Factors Driving Poor English Performance among College Students: A Case Study of Sonipat District in Haryana

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ABSTRACT

This descriptive quantitative research investigated factors influencing students' poor English performance at the college level. The sample pertained to 100 (n=100) Bachelor of Arts third-year students from two colleges in the Sonipat district of Haryana: Hindu College, Sonipat, and Ch. Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya, Butana, Sonipat. The participants comprised 50 students (25 boys and 25 girls) from Hindu College, Sonipat, and 50 (25 boys and 25 girls) from Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya, Butana, Sonipat. The data was collected in person using a questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale, with items divided into three categories: Influence of Socio-Cultural Background, Personal Attitudes and Motivation, and Teaching and Learning Environment at College. SPSS software was used to derive values like mean, standard deviation, variance, skewness, and kurtosis. The results indicated that all three factors are pivotal in seeding and nourishing English language competencies among students. The findings suggest that along with addressing the studied factors individually, understanding their intricate relationship can provide a leap in intervention strategies targeting English skills among college students.

Keywords: English performance; motivation; socio-cultural background

INTRODUCTION

The role and importance of proficiency in the English language cannot be overrated in the 21st century. As a lingua franca, English connects the world and is essential to mediate amongst governments for important commercial, education, and tourism agreements worldwide (Kitao, 1996). Even from the job perspective, English efficiency gives the aspirants an edge, particularly in Multinational Corporations. However, it is indisputable that most non-English college students studying English as a second language encounter numerous difficulties. India is a multilingual country, and as no two states speak the same language, English helps them communicate. English is the only language spoken and understood throughout India at present. Therefore, it is taught in schools from the primary level so that the students might be market fit after completing their formal studies.

Given the importance of English in all educational systems nationwide, students spend more than twelve years studying the English language. Besides, English continues to be a compulsory / elective language for almost all streams at the college level. In India, the Southern part has imbibed English as a convenient second language. However, in the Northern region, known as the Northern Hindi Belt, including states like Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Uttarakhand, and Uttar Pradesh, students still struggle to garner English skills.

Students from semi-urban and rural areas primarily strive for English skills, whether listening, speaking, reading, or writing. Even after passing the language examination at the graduation level, many students are unable to write well-structured sentences in English or speak simple sentences confidently (Meganathan, 2022). Numerous factors, such as poor educational background, socio-cultural influence, personal attitude and motivation, teaching-learning methods and strategies, class size, and gender role, among others, could influence college students' poor English proficiency.

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LITERATURE REVIEW

Numerous factors influence the learning outcomes of the students in English. Keumala et al. (2019) found that socio-cultural and educational backgrounds significantly influence learners' motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language. Ferdoes (2016) and Irfan & Saleem (2021) suggested that parental education and communication play a vital role in deciding the efficiency and attitude of children toward English as a second language. Studies worldwide have made similar claims about the essential role of the socio-cultural environment in deciding the English language proficiency of school and college students (Ahmad, 2015; Ahmed & Myhill, 2016; Amiri & Karfa, 2022; Helandri & Supriadi, 2024; Kung, 2017; Nouraldeen & Elyas, 2014). In India too, the studies reinforce the vitality of understanding and addressing the socio-cultural hurdles to garner better results in honing students' English language skills (Arooja & Bharathi, 2023; Bhatt, 2019; Kakita & Palukuri, 2020).

Along with socio-cultural factors, a student's attitude and motivation are key elements that affect how they tackle various life circumstances, including learning a second language. Attitude is crucial in learning a foreign language, influencing students' interest and motivation. Gardener's (1985) work provides a platform for researchers to explore motivation and attitude in language learning, focusing on favorable attitudes toward language learning. Studies contend that a positive attitude among students motivates them to work harder toward their language learning objective (Ditual, 2012; Fatiha et al., 2014; Thang et al., 2011). Moreover, the studies have also claimed that the structure of an English language program influences students' attitudes and motivations (Getie, 2020). Besides, Markley (2004) propounds that effective and efficient learning by students significantly depends on teachers and their actions in their classes.

The literature survey shows that the studies worldwide advocate the significance of socio-cultural, personal attitudes, motivation, and teaching-learning environment in mastering English as a second language. However, no such study exists from the Sonipat district of Haryana; therefore, the present study has tried to fill this gap by investigating the factors hampering college students' English performance and addressing the root causes of their inability to speak and write fluently and effectively.

METHODOLOGY

The literature review exhibits that getting students' opinions about the learning environment, teaching strategies, and self-motivation in English classrooms is crucial as the current study focuses on the factors influencing the students' performance.

