

Socio-economic Characteristics and English Language Achievement in Rural Bangladesh

M. Obaidul Hamid¹

Abstract: *This paper reports data from the author's PhD research which examined, among other issues, relationships between secondary school students' family socio-economic characteristics and their academic achievement in English in a rural sub-district in Bangladesh. The data show that the rural students had low levels of academic achievement in English as measured by their scores on a proficiency test as well as their grades in English in the school-leaving examination. Within this overall low level of achievement, there were patterned relationships between the students' family income and parental education and their academic achievement in English. Students who had higher levels of parental education and family income were more likely to obtain higher scores on the proficiency test as well as higher grades in English in the Secondary School Certificate examination. The paper discusses these findings and suggests their implications for theory, practice and policy of L2 English teaching and learning in developing societies in general and Bangladesh in particular.*

Introduction

Discourses of the benefits of English, for instance, English symbolising 'Aladdin's lamp' or providing access to 'international opportunity' abound the literature (Crystal 1997; Gargesh 2006; Kachru 1990; McKay and Bokhorst-Heng 2008; Pegrum 2004). It is debatable whether English proficiency by itself qualifies one to invoke 'the magical giant' that will do whatever one wishes, or provides one with the means to access global opportunities, but there is no denying that those who are English-proficient have decisive advantage over those who are not, assuming the former and the latter are otherwise comparable. However, what these discourses of English do not point out are the requirements for English learning in the form of investment – material, social and cultural – from public and private sources, and who are able to mobilise these resources and who are not, and whether there are relationships between resource investment and English learning achievement. Said differently, questions such as which groups of learners succeed in learning the valued language and who do not, and, as a consequence, who are entitled to the benefits of English and who are left out are missing in these discourses.

During British colonial rule, access to English and English proficiency achievement in the empire was associated with social elitism (see Rassool 2007). British rule introduced English and English education in India to run the colonial machinery as well as to comply with the growing demand of Western education. However, introducing English on a large scale was neither practical nor in the interest of the colonial project (Pennycook 1994). Therefore, the provision of English education was restricted (Pennycook 2004a), and only the social elites had access to its learning. The global profile of English has changed significantly since the colonial days. English has spread

¹ University of Dhaka, Bangladesh. Email: m.hamid@uq.edu.au; obaid_hamid@yahoo.com

almost all over the world at present. It has entrenched more in the former colonies now than it was during British rule. Increasingly, state policies in developing countries have introduced more English in the school curriculum, and the universalisation of primary education has ensured children's access to early instruction in English. One would therefore expect that these desirable educational developments should have significantly weakened the nexus of English to social elitism forged during colonial rule. Has it been the case in reality? Has the global spread and popularity of English ruled out the traditional elite advantage in English learning?

Addressing these questions empirically is challenging in our current state of knowledge because there has been little research on the comparative achievements of English as a second/foreign language (L2/FL) by students belonging to different social standings. This paucity of research in L2 education is unacceptable, particularly when compared with research in sociology of education which identifies, among other issues, the social correlates of academic achievement (Sadovnik 2007). In fact, socio-economic status (SES) characteristics, which are investigated to explicate students' scholastic achievement or underachievement, constitute the most common variable in sociology of education (Sirin 2005). Operationalisations of academic achievement adopted in this body of educational research usually refer to standardised test scores or school grades in mathematics, science, reading and verbal skills in the first language. English as an L2/FL is yet to be fully utilised as a potential outcome variable, particularly in countries where the language is an essential component of the national curriculum. Based on data from the author's PhD research in rural Bangladesh (Author 2009), this article addresses this gap in research. Specifically, it investigates relationships between students' family socio-economic issues and their English proficiency achievement as measured by English language test scores and grades in the national school-leaving examination.

