

THE IMPACT OF PARENTAL SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS ON THE WRITING PERFORMANCE OF IRANIAN TERTIARY LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT: *This study was conducted to investigate the impact of parental socio-economic status on the writing performance of Iranian tertiary learners. The data was drawn from 400 underclassmen whose majors were of the English language translation and English language literature fields respectively of four Iranian universities. Three instruments were yielded to collect the data on the influence of parental socioeconomic status upon students' writing performance, namely essay writing, questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. Subsequently, data analysis was undertaken using multiple-regression, r , the findings revealed a statistically significant correlation between low socioeconomic status and the learners' writing performance, $p = .038$, $p < 0.05$.*

Keywords: Academic achievement; English language; parents' involvement; socioeconomic status; writing performance

INTRODUCTION

The most fundamental role of the educational system is geared towards preparing students towards their acquisition of knowledge and cognitive capabilities for the sake of societal prosperity. Teachers and students of English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) fields alike having different levels of proficiency have highlighted the challenges and time-consuming nature in mastering English writing skills. In the context of Iranian students, EFL learners and their lacking capabilities are acknowledged specifically in writing in the language [1, 2, 3]. Furthermore, Birjandi [4] noted these students' difficulties in English writing in macro (i.e. grammar, vocabulary) and micro (i.e. content, organization) skills both. Moreover, Tahvildar [5] also highlighted difficulties of various degrees faced by these learners when tasked with writing.

A multitude of factors may be attributed to influencing the writing performance of EFL learners in Iran. In the context of its higher education, much research has been conducted to investigate the effect of these elements, including the linguistic and psychological variables in improving students' writing skills [4, 6]. These works have displayed a positive effect on the area of English writing, but the writing performance is associated with low scores and minimal improvement. Besides, Hosseini [7] also commented on the scores have failed to reflect the good improvement of the Iranian students' writing skills. In fact, these EFL students are still incapable of displaying English writing of a satisfactory level after their university graduation, attributable to their lacking linguistic competency. This subsequently affects their scholastic success, whereby writing skills are specifically are paramount in positioning their knowledge. To date, a vast amount of literature can be found enumerating the factors leading to student's educational performance. Socio-economic status (SES), in particular, remains to be an element highly contested and demanding for scholars investigating its role and contribution towards learner's scholastic performance [8, 9, 10]. SES is typically described as the amalgamation of economic and sociological measurement of a person's career exposure and the social position of their person or family with regards to others due

to their earnings, education level, and occupational standing [11].

It has been observed that there is a dearth of studies that explored the influence of SES factors on students' writing performance of tertiary education in Iran. Therefore, this has warranted further research in identifying the impacts of familial income, parental education, and parental profession that may minimize challenges faced by these undergraduates in writing and improving their performance in tertiary institutions. It should be noted that academic capability is primarily linked in influencing student performance, whereas parental SES is rarely linked with it. Thus, the findings of this study are anticipated to be beneficial to governments, parents, teachers, and societies at large. Moreover, it may also serve as a guide for administrators and education planners to distinguish elements of significant effect on the resulting academic performance. This particular study has been carried out to answer the following question: what is the correlation between the different levels of socioeconomic status (SES) and the writing performance of Iranian tertiary learners? Based on this question, it is hypothesized that there are significant relationships between the different levels of SES and the writing performance of Iranian tertiary learners.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past decades, the achievement gap has expanded and revealed the academic accomplishments of students from racially, culturally, and linguistically marginalized and impoverished families versus their peers [12]. The causes of academic underperformance are a particularly major concern in the educational system of almost all communities globally. This is due to the necessity for educators to distinguish elements influencing academic accomplishments and concomitantly prompt novel insights in delineating the manners in which these achievements can be increased. Therefore, such efforts will allow them to enumerate a spectrum of teaching strategies tailored for various categories of learners. Previously, [13] has claimed that students who achieve educational success will consequently excel economically in the latter part of their lives. However, the potential for such accomplishment may be diminished by poverty for many. [14] has also highlighted the contributory

