



The Effects of the Family's Socio-Economic Background on English Proficiency of Students at EFL Technology University in Taiwan

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study was to examine the parents' socio-economic status of the students from EFL Technology University, and the correlation between students' family background and their English academic achievement. The study involved a questionnaire survey; there were a total of 230 respondents, and 225 returned questionnaires completed the family background information. The valid questionnaire recovery rate was 97.8%. The data were analyzed with descriptive statistics, the Pearson product moment correlation statistical tool, Scheffe's posterior comparisons, and ANOVA. The results are summarized as follows.

(1). The influence of parents' monthly income on EFL technology university students'

English academic proficiency was significant.

(2). The influence of the father's education level on EFL technology university students' English academic proficiency was significant.

(3). The influence of the family structure on EFL technology university students'

English academic proficiency was insignificant.

(4). The influence of the father's occupation on EFL technology university students' English academic proficiency was significant.

(5). The influence of the mother's occupation on EFL technology university students' English academic achievement was insignificant.

Key words: English Academic Achievement, Family Background, Socio-Economic Status (SES)

INTRODUCTION:

In educational and economic studies, it has been found that background variables including family income, family type, family size, and parents' education are determinants of the amount and quality of education children receive over their lifetime (Jones, 1999; Rosetti, 2000). It is evident that familial and parental factors can either benefit or harm the chances of children receiving an education and excelling in a scholastic environment.

The main purpose of this study was to examine the parents' socio-economic status (SES) of the students from EFL Technology University, and the correlation between students' family background and their English academic proficiency. Research motivation, research question, term definitions, and results are going to exploit respectively as the research tendency of this study.

Review of the related literature

Social economic status and academic performance

Academic performance is affected by a number of factors such as the individual's gender, educational background of the parents, financial state of the family, admission points, social economic status and the type of school (Pehlivan, 2010; Karasakaloğlu &



Saracaloğlu, 2009). Understanding the effects of socioeconomic status on academic performance is important for both educators and students, so that not only can one assist educators in determining what instructional strategies best fit each individual student, but to help students reach their academic potential and the development of academics as well. Considine and Zappala (2002) argued that students from high social economic backgrounds are deeply exposed to scholastic materials, which aid their intelligence. Literature has provided evidence that those families where the parents are advantaged socially, educationally and economically foster a high level of achievement in their children (Bracey, 1999; Caldwell & Ginther, 1996; Milne & Plourde, 2006). A great number of researches have been done to ensure that all children can achieve their greatest learning potential if educators realize the social factors of children in the classrooms (Marsh, Hau & Kong, 2002; Erkan Acar, 2011; Ivy Kozi et al, 2010). In this respect, the demographic features of the individual are of great significance. This is why high priority should be placed on defining and understanding the effects of socioeconomic status on students' academic performance.

Social Economic Status (SES) according to Considine and Zappala (2002) is a person's overall social position to which attainments in both the social and economic domain contribute. Graetz (1995) claimed that one's educational success depends very strongly on social economic status of the parents. Students from high social economic status families perform much better at school compared to children from low SES families. Children who come from poor families have little access to materials and resources (Sirin,2005). Evidence exists that confirms that there is a correlation between family income and children's ability and achievement (Jeynes, 2002; McMillan & Western, 2000). Students from high-SES homes are associated with higher educational attainment. On the other hand, students coming from low-SES homes are faced with more trials and negative circumstances than those of their middle and high SES counterparts (Sirin,2005; Milne & Plourde, 2006; Malecki & Demaray, 2006).

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants of the study were randomly chosen from 6 classes of non-English major students of "College Freshmen English" class. Their majors varied from Industrial Engineering & Service Management, Spatial Design, Cosmetology and Styling, Tourism, Kinesiology Health Leisure Studies and Mechanical Engineering. All students had received the six-year standard formal English training in the Taiwanese education system. Furthermore, the administration of the study took place at the end of the full semester of the 2016 school year at a technology university in the central part of Taiwan. 230 questionnaires were correctly filled and returned, five was discarded as invalid; therefore, a total of 225 valid questionnaires (equal to 97.8% of distributed ones) used in the formal investigation. Of all the student population, females accounted for 60.9 % (n= 137), and 39.1.7% were males (n= 88). Based on participants' English test scores on the Taiwanese "Joint College Entrance Examination", and the scores from school's English classification test, 76 of the high English reading proficiency group of participants, designated as Group A, 75 of the average proficiency group, designated as Group B, and 74 of the low English proficiency group; this was Group C.

