

## THE ROLE OF THE FAMILY IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

Md. Jahangir Alam<sup>1</sup>, Md. Ashikullah<sup>2</sup> and Md. Mahbub Rahman<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Senior Sub-Editor, the Financial Express

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Department of English, Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology

<sup>3</sup>Lecturer (Sociology), Department of Arts and Sciences, Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study investigates the role of family in English language learning particularly in Bangladesh. Family role is very important to grow the sense of learning in learners as they are greatly influenced by it. Parents' positive attitude, education and awareness according to individual requirements and needs provide constant encouragement and support for the learners. Parents make the greatest difference to achievement through supporting their learning at home rather than supporting activities in school. A learner, whose family members are habituated to use English at home, feels encouraged to learn English which facilitates learning process. My findings, on the other hand, show that children of those parents who are unaware of providing sound family atmosphere lack confidence as well as self-esteem. This study also examines the impact of home environment on children's achievement in English language. My findings reveal that there is consistent relationship between the role of family and students' academic achievement.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural Capital, Socio-Economic Status, Language Learning, Family Role, Cognitive Development, Competence, Performance

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### INTRODUCTION

Family plays the most important role in children's development and education. Parental involvement in children's learning is a key factor in improving children's academic attainment and achievements, as well as their overall behaviour and attendance. The role of parents during a child's earliest years is the single biggest influence on their development. Good quality home learning contributes more to children's intellectual and social development than parental occupation, education or income. Early childhood is a crucial period for every child all over the world. This is the period when the child needs the cooperation and the supervision of the parents and other relatives within family. In Bangladeshi context, conscious parents put emphasis on their children's education and cognitive development. On the other hand, people with low income are often unable to provide their children with a sound home environment which contributes to learning.

David (2009) found that the role of family on children is very much influential. He described that changed roles of the family has great impact on children's development and education. Family pattern has a lot to do with child's moral development as well. Families where there is strong foundation of love, children there learn about family bonding and mutual trust. Family values also help developing children's mental and intellectual strength.

This paper also aims to address what sort of family support or assistance learners get at home in learning English. It also discusses the attitude or atmosphere in family hampers learning processes and what particular parental roles or activities facilitate English language learning.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

A happy family life as well as home environment plays a vital role in language learning. Family support and proper guidance keep children on right track and help facilitate learning process.

Various home conditions are contributory factors to children's language learning as well as academic achievement. There is general agreement among researchers that the child's early home experiences are part and parcel of his or her learning and education (Berstein, 1970:6; Brown, 1980:85; Grolnick & Ryan, 1989: 143).

Several researchers (Marjoribanks, 1972; Walberg, 1972; Kellaghan, 1977; Burns & Homel, 1985; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988) have detected a relationship between home environment and learning. This relationship is attributed to numerous variables. These measurable variables include, inter alia, parental structure, parent-occupational status, parental involvement and parental-managed learning programmes.

Bourdieu (1990) says children of well-to-do families are likely to get more facilities which contribute to learning process. But the children coming from families with low social status and poor income face difficulties to develop themselves as they suffer from lack of necessary supports from family which are prerequisites for learning.

According to Hamid (2011), there are relationships between students' family socio-economic characteristics and their academic achievement. He conducted research in Bangladeshi context which has investigated relationships between socioeconomic status (SES) and academic achievement in English as an L2/FL.

Cherian's (1991) research in South Africa substantiated the 'well-established' relationship between parental income and academic achievement in developed as well as developing countries. Cherian collected parental income data by means of a questionnaire survey of 1,021 seventh grade students in the sub-national context of Transkei. Academic achievement was the criterion measure of the aggregated grades in seven subjects including English, Xhosa, mathematics, history, science, geography and agricultural science. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that for low SES students there were positive relationships between parental incomes and academic achievement for both male and female students.

The environmental context in which a child is raised has long been recognized as crucial to determining developmental outcome in any number of domains. Elrado, Bradley and Caldwell (1989:71) have enumerated three historical stages of research on the impact of the environment on development. The first stage was characterized by global, social address variables, such as socio-economic status. These variables do not affect the child directly. In the second stage, studies characterized by an exploration of the relation between more specific environmental variables, such as parental responsibility and variety of stimulation and developmental outcome were examined (Bradley & Caldwell, 1984:803). In the third stage, the most recent research addressed the importance of organism-environment interactions in understanding the complex relation between home environment, individual characteristics and academic achievement.

Another class of environmental factors are those that influence children's academic achievement indirectly. These include such variables as the amount of social support provided to the mother and the amount of stress in the family's life. A family pre-occupied with life crisis is unlikely to provide stimulating, varied experiences that foster cognitive growth or the

emotional support that promotes academic achievement (Alwin & Thornton, 1984; Anastasi, 1986).