effect of familial earnings, parental employment, and the overall familiar structure towards a student's accomplishments. In the context of parental occupation, some may be relatively busier than the conventional standard, resulting in a lack of time with their children and affecting them negatively [15]. Moreover, those of lesser income and education levels are associated with higher likelihood of exerting minimal education expectancy for their offspring in comparison with the wealthier parents [16, 17]. Additionally, they are also linked with a lesser likelihood of participating in their children's learning either at home or school [18]. Thus, parental SES has been correlated with a strong and positive effect on children's accomplishments.

Those from higher SES have displayed better parental involvement with regards to their learning [19], allowing them to acquire the skillset, knowledge, conduct, and attitudes required for educational success. Furthermore, those blessed with parents of better education, higher earnings, higher-positioned occupations, and a two-parent familial unit also revealed education levels higher than other groups and minorities. Similarly, [20] has also related high SES with superior social support, less disciplinary issues, and higher social aspirations. Moreover, the National Educational Longitudinal Study also highlighted parental capabilities in allocating financial, social and human investment for their offspring's education towards achieving better academic outcomes [13]. It is worth noting that SES has been linked to influencing academic accomplishments in both the tangible material and perception alike. In the context of materials, students of high SES families may be allocated expensive tutorship, test materials, and schooling options, whereby they are all of better quality compared to those from the lower SES families [21, 22]. Meanwhile, the perceptual influence of SES towards educational accomplishments is apparent via the social cognitive processes utilized by students in manipulating their possibilities and opportunities [23, 24]. [25] works have outlined a socio-psychological analytical framework in enumerating the correlation between SES and educational accomplishments, integrating micro familial elements with macro tracking system factors. Lam has attributed constantly inadequate cognitive stimulating capital as a principal characteristic of children from financially disadvantaged families. This renders them to be classified to the class having the lesser aptitude, which results in them shouldering the outcome of the tracking system and dooming to poor educational outcomes and high dropout rates. Therefore, it is clear that learning and academic performance can be hampered by a student's inaccessibility towards a variety of resources. In another study, [26] has investigated the role of SES, family, race, and schools towards students' academic performance. Their findings indicate that race, parenting, and school resources are interdependent factors that contribute to educational success. Thus, teaching students hailing from low SES families requires educators who are knowledgeable and understanding of the indirect and direct influences capable of impacting the children's academic performance in a major way. Moreover, creating comprehensive educational policies and offering equal educational opportunities are also some of the exceptional

mechanisms in improving the learning environment for these students.

METHODS

In this study, a total of 400 Iranian undergraduates majoring in ELS and English language literature were recruited from the four universities of Shahid Bahonar University, Vali-e-Asr University, Isfahan University, and Shiraz University. These universities are located in the four different cities of Kerman, Rafsanjan, Isfahan, and Shiraz, respectively. The participants ranged between those in the fifth and eighth semesters of their respective academic years, who had passed all writing courses required during their previous semesters. Their mean age was 22.22 ± 1.80 , with 37.5 % of the participants ($n=150$) being males and 62.5% being females ($n=250$).

Research Instruments

In this study, the instruments employed encompassed a writing task (e.g. essay writing), questionnaire, and semi-structured interview. The first instrument of writing task administered required the participants to write an essay using either one of the three topics extracted from the book "College Writing: from Paragraph to *Essay*" [27]. Their title selection may be influenced by any prior knowledge or their capacity to produce a compelling write-up. Meanwhile, the second instrument of the questionnaire was utilized for data collection, whereby the items included were related to SES factors (i.e. father's/legal guardian's education, occupation, and family income), categorical, and closed-ended in nature. The third and final instrument employed was a semi-structured interview, which comprised of questions adapted from different related sources. Their content validity was ascertained by having all questions reviewed by two Ph.D. lecturers in the field of English language translation with experience in tertiary education. Additionally, all interviewees were recruited using a nested sampling design.

