

The influence of socio-economic background, personal effort and motivation on English proficiency

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to investigate the influence of three factors –socio-economic background, individual effort, and motivation– in English proficiency, and the possible relation between individual effort and family background, and between motivation and family background. The instrument used to collect the data was a questionnaire completed by 159 students from three high schools in Spain. The answers to the questionnaire were correlated with those students' grades in the subject English using SPSS. Results indicated that, from the three factors analyzed, motivation influenced students' proficiency the most and that motivation correlated with mother's occupation and higher amounts of input outside classes. From these findings, it can be concluded that English proficiency can be improved by increasing motivation, which in turn, can be increased by teachers providing more input and more enjoyable ways of getting input outside class such as listening to music or watching films in English.

Keywords: socio-economic background; personal effort; language input; motivation; English proficiency.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio fue estudiar la influencia de tres factores –contexto socio-económico, el esfuerzo individual y la motivación– en el nivel de competencia en inglés, y la posible relación entre esfuerzo personal y contexto familiar, y entre motivación y contexto familiar. El instrumento utilizado fue un cuestionario completado por 159 estudiantes. Sus respuestas se correlacionaron con sus notas en inglés usando el programa SPSS. Los resultados del análisis indican que, de los tres factores, la motivación es la que más influye en el nivel de competencia en inglés, y que correlaciona con la ocupación materna y un mayor nivel de *input* fuera de clase. De nuestros resultados se puede concluir que la competencia en inglés se puede mejorar aumentando la motivación, que a su vez, se puede incrementar aportando más *input* y maneras más entretenidas de conseguir dicho *input* fuera de clase como por ejemplo escuchar música o ver películas en inglés.

Palabras clave: contexto socio económico; esfuerzo personal; *input* lingüístico; motivación; competencia en inglés.

1. Introduction

Students with the same amount of years of instructed learning tend to reach varying degrees of proficiency, and thus, research has explored the existence of other factors which exert an influence on the varying degrees of English proficiency. Previous investigations have already indicated that, among others, there are three factors –students’ socio-economic background, individual effort and motivation– which influence academic outcomes, including English proficiency.

From the three factors mentioned, the relationship between students’ background and their school achievement is the one that has been explored the most, and different authors have shown social class affects significantly and persistently students’ school achievement (Requena, Salazar & Radl, 2012).

The effect of motivation on English proficiency has also been explored and it has been shown to be one of the key factors contributing to ESL proficiency (Dörnyei, 1998), as more motivated students get higher grades and perform better (Barrio Espinosa, 2015).

Finally, although there has been little research on the influence of the third factor considered, students’ personal effort, a relation between the amount of effort students exert and their family background has been suggested (Kuehn & Landeras, 2012), and as this effect might also affect English proficiency, this relation should be explored further.

Considering the three factors of our research have been shown to influence academic performance and English proficiency, our research focuses on which of those three factors exerts the most influence on English proficiency and on studying the possible relations between family background and the other two factors, which is another unexplored area of research.

In this paper, we will present previous research on the topic. Then, we will explain the method and the measures used. Afterwards, we will present the results together with the discussion. And finally, we will give some pedagogical recommendations in order to improve students’ motivation, and some suggestions for further research on the topic.

1.1. *Literature review*

School systems appeared in the Modern age, that is, in the XIXth century. At that time, enlightened philosophers believed that people could comprehend and control the universe through reason and empirical investigations. As a result, those enlightened thinkers wanted to create a better and more rational world (Ritzer, 2011). These philosophers believed in the power of education to

transform society into a better world. But, from the beginning, school systems were class-based. Compulsory education was divided into a double network; worker class children had access to a primary education that only allowed them to join the work force, whereas high class children had access to a primary education that would lead them to secondary and higher education (Perez-Agote, 2012). Consequently, school systems reproduced social inequalities from the very beginning, cutting short all the pedagogical optimism of the time.

After the Second World War, comprehensive schools were introduced. Their purpose was to avoid the division that class-based schooling had created, and to establish equal education opportunities for students. This system was based on meritocracy, students' personal achievement and effort were supposed to be more important than their social origin. Comprehensive school systems were supposed to reduce social inequality. On the one hand, those systems compelled schools to give a homogeneous education to all the population for a longer time, and on the other, they postponed the time in which students had to decide which track to follow, thus reducing families' influence in students' educational decisions as the older students were, the more autonomous they would be (Fernández Enguita & Levin, 1997 as quoted in Martínez García, 2007). Still, some authors believed that comprehensive school systems didn't have any real impact in reducing social inequality (Merino, Sala & Troiano, 2012).