Liando's (2007) doctoral study of EFL achievement considered high school and university students' social backgrounds together with attitudinal and motivational factors. Students' socio-cultural backgrounds, which constituted her conceptual framework, included the components of social orientation, parental/family influence and family SES. However, SES was measured in terms of parental occupation and income, without referring to parental education and other family educational resources which play a crucial role in differential academic achievement.. Regarding the effects of SES on EFL achievement, the study concluded:

Parents are different from one another, both in their relationship with their own children and their feelings or reactions towards schooling of their children. Some parents are better able to relate to their children than others. Some are warm and supporting, others may be rejecting or even negligent. Some parents are intelligent, competent people, others may be uneducated, illiterate, unable to grasp the meaning of situations involving their children, even though they love them (Grolnick & Ryan, 1989: 143). Some have a high regard for education, but others look upon education as something required by law and society (Brown, 1980:83). Values differ among parents. The goals and standards for their individual families will differ from one another

It is widely recognized by educationists and researchers (Hetherington, 1983:220; Heer, 1985:27) that parent-child relations are closely associated with important aspects of children's emotional, social and cognitive development. Parents are viewed as primary facilitators of children's self concept, interpersonal skills, achievement and sex role behaviour. Research evidence (Doherty, 1992:32) suggests that children who evidence problematic relations with their parents, are more likely to have low self-esteem and comparatively lag behind.

Christiansen and Herrera (1975: 1211) support the theory that unfavourable home environmental conditions may have a deleterious effect on the child's academic achievement. They maintain that mothers of the low income group do not prepare their children as competently for school because their methods of upbringing do not include such factors as the provision of information, the transmission of ideas and the setting of simple tasks that must be done independently. As a result of home circumstances and the attitudes of parents, the attitudes of children also differ. Whereas children from better neighbourhoods regard the school as a place where they can gain knowledge, children from poor neighbourhoods regard school as merely an institution that they are compelled to attend and they do not have a positive attitude towards the learning process (Christiansen & Herrera, 1975:122).

Jubber (1990:8) states that one factor often commented on is an unhappy home. It is thus evident that the child's emotional disturbance is increased by stress, not from society, but within the home environment (Jubber, 1988).

Blake (1981:421) examined the relationship between children's academic achievement and parental understanding. He found that parents of high achievers showed significantly greater understanding of their children than did parents of under-achievers. The results also indicated that parents of high achievers were significantly more accepting of their children than were parents of under-achievers.

There are several investigations which indicate that attitudes toward school, and intelligence are influenced rather heavily by the home-background of the child. In particular such attitudes have been related to the socio-economic aspects. Middle and upper-class children are reported to receive a greater pressure toward higher performance in these directions and toward a positive evaluation of scholastic achievements (Bell, 1986:5951. Generally speaking, it is expected that the homes will affect the achievement of the children, and that this influence has some relationship to the socio-economic status of the family.

When a child comes from a "good" home where the parent provides adequately for the needs of his family and where there is adequate opportunity for intellectual interests, the foundations are firmly laid by the time the child goes to school. However, in the case of the impoverished child, the father and mother may not, as a result of deficient finances, have the opportunity or the desire to stimulate the child intellectually, his vocabulary is limited, inaccurate or wrongly pronounced (Downie, 1989).

The emotional atmosphere in the home may exercise a great influence on the child. If, there is a cold care-less attitude, irregularity and evasion of discipline, the child may display such undesirable characteristics as dishonesty, aggression and a lack of punctuality. The quarrels, dissatisfaction and instability of the home atmosphere may disturb his emotional equilibrium and he may become demoralized. Parental antagonism towards the school may also have a deleterious influence on the child in that he also adopts these attitudes in imitation of his parents (Downie, 1989:53).

According to Bell (1986:596) a large part of a person's intelligence can be ascribed to the accumulation of experience and knowledge. Development in childhood thus forms the basis for the child later intelligence. Bell (1986) states that it is therefore imperative that the child must receive good and adequate food, be protected against illness, be intellectually stimulated and be well-adjusted.

Research has shown that someone who has grown up in poverty is disadvantaged well into adulthood. This is to a large extent because people from disadvantaged homes are less likely to get good educational qualifications. There is also a separate correlation between poverty and success in mid-life. Controlling for qualifications, people in their 30s who experienced financial hardship when growing up are less likely to be doing well in the labor market (Gibbons and Blanden 2006).

Bonci (2008) observes many parents are not aware of the importance they play in their child's education and have a limited understanding of their role in their children's learning. Many background variables affect the impact of the family and home environment (such as socio-economic status, level of parental education, family size, etc.) But parental attitudes and behaviour, especially parents' involvement in home learning activities, can be crucial to children's achievement and can overcome the influences of other factors.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

I have followed both qualitative and quantitative approaches to conduct my research.