The Measurement of SES

[8] outlined the measure of SES to consist of three principal indicators, namely: (a) familial income; (b) parental education; and (c) parental occupation. However, scholars may opt to not include a constituent or specific aspects of a constituent for any particular reason. Furthermore, there was no established technique for SES measurement, rendering scholarly investigations to opt for different approaches tailored to the conceptual study model presented [28]. Generally, works that utilized items as SES indicators included primary earner's profession, educational accomplishment, earnings, or an amalgamation of these elements to represent the household [29]. Meanwhile, some included both parental education level and profession into consideration [30]. Regardless, educational accomplishment research primarily incorporated SES estimation using the three fundamental principal variables: (a) family income; (b) educational accomplishment of the household leader; and (c) occupational status of the household leader. According to Altschul [31], SES was a multi-faceted correlative theory that was measurable in different manners. The SES for young individuals particularly called for the parental background to be included in consideration, encompassing parental profession, education status, and familial earning. Whether

broadly or separately perceived, these factors were capable of redefining the household's accessibility towards social, cultural and economic resources, thereby necessitating them to be translated using satisfactory measures of individual SES.

This particular work offered an unconventional manner to engage parental academic measurement, specifically by emphasizing the duration of formal education obtained by the household leader. This element constituted primary schooling, diploma, post-diploma, bachelor of art/science, and master of art/science. Additionally, the item "illiterate (no education)" was also included as an option for the element, due to the possibility of some father or legal guardian's lack of educational accomplishment. Meanwhile, the parental profession was indicated using paternal occupation only as per [31], according to the assumption that the adult male of a family was engaged in the labor force. However, females generally aided towards household income also nowadays, rendering maternal occupation to be considered if the paternal occupation was missing or unknown. Such an outlook was influential in the case of ensuring missing value domination that arose due to male detachment from the occupational force. Moreover, offspring were typically capable of distinguishing at least one of their parents' profession. Therefore, this particular work utilized six sub-categories of the paternal/legal guardian profession, namely: a) unemployed; b) unskilled; c) semi-skilled; d) skilled worker; e) semi-professional; and f) professional. Besides, household income in this work was operationalized as total household income, whereby the statistical center of Iran outlined 7,000,000 Iranian Rials as the minimum range of earning for a household. This value generally fluctuated according to the country's economic climate. Then, the SES index in this study was enumerated as a total point score per the point value allocated in the independent dimensions of education, occupation, and income. As the calculations incorporated three sub-categories of identical weight and range, the SES index may be valued between 3 and 18. Additionally, SES classification into different social groups was also integrated, namely, the four conventional social class categories in Iran constituted of the upper class, middle class, working-class, and lower class. Overall, these categories were incorporated in this work to elucidate the SES.

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Procedures

Both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used in this investigation to achieve the maximum satisfactory conclusion. The participants consisted of undergraduate students in their second semester of the academic year 2017-2018, whereby data collection was undertaken in four Iranian universities selected. The non-probability sampling method (purposive sampling) was subsequently incorporated to ensure the study met the required amount of participating respondents. Required to complete a writing task, the resulting output was subjected to a comprehensive rating by two raters. An investigator that opted for a categorical variable with more than two levels (e.g. SES indicators) in a multiple regression would generally obtain findings that were interpretable. Thus, the ensuing step of the process required

the recoding of the categorical variable into a dichotomous variable also termed as a dummy variable. Three out of four dummies would be subjected for estimation during the analysis in measuring the SES levels as an explanatory variable. Any three dummies could be incorporated, while the remaining dummy would be excluded to correlate to the reference category, which served as the relative underpinning point of the dummy variable coefficient exposition. It may also be explained as the inclusion of one less dummy compared to the number of categories in attaining the dummy variable, whereby the excluded dummy correlated to the reference category.