Moreover, research on the topic stated that schools still reproduced socioeconomic, gender and ethnic inequalities (Feitó, 2003; Martínez García, 2007; Bernardi & Requena, 2010; Fernández Enguita, Mena Martínez & Riviere Gómez, 2010). For example, Feitó (2003) stated that although working class schooling had increased in Spain in the 80s and 90s, inequality remained stable. He analyzed the data from the census of the years 1981 and 1991 and saw that only 14% of manual labourers' children finished higher education, compared to 70% of professional workers' children.

Bernardi and Requena (2010) analyzed the Spanish Labour Force survey data of the years 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008, and concluded that social class influenced students' probability to complete Compulsory Education, as well as their probability for choosing the vocational training track. They also found that social class influenced students' probability for retaking the last school year of Compulsory Education (CSE) after having failed.

Bernardi and Requena (2010) reported that service class (professional, senior administrative, and senior managerial employees) children had the highest rates of CSE completion (75.7%), whereas unskilled workers children rates were much lower (38.1%). Differences could also be seen when retaking a school year

after failing it at CSE. While 90.7% of service class children retook the year, only 69.7% of unskilled workers' children did. It could be assumed, then, that social class of origin influences both education achievement and decisions.

Causes for dropping out of school were investigated recently by Fernandez Enguita et al. (2010). They concluded that one of the main reasons for dropping out of school was students' social class of origin because among students with similar grades, the decision of dropping out was more frequent among working class children than among middle class children.

Table 1. School failure signs depending on parents' occupation

	Parents' higher occupation			
	White collar / qualified	White collar / No qualified	Manual / qualified	Manual / No qualified
Has retaken a school year	18,4	30,1	37,6	36,2
Doesn't aspire to Upper Secondary Education	6,9	12,8	23,5	23,1
Scoring below a standard deviation	10,4	16,6	27,6	28,8
High risk of school failure	22,7	35,6	46,3	44,8

Source: PISA 2003.

Table 2. School failure signs depending on parents' level of studies

	Parents' higher level of studies						
	None	Primary	Secondary	Vocational Training	Upper Secondary	Univ. (3)	Univ. (5)
Has retaken a school year	48,2	37,8	25,5	24,1	29,5	27,7	16,3
Doesn't aspire to Upper Secondary Education	39,8	23,8	13,3	13,0	13,1	8,2	5,1
Scoring below a standard deviation	43,0	26,7	15,8	17,3	17,8	14,5	9,7
High risk of school failure	62,9	46,2	31,8	31,0	35,5	33,1	20,2

Source: PISA 2003.

As Tables 1 and 2 from Fernandez Enguita et al. (2010) show, there is a strong connection between parents' occupation and level of studies, and their children school failure rates. The amount of children who had retaken some school year was nearly double (36,2% vs. 18,4%) for unskilled workers' children than for white collar workers' children, and also for all other indicators of high risk of school failure. The same happened with parents' education, the higher the level of studies of parents, the lower all the indicators of risk of school failure were. So taking into account all these data, we can conclude that social class significantly influences students' achievement in school.

Rodriguez Izquierdo (2012) introduced a new factor which helped explain school success further showing that parents' positive attitudes towards school predicted academic success independently from socioeconomic level. However, whether social background has any influence on students achievement in the subject of English is not clear.

Gradman and Hanania (1991) investigated the influence of several language learning factors in ESL proficiency, including socio-cultural background variables. These authors concluded that the variables which proved to contribute most to English learning were all related to a higher amount of language input: exposure to the language through extensive reading outside class, exposure to native teachers, the use of English as the language of instruction, and participation in intensive English programs. On the contrary, socio-cultural background variables didn't seem to have a strong influence.

Nevertheless, it should be taken into account that Gradman and Hanania (1991) conducted their study at the University of Indiana, and consequently, we could assume the participants in their study would probably have had similar social background, and, thus, differences due to that would not be relevant. Furthermore, all those students were already at university and considering the high risk of failure of lower socio-economic background children, we could assume most of the participants did not belong to those groups. Consequently, social class seems to have a bigger influence in Compulsory Education than at University.

Another factor which might have a strong influence in English proficiency is personal effort, and even though it could be conjectured that students who exert more personal effort (by reading in English at home, or by simply studying more) will get a better achievement grade in English, theoretical and empirical research on the topic has been scarce due to the difficulty of measuring effort (Kuehn & Landeras, 2012). Nevertheless, some papers have shown the importance of the family in students' amount of effort, for

example Kuehn and Landeras (2012) found that «an improvement in parental education from not having completed compulsory education to holding a university degree is associated to around 15% more effort by the student (approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes of additional weekly homework)» (p. 21). Hewitt (2006) conducted an empirical study with 42 kids in Andalusia on the influence of parental encouragement in ESL performance. She took into account two variables: parental knowledge of English and the amount of times they helped their children in English homework. She concluded that both variables influenced children written and listening performance in ESL. Consequently, the amount of effort that a student performs also seems to be influenced by family background.