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A questionnaire with a total of 13 items SPSES (Survey of Parental Socio-Economic Status) was employed in order to study students' socioeconomic background information to determine the correlation between family socioeconomic status and academic



performance (Appendix). The main research question was as follows: “Whether family’s socioeconomic background can be a predictor of EFL Learners’ English language proficiency?” The data instrument was edited from three inventories: (1). The observations of high achievers in American Chinese families and in Taiwanese families (Cai, 1996), (2).The descriptions of the family factors that influenced children’s achievement (Lin, 2000), and (3).A favorable environment for successful children’s performance (Hamner &Turner, 2001). This instrument scale was a five point Likert scale ranging from “very disagree” being “1” to “very agree” being “5”. The questionnaire contained 13 statements about family socioeconomic background, including personal data, educational levels of parents, family’s monthly income, and parents’ occupations, etc.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Pilot Study

The researcher would like to find out whether the demographic background questionnaire items suited for each of the subtests before the formal survey, therefore, a pilot study was conducted with 105 participants from three classes. The reliability coefficient of this scale was calculated as 0.91 through the statistical analysis of SPSS (statistical package for the social science) 18.0 after the data were collected. It meant that the questionnaire items had high reliability and was reasonably reliable for the formal final study. In addition, three EFL professors helped to examine the appropriateness and adequacy of the wording for the questionnaire items. The researcher eliminated inappropriate items as suggested by reviewing panel. Thus, the consistency estimate of reliability for the 13-item questionnaires for demographic background was reached.

ANALYSIS OF DATA AND RESULTS

The study took the quantitative approach because it was based on variables measured with numbers and analyzed with statistical procedures. The Statistic Package for the Social Science (SPSS) version 18.0 for windows was used to answer the research questions to explore the correlation between parents’ social economic status of the students and their English learning proficiency. The descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations), Pearson correlations, an Analyses of Variance (ANOVA) and Pearson correlation coefficient (r) were used with the aim of identifying the relationship between parents’ social economic status, and students’ English learning proficiency of three groups students at a technology university.

RESULTS

As shown in Table 1 that there is a strong and positive correlation between parents’ educational level and three groups of students’ English language proficiency groups because whose significance value of 0.000 is less than $\alpha = 0.05$. Moreover, the father’s occupation was related to the EFL technology students’ English Learning proficiency based on the result ($r = .146^*$). However the mother’s occupation did not show any significant difference from the level of English Language Proficiency by three groups of participants ($p > .05$).



Table 1 Correlation of the Parents Educational Level and students' English learning Proficiency

Correlation	English	Learning Proficiency
Father's education level		.298** (.000)
Mother's education level		.229** (.000)
Father's occupation		.146* (.028)
Mother's occupation		.051 (.445)

** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

Table 2 Means and Standard Divisions for Parents' Educational Level and Their Occupation of Three Groups

Father's educational level	N	M	SD
Group A	76	2.71	1.05
Group B	75	2.28	1.10
Group C	74	2.36	1.00
Mother's educational level	N	M	SD
Group A	76	2.08	.84
Group B	75	2.39	1.10
Group C	74	2.28	1.10
Father's occupation	N	M	SD
Group A	76	3.82	1.50
Group B	75	3.73	1.70
Group C	74	4.46	2.06
Mother's occupation	N	M	SD
Group A	76	3.89	1.41
Group B	75	4.04	1.27
Group C	74	4.07	1.48

The percentage and frequency in Table 3, showed that parents' educational attainment of three groups completed senior high or vocational high education (n=33; 43.4%, n= 40; 53.3%, n=42; 56.8%), followed by the junior high (n=21; 27.6%, n=16; 21.3%, n=10; 13.5%).



