

The Impact that Socioeconomical Factors Have in the English Learning Process: Guanajuato City

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Received: 1 June 2025 ▪ Revised: 11 August 2025 ▪ Accepted: 31 December 2025

Abstract

This study explores the impact of socioeconomic factors on English language learning among students in Guanajuato, Mexico. Drawing on qualitative data from semi-structured interviews with students from both public and private schools, the research examines how elements such as parental education, access to educational resources, personal motivation, and language exposure influence learners' perceptions and outcomes. Findings reveal that while access to books and technology is important, it is the consistent use, practical application, and support systems that ultimately determine the effectiveness of language learning. Students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds report greater confidence, fluency, and motivation, often due to increased exposure to English through travel, media, and supportive learning environments. In contrast, those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds face additional challenges not only in terms of material access but also in receiving guidance and practice opportunities. The study concludes that addressing these structural disparities is crucial for fostering equitable and effective language education.

Keywords: Exposure, motivation, parental involvement, resources, socioeconomic status (SES).

“When basic physiological and safety needs are unmet, the cognitive engagement necessary for learning is hindered. Maslow's hierarchy reminds us that learners must first feel secure and supported before they can reach their full potential in academic pursuits, including language acquisition.”

(Maslow, 1943)

1. Introduction

English has established itself as a global language with strong influence across educational, professional, and social contexts. In countries like Mexico, English proficiency is often associated with access to better job opportunities, academic advancement, and international communication. Perhaps, learning English has become a significant educational goal. However, the ability to acquire a second language is not determined only by individual effort; it is shaped by social and economic contexts. Besides, socioeconomic status (SES) emerges as a fundamental determinant of students' access to learning opportunities, motivation, and educational outcomes. The importance of this study lies in its exploration of how socioeconomic background affects students' engagement with the English learning process. In Mexico, disparities in SES are reflected in the educational system, particularly in the divide between public and private schools. This

divide results in unequal access to educational resources, technological tools, and supportive learning environments. By examining these differences in the specific context of Guanajuato, this study aims to discover how does socioeconomic factors affect the English learning process.

The objective of this research is to analyze how socioeconomic factors influence English learning in terms of motivation, access to resources, frequency of practice, and perception of language fluency. The study also aims to compare the experiences of students from different SES backgrounds particularly between public and private school attendees to identify the structural advantages or barriers they encounter. In addition, it investigates the role of parental involvement and educational support in shaping students' attitudes and confidence toward learning English.

This study builds on existing literature that consistently highlights the impact of SES on academic achievement and language learning. According to the American Psychological Association (2020), SES is a multidimensional construct involving income, education, and occupation, all of which significantly influence educational access and outcomes. Empirical studies from various countries have shown that students from higher SES backgrounds tend to have more positive attitudes toward English learning (Akram & Ghani, 2011), greater access to private tutoring and multimedia resources (Vonkova et al., 2023), and increased exposure to authentic language contexts, including travel and cultural exchange (Gayton, 2010). These advantages not only improve language acquisition but also foster intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Theoretical models also help contextualize these findings. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943) provides a psychological framework suggesting that individuals must satisfy basic physiological and safety needs before they can focus on higher-order goals like learning and self-actualization. In educational settings, students from low-SES backgrounds often experience chronic stress, food insecurity, and unstable home environments all of which may limit their cognitive and emotional availability for language learning. Harris (2023) reinforces this argument by emphasizing that food and home stability are foundational for success in academic disciplines, including second language acquisition. By linking these theoretical and empirical perspectives to the lived experiences of students in Guanajuato, this study offers an analysis of how socioeconomic inequalities translate into educational disparities in English language learning.

2. Literature review

The connection between socioeconomic factors and language acquisition has long been a topic of interest for educational researchers. Understanding this relationship is key to addressing issues in English learning outcomes. This section explores how basic human needs and social conditions impact students' ability and motivation to acquire a new language.

One influential theoretical framework in this regard is Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which suggests that human motivation follows a five-tier structure where individuals must satisfy lower-level needs before advancing to higher ones (Maslow, 1943). When applied to education, and specifically language learning, Maslow's model highlights critical barriers faced by students. At the base are physiological needs such as food and shelter; Students may struggle to focus on academic tasks like English learning. Besides, safety needs refer to the importance of a stable home and school environment. Students living under financial insecurity often experience chronic stress, which directly impacts their ability to learn. The third level, social needs, highlights the value of supportive relationships in sustaining motivation, although socioeconomic challenges often restrict students' social opportunities. In addition, when students lack the necessary resources, their self-esteem and confidence can suffer, which can lower their belief in their ability to succeed academically. As a result, reaching their full potential the stage of self-actualization

becomes much harder if their basic needs aren't addressed first. In this way, Maslow's theory illustrates how basic human needs reinforce not only general well-being but also academic progression, making it essential to consider these factors in English language education. Adding empirical support, Harris (2023) emphasized that home stability and food security is fundamental to achieve success in multiple disciplines, including language learning. His findings highlight that addressing basic needs must be a priority to guarantee educational development, particularly among students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds.