Research on motivation (Dörnyei, 1998) has shown it to be one of the key factors in ESL proficiency. Gardner (2007) conducted an empirical research with Spanish students, and concluded that «the more highly motivated students have higher grades than the less motivated ones» (p. 16). Liuolienè and Metiunienė (2006, as quoted in García Sanchez & Cruz Vargas, 2013) observed that the more highly motivated students were more autonomous in their learning and worked more independently than the less motivated ones.

One study by Bernaus, Wilson and Gardner (2009) concluded that teachers' motivation plays an important role in the process of language learning. Motivated teachers will use more motivating strategies in class, and that will influence directly students' motivation and achievement. Uribe, Gutiérrez and Madrid (2008, as quoted in García Sanchez & Cruz Vargas, 2013) showed that Spanish students had positive attitudes towards learning a foreign language. Those attitudes seemed to be affected by gender, English grades, private classes, social class and the year in which students had started to learn English. Again, the influence of students' social class and family background appeared.

Considering that all the research described points out to the importance of family background, individual effort measures and motivation for EFL learning, it seems worth exploring which of these factors has more influence in English achievement. Consequently, the main objective of this paper is to try to answer the following four research questions:

1. Which of the following three variables has more influence in English proficiency: socio-economic background, individual effort, or motivation?
2. Is there a relation between individual effort and family background?
3. Is there any connection between motivation and family background?
4. Is there a connection between individual effort and motivation?

2. Method

2.1. Context

In the year 1979 the General Law of Education (LGE) introduced comprehensive schools in Spain. It established that education was compulsory from the age of 6 until the age of 14. Twenty years later, the General Organic Law of the Education System (LOGSE) expanded compulsory education to the age of 16.

This is the system currently in force in Spain. Until the age of 12, students study Primary Education. At the age of 12, they begin Compulsory Second Education (CSE). Students finish their CSE degree at the age of 16. When they finish CSE, those students who want to continue studying can choose between two different tracks; they can either go to vocational training school or go to upper secondary education, which will lead them to University.

The present study took place in three different Public High Schools in the north of Spain, in a province divided in three different parts according to the language spoken. The parts are called the Basque speaking area, the mixed region and the Spanish speaking area. Spanish is the official language in the entire province, whereas Basque is only co-official in the Basque speaking area. This linguistic division also has an effect on education and several teaching models can be found according to the language of instruction. In the Basque speaking area, where students are supposed to know both languages, the A model (Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque a subject); the D model (Basque is the language of instruction and Spanish a subject); and the B model (the languages of instruction are Basque and Spanish) are currently in force. In the mixed region, where students have the right to be educated in Basque if they ask for it, the A model, the D model and the G model (Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque is not taught as a subject) are currently in force. Finally, in the Spanish speaking area, only the models A and G are economically supported by the government.

The city where this study took place is located in the mixed region. High School 1 and High School 2 are located in the same neighbourhood, whereas High School 3 is located in a second neighbourhood. While High School 1 instructs in the D model (Basque is the language of instruction in this model), High School 2 and 3 do it in the A model (Spanish is the language of instruction and Basque only a subject).

2.2. *Participants*

The participants of the study were students from the 4th year of Compulsory Education. Students were between 15 and 17 years old, which means some of them were retaking the school year. The distribution of participants in the different settings can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3. Participants

	Participants
High School 1	61 students
High School 2	63 students
High School 3	35 students
Total	159 students

2.3. *Instruments*

A questionnaire (see Appendix I) was created to study our research questions. The questionnaire was anonymous, and it was divided into three sections: personal data, personal effort and motivation.

In order to analyze students' socioeconomic background, a modified version of the questionnaire used in Gil Flores (2011) was employed. The variables taken into account were 18 and included information about parents' nationality, level of studies, occupation and habits. To classify parents' occupation, the classification used by the Spanish National Institute of Statistics (INE) was used (for more information see Appendix II).

To analyze students' personal effort, seven variables were taken into account in the questionnaire. First of all, students were asked for the amount of time they spent studying English at home on their own or through private lessons. Apart from that, it was also considered important knowing how much English input they received outside the classroom. Although watching movies, reading magazines or travelling abroad could be regarded as leisure rather than as studying, they were also taken into account because they also serve as input.