The paper is organised as follows. The next section briefly outlines some theoretical and empirical developments which have inspired the study. This is followed by a review of research that has investigated relationships between SES and academic achievement in English as an L2/FL. The section that follows introduces the study and outlines its context and methodology. The next section presents data and their analyses at three levels – univariate, bivariate and multivariate. The findings are then discussed and the limitations of the work outlined before drawing out their implications and suggestions for further research in the concluding section.

Motivation for the Research

This work was motivated by research in sociology of education which, as previously noted, explores relationships between students' socio-economic backgrounds and their academic achievement. Given the growing importance of English for individuals and societies in our

globalising world, it is necessary to understand whether academic achievement in English is also mediated by socio-economic variables. This empirical evidence can inform L2 learning theory, pedagogy and policy. As the brief review of work in the next section suggests, little research has been conducted in this regard.

Secondly, inspiration for the research also came from critical approaches to applied linguistics and language education (Pennycook 2001, 2004b; Tollefson 1991, 2000, 2002). Pennycook's critical applied linguistics calls for understanding, among other issues, social inequalities in L2 learning in terms of race, ethnicity, gender and social class. Similarly, Tollefson argues for critical, social perspectives which will allow us to understand different social and institutional constraints which inform language choice and language teaching and learning experiences and outcomes in different social contexts.

Finally, this work was informed by the growing importance of the contested terrain of *social* in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). It represents an attempt at revitalising the call for focusing on the social dimension of second language learning. Although the linguistics- and cognitive psychology-dominated SLA has given some space to the social in recent decades, the latter is still understood in a limited sense, for instance, the immediate context of L2 use or communication (Akbari 2008). The social has not extended to include socio-economic and other contextual forces which influence L2 learners' learning potential, opportunities and outcomes (Author 2009).

Research on Socio-economic Status and English Achievement

As previously pointed out, although there has been substantial research on SES and academic achievement, there has been little work on the relationships between SES and English as an L2/FL achievement. The few studies that explored such relationships have produced inconclusive findings. For instance, Cherian's (1991) research in South Africa substantiated the 'well-established' relationship between parental income and academic achievement in developed as well as developing countries. Cherian collected parental income data by means of a questionnaire survey of 1,021 seventh grade students in the sub-national context of Transkei. Academic achievement was the criterion measure of the aggregated grades in seven subjects including English, Xhosa, mathematics, history, science, geography and agricultural science. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) showed that for low SES students there were positive relationships between parental incomes and academic achievement for both male and female students.

Liando's (2007) doctoral study of EFL achievement considered high school and university students' social backgrounds together with attitudinal and motivational factors. Students' social

cultural backgrounds, which constituted her conceptual framework, included the components of social orientation, parental/family influence and family SES. However, SES was measured in terms of parental occupation and income, without referring to parental education and other family educational resources which play a crucial role in differential academic achievement (see Feinstein et al. 2008; Pittaway 2004). Regarding the effects of SES on EFL achievement, the study concluded:

[...] the correlation between SES and academic achievement was consistently non-significant across the groups. Even when the data from the questionnaire were verified through the interviews, almost all respondents (students and teachers) believed that SES was not related to students' academic achievement. This finding was unexpected because participants in this study came from different socio-economic backgrounds, yet had similar opinions in this matter. (Liando 2007, 182)

Although the students were from different social backgrounds, the sample did not include socio-economically disadvantaged students. In other words, all students had access to a certain level of family resources and learning opportunities, as one of her students typically observed:

In my opinion, parents' social status does not affect directly towards their children's motivation to study English because, in this case, the main subject is the child. In this era, everyone has the same opportunity towards the use of English, in particular in the formal education field. (Liando 2007, 166)

These observations are reminiscent of the interpretations in a British-German study, which stated that in an environment that fosters a belief that "opportunities are open to all", [...] people blame themselves for their failures in education and the labour market, [not external forces]. (Evans 2007, 90)

SES, which comprised parental occupation and income in the Liando study, was not an issue for the students. However, the students underscored the role of parental encouragement and family influence in their motivation and academic achievement. In other words, her participants emphasised parental education and parental encouragement more than parental occupation and income, although parental education was not included in her operationalisation of SES.

