota (GSSH), district Hyderabad rural, Sindh, Pakistan. The study uses Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as a theoretical framework to this study, analyzes the data following this theory, and applies the theory. Moreover, this is a qualitative study and uses Interpretivist paradigm to understand the social reality. This research pursues to construct the connection between family background, especially the attitudes of parents which are influenced by family structure, socioeconomic position of the parents, and parents' education level and the English proficiency of the students. The research investigates these elements and discovers that parents' attitudinal support with regards to emotional and material support is lacking on the basis of micro factors, such as parents' interest, care, seriousness, and importance of English. Moreover, this study also finds that some of the parents emotionally and economically support their students. However, the main concern is that most of the parents are not literate in English language; therefore they are not able to linguistically support their children.

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1. Introduction

Different kinds of conditions affect students' educational performances. These conditions include internal (home) or external (outdoor) circumstances. The researchers try to explore or explain these kinds of conditions for the sake of establishing various relationships with students' academic performances. Academic performances of the students depend upon a few of these conditions which play a significant role in students performances, these can include; educational qualifications of the parents, type of family structure, socioeconomic status of the family, and attitudes of parents as regards to students' academic excellence. First three of these conditions affect as a background conditions as regards to influencing last condition. Following, parents' those attitudes influence educational performances of the students.

Indoors, socialization process is impacted by family's attitudes and parents' interest and support influence academic attainment of the students (Circere11, 1978; Marjori-banks, 1979; Walberg and Marjori-banks, 1976). The researcher has got interested in the topic because it is generally seen that the same teacher teaches to students and provides same chances but students' performance becomes different. Some students perform well and others lag behind especially at GSSH. However, the researcher assumes that the reason behind students' lower grades stands as the influence of parents' attitudes. Thus, it becomes important to inquire family background's impact on students' academic achievement (especially proficiency in English). The researcher intends to suggest findings of this research to educational stakeholders, policy planners, parents, government and curriculum developers for the implementation of the findings within families and school.

In Pakistan, the number of spoken languages is more than 60 languages but the official language remains as English language. According to Pathan (2009) English language performs different functions in Pakistan, such as instrumental, creative, regulative, and interpersonal functions. Particularly, elite class knows the English language in greatly practices it in power domains i.e., defense forces (military), government (civil bureaucracy and administration, legal system), business, commerce and trade, media, corporate sector, and education (Abbas, 1993; Rahman, 1996, 2002 & 2003; Mansoor, 2004; Coleman, 2010; Coleman & Capstick, 2012; Shamim, 2011; Islam, 2018; Irfan, 2019). Rahman (2007) and Islam (2018) point out that English language is used in both formal and informal-'private conversation, reading, entertainment, and travel-spheres' (p. 220).

Whole of days in daily lives develop the literacy and language formation and it is a ongoing process which takes place in the home, in the classroom, and outdoors. Hence, most important thing in this process is the quality and rate of growth in becoming successful in these abilities. Therefore, the development depends upon the learning capacities and patterns of every individual student. The development process can contain student's primary language (mother tongue), racial, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students. For those who are second language learners the openness to learning a new language and home language matters. The research studies into the factors that enhance positive language growth and learning in individuals are necessary in clarifying achievement deficiencies. The students who belong to various socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds can come up with these kinds of deficiencies. In consideration to this, the researcher tries to

understand the major problem which this research attempts is the relationship between parents' attitudes and students' English language proficiency.

Many students do not perform well in their school subjects, especially English language subject. The reason behind this failure is that students' knowledge with respect to English language stands as greatly inadequate. Education system in Pakistan gives a vigorous and mandatory position to English language. Despite a large importance given to English language, the students have been performing marginally in English language over the years, especially the students of Government Secondary School Halepota (GSSH), district Hyderabad, Sindh, Pakistan. Thus, aim of this research is to inquire the influence of family's attitudes on the educational performance of the students regarding English language. Hence, the researcher includes Bourdieu's term of cultural capital as theoretical framework in this research. "Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital refers to the collection of symbolic elements such as skills, tastes, posture, clothing, mannerisms, material belongings, credentials, etc" (Routledge, 2016). Besides, this research looks for workable suggestion which may facilitate in understanding educational system with respect to English language learning.

1.1 Research Aim

The aim of this research is to explore the effect of cultural capital (family background) on English proficiency of students in GSSH Hyderabad district rural, Sindh, Pakistan. The researcher tries in this study to make a relationship between family background and attitudes of parents as cultural capital. Therefore, this study inquires the influence of attitudes of parents on students' English language proficiency.