Finally, to analyze students' motivation, a modified version of Gardner's (1985) AMTB questionnaire (used with Croatian, Japanese, Polish, Portuguese and Romanian students) was used. In order to make the questionnaire shorter, all the items related to Instrumental Orientation and Parental Encouragement were selected, but only some of the items that define Motivation.

In Gardner's test, there were four items included in Instrumental Orientation, which stressed the utilitarian value of learning English. Parental Encouragement was analyzed through eight items and it referred to the extent students felt their parents support them with English. Finally, Motivation was made up of motivational intensity; desire to learn English, and attitudes toward learning English. As we said, not all the items of this last variable, Motivation, were selected. Only four items from each of the three aspects included in Motivation were chosen –from each aspect two positively keyed and two negatively keyed– trying to respect the original proportions. Motivational Intensity measured students' motivation through their assignments, future plans to learn English and so on. Desire to learn English took into account the students' desire to learn English. And finally, Attitudes towards learning English stressed students' feelings toward the language; some items expressed positive feelings and other negative feelings.

2.4. *Procedure*

The questionnaires were worded in the L1 of the students, so in Basque and Spanish, because we wanted students to clearly understand the meaning of each question. Firstly, the objectives of the project were explained to the students and then they were given the questionnaire. Students filled the questionnaire individually. Both the teacher and the researcher were in the classroom in order to clarify any doubt the students might have.

2.5. *Data and data analysis*

The data were obtained from the questionnaires and were analysed using SPSS. The Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to observe the relationship among the different variables and students' grades in English. Significance level was set at the 0.05 level and at the 0.01 level. The level of correlation was considered weak (between ,10 and ,29), or moderate (between ,30 and ,49).

3. Results and discussion

3.1. *Correlation between socio-economic, personal effort and motivation variables and students' grades in English.*

As can be seen in Table 4, only three socio-economic variables showed weak correlations with students' grades: having parents who are fond of reading (V15), amount of books and father's level of studies. The first two correlations could be easily explained as students whose parents read regularly will more likely

read themselves, and it has been widely demonstrated that children who read perform better in school (Cullinan, 1998). The father’s level of studies showed a weak correlation, and thus we can see that the level of studies influences, though weakly, performance. However, all other socio-economic factors showed no correlation, and thus, it could then be concluded that, in general, students’ family background doesn’t affect their performance in English.

Table 4. Pearson correlation coefficient of those variables that proved to be significantly correlated with students’ grades in English ordered from most significant to least significant within the three set of variables

Variables	V26: Grades	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
Socio-economic variables:		
V15: Reading (parents)	,224	,006
V13: Books	,191	,020
V3: Father’s level of studies	,165	,044
Personal effort variables:		
V20: Music	,232	,004
V25: Private lessons	,196	,016
V21: Movies	,182	,025
V23: Reading	,164	,045
Motivational variables:		
V39: My parents think I should devote more time to studying English.	-,393	,000
V27: I make a point of trying to understand all the English I see and hear.	,390	,000
V37: I plan to learn as much English as possible.	,341	,000
V30: I keep up to date with English by working on it almost every day.	,265	,001
V45: My parents have stressed the importance English will have for me when I leave the university.	,226	,006
V36: I wish I were fluent in English.	,206	,012
V34: I haven’t any great wish to learn more than the basics of English.	-,207	,011
V40: My parents encourage me to practice my English as much as possible.	,189	,021

More personal effort variables than socio-economic variables correlated with English proficiency. From the seven variables considered, four correlated, though weakly. Listening to music in English outside the classroom (V20) proved to have the highest correlation, even though it was a weak correlation. Other variables had lower but still significant correlations: watching movies in English (V21), reading in English (V23), and attending private lessons (V25). All of these variables represented a higher English input outside the classroom. The amount of time students spent studying English at home didn't correlate with their grades. Consequently, homework doesn't seem to have a distinctive effect in students' qualifications.

Finally, most correlations were established between students' motivation and their English proficiency. A third of all the motivation variables significantly correlated weakly or moderately with higher grades in English. Three of the variables showed a moderate correlation with English grades: parents encouragement (V39), persistence in trying to understand (V27) and personal motivation (V37). The role of parents encouragement is stressed in these findings, as it is the variable which correlated the highest with grades. It can be concluded that in general, students who perceived English as important, and showed a greater interest in its learning scored better in the classroom.

Taking into account these results, and to answer our first research question about which of the three variables analyzed influences English Proficiency the most, it could be concluded that motivation seems to influence the most English proficiency, followed by personal effort, and socio-economic background, which contrary to previous research on school achievement (Fernandez Enguita et al., 2010) seems to influence English grades the least. The lack of correlation between English level of proficiency and socio-economic variables supports previous research (Gradman and Hanania, 1991).