In Mexico, on the other hand, González, Lima and Castillo (2004), as reported by Davies (2009), showed relationships between students' socio-economic status, institutions of higher education (public versus private) that they selected for study and their levels of English proficiency. The researchers drew a picture of the contrasts between students' English proficiency at private and public institutions, as reported in Table 1.

Table 1: Distributions of Students by Levels of Proficiency at the Entry Level at Mexican Public and Private Universities (based on data in Davies 2009, 5-6).

Proficiency levels	Public university (n = 1500)	Private university (n = 1400)
Upper intermediate+	7%	41%
Lower intermediate/intermediate	15%	43%
Beginner/Elementary	78%	16%

As Table 1 shows, whereas only 22% of students in the public university had lower to upper intermediate levels of English proficiency at the entry level, this figure was 84% for students in the private university. Compared to a mere 7% of students who were assigned to upper intermediate level at the public institution, there was 41% of students with upper intermediate level of proficiency who were not required to take further English courses because they had satisfied English proficiency requirements. Finally, while only 16% of students was assigned to elementary level at the private university, this figure was 78% for the public university students. The contrasts between the socio-economic statuses of students in these two types of institutions, although further details on SES indicators were not provided, and their levels of English proficiency are indeed striking. As Davies noted:

That contrast indicates how English is more quickly and effectively acquired by the upper socio-economic levels of the Mexican population [who mostly attend private schools at the pre-university level], and correspondingly more slowly in the much larger, lower socio-economic levels of the population, e.g., in the public university (not to mention the larger segment of population which does not advance to upper secondary school, let alone university). (2009, 6)

The conclusion that Davies drew presented a grim failure of Mexican ELT where the limited attainable success was to be attributed to socio-economic factors:

Mexican public ELT is clearly a general failure, affecting most of those Mexicans who cannot afford good private education and are not lucky enough to attend one of the best state schools or to be taught by some of their best English teachers. (7)

The few studies reviewed in this section suggest inconsistent relationships between SES and English achievement due to researchers' methodological preferences as well as limitations. Cherian (1991) did not focus exclusively on English achievement; Liando's (2007) dependent variable was EFL achievement, but parental education was missing from her operationalisation of SES; while the Mexican study did not include details on SES characteristics. Moreover, the

paucity of research suggests that much more research needs to be carried out in this area. It is also imperative that studies dealing SES-English achievement relationships include detailed methodological procedures in operationalising the complex constructs of SES and English achievement. Although the data reported in this study have their own limitations, their collection and analyses were guided by methodological transparency and rigour.

Context and Methodology

Context

The main study (Author 2009) on which the present article draws was set in a rural sub-district called Nadiranga, a pseudonym, which is located in the northern region of Bangladesh. This sub-district is one of the poorest in the country (Rahman et al. 2005) where the literacy rate is about 33% (compared to the national literacy rate of 45%) and where the majority of the local residents live below the poverty line (see Author 2009, in press for more details). The larger study was set in this peripheral context in view of two objectives. First, taking Nadiranga as a typical case, the study aimed to highlight the dynamics of English teaching and learning in rural Bangladesh. Second, it aimed to generate empirical evidence for the urban-rural divide in English achievement and to suggest its implications for centralised English language policy and English learning management which are generally guided by discourses of egalitarianism and social equity (see Author forthcoming).

Methodology

The larger study used a mixed-methods research design to explore relationships between aspects of secondary school students' family capital (economic, cultural and social) and *habitus* and their English learning achievement. The present article is based on the quantitative data of the main study. The latter included a range of independent variables related to aspects of economic, cultural and social capital and *habitus*. This paper selects only a few of these variables that constitute economic (parental occupation and income) and cultural capital (parental education). The quantitative data were generated by means of a questionnaire survey and an English proficiency test for 10th grade students which were locally produced by an English Teaching Task Force commissioned by the Ministry of Education. In addition, the students' grades in English in the 2007 national school-leaving examination 2007 called Secondary School Certificate (SSC) were collected from the schools. These two measures of English proficiency – test scores and grades in English – are correlated with measures of parental occupation, income and education data.

