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English Listening Skills of College Students of Punjab in Relation to Socio-Economic Background

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between socio-economic background of college students and their English listening skill proficiency. Descriptive survey method was used. The participants included 273 first year graduate students comprising of both girls and boys studying in six government degree colleges of Punjab, India. Self-prepared Socio-Economic Background Measure and English Listening Skill Proficiency Test were used to collect data which was analyzed with the help of descriptive statistics and t- test. The results revealed that high socio-economic background students had a higher level of listening skill proficiency than their middle and low socio-economic background counterparts. However, there was no significant difference between the listening skill proficiency of middle and low socio-economic background college students. Based on these findings, it is recommended that students should be encouraged to listen to English educational programs, broadcasts, educational films, discussions, documentaries and interviews so as to gain ample listening experience. This should be further enhanced with the incorporation of these strategies by teachers themselves.

Key words: English listening skill, socio-economic background, college students

1. Introduction

In this age of globalization brought about by a rapid advancement in the field of science and technology, within the multicolored spectrum of the other major languages of the world such as Mandarin Chinese, Spanish, French, Hindi, Arabic, Bengali, Russian, Punjabi and Japanese, English language has come to acquire a significant place on the world map. It has acquired the status of 'World language' owing to its world-widespread, current position as a lingua franca of a vast majority of nations, besides playing a significant role as a vital channel to reach the world, a language making people aware of the current scenario and by serving as a storehouse to world knowledge. These factors have invariably made it practically very useful in all walks of life.

Realizing the importance of the English language as an important agent of change and progress, it has been given a prominent position in the Indian scheme of studies. The Secondary Education Commission (1952-53) favoured the retention of English because "much of the national unity in the political and other spheres of activity has been brought about through the study of English language and literature." The Central Advisory Board of Education (1956-57) secured an important place for English in the 3-language formula devised by it when it pronounced: "English should be one of three compulsory languages for students at the secondary stage. The other two being Hindi and the mother tongue or the regional language." The Indian Education Commission (1964-66) suggested to include "the associate official language of the Union so long as it is recognized as such" in the modified 3-language formula. This has, in turn led to "Mass Learning" of English language which has brought in its wake certain pitfalls. In India, the conditions under which English is taught still demand a lot of attention. Language learning is a skill and it needs to be undertaken by keeping in mind this main objective supplemented by the use of the right methodologies and techniques coupled with the constructive role played by the human resources to facilitate its speedy and accurate acquisition.

1.1. English Listening Skill

There are four parameters to adjudge the English Language proficiency of an individual. These are also known as the Linguistic skills including the Receptive skills Listening and Reading, and Expressive skills Speaking and Writing. Listening paves way for the acquisition of other skills. It involves identification of sounds, information, attitudinal tone and understanding of syntactic patterns. It is an important primary skill since it provides input in the form of vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, spoken word as well as other features of speech which are crucial in the acquisition of English language. It also occupies a big chunk of communication as is substantiated by a study by Wilt in 1950 who found that it occupied 45 % of the communication, followed by speaking (30 %), reading (16 %) and writing (9 %) respectively.

Thus, it is vital that a learner of English language must display a reasonable level of proficiency in English listening skill for the proper acquisition of the other three linguistic skills namely speaking, reading and writing.

1.2. Socio-Economic Background

Socio-economic background is an economic and sociological combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position relative to others, based on income, education, and occupation. When analyzing a family's socio-economic background, the household income, earners' education, and occupation are examined, as well as combined income, versus with an individual, when their own attributes are assessed.

It is widely accepted that socio-economic background of a child bears an impact on his overall personality development. The children from high socio-economic background have better opportunities for their academic development, which in future lead to better career prospects for them and better position in society. But on the other hand, we have before us the living examples of great political, literary figures and educationists who, though not blessed with a good socio-economic background, received highest laurels in the field of education and later shone as the leading figures of contemporary society. Thus, it is intended to examine the real nature of listening skill proficiency in socio-economic context.

2. Review of Related Literature

On reviewing relevant literature available in the field, it was concluded that socio-economic background has an effect on language skills of students (Chandrakanthi, 2003, Subbhuraam and Ananthasayanam, 2010) or certain aspects of English language such as emergent literacy levels and the impact of maternal mediation level and home literacy environment on children's emergent literacy level (Korat, Klein and Segal-Drori, 2007), actual literacy level of children (Korat, 2011), language processing skills (Fernald, Marchman and Weisleder, 2013). On the other hand, some researchers found that socio-economic background bears no impact on components of language development such as receptive vocabulary (Black et al., 2008). Besides, socio-economic background of parents had a positive and significant relationship with the level of role performance of parents in child education and development (Torimiro et al. 2004). Though with mixed results, socio-economic background is the strongest predictor of educational outcomes of children (Fransoo et al. 2005).