The influence of the amount of input that students receive outside the classroom (through music, movies or private classes) should not be undervalued, it is interesting to note that according to our results, teachers and parents encouragement can play an important role in their students' English proficiency. Teachers can barely influence their students' socio-economic background, but they can clearly influence their motivation and, thus, their grades. This opens up tons of possibilities for teachers in order to stimulate their students' desire to learn English, and it moves us away from socio-economic determinism.

As no correlation was found between personal effort and family background, the answer to our second research question should be there is no relation between family background and personal effort. A promising finding as personal effort has more influence on English grades than family background.

3.2. *Correlation between socio-economic variables and motivation*

As can be seen in Table 5, one socio-economic variable, students' mother's occupation (V4) proved to have a weak correlation with a third of the motivational variables.

Table 5. Pearson coefficient correlation for those motivational variables that proved to be significantly correlated with students' mothers' occupation

Variables	V4: Mother's Occupation	
	Pearson Correlation	Sig.
V47: Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.	-,257**	,001
V44: My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.	-,236**	,003
V28: English is a very important part of the school programme.	-,235**	,003
V43: My parents feel that I should continue studying English all my life.	-,218**	,007
V41: My parents are very interested in everything I do in my English classes.	-,212**	,008
V40: My parents encourage me to practice my English as much as possible.	-,204*	,011
V46: My parents try to help me to learn English.	-,177*	,029
V30: I keep up to date with English by working on it almost every day.	,158*	,049

Most of the variables that showed a correlation were related to parental encouragement. Hence, it can be concluded that the mother's occupation influenced students perception of English. Parental encouragement is the factor which shows the strongest correlation to mother's occupation so depending on the students' mother occupation, parental encouragement is higher.

In general, mothers whose jobs required more qualification tended to encourage their children more to learn English. At the same time, their children also tended to perceive English as an important subject. Considering parental encouragement exerts a very strong influence on academic achievement (Rodríguez Izquierdo, 2012), and also correlated moderately with English grades, this result should be taken into consideration.

The fact that father's occupation did not correlate with parental encouragement could reflect that nowadays mothers are still more involved in their children education. It can be seen that parental involvement is important for children to be motivated, because it also influences the way in which students perceive English.

As it can be seen in Figure 1, to the question «English is a very important part of the school programme» directors and managers' (1) children scored high (4,66). Children whose mothers were manual workers (7), worked in elementary occupations (9) or were «not paid» domestic workers (10) scored below 4, with the exception of equipment and facilities operators' children (8) that scored 5. This sharp peak is not an exception but it is due to the fact that there was only one student whose mother worked as equipment operator.

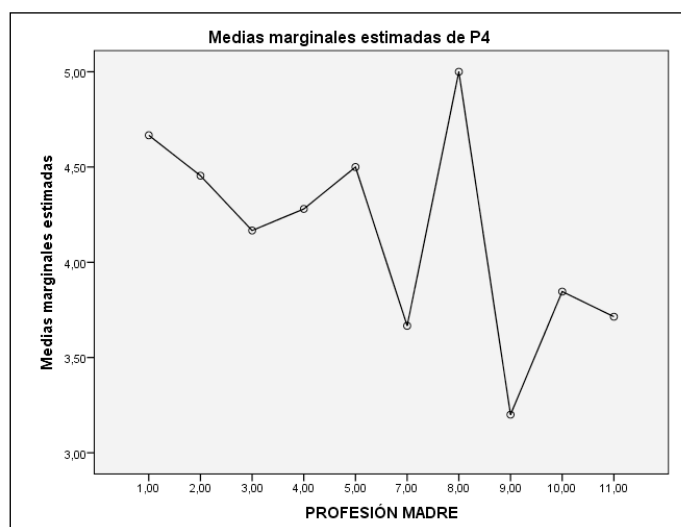


Figure 1. Correlation between mother's occupation and importance given to English at home.

3.3. *Correlation between personal effort and motivation*

Four of the personal effort variables significantly correlated with seventeen motivational variables too (see Table 6). Listening to music in English correlated with 11 of the 24 motivational variables; watching movies in English correlated with 8 of the 24 motivational variables; watching TV shows in English correlated with 14 of the 24 motivational variables; and reading in English outside the classroom correlated with 10 of the 24 motivational variables.