The investigation culminated at two colleges: Hindu College, Sonipat and Ch. Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya, Butana, Sonipat. Hindu College, Sonipat, is administered by The Sonepat Hindu Educational and Charitable Society (Regd. 1914), one of northern India's oldest and most reputable non-profit educational groups in Haryana's Sonipat district. The group operates sixteen educational institutions with a strength of more than 20,000 students. Though situated in an urban space, the college has convenient access for rural students from villages sprawled in the neighborhood of Sonipat. Besides, Ch Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya is administered by Janta Vidya Bhawan Charitable Society (Regd. 1951). It is situated in Butana village of Gohana tehsil in Sonipat. Majorly catering to rural students, Ch Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya has sizable enrollments from urban and semi-urban areas around. Therefore, Hindu College and Dhajja Ram College, being premier and popular institutes, have the strength of roughly 4000 students, including boys and girls from a large part of the Sonipat district.

The study involved 100 students. The participants comprised 50 students (25 boys and 25 girls) from Hindu College, Sonipat, and 50 (25 boys and 25 girls) from Dhajja Ram Janta Mahavidyalaya, Butana, Sonipat. The participants were selected based on their previous year's exam performance, which they could barely pass with the lowest required grades in their English examinations. In their three-year English course, they studied the basics of English phonology and grammar, comprehension and composition skills, and representative forms of English poetry, story, drama, and novel in their syllabus. The age of participants ranged from 20-25 years. The participants were chosen conveniently since the researchers work in the colleges where the study was conducted.

Based on a literature survey, a questionnaire with 18 questions was developed, with six items each from the area of socio-cultural background, personal attitude and motivation, and teaching-learning environment at college. Respondents could rate each item on a 5-point Likert scale: strongly agree (5), agree (4), neutral (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). Students were informed that their answers would only be used for research and not be included in their evaluation process. The researcher did not get any personally identifiable information. The students were aware that participating in the study was entirely voluntary. The survey was conducted during class; each participant had 40 minutes to tick the desirable option. The participants' responses were analysed using SPSS software to derive mean, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis values.

ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Influence of Socio-Cultural Background

The participants were asked to respond to the following six items coded from S1 to S6 on a five-point Likert scale questionnaire to understand socio-cultural factors' influence on students' interest and competency in the English language.

S1: My parents and peers are well aware of the importance of English in global communication.

S2: My family motivates me to learn and speak English at home and among friends.

S3: The quality of English education in my school was sufficient to develop strong language skills.

S4: I have ample access to English language learning resources in my community.

S5: People with English skills earn no respect and acceptance in my community.

S6: I get a chance to interact with proficient English speakers in my neighbourhood.

As per the data in Table 1, socio-cultural factors significantly influence students' motivation and proficiency in learning the English language. The mean values for factors S1 to S6 oscillate in the range from 2.40 to 2.78. This range indicates that students perceive these socio-cultural factors as important in their language learning journey. The standard deviations and variances show some variability in how students perceive these factors; primarily, factors S5 and S6 have higher standard deviations and variances, which suggests that students may have differing opinions or experiences about the reputation of people with English proficiency and interaction chances with people with English skills in their community. Skewness values indicate the asymmetry of the distribution of responses for each factor. Positive skewness values for all factors except S5 suggest that more students believe that English competency does not earn any special respect in their community; this implication is supported by negative kurtosis values against S5. The low values against standard error of skewness and kurtosis indicate the reliability and closeness of true skewness and kurtosis data distribution.

Table 1: *Descriptive Statistics of Socio-Cultural Factors*

Question Code	Valid (N)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
S1	100	2.78	1.186	1.406	.253	.241	-.967	.478
S2	100	2.62	1.204	1.450	.668	.241	-.523	.478
S3	100	2.75	1.104	1.220	.605	.241	-.377	.478
S4	100	2.71	1.157	1.339	.231	.241	-.905	.478
S5	100	2.62	1.369	1.874	.309	.241	-1.192	.478
S6	100	2.40	1.223	1.495	.778	.241	-.315	.478

Personal Attitudes and Motivation

The participants were made to respond against the following six items coded from P1 to P6 on a five-Likert scale questionnaire to decipher the role of personal attitude and motivation behind their performance in English language skills.

P1: I feel hesitant or discouraged about speaking English because I fear making mistakes or being judged.

P2: I feel that English grammar is too complicated to understand, so I avoid learning it.

P3: I usually practice speaking, writing, or listening to English even outside the classroom

P4: I think that speaking English well is important for my future.

P5: I believe that I am not capable of becoming fluent in English.

P6: Earning a university degree and getting a job are more important to me than learning English.