Table 3 Father and Mother's Educational Level

Father's educational level			
Item	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Junior high	21 (27.6%)	16 (21.3%)	10 (13.5%)
Senior High or Vocational	33 (43.4%)	40 (53.3%)	42 (56.8%)
Junior college	13 (17.1%)	4 (5.3%)	10 (13.5%)
Bachelor	6 (7.9%)	12 (16.0%)	9 (12.2%)
Master or higher	3 (3.9%)	3 (4.0%)	3 (4.1%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	75 (100.0)	74 (100.0%)

Mother's educational level

Item	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Junior high	14 (18.4%)	14 (18.7%)	16 (21.6%)
Senior High or Vocational	50 (65.8%)	37 (49.3%)	38 (51.4%)
Junior college	6 (7.9%)	8 (10.7%)	7 (9.5%)
Bachelor	4 (5.3%)	13 (17.3%)	9 (12.4%)
Master or higher	2 (2.6%)	3 (4.0%)	4 (5.4%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	75 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)

It's also clear that majority of the fathers' occupation in three groups were in service industry, followed by business, financial and insurance (Table 4).

Table 4 The Summary of Frequent and Percentage Comparison among Father and Mother's Occupation by Groups

Father's occupation	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Soldier/policeman/ employee/ teacher	2 (2.6%)	3 (4.0%)	6 (8.1%)
Business/financial insurance	17 (22.4%)	20 (26.7%)	8 (10.8%)
Information /Technology Industry	7 (9.2%)	8 (10.7%)	6 (8.1%)
Service industry	34 (44.7%)	29 (38.7%)	27 (36.5%)
House keeping	3 (3.9%)	2 (2.7%)	3 (4.1%)
Agricultural/ Forestry/Fishery/Husbandry	11 (14.5%)	7 (9.3%)	10 (13.5%)
Medication	0 (0%)	3 (4.0%)	5 (6.8%)
Retired	2 (2.6%)	3 (4.0%)	9 (12.2%)
Total	76 (100%)	75 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)



As shown in Table 5, the majority of the mother in Group B, and C (n=28; 37.3%, n=31; 41.9%) were found to be unemployed (Housekeeping), followed by in service industry, but service industry was listed more frequent one for the mother of Group A.

Table 5 *The Summary of Frequent and Percentage Comparison among Mother's Occupation by Groups*

Mother's occupation	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Soldier/policeman/ employee/ teacher	4 (5.3%)	0 (0%)	5 (6.8%)
Business/financial insurance	14 (18.4%)	15 (20.0%)	9 (12.2%)
Information/Technology Industry	3 (3.9%)	5 (6.7%)	8 (10.8%)
Service industry	27 (35.5%)	23 (30.7%)	15 (20.3%)
House keeping	23 (30.3%)	28 (37.3%)	31 (41.9%)
Agricultural/ Forestry/Fishery/Husbandry	4 (5.3%)	2 (2.7%)	4 (5.4%)
Medication	0 (0%)	2 (2.7%)	1 (1.4%)
Retired	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.4%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	75 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)

As shown in Table 6, the monthly income of the family was related to the EFL technology students' English learning proficiency based on the results ($r = -.178^{**}$). However, familial structure has no significant effect on participants' English learning proficiency by three groups.

Table 6 *Correlation of the Family's Monthly Income and Students' English Learning Proficiency*

Correlation	English	Learning Proficiency
Monthly income		-.178** (.007)
Familial structure		.083 (.216)

** $p < 0.01$

As shown in Table 7, the monthly income of the family was related to the EFL technology students' English Learning proficiency based on the results ($p < .05$). And by using Post-Hoc Comparison, the results showed the participants in Group A and C, whose monthly income of the family had significant impact on their English learning achievement.

Table 7 *The Summary of the English Learning Proficiency in Relation to the Monthly Income of the Family by Groups*

	Groups	M	SD	P	Post-Hoc Comparison
Monthly income	A	3.33	1.72	.015	A > C, B > C
	B	3.23	1.66		
	C	2.59	1.60		

* $p < 0.05$



As shown in table 7, majority of the parents' monthly income in Group A, and C (n=17; 22.4%, n=25; 33.8%) were less than 50 thousand, followed by of the parents income were within 50-100 thousand, but majority of the parents' monthly income in Group B categorized in 50-100 thousand.

Table 7 Summary of Frequent and Percentage Comparison of Family's Monthly Income

Item	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Less than 50 thousand	17 (22.4%)	15 (20.0%)	25 (33.8%)
50-100 thousand	15 (19.7%)	19 (25.3%)	20 (27.0%)
100-200 thousand	6 (7.9%)	6 (8.0%)	8 (10.8%)
Above200 thousand	2 (2.6%)	4 (5.3%)	2 (2.7%)
Have no idea	36 (47.4%)	31 (41.3%)	19 (25.7%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	75 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)

As shown in Table 6, the familial structure has insignificant effect on participants' English learning proficiency. From Table 8, indicated that majority of the participants were come from average family (Group A, n=57; 75.0%, Group B, n=61; 81.3%, Group C, n=51; 68.9%).