Table 6. Significant correlations of motivation variables with personal effort variables

Motivation	Music	Movies	TV show	Reading
V27: I make a point of trying to understand all the English I see and hear.	,378	,279	,329	,258
V28: English is a very important part of the school programme.	,188		,285	,192
V29: I would like to learn as much English as possible.	,294		,261	,261
V31: Learning English is a waste of time.	-,276			
V32: To be honest, I really have no desire to learn English.	-,266	-,210	-,299	
V34: I haven't any great wish to learn more than the basics of English.	-,208		-,203	-,224
V36: I wish I were fluent in English.	,292	,203	,231	,206
V37: I plan to learn as much English as possible.	,462	,331	,397	,277
V38: I think that learning English is dull.			-,188	
V39: My parents think I should devote more time to studying English.				,165
V43: My parents feel that I should continue studying English all my life.	-,210		,243	
V44: My parents feel that it is very important for me to learn English.			,249	
V46: My parents try to help me to learn English.		-,183		
V47: Studying English is important because other people will respect me more if I know English.		,226	,179	
V48: Studying English language is important because it will be useful in getting a good job.			,162	,232
V49: Studying English is important because it will make me more educated.	-,173	,225	,239	,165
V50: Studying English is important because I will need it for my career.	-,176	,280	,287	,243

Students who received a higher input of English through media showed a greater interest in learning as much English as they could. They also showed a greater instrumental orientation, especially in the case of students who watched movies and TV shows. Our findings could be explained by the fact that the American and British film and music industry, and the culture related to it, is very appealing for teenagers. Learning a language is not just learning a system of symbols, it also means learning a culture. And the English speaking countries' culture is nowadays widely displayed in the media (music, movies, magazines and so on). Hence, the culture and the ways of living American and English media show motivate students to learn the language of the culture they are seeing or listening to through the screen. In the same way, as the media show language in its context, it could be said that students who watch TV shows or read in English are more capable of realizing the instrumental value of the language. And when students know something will be useful for them, they will be more motivated to learn it. Thus, the use of media resources could be very useful in order to increase students' motivation inside the classroom. Still, it cannot be established if motivation was higher because they listened to music in English, watched movies and TV shows and read in English at home; or alternatively, as a consequence of their higher motivation, they listened to music, watched movies and TV shows and read in English at home. Nevertheless, as we will see in the next section, research has shown that overall the use of new technologies in the EFL classroom increases students' motivation.

According to our results, no significant correlations have been found between students' personal effort variables and family background variables. On the contrary, there was a relation between motivation and family background (mother's occupation influenced motivation), as well as multiple correlations between motivation and the amount of input that students received outside the classroom.

4. Pedagogical recommendations

As we have concluded, it seems that motivation influences the most students' English proficiency. And it appeared that listening to music and watching movies and TV shows in English influences students' motivation. Consequently, it could be interesting to use those kinds of materials inside the classroom. Watching movies and videos or listening to songs not only has a motivating effect on students but it is also the only means from which students can receive a significant exposure to English outside the classroom in EFL contexts. Movies or music can help students' English learning because they help to bring the real use of the language into the classroom (Genc Ilter, 2009).

Many papers have shown how the use of new technologies in the EFL classroom can be motivating. Madrid et al. (1993) conducted a research to observe the sources of EFL students' motivation. For this purpose, they passed a questionnaire to 13, 15, 16, 17 and 18 years old EFL students. Classroom methodology was one of the variables studied. The questionnaires showed that «participants present a clear inclination towards all the activities implying a more active usage of language» (Madrid et al. 1993, p. 30) and that most of the times, watching videos was one of the activities that students liked the most.

One of the biases in EFL teaching is the lack of «real» communicative situations in which students would be able to see the actual use of the language. Teachers could counteract it by introducing different videos, songs, movie segments (or full movies), radio programs, etc. Kelsen (2009) argued that English popular culture could be motivating. She conducted a research using YouTube as a supplementary material in EFL classes, and showed that it helped to motivate students. Teachers should be careful when choosing these materials, as they should be relevant to the lesson. For example, if students read a text in the classroom about some historical topic, then, the teacher could select a video about that same topic, thus complementing the text. Or if a specific grammar point is being worked, the teacher could select some movie fragments in which characters put that particular structure in use.

There are already some blogs created by teachers that try to teach students different grammar structures through different movie segments. Following these activities, students will be able to see the language in use while they improve their listening skills. Teachers could also complement these activities with different speaking or writing activities by i.e. making students reflect about what is going on in the scenes.