2.1 The influence of socioeconomic factors on language learning opportunities and strategies

Building upon this premise, it becomes necessary to examine socioeconomic status (SES) as a central factor of educational opportunities and outcomes. Defined as a composite measure of income, education, and occupation (American Psychological Association, 2020), SES shapes students' lived experiences both inside and outside the classroom.

Research consistently shows that SES plays an important role in English language learning. Muhammad Akram and Mamuna Ghani's study among Pakistani intermediate students found that those from higher SES backgrounds generally have more motivation and more positive attitudes toward English acquisition. This can largely be attributed to more parental involvement, better access to educational resources, and reduced anxiety in the learning environment. In contrast, students from low-SES backgrounds often lacked both the material and emotional support necessary to grow academically. These findings highlight how SES not only impacts access to resources but also influences students' openness to learning and confidence in language learning.

This relationship between SES and language learning motivation has also been observed internationally. For example, Vonkova, Papajoanu, and Moore (2023) demonstrated that students from higher SES backgrounds in Czech lower secondary schools benefited from greater institutional support and extracurricular exposure to English, such as private tutoring and travel experiences. These immersive opportunities improve their motivation and language acquisition, revealing the significant advantage provided by wealthier social backgrounds.

Similarly, Gayton (2010) mentioned the importance of real-life exposure in language learning. His study found that students who traveled abroad, an opportunity more available to high-SES families, showed greater motivation and saw English as a practical, usable skill. By contrast, lower-SES students often lacked access to authentic English contexts, making language learning seem irrelevant or distant. Gayton's suggestion to simulate immersion through online exchanges or multimedia projects offers a practical strategy to help bridge this gap and bring real-world English experiences closer to disadvantaged students.

Complementary findings by Lee and Lee (2018) reveal that higher-SES students tend to use more learning strategies, benefiting from increased exposure to English-speaking environments and technology. In comparison, lower-SES students often depend more heavily on social learning strategies and require targeted institutional support to foster independent, effective study habits.

Beyond motivation and strategies, the influence of SES extends directly to learning outcomes. Mirza (2001) found a significant effect of socioeconomic status on English academic performance, highlighting how lack of materials creates additional educational barriers. Supporting this, Mattheoudakis and Alexiou (2009) noted that students from higher SES backgrounds had access to opportunities essential for accelerating the learning process, while lower-SES students faced consistent resource-related challenges (Akhtar & Niazi, 2011).

Recent research continues to reinforce this trajectory. Hui and Chen (2025) demonstrated that English learning motivation acts as a bridge between SES and pragmatic language awareness, a skill critical for fluency but often underdeveloped in students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Their findings suggest that motivation not only improves learning but also reflects broader social differences, supporting the idea that socioeconomic status has a deep and lasting impact on a person's educational path.

In conclusion, the body of research consistently points to socioeconomic status as a key structural factor influencing language learning opportunities, motivation, strategies, and outcomes. Understanding this influence is essential for educators to design better strategies for the students and help them to achieve the goal of English learning.

3. Methodology

This article aims to answer the question: How do socioeconomic factors affect the English learning process? following with this question a comparative approach was used in order to analyze the impact of socioeconomic factors on English language learning among students from both public and private schools in the city of Guanajuato. In comparing these groups, this study aims to highlight potential differences and challenges faced by students from various socioeconomic backgrounds and the impact that this has in their English learning process.

4. Context and participants

Participants in this study include students from Guanajuato, the age range goes from 19 to 30 years old in either public or private schools. Participants include both female and male profiles. Participants were selected to represent a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, parental education, and access to educational resources. Public school participants represent students from lower SES backgrounds, while private school participants represent students from higher SES backgrounds.

This allows the researcher to make a comparison of the factors and what effects these have on the English learning process. The representatives of higher SES backgrounds did all of their basic education on private schools, while the representatives of lower socioeconomic backgrounds did all their basic education in public institutions.

5. Instrument application

A main data collection was used, this was interviews. This method is appropriate for collecting both quantitative data on access to resources and parental support, as well as qualitative perspectives of the students. The selection of semi-structured interviews as the primary qualitative data collection method is based on their ability to capture in-depth insights into students' attitudes, motivations, and challenges in learning English. Different from structured interviews, which follow a more rigid set of questions, semi-structured interviews allow flexibility in exploring the key research topics.