3. Emergence of the Problem

Although many studies related to socio-economic background and language development have been conducted, it is still desirable to understand the extent of relationship between socio-economic background and English listening skill in particular. Since development of listening skill is the precursor of other linguistic skills, so it is vital to understand its development in different socio-economic contexts.

4. Objective of the Study

To study English listening skill proficiency of college students in relation to socio-economic background.

5. Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested:-

- H_0 1- There is no significant difference in English listening skill proficiency attained by high and middle socio-economic background college students.
- H_0 2- There is no significant difference in English listening skill proficiency attained by high and low socio-economic background college students.
- H_0 3- There is no significant difference in English listening skill proficiency attained by middle and low socio-economic background college students.

6. Sample

The sample comprised of 273 first year graduate students including both boys and girls who were studying in science, commerce and arts streams in government degree colleges affiliated to prominent universities in public sector in Punjab, namely Panjab University, Chandigarh and Punjabi University, Patiala. These students' recent exposure to school education which immediately followed the early impact of their family socio-economic background- both covering the formative years of their language development, formed the basis of their selection. The learners at the school level too belong to a mix of high, middle as well as low socio-economic background where the level of income, parental education and occupation differ which seem to have an effect on the overall personality development of children. Thus, the possible connection of socio-economic background with English listening skill proficiency of students needs to be analyzed. Consequently, in first year of graduate studies, the level of impact, if any, of socio-economic background on English listening skill proficiency of an individual can be examined more fairly.

7. Tools Used

The following tools were constructed by the investigator herself and were used in the study:-

- Socio-Economic Background Measure
- English Listening Proficiency Test

7.1. Socio-Economic Background Measure

A Performa was developed to identify the profile of family members indicating their social and economic background. General information about the students was sought in the beginning followed by 15 items related to learners' school type, medium of instruction, rural/urban background, occupation and income of parents, type of house and other items indicating his/her social and

economic status. It was administered to the initial sample (60 students) for an initial tryout. However, after contemplation of preliminary results, two items were excluded.

7.1.1. Final Draft

After making necessary modifications, the final draft of the Performa was developed in such a manner to bring about a comprehensive and accurate picture of the socio-economic background of the students by utilizing minimum time and effort. General information like student's name, age, class, names of both parents and name of college is collected in the beginning of the Performa. It is followed by question items related to the learner's educational and social background including educational level and income of parents, educational background of siblings, learner's occupational preferences for future, type of house they live in, pocket allowance, conveyance type, number of rooms in house, types of articles in the house and subscription to newspapers and magazines. Weightage was allocated to item responses which was added to get the combined socio-economic background (SEB) score of each student which was further used to identify his/her socio-economic background.

7.2. English Listening Skill Proficiency Test

The format of English Listening Skill Proficiency Test was based upon the world renowned and standardized International English Language Testing System (IELTS) which is reliably used by Government and academic organizations in most countries of the world to assess the English language proficiency of prospective applicants. But since the sample of the present study comprised of first year graduate students of degree colleges who have not passed through any preparation phase which is usually required before appearing in IELTS due to its highly standardized and increasingly complex nature, the difficulty level of test items used in the present study was been adjusted to the local context.

7.2.1. Expert Opinion and First Tryout

Initially, five samples of English Listening Skill Proficiency Test were prepared to test the listening skills of the students. They were reviewed by Language experts and Education experts for any modifications required. On the basis of their valuable suggestive criticism, the most appropriate sample of English Listening Skill Proficiency (ELSP) Test was selected, along with incorporation of certain additions and modifications in the style of questions. To further ensure its suitability for first year students, the chosen sample of the proficiency test was selected and administered to 60 students studying in Government College, Derabassi and Government College, Mohali respectively for an initial tryout.

This test contained: 15 objective type test items based upon five mini-talks related to the academic and social life situations of the students. Thereafter, the test sheets attempted by the students were marked by the investigator. Subsequently, the number of correct responses received on each of the test items in the Listening Test were added separately. After reviewing the results, it was found none of the students could attempt one test item (item no. 3) in the Listening Test. Henceforth, the language of this test item was simplified which resulted in a satisfactory ELSP test for Final data Collection.

7.2.2. The Final Draft

The final draft of the English Listening test consisted of 5 self-prepared mini-talks (monologues) based upon educational (academic) and social situations familiar to the students. There were 3 questions based on each mini-talk resulting in total 15 questions. The questions were of objective multiple choice type.