Full movies could also be very good materials for arising students motivation and awareness of the language. To start with, movies should not be only used for entertainment. Teachers should try to make the most of each movie conducting different and varied activities. For example, theme-based discussions could be a very interesting and complete activity; «a theme-based discussion allows students to explore relevant issues raised from a variety of perspectives, develop critical thinking skills, elicit responses, converse freely on many of the aspects of the film they have viewed, while freeing them from overly restrictive learning habits that focus exclusively on grammar and vocabulary» (King, 2002, p. 512).

Integrating authentic materials in a meaningful way inside the classroom could raise students' motivation and make students realize that languages are alive, that they actually serve for communicating. These materials will allow students to see the language in use.

5. Limitations and future directions

One limitation of the current study is the use of students' grades in English as the criteria for English proficiency. A test could be passed to all the students in future studies to test students' level of English with the same measure. The students in our sample had been evaluated by different teachers in different high schools. This means that teachers could have followed different evaluation criteria when evaluating their students and therefore, these differences could have resulted in misleading results.

Another limitation was not choosing high schools with very different socio-economic contexts. Although the high schools that we have chosen differ from each other, it could be argued that they are quite similar for a study of this kind. If we want the analysis of the influence of students' socio-economic background in their English proficiency to be reliable we should have taken a bigger sample from a broader range of high schools, comparing high schools from more neighbourhoods, but also private or state-subsidised high schools.

The results of this study should be cautiously interpreted, as only correlational conclusions may be reached. The Pearson coefficient correlation shows there is a relation between two variables or more, but it doesn't establish a cause-effect relation. Hence, future studies could analyse the result with more complex and accurate statistical methods.

6. Conclusions

From our results, it can be drawn that among students' socio-economic background, personal effort and motivation, the last one influences the most English proficiency, followed by personal effort, whereas socio-economic background influences English proficiency the least.

According to our results, no significant correlations were found between students' personal effort variables and family background variables. On the contrary, there was a relation between motivation and family background (mother's occupation influenced motivation). And there were also multiple correlations between motivation and the amount of input that students received outside the classroom.

Given our results, we would like to stress the great possibility that teachers have to make a difference. If motivation is that important, and if more motivated students will get better grades whatever their socio-economic situation is, teachers will have the chance to influence their students' achievement if they know how to motivate them. Bernaus et al. (2009) already stated that teachers'

motivation and the use of motivating strategies will be determinant for motivating students and for their English proficiency and our findings strongly support their hypothesis.

Overall, our research indicates once more the great influence of motivation in EFL contexts. More motivated students will score better. In addition, our findings show that there is a strong relation between students' motivation and media resources. The culture portrayed in American or English media motivates students to learn English. Something teachers should take into account in order to increase students' motivation inside the classroom, as their role as teachers would be fundamental in influencing students' motivation and thus their grades.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix I Questionnaire

Datos personales

1. Edad:

2. Sexo: hombre mujer

3. Nacionalidad del padre:

4. Nacionalidad de la madre:

5. Nivel de estudios del padre:

a) Sin estudios

b) Primarios

c) Secundarios

d) Bachillerato y/o Formación Profesional

e) Universitarios

f) Otros

6. Nivel de estudios de la madre:

a) Sin estudios

b) Primarios

c) Secundarios

d) Bachillerato y/o Formación Profesional

e) Universitarios

f) Otros

7. Profesión del padre:

8. Profesión de la madre:

9. Número de miembros en el hogar (tú incluido/a):

Vivienda familiar

10. ¿Tienes los siguientes objetos en casa?

– Ordenador Sí No

– Internet Sí No

– TV Digital, por cable/satélite Sí No

– Mesa de estudio Sí No

– Material de consulta y apoyo escolar (enciclopedias...) Sí No

11. Números de libros en el hogar:

0-10 libros 11-25 libros 26-100 libros 101-200 libros

Más de 200 libros

Hábitos familiares

12. Tus padres leen el periódico habitualmente	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
13. ¿Son aficionados a la lectura?	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
14. ¿Asisten a actividades culturales? (cine, teatro, conciertos...)	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
15. ¿Participan en alguna actividad cultural?	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>		
16. ¿Saben inglés?	Mucho <input type="checkbox"/>	Algo <input type="checkbox"/>	Poco <input type="checkbox"/>	Nada <input type="checkbox"/>