6. Advantages of semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews provide several benefits for educational research. First, they facilitate open and meaningful dialogue, allowing participants to elaborate on their experiences and express their opinions. Additionally, this allows researchers to ask follow-up questions that clarify responses, allowing deeper insights. Finally, this method provides the

opportunity to the researcher to cover topics that may emerge and perhaps enrich the investigation.

7. Design and implementation of the instrument

The interview was carefully designed to align with the objectives that the research has. The questions were structured to address the following key areas:

- Students' perceptions of their English proficiency.
- Motivations for learning English.
- Challenges faced in the learning process.
- Influence of external factors such as parental involvement and exposure to English outside the classroom.

To promote comprehension and response accuracy, the questions were formulated in simple and clear language, avoiding complex terminology.

8. Ethics

Participants were informed about the purpose of the research. They have their acceptance to participate in and share their experiences with the researcher. They also allowed the use of their data for the article, this data will be use only with academic purposes. In line with ethical research guidelines, participants retained the right to withdraw from the study at any time or to request anonymity if they wished (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The participants have the will to abandon the investigation anytime or to require staying anonymous if they decide to.

The instruments created were applied to seven participants in total from both context public and private schools. The analysis of the results will be presented below.

9. Data analysis

This section presents an analysis of the data obtained, focusing on the influence of socioeconomic factors, access to resources, motivation, and their impact on students' perception of English learning and language fluency. The data was obtained through interviews and organized into emerging themes, supported by extracts from the information provided by the participants of the research.

10. Socioeconomic factors and perception of English learning

Socioeconomic background and parental education play a crucial role in shaping students, language learning experiences, not only by influencing access to resources but also by affecting their perception of English learning. While access to books and technology can provide an advantage, the level of parental involvement and overall socioeconomic environment determine how these resources are utilized and perceived by students. Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco, for example, shared that his *"parents had university degrees, providing him with access to English books and technology."* However, he also noted *"limited parental involvement in his English learning process."* This suggests that while a higher level of parental education may facilitate access to resources, it does not necessarily translate into engagement in the language learning journey. The presence of educational tools may not be

enough if students lack guidance, motivation, or structured opportunities for practice. Similarly, Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora, whose “*parents completed secondary education*,” had access to similar resources but “*received no direct support with English homework*.” Even when students have similar access to resources, not having help from their parents can make them see learning English differently. They might feel less motivated or confident about improving. This shows that socioeconomic factors affect more than just having material. They also influence how students feel about their ability to learn and stay engaged with the language. These findings align with research indicating that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds often benefit from bigger exposure to English through parental influence, even when direct involvement is not present. However, students from less privileged backgrounds may face additional barriers, not necessarily about the lack of resources but because of reduced academic support and less structured learning opportunities at home.

11. Access to resources and their utilization

Access to educational resources such as books and technology does not always translate into effective learning. The lack of use of these resources could have an impact on the students’ progress. To have effective progress the frequent use of the available resources and strategies is fundamental. Socioeconomic factors influence not just access but also the frequency and quality of resource utilization, which in turn impacts English proficiency. As Renata Garcia de Alba and Ana Karen González Morales both reported having access to English books, technology, and educational internet services. However, their frequency of use varied significantly. Renata reported using technology for English learning only “*1–2 times a week*,” while Ana Utilizes these tools “*almost daily*.” This distinction highlights the importance of not only having resources but also the consistency and effectiveness of their use in language acquisition. Moreover, these differences in usage reflect broader structural disparities. Students like Ana, who use resources daily, often benefit from supportive environments that reinforce learning habits such as scheduled study time, parental encouragement, or institutional emphasis on technology integration. Conversely, students like Renata may face limitations such as shared devices, lack of internet connectivity at home, or competing responsibilities that reduce their ability to engage with learning tools consistently.

The socioeconomic background, personal motivation, and learning environments play a role in shaping students’ engagement with available tools. Even when students have access to books and technology, factors like time constraints, lack of guidance, or priorities may limit their ability to make full use of these resources.

12. Motivation and perceived importance of English

Motivation plays a crucial role in the process of learning a new language, this motivation is often shaped by their socioeconomic context, influencing both their reasons for learning and their perceived importance of the language. By analyzing participants’ responses, two prominent types of motivation emerged: instrumental and integrative motivation. Ana Karen González Morales highlighted “*career advancement and higher education requirements*” as her primary motivators. This instrumental motivation aligns with Gardner’s (1985) theory, which views language learning as a tool for achieving practical benefits. Her perception of English as a means to access better job opportunities and academic growth demonstrates how economic aspirations shape her motivation. Additionally, this goal-oriented approach often related to intrinsic motivation, as the participant becomes dedicated in finding effective strategies for her own learning, supported by the resources she can access. On the other hand, Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora and Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco emphasized

opportunities for “*travel and cultural engagement*.” Their integrative motivation shows a real desire to use English to connect with other cultures, leading to more lasting and stronger efforts to learn the language. This intrinsic motivation not only improves their engagement with the language but also makes the learning process more satisfying and meaningful. The socioeconomic background of these students likely plays a key role in shaping their motivational orientation. Students with more financial resources may have a bigger exposure to international travel and cultural exchange, therefore, creating integrative motivation. In contrast, those from more limited economic circumstances may prioritize instrumental goals, perceiving English proficiency as a necessity for economic mobility. These differing motivations also influence the strategies students adopt and the resources they can access, affecting their language learning outcomes.