A total of 228 10th grade students (118 girls and 110 boys) from eight secondary schools in Nadiranga completed the questionnaire and took the English test. Two of the schools were for

girls, one for boys and the other five had both boys and girls in their student populations. The sample included schools from the small rural town in Nadiranga as well as from remote areas within the sub-district. Further details on questionnaire design and research procedures can be found in Author (2009).

Data and Findings

The data of the study were analysed at three levels – univariate, bivariate and multivariate. These three levels of analyses are discussed in the following pages.

Univariate (Descriptive) Analyses

Parental occupations, income and educational expenses

The constituents of family economic capital included 1) parental occupation, 2) parental income, and 3) education expenses per student per month. The upper section of Table 2 shows parental occupations of the 10th grade student sample. As can be seen, while fathers were involved in all the occupational categories listed, mothers were overwhelmingly engaged in home-making (91%). This is not surprising in a rural Bangladeshi context, where women contribute to the family mainly by working from within. Since an overwhelming majority of mothers were engaged in home-making, mother's occupation does not provide variability to influence results and was not considered further in the statistical analysis.

Farming was the main occupation of the fathers, reported by about one-third of the study participants. It was followed by business, which employed about 22% of the total sample's parents. Government and non-government services were represented by 13% and 14% of fathers respectively. These two sub-categories were merged as 'salaried service' to create a sizable data segment in the category, which can generate more meaningful data analysis and findings. So there were four categories of occupation for further analysis: salaried service (27%), business (22%), farming (33%) and manual and other (18%).

Table 2: Percentage Distribution of Different Aspects of Economic Capital (n = 228).

Parental occupation	Percentages	
	Father	Mother
Govt. service	13.2	1.3
Non-govt. service	14.0	5.3
Business	21.9	0.4
Farming	32.5	0.9
Manual work	9.2	1.3
Home-making	--	90.8

Other	9.2	00
Parental income per month	Percentages	
Tk. <2000	46.5	
Tk. 2001–5000	30.7	
Tk. 5001–15,000	19.7	
Tk. 15,001–30,000	2.2	
Tk. 30,001 or above	0.9	
Educational expenses per month		
Tk. < 500	66.7	
Tk. 501–1,500	28.1	
Tk. 1,501–3,000	4.8	
Tk. 3,001–4,500	00	
Tk. 4,501 or above	0.4	

The second and third sections of Table 2 report data on parental income and family expenditure on students' education per month. Given the socio-economic conditions of the sub-district, it was to be expected that most families belonged to low levels of income. Approximately 47% of the families had an income of Tk. < 2000 per month (1 \$ = 70 taka approximately). This is followed by 31% of families on the second income level (Tk. 2001-5000) and 20% of the families on the third level (Tk. 5001-15000). The fourth and the fifth income levels, the highest two, had negligible representation in the data (only about 2% and 1% respectively). Therefore, these two levels were merged with the adjacent third income level, and three levels of income were created for more meaningful statistical analysis with considerable percentages in each category: a) Tk. < 2000 (47%), b) Tk. 2001–5000 (31%), and c) Tk. 5001 and above (23%).

In line with family income, the amount of money that the families spent on students' education was also low. Two-thirds of students (67%) reported that their families spent less than Tk. 500 per month on their education. This was followed by 28% of students whose families belonged to the second lowest expense level (Tk. 501-1500). Expense level 3 had a modest representation (4.8%). The mean difference in the proficiency test scores between expense level 2 and 3 was not significant. No students fell into expense level 4, while level 5 had negligible representation. For further analysis of the data, the levels of expenses were rearranged to obtain only two categories: 1) Tk. < 500 (67%), and 2) Tk. 500 or above (33%).