1.2 Research Question

How does attitude of parents towards English language affect students' achievement?

1.3 Significance of Research

This study's findings would guide the parents/guardians to implement their responsibility for English language proficiency of the students. They can learn from this research that they are their children's primary educators and English language proficiency of students depends upon their type of roles. This study would do that by giving rich information from this research. This study would provide information to policy planners and educational stakeholders, and would assist them for the improvement of secondary school students' English language proficiency. Moreover, this study could help to improve policy planning regarding curriculum development with respect to social conditions of the students for the betterment of English proficiency of the students.

2. Literature Review

A number of studies give evidence that students from upper and middle class families have advantages over students from lower class families regarding language proficiency, specially the English language proficiency. The research points out that academic achievement of the students is influenced by environment at home (Arshad, Attari, & Elahi, 2012). Only educated parents can promote better environment for the educational improvement of the students (Bhurgri. et al. 2020). The family plays a significant role in second language learning of the students. For the peer engagement and performance improvement in learning a second language, there is a need for teachers to promote help, guidance, supervision and motivation at a great length. Into the home and out of the home students need to have a place for practice what they learn in school. In this respect, parents impact the educational achievement of their children (Atta & Jamil, 2012). According to Kocaman and Kocaman (2015), family must be involved in language education, because family necessarily helps students at early age in learning a foreign language. Therefore, in the second language learning process of the students, family becomes a significant factor. In addition, parents' interest, academic achievement, collaboration, and socioeconomic position influence students' language proficiency (Phillips, Brooks-Gunn, Duncan, Klebanov, & Crane 1998). When parents take interest in second language learning practices of their children, it positively influences students' language proficiency to the excellent. In contrast, educational attainment of the students becomes weak when family does not contribute in learning process of the students.

Furthermore, many parents have interest for their children in learning a second language, however, they cannot support them in second language learning process fully. In rural areas, some of those parents are farm workers who are unable to maintain time for their children's learning process (Zhou, 2020). In their study, Forey, Besser, and Sampson (2016) examined that 75.7% faced difficulties in helping their children to learn, such as problems in formulating sentences in English, arrangement of English learning practices, lack of English literacy resources, and difficulties in reading English texts to the children. According to Forey, et al. (2016) there are some of the reasons including, lack of skills, lack of time, and lack of English knowledge, these reasons make parents discouraged to take part in students' English learning. Moreover, few of the parents do not wish for their children to learn a second language due to their disagreement with second language learning. Due to this, they do not give their children facilities such as English learning materials and teaching at home (Zhou, 2020).

Moreover, parents' socioeconomic status highly impacts second language learning of the students at an early period. According to Fernald, Marchman, and Weisleder (2013), socio-economic disparities largely impact the language learning performances of the students. Generally speaking, many common families believe that there is the lack of relationship between socioeconomic status of a family and foreign language learning, no matter what the circumstances, upper class and lower class students both can study and learn a foreign language. Following an entry test in which students' abilities were checked, Ramey and Ramey (2004) pointed out that students from high socioeconomic status secured more marks than the students from lower socioeconomic status.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study employs Pierre Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital as the theoretical framework supporting the study and the researcher applies this concept in data analysis. Pierre Bourdieu has worked on three different kinds of capital, i.e. economic capital, social capital, and cultural capital (1984). In this study the researcher is borrowing the concept of cultural capital to understand the impact of family background on English language learning of students. The concept of cultural capital has been defined by Bourdieu differently during different times. For example, informal academic skills formulate the cultural capital, and these academic standards are the peculiarities of elite class, an index of class berth, preferences, cultural attitudes, and behaviors that are understood as "tastes", which are utilized for social selection (Bourdieu, 1984).

In *The Forms of Capital*, Bourdieu (1977) indicates that cultural capital can exist in three forms:

- a) *Embodied Cultural Capital*: in form of long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body that help in appreciating and understanding cultural goods such as music, scientific formulas, works of art, and even popular culture. This is internalized by the individual through the socialization process, which begins in early childhood. Those children, who come from a privileged or more economically secure environment, are more likely to acquire embodied cultural capital, which requires time, money, and knowledge on the part of primary caregivers.
- b) *Objectified Cultural Capital*: in the form of cultural goods (pictures, books, dictionaries, instruments, machines, etc.).
- c) *Institutionalized Cultural Capital*: in form of educational credentials and credentialing system. (p. 47).