### **Participants / Subject / Population and Sample**

The data for the present study were collected by means of a questionnaire survey and interview. The participants are 20 parents and 20 children. To ensure confidentiality, synonyms have been used for each of the participants. Question survey has been done among 25 guardians and 25 students. To collect the data of the academic performance of the children I personally visited 4 schools. All the schools are situated in Dhaka. 2 of the schools are private and the other 2 are public. The selection of these participants was guided by convenience. I personally know some of them who introduced me to other parents and children. For the filling of questionnaires I myself went to the guardians, children and they instantly fill them. The children are between 7-10 grade. They encompass lower class, higher class and middle class family status.

The questionnaires (see the appendix) focused on a wide range of issues related to the role of family in English language learning. Some of the questions were open-ended, but most of them are guided questions.

### **Instruments**

**Observation:** Observation, a conscious intentional act, is one of my key tools to ascertain the real picture. I observed learners' individual and peer group activities at classrooms and at homes.

**Elicitation:** To elicit information, I used the instruments –questionnaires (multiple-choice and open-ended) and interviews with parents of different social classes and status, teachers, including learners and their siblings of different ages, aimed at understanding the role of the family in supporting or hindering English language learning.

In my research, family is classified according to income, education and social status. The locations of my study were Dhaka city and its adjacent rural places.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data by doing a content analysis. I throughout read the participants' replies to any particular question and summarized the views. I divided the summaries of the participants' responses into as many categories as possible. To maintain the validity and reliability of the responses I collected the same data from many dimensions. I will now present these findings for each of the questions.

## **FINDINGS**

The emerging themes generated from both the questionnaire and interviews are discussed under the major categories: namely: proper parental role, encouragement, home environment,

admission into good institution, extra care by private tutor, English practice at home, financial support.

### **Proper Parental Role:**

After interviewing 6 parents of high socioeconomic status, 5 of them claimed that they provide all necessary facilities for their children. Their children's communicative competence is relatively well and they have good command over English. One of the parents of high SES says:

I always cherished the desire that my children would have a good command over English. To ensure this I mandatorily fixed an English teacher for them. All we know that English is really necessary to get a good job. Even if he (his child) wants to join my business, he needs English to communicate with the foreigners (Kazi, 10 October, 2017).

On the other hand, only 4 parents out of 8 of middle class family think that they could not provide proper guidance to their children as they have to be busy with office work all day. They think that their children would do better in learning English if they passed enough time with them and encouraged them to learn English.

2 lower-income group parents out of 6 have realization that they had inability in ensuring the basic necessities that contribute to learning. But other 4 parents do not even bother about the low proficiency of their children in English. One of the parents, who confess his inability in playing a proper parental role, says:

My son is not bad in English. But need proper care, he needs an English teacher. But you know our condition. I face difficulties in bearing the minimal educational cost of my children (Majid, 11 October, 2017).

### **Encouragement:**

10 out of 20 parents tell that they always try to motivate and encourage their children in Learning English. As all the participants students here are between the age of 8-15, most of the time they were encouraged by their family in such way as giving English story books in their birthday parties, watching English Cartoons instead of Hindi or other languages, play with English words, developing a competition among the children in family. Thus they get a good exposure in English, which ultimately leads to learning English Language. This encouragement from the guardians are also proven by the questionnaire survey of the students. On a point to whether they get encouraged by their parents, 20 out of 30 students agreed that they were always motivated by their family members in form of getting chocolates for each correct sentences, English story books in birthday party, helping in collecting English Cartoons etc.

### **Home Environment:**

9 out of 16 of the middle class family's children said that they feel disturbed as they had to share their living room with their relatives. They also expressed their frustration over their parents' excessive command and order on a regular basis. As regards the upper class students, though they have separate living rooms, they also express their grief on their parents' rude behavior at the time of dealing with educational activities. However, the lower class family

children enjoy a kind of freedom in their academic activities as their parents are less aware of their educational performance. The indifference of lower class parents to the study of their children is also revealed by the interview of them. 4 out of 6 lower class parents admit that they hardly bother on their home environment fit for learning. One of the parents from the lower class family says:

I face problem in maintaining daily expenses of my family. You know how costly it is to maintain a family in Dhaka city. We hired a two room's house. But I have three children and they have to live in a room. (Kamal, 19 October, 2017)

### **Admission into a good Institution:**

Among 20 Of the parents, 10 of them are happy that they could admit their children in good institutions. They guardians think that a good institution from the early academic stage is really necessary to build a good basis of their children, especially in English. However, all the parents of lower class family expressed their inability to admit their children in good schools as they have lack of money.