Parental education

As Figure 1 shows, most parents of the student participants had primary or secondary levels of education, and the percentage of mothers with such education (67%) was higher than that of fathers (53%). However, more mothers were without formal education than fathers (20% versus 13%). Similarly, mothers had more modest representation in the higher secondary (7%) or tertiary education (2%) than fathers (22% higher secondary; 11.8% tertiary). In further analysis of the parental education data the highest categories (higher secondary and tertiary for fathers; secondary and above for mothers) were merged to form the new categories of 'higher secondary and above' for fathers and 'secondary and above' for mothers. The reason for the merging, as previously noted, was to create a sizable data segment in each category which is more appropriate for meaningful analysis.

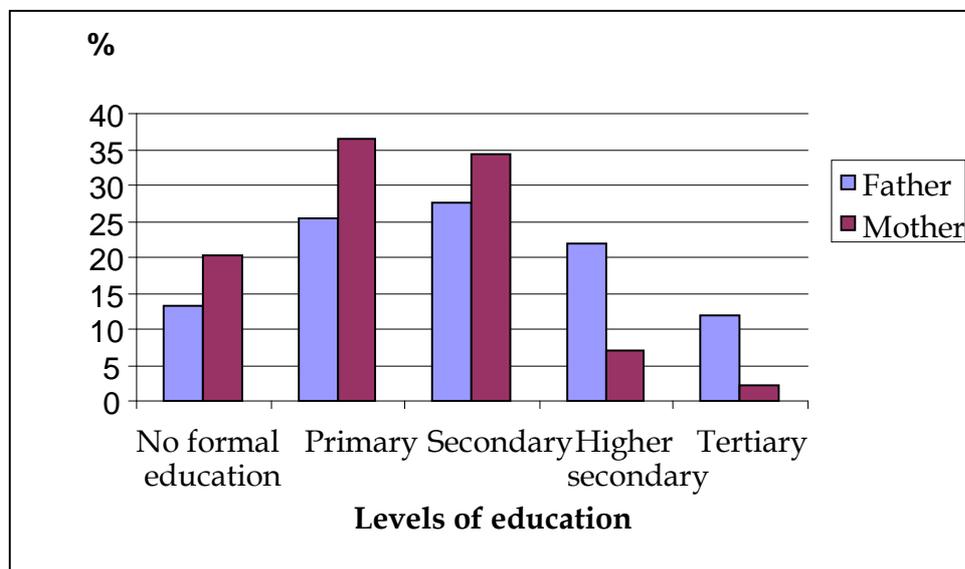


Figure 1: Levels of Parental Education of the Student Sample.

English Proficiency Scores

The present study included two measures of English achievement: students' scores on a 60-point English test, and their scores in English in the SSC examination, 2007. The SSC English scores were available only as letter grades, which were converted into number grades (e.g., A = 4) following the conversion system used in the SSC examination.² The English test scores, on the other hand, were raw scores, which were also converted into comparable numeric categories following the same grading system,³ providing a comparable metric for the two sets of scores

² The grading system used in the SSC examination is: 80% and above = A+ (5); 70% to 79% = A (4); 60% to 69% = A- (3.5); 50% to 59% = B (3); 40% to 49% = C (2); 33% to 39% = D (1); 0% to 32% = F (0).

³ Although the raw test scores were converted into grades for purposes of comparison with SSC grades, raw scores were used for the bivariate analysis.

(see Figure 2). Chi-square tests were carried out to examine the relationship between the two measures of English achievement. English test grades and SSC grades were statistically significantly associated (Chi-square =101.607, df = 9, p < 0.0001).

Although 228 students took the proficiency test, only 200 were able to take the SSC examination in 2007. The remaining 28 students were not allowed to sit the SSC examination because of their poor performance in the school-based SSC-qualifying test.

The data substantiated the overall low level of English achievement among students in the rural sub-district. About 79% of students either failed English in the SSC examination or earned the two lowest grades (C and D). Only a small portion of students (19%) earned the grades of B, A- or A, and none of them obtained A+, the highest grade. Their grades on the proficiency test had comparable distributions. On average, the students were able to answer 40% of the test items correctly.