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Philosophical and Methodological Orientations

The philosophical orientation is paradigm choice. Firstly, this study is based on Interpretivist paradigm for understanding family's cultural capital. Secondly, the researcher chooses a qualitative study as the leading methodology to understand the cultural capital of the parents.

4.2 Case Study as a Research Design

A simple definition of case study is that "a research approach in which one or a few instances of a phenomenon are studied in depth" (Given, 2008, p. 68). The case study helps to study a case in real life context intending to understand a case in-depth (Creswell, 2013). Further, the aim of this study is to inquire existing occurrences rather than historical events and evidences are used (e.g., semi-structured interviews). Consequently, the researcher finds case study as the best methodological design for answering the research question- How does family background affect English language proficiency of learners at a government school?

4.3 Research Method

4.3.1 Participants

Site Selection. In Hyderabad district, there are total 20 number of Union Councils from which the researcher chooses Union Council, Tando Alam Mari as a particular zone for the selection of research participants.

Participant Selection. My primary question can be considered- How does family background affect English language proficiency of learners at a government school? The researcher searched for some representative families with various measures of economic, social, and cultural capitals. As measuring parents' capitals are struggling, the researcher used students' different and similar academic opportunities as the major criteria for selecting participants. The researcher chose 10 students with different and similar capital families and two teachers informing about parent capitals, for the reason to check similarity and difference among the students possessing family capitals.

Data Collection. In qualitative research, collecting the data is a deep and active activity. In this study, ten students from different families and two their class teachers in GSSH are studied. The semi-structured interviews had been conducted in this research with the help of interview protocols. There are two different interview

protocols, one for students and second for teachers.

Interviews. Interview is the most used method for collecting data in qualitative research (Bryman, 2016). Moreover, interview is an important mood of collecting evidence in case study (Yin, 2013). In this study, semi-structured interviews are conducted with respect to certain guide of questions to encompass clear outline of a topic (Kvale, 1996). Interview protocol was arranged into the theme of family background's effect on English language proficiency of students to conduct the semi-structured interviews. The researcher conducted two focus group interviews with students, each group containing five students. Secondly, two class teachers of GSSH were interviewed.

4.4 Findings and Discussion

4.4.1 Poor English Background

According to Letts, Edwards, Sinka, Schaefer & Gibbons (2013) students of upper socioeconomic status learn a language fast than the students from lower socioeconomic students. The type of linguistic background in families influences directly the linguistic abilities of the students. Most of the students belong to families which are poor village life workers. According to a student participant, *"My father gets up in the morning, takes breakfast. Then he goes to the fields to collect grass for our pets or he goes to work as a laborer for wages. My mother gets up in the morning. Cooks breakfast, then goes to collect grass for our pets or works as a laborer for wages.* Therefore, it is clear from this that different socioeconomic positions create different cultural capitals; especially poor families' linguistic cultural capital is marginalized.

4.4.2 Parents' Attitudes and Support

Parents can support their children in variety of ways, such as in the form of material, financial, and emotional assistance to learn English (Yusup & Ahmad, 2016). However, support also depends upon the type of family class. Many families from working class background even do not have idea of supporting their children in learning English. Answering a straightforward question teacher one and teacher two both believe that only 3% to 5% parents support their children in English learning: *"Only 4% or 5% parents support their children and provide them facility.* Moreover, support by the parents also depends upon parents' cultural capital. The parents who are from lower class, their support seem low as well. This would be that their cultural capital regarding supporting their children is weak.

4.4.2.1 Emotional Support

4.4.2.1.1 Interest of Parents

Interest of students in learning English is a great factor behind learning English successfully. Teacher one and teacher two regard middle class students more interested to learn English than working class students. *"50% chance is that those poor students have an interest in learning English"* and *"students from middle class families want to learn complete English and for that they also attend tuition centers"*. Furthermore, Teacher two stresses the idea of absence of effective teaching as another cause behind the students' less interest in learning English. He believes that teaching English effectively to them at primary level and middle level would enhance their interests in learning English.

"We should give something to children, we should feed them. When we feed them and teach them English then it would be possible that their interest would increase. If the base of students would be strong then their interest will develop".

Furthermore, the families chosen for this study depend upon the father. The decisions of father are considered important in these families. Therefore, the interest of father in their children's educational success is of uttermost significance. Children imitate the positive behaviours of their parents because those influence them, including the linguistic behaviours (Ellis, 2008). Unfortunately, there is the lack of father's interest in their children's education in the chosen area of study. Teacher one comments on that:

"Very sorry to say that in our society the father is not interested too much in their children's education and English learning. They are really not interested about what their child learned or wrote in school".