13. Fluency, confidence, and self-efficacy

Despite access to resources, many participants reported a lack of practice opportunities essential for developing fluency. This suggests that while material resources are available for them, socioeconomic factors still shape the effectiveness of language acquisition. As Melanie Duran and Carlos Helier Ramírez Orozco pointed out, they “*lacked the practice opportunities necessary to build fluency in the target language*.” Their experiences reflect the gap between access and application, reinforcing the idea students need to be exposed to real life use of the language as much as possible in order to achieve fluency.

Similarly, confidence in language use appears to be influenced by the availability of practical engagement. Joanny Lizbeth Guzmán Mora, who “*used technology more frequently*,” reported higher confidence in her English skills. However, she still emphasized a “*need for more practical language application*,” highlighting that technological access does not guarantee proficiency. This aligns with research indicating that confidence in second language acquisition depends more on how often and how well you practice, rather than just having learning tools. While having access to resources is fundamental on the learning process, the absence of opportunities for real-world application can interfere with students’ perception of their own capabilities. This suggests that besides economic factors, the environment plays a critical role in shaping learners’ ability to develop fluency and confidence in English. The analysis reveals that socioeconomic background, access to resources, motivation, and opportunities for practice collectively shape students’ experiences and perceptions of English learning. While resources and parental education provide a foundation, consistent use, motivation, and practical application are crucial for developing language proficiency and confidence.

14. Conclusion

This study aimed to examine how socioeconomic factors influence the English learning process among students in Guanajuato. The research question explored the extent to which financial background, access to resources, and motivation shape students’ learning experiences and perceptions of language acquisition. The findings suggest that while access to books and technology plays a role in language learning, the students’ socioeconomic background also have an impact on their motivation, confidence, and overall engagement with the language.

The study has shown that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds tend to have more exposure to English, even when direct parental involvement is limited. However, students from lower-income backgrounds may face challenges not necessarily due to a lack of resources but because of limited academic support and learning opportunities at home. Besides, motivation is key factor, with students demonstrating both instrumental and integrative orientations depending on their personal goals and economic circumstances.

One of the key findings of the study is that while students may have access to resources, the frequency and effectiveness of their utilization vary significantly. Those who actively use technological tools and reading materials tend to develop stronger language skills, while others may struggle due to a lack of guidance or practice opportunities. Besides, the study has found that fluency and self-efficacy in English are strongly linked to real-world application, emphasizing the need for environments that foster practical language use.

These findings have several important implications for educational practice and policy. First, they highlight the need for targeted interventions in low-SES communities that go beyond merely providing access to resources. Schools and educational institutions should create structured environments that support consistent and meaningful use of technology and reading materials. This might include after-school English programs, workshops for parents on how to support language learning at home, and school initiatives that simulate real-world English use through conversation clubs, multimedia projects, or language exchange programs. Furthermore, understanding students' motivational orientations can help educators with their instruction. Those with instrumental motivation may benefit from career-focused language activities, while integrative learners might thrive in culturally rich and communicative environments. Addressing these motivational differences can lead to more personalized and effective teaching strategies.

Finally, Policymakers must consider not only what students have, but also how their social environment, home stability, and emotional support systems influence learning outcomes. Interventions should therefore adopt a holistic approach that supports students both academically and emotionally.

The study also presented limitations. The sample size was relatively small, and data collection was based mainly on interviews, which may introduce bias in participants' self-reported experiences. Future research could expand on these findings by including bigger participant groups and examining the impact of external interventions.

In conclusion, while material resources are essential, they do not guarantee language learning success. Socioeconomic background influences motivation, confidence, and the ability to engage effectively with the language. By addressing these factors, educational institutions can create more friendly learning environments that support students from diverse backgrounds in achieving language proficiency.

I hope that this study provides a comprehensive perspective on the multiple challenges that students face throughout the English learning process. Moreover, I aspire for this research to contribute to the academic field by serving as a valuable foundation for future studies, encouraging further exploration of the impact of socioeconomic factors on language acquisition and the development of effective educational strategies.

Acknowledgements

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The author declares no competing interests.

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