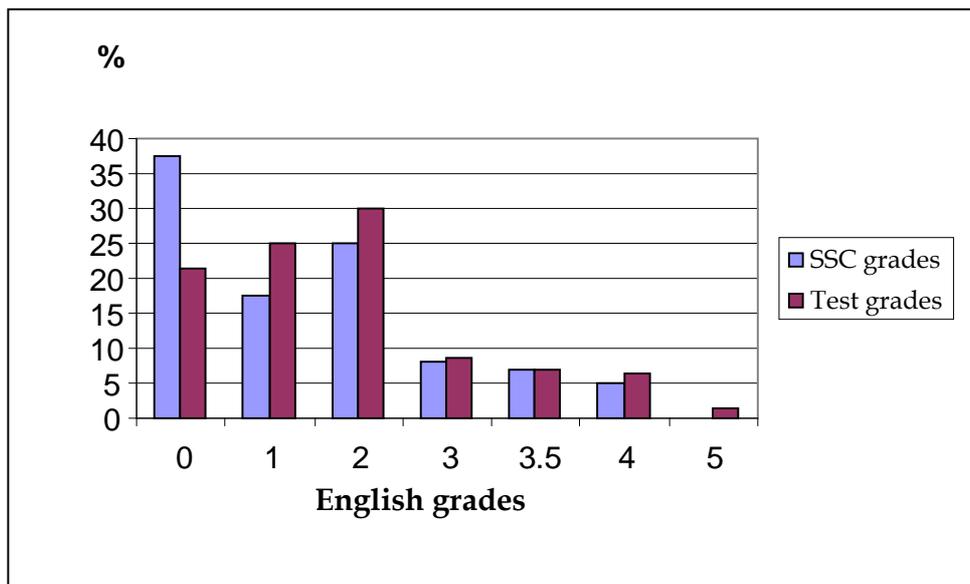


Figure 2: Comparison of SSC English grades and English test grades

Bivariate Analysis

Parental occupations, income, educational expenses and English achievement

One-way ANOVAs were conducted on students' scores on the English test (raw scores) using fathers' occupations as the break down variable. The results showed significant differences (p <

0.001) in the mean scores of students grouped according to the occupation categories. Post hoc tests specified the following differences: students whose fathers were in salaried service outperformed their counterparts in the business, farming and manual and other categories, and the differences were significant at the $p < 0.05$ level. The last three categories were hierarchically ordered in terms of mean proficiency scores (business was followed by farming, which was in turn followed by manual and other), but none of the differences were statistically significant.

When students' SSC English grades, the other outcome variable, were examined, a one-way ANOVA produced similar results. Differences in the mean scores of different occupational categories were statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). However, post hoc results showed that the mean score for the salaried service category differed significantly from that of farming and manual and other, but not from that of business.

Like fathers' occupations, parental income also showed significant differences in students' scores on the proficiency test ($p < 0.0001$) as well as in their SSC English grades ($p < 0.001$). The mean proficiency scores of students belonging to income levels 1 (Tk. <2000) and 2 (Tk. 2001-5000) differed significantly from that of level 3 (Tk. 5001 or above). As expected, level 2 also had a higher proficiency score mean than that of level 1, which, however, was not statistically significant.

In terms of educational expenses, which constituted a further aspect of economic capital, the mean difference in the proficiency scores between the two groups (expense level 1 = Tk. <500 and 2 = Tk. > 500) was 5.2, which was statistically significant ($t = 3.968$, $df = 226$, $p < 0.0001$). The other outcome variable (SSC English grades) produced similar results ($t = 3.836$, $df = 198$, $p < 0.0001$). It was observed that the higher the level of expenses on education, the better the mean in the proficiency test and the SSC English.