Estudio

17. ¿Cuánto tiempo dedicas al estudio del inglés a lo largo de la semana?	1 hora <input type="checkbox"/>	2 horas <input type="checkbox"/>	3 horas <input type="checkbox"/>	4 horas o más <input type="checkbox"/>	Otro: _____		
18. ¿Escuchas música en inglés?	Muy a menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A veces <input type="checkbox"/>	Poco <input type="checkbox"/>	Nunca <input type="checkbox"/>		
19. ¿Ves películas en inglés?	Muy a menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A veces <input type="checkbox"/>	Poco <input type="checkbox"/>	Nunca <input type="checkbox"/>		
Si ves películas en inglés, ¿usas subtítulos?	En inglés <input type="checkbox"/>	En castellano <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>				
20. ¿Ves series o programas de televisión en inglés?	Muy a menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A veces <input type="checkbox"/>	Poco <input type="checkbox"/>	Nunca <input type="checkbox"/>		
Si ves series en inglés, ¿usas subtítulos?	En inglés <input type="checkbox"/>	En castellano <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>				
21. ¿Lees en inglés? (libros, revistas, periódico...)	Muy a menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A menudo <input type="checkbox"/>	A veces <input type="checkbox"/>	Poco <input type="checkbox"/>	Nunca <input type="checkbox"/>		
22. ¿Has estado alguna vez en un país de habla inglesa?	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>					
Si has respondido afirmativamente, ¿por cuánto tiempo?	1 semana <input type="checkbox"/>	2 semanas <input type="checkbox"/>	1 mes <input type="checkbox"/>	2 meses <input type="checkbox"/>	Otros: _____		
¿Cuántas veces?	1 vez <input type="checkbox"/>	2 veces <input type="checkbox"/>	3 veces <input type="checkbox"/>	4 veces o más <input type="checkbox"/>			
¿Hiciste uso de la lengua inglesa?	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>					
23. ¿Acudes a clases de inglés fuera del horario escolar?	Sí <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>					
Si has respondido afirmativamente, ¿cuántas horas a la semana?	1 hora <input type="checkbox"/>	2 horas <input type="checkbox"/>	3 horas <input type="checkbox"/>	4 horas o más <input type="checkbox"/>			
24. ¿Qué nota has obtenido este último trimestre en la materia de inglés?	Suspense <input type="checkbox"/>	5 <input type="checkbox"/>	6 <input type="checkbox"/>	7 <input type="checkbox"/>	8 <input type="checkbox"/>	9 <input type="checkbox"/>	10 <input type="checkbox"/>

Motivación

[Marca del 1 al 5 atendiendo a cuan identificado/a te sientes con la oración (1 si no te sientes nada identificado/a; 5 si te sientes muy identificado/a)]

Pregunta	1	2	3	4	5
1. Siempre intento entender todo el inglés que leo y escucho.					
2. Mis padres piensan que debería dedicar más tiempo al estudio del inglés.					
3. Aprender inglés es importante porque otras personas me respetarán más si sé inglés.					
4. El inglés es una asignatura muy importante.					
5. Cuanto más inglés aprenda, mejor.					
6. Llevo el estudio del inglés al día.					
7. Mis padres me animan a que practique el inglés lo máximo posible.					
8. Mis padres se interesan mucho por todo lo que hago en la clase de inglés.					
9. El aprendizaje del inglés es importante ya que me permitirá conseguir un mejor trabajo.					
10. Aprender inglés es una pérdida de tiempo.					
11. Mis padres me animan a que pregunte al profesor en caso de tener algún problema con el inglés.					
12. Sinceramente, no me interesa aprender inglés.					
13. Cuando el profesor/a de inglés me entrega la tarea corregida, no la reviso.					
14. Solo me interesa obtener unos conocimientos básicos de la lengua inglesa.					
15. Estudiar inglés es importante porque ello hará que sea una persona más instruida.					
16. Mis padres creen que debería seguir estudiando inglés a lo largo de mi toda vida.					
17. Suelo dejar la elaboración de la tarea de inglés para el final.					
18. Mis padres creen que es muy importante que estudie inglés.					
19. Estudiar inglés es importante porque me será necesario en mi profesión.					

Pregunta	1	2	3	4	5
20. Me gustaría poder hablar inglés de manera fluida.					
21. Mis padres han recalado la importancia que tendrá el inglés para mí cuando deje el instituto.					
22. Planeo estudiar todo el inglés que me sea posible.					
23. Mis padres intentan ayudarme con el estudio del inglés.					
24. Pienso que estudiar inglés es inútil.					

Appendix II INE Classification

Occupations
1. Directors and managers.
2. Scientific and intellectual professionals and technicians.
3. Technicians; lower grade professionals.
4. Accountants, administrative and other office workers.
5. Service workers: Catering, personal care, protection and sellers.
6. Skilled workers in the farming, livestock, forest and fishing sectors.
7. Manual workers and skilled workers in the industry.
8. Equipment and facilities operators and assembly operators.
9. Elementary occupations.
10. Domestic workers (not paid)
11. Unemployed