The data in Table 2 reflects that the mean values for items showing negative attitude, i.e., P1, P2, P4, P5, and P6, are higher than item P3, which enquires about a positive inclination towards practicing language outside classroom settings. Besides, the standard deviation for P4 (1.225) suggests a diverse opinion about the value ordained to English skills for their future career prospects, which is further supported by skewness value (-1.035) for P4.

Table 2: *Personal Attitudes and Motivation among students*

Question Code	Valid (N)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
P1	100	3.24	1.102	1.215	-.955	.241	-.218	.478
P2	100	2.96	1.127	1.271	-.050	.241	-1.076	.478
P3	100	2.49	1.185	1.404	.563	.241	-.573	.478
P4	100	3.44	1.225	1.501	-1.035	.241	-.214	.478
P5	100	2.87	1.292	1.670	.190	.241	-1.050	.478
P6	100	3.54	1.210	1.463	-.690	.241	-.507	.478

Teaching and Learning Environment at College

To showcase their perception of the English language teaching-learning environment at college, the participant marked their preferences against the following six items coded from T1 to T6 on the five-point Likert scale questionnaire.

T1: The course materials provided in my college are sufficient for improving English skills.

T2: The teachers at my college use interesting and innovative strategies for teaching English.

T3: My college gives the facility of a language lab and other technologies to provide online content for seamless learning and practice of English

T4: I have an English-speaking peer group at college.

T5: I am active and encouraged to take part in English class activities

T6: My teachers focus more on rote memorization rather than practical usage

Table 3: *Participants' Perception of Teaching and Learning Environment at College*

Question Code	Valid (N)	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance	Skewness	Std. Error of Skewness	Kurtosis	Std. Error of Kurtosis
T1	100	2.79	1.076	1.157	.183	.241	-.409	.478
T2	100	2.95	1.095	1.199	.195	.241	-.571	.478
T3	100	2.51	.959	.919	.848	.241	.875	.478
T4	100	2.56	1.076	1.158	.710	.241	.110	.478
T5	100	2.78	1.168	1.365	.286	.241	-.632	.478
T6	100	3.24	1.129	1.275	-.789	.241	-.467	.478

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics on teaching factors influencing and motivating students to learn English. The highest mean value for T6 indicates that a higher number of students believe that their teachers' approach focuses more on rote memorization rather than practical usage of the English language. A low standard deviation and variance for T3 suggest that most students feel a lack of seamless technological support from their colleges. This outcome is supported by the highest positive skewness and kurtosis values for T3.

DISCUSSION

The data indicates that socio-cultural background, personal motivation, and teaching-learning environment may impact students' proficiency in learning English. It suggests that socio-cultural factors such as indifferent family attitudes, poor community infrastructure and acceptance of the English language, weak school education base, and lack of interaction opportunities may significantly either motivate or demotivate students to learn English. These findings are in line with the earlier studies on the influence of socio-cultural factors on English

language competence (Anyanwu, 2016; Garayeva, 2015; Rhodes & Ochoa, 2005).

The results of the personal attitude and motivational factors reveal that most respondents are full of self-doubt and are pursuing English to complete their college degree. Most participants focus on learning English for class assignments and tests only. They do not learn English in order to become proficient in it. The findings agree with Shaikholeslami & Khayyer (2006) and Mauliya & Relianisa (2020), which suggest that students prioritizing high marks may be less motivated to enhance their knowledge.

Moreover, it is inferred that the students' poor performance can be the byproduct of a non-conducive teaching-learning environment. These insights agree with the studies by Nguyen et al. (2014) and Lodhi et al. (2019), contending that the academic achievement of language learners is dictated not just by their intellect but also by the learning environment in which they are placed.

CONCLUSION

The primary goal of this research was to investigate the factors that influence students' inadequate English competency as a foreign language at the college level, with special reference to the Sonipat district of Haryana, India. The students' dismal performance in target institutions has caused concerns among most teachers. This study investigated why many students struggle to master English language skills even on the verge of college completion. This study of BA third-year students from representative Sonipat district colleges found that the socio-cultural background, personal attitude and motivation, and teaching-learning environment at colleges have a crucial role in students' low English performance. Most poor-performing students come from non-supportive backgrounds where learning and enriching English skills do not get much assistance and recognition. Besides, the students are not personally motivated and sensitized towards honing their competencies. On top of that, many students are not satisfied with the teaching-learning environment at colleges.

According to the researchers, these findings have useful practical significance for language teachers in the Sonipat district of Haryana, as understanding and addressing these factors can help educators create a more conducive learning environment for students and improve their language learning outcomes. The study has its limitations as it has not considered factors like gender, class size, and non-Bachelor of Arts students. Additional research is needed to identify the role of such factors. Furthermore, researchers may conduct studies to understand the interrelation of the three studied factors.

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