Parental Education and English Achievement

Analyses showed that the higher the level of education of the father and/or the mother, the higher the mean of students' proficiency scores, or the higher the SSC English grade. In the case of the father's education, the mean score of students whose fathers had a higher secondary or above level of education was significantly higher than the mean scores of students from all other levels of education, such as secondary, primary and no formal education ($F = 7.391$, $df = 3, 224$, $p < 0.0001$). Likewise, students whose mothers had secondary or above level of education had a mean score which was significantly higher than the mean scores of students whose mothers had only primary or no formal education ($F = 8.763$, $df = 2, 225$, $p < 0.001$). However, as Table 3 shows, the mean differences between no formal and primary level in the case of mothers, and no

formal, primary and secondary in the case of fathers, were not significant, although the differences increased consistently with the rise in the level of parental education. The analyses showed that only the highest levels of parental education (i.e., higher secondary or above for fathers, and secondary or above for mothers) were significantly associated with the students' academic achievement in English.

When the students' English grades in the SSC examination were used as the outcome variable, a one-way ANOVA produced similar results. That is, the highest levels of parental education had significantly higher means than the other levels of education ($F = 6.363$, $df = 3, 196$, $p < 0.001$, for father's education, and $F = 7.033$, $df = 2, 197$, $p < 0.001$ for mother's education).

Table 3: Parental education and measures of English achievement.

Levels of education	Proficiency test scores			SSC English grades		
	N	Mean	Std dev.	N	Mean	Std dev.
Father						
No formal education	30	21.30	3.640	27	0.722	1.003
Primary	58	24.03	5.834	48	1.062	1.132
Secondary	63	24.38	6.857	56	1.348	1.217
Higher second. or above	77	28.32	10.379	69	1.826	1.447
Total	228	25.22	8.062	200	1.360	1.308
Mother						
No formal education	46	23.43	5.568	42	0.857	1.111
Primary	83	23.27	6.129	72	1.229	1.147
Secondary or above	99	27.69	9.696	86	1.715	1.429
Total	228	25.22	8.062	200	1.360	1.308

Father: $F = 7.391$, $df = 2, 225$, $p < 0.0001$ (proficiency test); $F = 6.363$, $df = 2, 197$, $p < 0.001$ (SSC)

Mother: $F = 8.763$, $df = 2, 225$, $p < 0.001$ (proficiency test); $F = 7.033$, $df = 2, 197$, $p < 0.001$ (SSC)

Multivariate Analyses

The data were also analysed using multivariate logistic regressions to investigate factors (i.e., aspects of economic, cultural and social capital and habitus) that were independently associated with students' SSC English grades and their grades in the proficiency test. Unlike bivariate analyses, multivariate techniques allow us to understand relationships between specific predictor variables and outcome variables after adjustments for the effects of other factors that exist in a particular context.

Because of the interrelationships between the independent variables (for instance, parental income was significantly correlated with parental education and income was correlated with education expenses), the main study conducted two pairs of regression models (see Author 2009). This section will report only the relationships of parental income and father's education with the two measures of English proficiency previously mentioned.

Multivariate analyses revealed that SSC English grades were positively associated with parental income. The students whose families belonged to the highest level of income (level 3, Tk. 5001 or above per month) were 2.25 times more likely to obtain higher grades in SSC English than those whose parents' monthly income was less than Tk. 2000 (income level 1). Similarly, students whose parental income was at level 3 were over 2.5 times more likely to obtain a higher grade in the test than those whose parents had monthly income at level 1. Students belonging to income level 2 were also more likely to have higher grades than those at level 1, although the probability was not statistically significant.

Analyses also showed that the higher the level of students' fathers' education, the more likely they were to obtain higher grades in the SSC examination. Students whose fathers had a secondary education were 2.6 times more likely to earn a higher grade than those whose fathers had no formal education. Likewise, students whose fathers had a higher secondary or above levels of education were 4 times more likely to earn a higher SSC grade in English than their counterparts whose fathers had no formal education. When the other measure of English proficiency (i.e., the students' grades in the proficiency test) was taken into account, a positive association between father's education and English achievement was found. For instance, students whose fathers had higher secondary or above levels of education, had approximately 2.2 times more chance of securing a higher grade in the proficiency test than those whose fathers did not have formal education (see Author 2009 for details).