In this work, the middle-class SES served as the reference variable, due to it being the normative reference for analysis in SES studies. The Iranian social class was categorized into the four classes of high SES, middle SES, working SES, and low SES, respectively. Qualitative data analysis was undertaken by adopting grounded theory integrated with codes and categories. After participants' responses were collected, they were translated into English prior to accuracy checking done by two Ph.D. lecturers of the Shahid Bahonar University. Both were equipped with a minimum of 10-year experience in teaching English translation for undergraduate students in the English Language Department of the university. Then, this was followed by assigning positive and negative codes for each topic, which were correlated to yes and no answers, respectively, for the research questions related to the topic. Next, thematic coding was undertaken to minimize the number of participants' responses, whereby the final step of the interview constituted of identification of specific themes according to the responses to each research question. These themes were distinguished by the process of identifying statements that served as the general consensus for all participants and mentioned in response to the research question.

RESULTS

This work elicited descriptive data associated with the SES status, consisting of parental education, parental profession, and household income. The findings revealed that most of the participants' paternal/legal guardians (37.25%) obtained their diploma, whereas all were educated. Meanwhile, 38% of them were of the semi-skilled sub-category, followed by skilled (30.5%) and semi-professional (29.75%). Additionally, only 0.75% of them were unemployed. Finally, the final sub-category of household income revealed that 33.75% of the participants recorded household income ranging between 12,020,000 to 17,020,000 Iranian Rials, while a 1% minority constituted of household income of 27,050,000 Iranian Rials and more. It should be noted that this work incorporated the total income of the household, whereby the Iranian currency of 1.00 Iranian Rial Rates (IRR) was equivalent to 0.000037 USD. Such a currency exchange was also fluctuating according to the country's economic climate. Therefore, SES measurement for the participants was undertaken by totaling the score of paternal/legal guardian's education, paternal/legal guardian's profession, and the collective household income altogether. These scores were then classified according to the primary

Iranian social class categories of low class, working class, middle class, and upper class, respectively.

Writing Task

Approximately 56.3% of the participants obtained a score of 3, followed by a score of 2 (26%), a score of 4 (15.8%), and the highest score of 5 (2%). Enumerating the writing task was subsequently conducted by employing Cohen's kappa coefficient. The findings revealed that $K=.837$, $p=.000$, $p<.0005$, indicating strong agreement between the two raters while scoring the writing task, whereas the score of one rater was utilized as the ultimate writing score. Similarly, multi-regression was incorporated to measure the statistical analysis and correlation between the SES and participants' writing performance.

Questionnaire

This work utilized the middle class as the normative reference variable for data analysis, allowing the rewording of the hypothesis as follows: "There are significant positive relationships between a) low class; b) working-class; c) upper class; and d) middle class in the writing performance of Iranian undergraduates. The analysis for each SES class was as follows:

(a) There is a Positive Relationship between Low SES Class and Middle SES Class in the Participants' Writing Performance.

A significant correlation was found between the low SES class and the participants' writing performance at $\beta=-1.386$, $p=.038$, $p<0.05$. This suggested that students from low SES class displayed significantly better performance compared to those of the middle SES class.

(b) There is a Positive Relationship between Working SES Class and Middle SES Class in the Participants' Writing Performance.

No significant correlation was found between the working SES class and the participants' writing performance at $\beta=.273$, $p=.285$, $p>0.05$.

(c) There is a Positive Relationship between Upper SES Class and Middle SES Class in the Participants' Writing Performance.

No significant correlation was found between the upper SES class and the participants' writing performance at $\beta=-.304$, $p=.484$, $p>0.05$.

Semi-Structured Interview

The qualitative data was analyzed by assigning the two codes of positive and negative with yes or no answers with regards to the three SES indicators of the parental profession, parental education, and household income. Table 1 below displays the coding system devised for SES accordingly.