Therefore, the underdevelopment of interest for English learning among students is the result of parents' disinterest towards the English learning of their children and inefficiency in basic education. Thus, cultural capital of the students influences their interest in learning English.

4.4.2.1.2 Parents' Care

Care of parents towards English language learning has been found another attitude impacting English proficiency. More care from parents regarding English language could lead to success in English learning. According to most of the student participants, their parents care for their English studies. They do not call for home jobs at the time of English studies except few. Most of the parents behave calmly, kindly, and politely at the time of their children's English studies. Therefore, care is provided to students, but they themselves are not motivated to study English regularly. As one of the participants describes the situation as follows:

"My parents care for my English studies, they say sit and study and my father goes to perform home jobs at that time of my study, but I rarely give time to my English studies. My parents do not speak to

me loudly when I am studying English, and just ask me something politely if they have to ask”.

In contrast, disturbance has been found as an obstacle under the theme of care. Together with positive care, some participants also complained about their uncomfortable place for studying at home. Most of the participants do not have an individual room to study properly. A student participant complained that he studies outside of room, so passing of their siblings around him distracts him. But there are only a few participants who tell that they become disturbed: *“they run and come again and again around me who distracts me”.*

4.4.2.1.3 Parents’ Seriousness

The views of the both teachers are different on the seriousness of parents and students towards English language learning. When asked about the seriousness of parents towards English proficiency of their children. One teacher believes that parents are not serious towards English learning of their children, *“parents are not serious about the English learning of their children”*, and another believes vice versa, *“Yes they are serious about that”*.

4.4.2.1.4 Importance of English in Home

How much importance parents and siblings give to English language, could also influence English learning of students. In theory, parents think that English language is an important language to be learned. As, when asked about parents’ perception regarding English as second language learning, three of the student participants said that their parents believe that it is necessary to learn English to secure a job. According to a student participant, *“My father says to me that it is important to learn English to get job”*. Besides, parents also see the English language as the real education. Families of two of the student participants perceive English as the language of literates, *“My parents say that those who know English are real literates”*. Moreover, some parents also consider English as a good thing or good education. *“My parents say study and learn English, English is a good education”*. So, English as necessity, real education, language of literates, and a good education are the perception attitudes of parents. These are positive attitudes and they may motivate students to learn English.

4.4.2.2 Material Support

Individual study room is relaxing. When students sit in an individual study room then their focus from outside world is reduced. Then they can focus on their studies easily and can work hard. They have the sense of pride of having an individual study room, which motivates them to study. Only two out of ten student participants have an individual study room study. *“My father has provided me an individual room for study”*. However, most of the participants have not an individual study room and its absence distracts them in learning English. According to one of the student participants, an individual room helps to focus on studies:

“Silent place is good for studying and learning English but I don’t have a place like individual room so that I could study with focus. I become distracted when I study among the voices and among the movements of my family members”.

Computers and smart phones with internet facility help to learn English by typing, installing dictionary, bilingual books, using chat rooms, social media, online English learning websites, YouTube etc. These all networks offer variety of ways of learning English. However, none of the participants have the facility of computer. But, six out of ten participants have touch screen mobile phones with internet facility. But how students use them is a controversial issue.

4.5 Conclusion

The study examined the impact of family background on English proficiency of the students in Government Secondary School Halepota, district Hyderabad rural, Pakistan. The study inquired how class difference, attitudes of parents towards English language learning, parents’ support influence students’ English proficiency. These all together create certain kinds of parents’ general attitudes towards English language proficiency of their children. Therefore, especially attitudes of family in a broad perspective towards their children regarding English language learning were investigated in the study. The research borrowed case study design in which semi-structured interviews were arranged to collect the data from two teachers and ten student participants.

The study used interview transcription and coding to reach at particular themes and sub-themes to outline information from the participants. The researcher adopted Bourdieu’s concept of cultural capital as a theoretical framework for analyzing the data and applying the theory. The findings of the study show that parents’ attitudinal support with regards to emotional (Micro factors such as interest, care, seriousness, and importance of English) and material support influence students’ English proficiency. In this study, it was found that parents of chosen participants are poor and less aware of the micro factors and therefore they sometimes support unconsciously and consciously. And most of the times they do not support their students at all.

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