An overview of the English Listening Skill test is as given below:-

Ques. Item No.	Type	Context	Score
1	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 1 (Academic situation)	1
2	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 1 (Academic situation)	1
3	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 1 (Academic situation)	1
4	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 2 (Academic situation)	1
5	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 2 (Academic situation)	1
6	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 2 (Academic situation)	1
7	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 3 (Social situation)	1
8	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 3 (Social situation)	1
9	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 3 (Social situation)	1
10	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 4 (Social-academic situation)	1
11	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 4 (Social-academic situation)	1
12	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 4 (Social-academic situation)	1
13	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 5 (Social-academic situation)	1
14	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 5 (Social-academic situation)	1
15	Multiple choice type	Mini-talk 5 (Social-academic situation)	1

Table 1: showing the scheme of Test items in English Listening Skill Proficiency Test

7.3. Administering The Tools

Students were given detailed instructions in simple language about the items in Socio-Economic Background (SEB) Measure and they were asked to give item responses. After the completion of SEB Measure, they were given detailed instructions about the English Listening Proficiency Test.

Thereafter, the mini-talks were played/spoken successively and students marked the responses as they listened to each mini-talk which was played only once. The total time for listening test was 10-11 minutes.

7.3.1. Scoring

The answers were marked either as correct or incorrect according to the scoring key prepared beforehand. Each correct response was awarded 1 mark and incorrect responses were awarded no score. Based upon this marking, the listening test scores of students were calculated.

8. Statistical Techniques Used

Descriptive statistics like measures of Mean and Standard Deviation were computed to describe the English listening skill proficiency of college students. This was followed by t-test for statistical interpretation of data to find out the significance of the effect of socio-economic background in relation to English listening skill proficiency of college students.

9. Results and Discussion

The following results were obtained:-

Socio-Economic Background	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean difference	Df	t
High SEB	64	8.73	2.863	.856	202	2.359
Middle SEB	140	7.88	2.164			

Table 2: Comparison of Listening scores of High and Middle SEB College Students to test Null Hypothesis- 1

The above Table shows that English listening skill proficiency of students belonging to High Socio-economic background (High SEB) is higher than that of the students belonging to Middle SEB. The difference between these two means is significant at .05 level as the t ratio has come out to be 2.359. Thus, null Hypothesis 1 stating no significant difference between English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to High SEB and Middle SEB was rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that the English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to High SEB is higher than the English listening skill proficiency of students belonging to Middle SEB.

Socio-Economic Background	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean difference	Df	t
High SEB	64	8.73	2.863	1.010	131	2.142
Low SEB	69	7.72	2.572			

Table 3: Comparison of Listening scores of High and Low SEB College Students to test Null Hypothesis- 2

The above Table shows that English listening skill proficiency of students belonging to High SEB is 8.73 and is higher than that of the students belonging to Low SEB. The difference between these two means is significant at .05 level as the t ratio has come out be 2.142. Thus, null Hypothesis 1 stating no significant difference between English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to High SEB and Low SEB stands rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that the English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to High SEB is higher than the English listening skill proficiency of students belonging to Low SEB.

Socio-Economic Background	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean difference	Df	t
Middle SEB	140	7.88	2.164	.154	207	.454
Low SEB	69	7.72	2.572			

Table 4: Comparison of Listening scores of Middle and Low SEB College Students to test Null Hypothesis- 3

The above table shows that English listening skill proficiency of students belonging to Middle SEB is 7.88 and is higher than that of the students belonging to Low SEB. But, the difference between these two means is not significant at .05 level as the t ratio has come out be .454. Thus, null Hypothesis 3 stating no significant difference between English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to Middle SEB and Low SEB was retained. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between the English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to Middle SEB and Low SEB.

10. Conclusion

On the basis of the findings and interpretation of the results, it was concluded that:-

- College students belonging to high socio-economic background have a higher level of English listening skill proficiency than the college students belonging to middle socio-economic background as well as low socio-economic background.
- But, there is no significant difference between the English listening skill proficiency of the students belonging to middle socio-economic background and low socio-economic background.
- This shows that there is a certain level of impact of socio-economic background on English listening skill proficiency of college students.

11. Suggestions

On the basis of the above findings it is suggested that English listening skill proficiency of college students belonging to different socio-economic backgrounds needs to be enhanced by giving them ample opportunities to listen to English educational programmes, documentaries, news, broadcasts, interviews and discussions to as to familiarize them with a wide range of English language vocabulary, structural patterns and pronunciation.

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