Table 1. Coding System for SES

Topic	Categories	Code	Description
SES	1) Parents' Education	-PEPE	- Positive Effect of Parents' Education
		-NEPE	-Negative Effect of Parents' Education
	2) Parents' Occupation	-PEPO	- Positive Effect of Parents' Occupation
		-NEPO	- Negative Effect of Parents' Occupation
	3) Family Income	-PEFI	- Positive Effect of Family Income
		-NEFI	- Negative Effect of Family Income

Table 1 indicates the three SES indicators distinguished as the primary SES categories in the coding system. The two codes of PEPE (Positive Effect of Parents' Education) and NEPE (Negative Effect of Parents' Education) were assigned for parental education specifically. PEPE was for participants conceding with the positive influence of parental education towards a student's writing performance, whereas NEPE was for those who contested such influence towards the performance. Meanwhile, PEPO (Positive Effect of Parents' Occupation) was for participants conceding the positive influence of parental occupation towards the writing performance, whereas NEPO (Negative Effect of Parents' Occupation) was for those who contested such influence towards refining a student's writing performance. Table 2 reveals the selective themes for each code accordingly.

influence of parental profession towards the writing performance, whereas negative (NEPO) code was for those who contested such influence towards the performance. Finally, PEFI (Positive Effect of Family Income) was for participants conceding the positive influence of household income towards the writing performance, whereas NEFI (Negative Effect of Family Income) was for those who contested such influence towards refining a student's writing performance.

Table 2. The Thematic Category for SES

Topic	Codes	Selective Themes
SES	-PEPE	-Background Knowledge of English Writing -Idea and Information
	-NEPE	-Insufficient Time
	-PEPO	- Idea and Information
	-NEPO	-No Motivation -Insufficient Time -No Background Knowledge of English Writing
	-PEFI	- Facilities
	-NEFI	-No Motivation -Diligent Students

The selective themes for the three main categories of SES (i.e. parental education, parental occupation, and family income) are illustrated as seen above. The code PEPE specified the themes of “Background Knowledge of English Writing” and “Idea and Information”, while the code NEPE displayed the theme of “Insufficient Time”. Next, the theme of “Idea and Information” explained the code PEPO, whereas the code NEPO specified the selective themes of “No Motivation”, “Insufficient Time” and “No Background Knowledge of English Writing”. Finally, the last two codes of PEFI and NEFI were explained by the theme “Facilities” and the themes “No Motivation” and “Diligent Students”, respectively.

Background Knowledge of English Writing: In the context of parental education impacting student’s writing performance, most of the participants claimed that well-educated parents were equipped to help their children in English writing tasks. However, the parents required a fundamental understanding of English writing to be capable of assisting their children in this task. P1: (Participant Number 1)

Yes, my opinion is that parental education is influential in improving the student's writing performance, as they are equipped with knowledge in the English language. For instance, those with a B.A/B.S (Bachelor of Art/ Bachelor of Science), MA/MS (Master of Art/Master of Science), or Ph.D. degree typically learned English during their studies, rendering them familiar with the language and capable of assisting their children in the task. My parents both had their respective M.A. degrees, but they did not assist me in such writing tasks as they lacked adequate time to help. Instead, they asked for me to discuss with my teacher in aiding my English writing assignments.

Idea and Information: The participants also highlighted obtaining tips and ideas regarding writing a topic as supplementary elements associated with parental education. Most of them highlighted the positive impact of the element towards an offspring’s writing performance.

P4: (Participant Number 4)

Well, my parents lacked the fundamental knowledge of the English language to check my writing assignments and offer their opinions, but they occasionally assisted by suggesting

information regarding the writing topic. My father had a post-diploma, while my mother held a primary school degree.

Insufficient Time: Some participants reported that their parents possessed fundamental knowledge of the English language but lacked adequate time to aid in their writing assignments.

P40: (Participant Number 40)

My father's English writing was good but he was busy with his job. He did not help me with my writing assignments in the previous semester.

Information and Idea: Most of the participants ascertained the positive influence of parental profession towards their children’s writing performance, as parents were equipped to aid by suggesting ideas and tips regarding the writing topic.