### **Extra care by private tutor:**

Among 20 participant families, 15 guardians have managed a private tutor for their children. Among these 15, 10 guardians have given their children a separate English tutor to make their children good at English. Again the children from lower income family are deprived of having at least one teacher for all subjects. One of the guardians from lower class family expresses his grief as follows:

Vai, I know it very well that it's very necessary to have a private tutor for my children but vai I live hand to mouth, how can I afford a private tutor for each of my children. (Kasem, 18 October, 2017)

It is also revealed from the questionnaire that 15 among the 20 lower income family do not have any private tutor and the rest of the 5 students are going to coaching centres where they get a little exposure or scope to learn English.

### **English practice at home:**

The questionnaire survey on the point of using frequent English words at home, 15 among the 25 respondent students learn my English words, expressions, sentences as their elders in their family frequently use English with Bangla. They said that this practice helps them to pick up new words in an easy manner. In also interviews of the students 8 out of 12 respondents agreed that they build their basic in English at a very early age and they were helped either by their parents or elder brothers and sisters.

## **DISCUSSION**

From the above findings it is emerged that three major family affairs actually affect the English Language Learning of a child: (i) Poverty, (ii) Illiteracy, (iii) Carelessness.

Poverty is one of the major impediments for the educational development in Bangladesh. The same thing is again found in this research. Lack of congenial environment for learning English, parents' failure to support their children by providing enough facilities, absence of home tutor for development English skills, the inability to admit children in well known educational institution actually result in the poor academic performance of the students. Consequently it affects and hampers their English language learning. Poverty affects the total educational environment is also proven in the finding of this research on the success rate in exam of the students from upper, middle and low class families. The success rate of the students in the school exam from upper class family is 62.5%, where the rate in case of middle class and lower class is 43.75% and 33.33% respectively.

**Table 1: Success Rate of Students in School Exams from Higher Class family**

Number of students	Performed well in exam	Success rate in exam
8	5	62.5%

5 out of 8 students from higher class family relatively perform well in examinations. Their class roll is in between 2 to 15

**Table 2: Success Rate of Students in School Exams from Middle Class family**

Number of students	Performed well in exam	Success rate in exam
16	7	43.75%

3 of the middle class family's children said that they feel disturbed they had to share their living room with their relatives. They also expressed their frustration over their parents' excessive command and order on a regular basis.

**Table 3: Success Rate of Students in School Exams from Lower Class family**

Number of students	Performed well in exam	Success rate in exam
6	2	33.33%

2 lower income group parents out of 6 in their interview express their realization that they had inability in ensuring the basic necessities that contribute to learning.

This findings also match with Several researchers (Marjoribanks, 1972; Walberg, 1972; Kellaghan, 1977; Burns & Homel, 1985; Kurdek & Sinclair, 1988; Bourdieu 1990) have detected a relationship between home environment and learning and children of well-to-do families are likely to get more facilities which contribute to learning process. But the children

coming from families with low social status and poor income face difficulties to develop themselves as they suffer from lack of necessary supports from family which are prerequisites for learning.

Educational Qualification of family members is another important aspect that affects the English language learning of children. From the finding it is evident that children who have a good command in English have had the basis from their family members namely; parents, elder brothers, or even from grandfathers. Family members having high educational qualification normally use Bangla and English side by side in their daily life. Thus the children of such families get a good expouse to English that contribute to develop their overall skill in the language. That education quality of family members matters in learning English language also evident from the research of Grolnick & Ryan, (1989) Mthembu (1996) and Brown(1980) who found Illiteracy of the family members really affect the learning process of the children.

The findings also reveal that the children from lower class families get less encouragement for learning English from their parents or elders. Whereas the well to do families as well as the middle class families have awareness on the ground that their children to do better in English to ensure a bright future. Actually the lower income family guardians are totally indifferent from their educational development of their children which we found in their interviews that 6 out of 8 parents from lower class family show a nothing to do attitude regarding their children education.

## CONCLUSION

The proper role of family helps students to discover their cognitive skills. They should be treated and motivated well at home. Good habits and characteristics are formed based on family environment which lead them to build up a prospective future. As students of educated family get more exposure of using English language, they learn it from their everyday activities.

Admittedly, the case study involved a small sample, and therefore the findings should be interpreted cautiously. This study has not been carried out for building up any theory. Rather it provides some qualitative results and some emerging patterns on how family affects the English language learning of children, what can be done to expedite this learning and what role the parents could perform to make their children learn English language easily

Finally, it is expected that the qualitative results and insights gained from the survey, to some extent, will make the parents aware about their role in English language learning of their children in Bangladesh.

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