Table 8 Summary of Familial Structure

Familial structure	Group A (N)	Group B (N)	Group C (N)
Average family	57 (75.0%)	61 (81.3%)	51(68.9%)
Single/Grand-parenting	12 (15.8%)	13 (17.3%)	13 (17.6%)
Send family-friendly	6 (7.9%)	1 (1.3%)	8 (10.8%)
No parent families	1 (1.3%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Total	76 (100.0%)	75 (100.0%)	74 (100.0%)

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings through the statistical analysis of ANOVA, Pearson correlations, and Post-Hoc Multiple Comparison, revealed the existence of a significant relationship between parents' education level, the father's occupation, and family's monthly income and students' English proficiency. However, the mother's occupation has no relation to the students' English proficiency. The explanation for this may related to the tradition that the majority of women in traditional Chinese society customarily lived oppressed lives, especially when they get married. According to the notion of socialization and stereotyping, men, on the other hand, are seen in the relatively high economic domain, and the responsibility of family-raising still be dominated by them. As fathers have to go out to work and bringing in income, while for women are less concerned.



The findings also revealed that there was no significant relationship between familial structure and English proficiency because the Pearson product moment correlation index of mother's occupation and familial structure and English learning proficiency gave an insignificance or p-value of .445 (mother's occupation) and .216 (familial structure), which were greater than alpha 0.05 as shown in Table 1 and 6 implying that there was no relationship between the mother's occupation and familial structure and English learning proficiency of EFL technology university students.

In addition, the parents' educational level did have the influence on the students' English proficiency. Those students' from lower parents' educational level performed more poorly in English than those who from families with higher father's educational level. However, it was contrary to the case regarding mother's educational level, the results showed that the mean score (2.08) in Group A was lower than Group B (2.39) and C (2.28). The findings also indicated that students coming from higher monthly income families outperform on English performance than those from lower monthly income families. That is, the higher a family's monthly income status, the higher the English academic performance of the student.

The findings of this study was consistent with the conclusions made by Considine and Zappala (2002) who found that students coming from families whose parents were advantaged economically and educationally would perform relatively better than those coming from lower social economic and educational strata, and vice versa.

Based on the results of this study, it's suggested that students with families located at the higher social hierarchy are inclined to seek or gain access to better educational facilities than whose parents are at the lower social economic hierarchy, and the students of low SES is reflected in their self-esteem when it comes to English learning, in such case, some pedagogic implications can be provided for school authorities English instructors, and families as well. That is, school authority and English instructors may play as a facilitator; providing extra remediation learning or other supplemental resources to those students coming from lower SES families such as, creating interesting lesson plans by the help of different strategies, techniques and procedures in which the students' learning motivation is gained, fostering a learning friendly atmosphere adopting cooperative learning activities, individual tutoring assistance in or after class and the effective learning strategies to boost students' English learning self-confidence, interest and ease their emotional stress of language anxiety. Meanwhile, parents can offer their children more positive attitudes and supports, show more concern or supervision about their learning and so on.

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APPENDIX

EFL 科大學生家庭背景對英語學習成就問卷調查表

壹、個人背景資料

1.性別：1□男，2□女

2.系別：

1.□工程學院 (自動、機械、電子、土木、電通、電機)

2.□管理學院 (工業工程、資訊、國企)