P24: (Participant Number 24)

My parents were a businessman and a housewife, respectively. They lacked the fundamental knowledge of the English language but aided me when formulating ideas on the writing topic. They also offered a discourse and additional information and ideas regarding the topic. My opinion was that parents may be more helpful if the topic was correlated with their professions.

No Motivation. Insufficient Time and No Background Knowledge of English Writing: These themes were coded for NEPO, whereby the participants highlighted the lack of occupational impact towards student’s writing performance. They reasoned that some parents were extremely occupied with their professions, especially the fathers, leaving them inadequate time to check their children’s writing assignments. They would return home fatigued and unmotivated to discuss with their children regarding their assignments, checking and helping them write. Additionally, some lacked the fundamental knowledge in English writing.

P37: (Participant Number 37)

My parents were an employee and a housewife, respectively. My father knew the English language but was extremely busy with his occupation and lacked the time and motivation to discuss my writing assignment with me. Meanwhile, my mother did not assist me as she was less familiar with English.

Facilities: Most of the participants opined that household income led to a positive influence on student's writing performance, as the parents were financially equipped to invest in good facilities for their children. This included purchasing English writing books or registering them for English language institutes in enhancing their language in general, and their writing specifically. P35: (Participant Number 35)

Well, some parents did not attain a high education degree, rendering them incapable of helping their children in such writing assignments. Furthermore, some are extremely occupied and left with no time to check the assignments and help their children. However, they supported by investing in facilities like book purchases and registering in English language institutes. My parents were both employees, which meant they were extremely occupied with their professions and incapable of assisting me in my writing assignments. Despite their occupation engagement, they purchased books and registered me in English language institutes for the English language course. It proved to be very helpful.

Diligent Students: Some of the participants highlighted the lack of a positive correlation between household income and student's writing performance, claiming that some were of the low social class and did not engage in classes in English language institutes. However, these students attempted to compensate by writing and practicing often, whereby more practicing and studying hard would result in significant improvement in their writing.

P27: (Participant Number 27)

The family income resulted in no positive impact on student's writing performance, as I think it was reliant upon the amount of exercise and practice they engaged in with writing. Many came from low-income households and of low social class but were good in the language and scored high marks in writing. This was attributed to them studying hard and practicing diligently. In contrast, others of high-income households and high social class obtained very low marks as they did not study hard.

CONCLUSION

In this study, the SES findings revealed no correlation with some of the works available in the existing body of literature [17, 9, 8, 32, 18]. According to Adams (cited in [33], p.2), low

SES negatively influenced student's academic performance, which was due to their fundamental needs that were unfulfilled. Therefore, they failed to display better academic performance. Moreover, Seyfried [10], linked low SES with students being barred from obtaining resources, leading to extra stressors at home that impacts their life, including academic performance. This work revealed findings that indicated students of low SES households of different semesters displayed better performance in writing. Besides, the semi-structured interview sessions also yielded the opinion that parents lacking the fundamental knowledge of the language may assist anyway via a discussion (in Persian) regarding the topic writing. Additionally, they could offer ideas and information related to the topic so that the students could start writing simply by utilizing some information

about it. Similarly, many may not access educational resources like writing books, computer and tutors. Such two-way communication would encourage them to write better.

In contrast, some participants mentioned that although their parents were educated, they did not help them in their writing assignments. These parents did not have any motivation to engage in their children's writing process and assist them in writing assignments as they were too busy with their occupation and lacked adequate time to discuss these assignments at home. Only a small number reported that their parents discussed with them about writing assignments and offered information regarding the writing topic. Moreover, those whose parents had background knowledge of English writing were assisted in selecting suitable vocabulary and punctuation. Therefore, in view of the importance of SES towards students' academic performance, it could be concluded that providing a collaborative learning environment at home allowed students to receive structured assistance from their parents, even those with less-educated parents. Thus, they may proceed beyond their actual developmental level towards achieving their potential development level, specifically in improving these students' writing performance.

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