3. 設計學院 (商設、空設、數媒)
4. 生活科技學院 (應外、美容、運休、觀光)
3. 父親的教育程度：1 國中以下 2 高中職 3 專科 4 大學 5 研究所以上
4. 母親的教育程度：1 國中以下 2 高中職 3 專科 4 大學 5 研究所以上
5. 何時開始學習英語：1 幼稚園 2 國小 3 國中
6. 父親的職業：1 軍警公教 2 商業/金融保險業 3 資訊科技業 4 服務業
5 家管 6 農林漁牧業 7 醫藥 8 退休
7. 母親的職業：1 軍警公教 2 商業/金融保險業 3 資訊科技業
4 服務業 5 家管 6 農林漁牧業 7 醫藥 8 退休
8. 目前家庭每個月的經濟收入大約是(包含父母親，或主要照顧你的家庭的收入，家庭的收入)：1 5 萬元以下 2 5-10 元萬 3 10-20 萬元
4 20 萬元以上 5 完全不知道
9. 家庭結構是：1 一般家庭 2 單親/隔代教養家庭 3 寄親家庭 4 無親家庭
10. 喜歡英語的程度：1 非常不喜歡 2 有點不喜歡 3 普通 4 有點喜歡
5 非常喜歡
11. 請問您截至目前為止，學習英語已有幾年的時間：
1 6年以下 2 7-10年 3 11年以上
12. 對你而言，學習英文有多重要？
1 不重要，2 不太重要，3 還算重要，4 重要，5 很重要
13. 課堂之外你每星期平均額外花多少時間學習英文？
1 少於2小時，2 2到4小時，3 4到6小時，4 多於6小時

貳、家庭英語學習及狀況評量

以下各題請根據你個人的實際學習，圈選最適合您的數字。

1 = 非常不同意 2 = 不同意 3 = 不確定 4 = 同意 5 = 非常同意



	非常不同意	不同意	不確定	同意	非常同意
1. 父母會鼓勵我多講英文或是念英文給他們聽。.....	1	2	3	4	5
2. 我會和父母或兄弟姊妹用簡單的英文單字或句子交談。...	1	2	3	4	5
3. 我和家人會利用空閒時，彼此分享學英文的經驗。.....	1	2	3	4	5
4. 我會講上英文課時，所發生的事情給父母或家人聽。.....	1	2	3	4	5
5. 當我談到英文課的內容時，父母或兄弟姊妹會注意聽。...	1	2	3	4	5
6. 父母會要求我聽或看有關英文的光碟、錄音帶、廣播、電視節目。.....	1	2	3	4	5
7. 父母曾經念英文故事或用英文講故事給我聽。.....	1	2	3	4	5
8. 父母會希望我的英文成績或程度比現在更好。.....	1	2	3	4	5
9. 父母會期望我所學會的英文比在學校所教的更多。.....	1	2	3	4	5
10. 父母會希望我的英文成績能在團體中表現優異。.....	1	2	3	4	5
11. 父母會認為讀英文是我的一項很重要的功課。.....	1	2	3	4	5
12. 父母會和我說明英文的重要性。.....	1	2	3	4	5
13. 父母會詢問我的英文課的內容和進度。.....	1	2	3	4	5
14. 父母會期望我主動學好英文，而非被動的學習。.....	1	2	3	4	5
15. 父母會希望英文成為我學習上的利器。.....	1	2	3	4	5
16. 父母會認為要學好英文就一定要努力不懈的學習。.....	1	2	3	4	5
17. 父母會要求我上英文課時要認真的聽課。.....	1	2	3	4	5
18. 父母會要求我能將英文實際地應用出來。.....	1	2	3	4	5
19. 父母會要求我每天複習或預習英文功課。.....	1	2	3	4	5
20. 父母會陪著我一起念英文或是聽英文。.....	1	2	3	4	5
21. 遇到不會的英文時，我都會去問父母。.....	1	2	3	4	5
22. 遇到英文學習上的問題時，父母都會幫我想辦法或者找人解決。.....	1	2	3	4	5
23. 父母會教導我學英文的方法或技巧。.....	1	2	3	4	5
24. 父母會找機會和我的英文老師(校內或校外)溝通。.....	1	2	3	4	5
25. 父母會額外訂閱或購買英文方面的書籍或報紙，來增進我的英文能力。.....	1	2	3	4	5
26. 父母會建議或與我討論未來的英語學習計畫。.....	1	2	3	4	5
27. 對於我學習英文的支出(如補習英文、買書等)，父母會全力支持。.....	1	2	3	4	5
28. 對於我的英文學習或考試內容，父母會幫我複習或檢查錯誤(任何一項)英文學習或考試內容。.....	1	2	3	4	5
29. 對於英文老師指派的活動(如聖誕節)，父母都很樂意參加。.....	1	2	3	4	5
30. 父母每次除了簽英文聯絡本以外，還會檢查我的英文作業。.....	1	2	3	4	5