Discussion

Parental Occupations, Income and English Proficiency

Bivariate analyses showed that parental occupation, family income and educational expenditure had significant associations with measures of English achievement. Students whose fathers were in salaried employment, whether in the public or the private sectors, outperformed students whose fathers were in other occupations such as business, farming and manual work. Variations in the students' English achievement in terms of whether their fathers were in salaried service or in other occupations were expected. Parents who were in salaried employment would have higher levels of education than those in other jobs. Moreover, being so employed was a

guarantee of a regular monthly income in a generally disadvantaged region such as Nadiranga. Furthermore, this occupational option allowed people to socialise with other educated people at work and to cultivate values, attitudes and behaviours which attach higher value to children's education and academic achievement. Lareau's (2007) ethnographic study of childrearing in middle, working class and poor families in the US – both White and Black – showed that parents' occupations 'mattered' because their work influenced their childrearing beliefs and practices.

Family income and educational expenses – the two other aspects of economic capital – were found to advantage students who were from families with higher levels of income and educational expenditure. Multivariate analyses revealed that an increase in the level of income marked a corresponding increase in the mean scores on the proficiency test, or that the students were more likely to obtain higher grades in SSC English. However, it is the highest level of parental income that was significantly associated with English achievement.

Why was economic capital associated with the measures of English achievement? DuBois (2001) explained that:

[F]amily income could include an inability to provide desirable educational support materials at home, thus restricting the opportunities of youth to engage in activities that are instrumental to developing confidence and positive perceptions of themselves as academic learners. (162)

Based on his research in the US, DuBois argued that inadequate family income affects the provision of educational support materials at home, which, in turn, affects learners' perceptions of themselves because they are inhibited from participating in self-development activities. His explanation applies to the present context as well. First, it is economic capital that enables parents to purchase books and education supplies for their children, and, more importantly, arrange private tutoring in English (PT-E) for them (see Author et al. 2009). Not having access to adequate capital has adverse consequences: Konka, one of the 14 students who were interviewed in the qualitative phase of the parent study, could not sit all the papers in the SSC-qualifying test because her parents were unable to pay the required fees for the test. Consequently, she was barred from taking the SSC examination in 2007 (see Author 2009). More crucially, low levels of family capital prohibited students from participating in PT-E. Analyses of student interview data in Author et al. (2009) showed that PT-E participation was considered essential for English learning achievement. Finally, family economic factors influenced students' self-confidence. For instance, Monir and Rajib, two other students who were interviewed in the main study, explained how not being able to meet their educational needs affected their determination and left them frustrated. In sum, family economic factors affected students' academic achievement in English by restricting their access to necessary logistics (books and

other supplies), learning opportunities (PT-E) and development of their self (confidence and motivation).

The association between economic capital and English achievement in the present research further strengthens the relationship between parental income and academic achievement reported by Cherian (1991). However, the present findings are different from those in Liando (2007) previously reviewed.

Ripple and Luthar (2000) worked with disadvantaged students in the US in order to explicate their academic achievement (although not in English). They observed that because their participants were from comparable social backgrounds, SES had no significant association with grade achievement and other behavioural outcomes:

Although low SES is strongly predictive of poor academic outcomes across children from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds, it is not linked to outcomes in this group of students because all of these children were from relatively socioeconomically disadvantaged families. Because it did not differentiate between participants, SES was dropped from further analyses. (Ripple and Luthar 2000, 285-286)

While the Indonesian study (Liando 2007) did not include participants from the lower class or disadvantaged backgrounds, the US study included only disadvantaged students. By contrast, the present study was set in a predominantly disadvantaged location. However, its student participants differed from one another, although not widely, in terms of family capital and parental characteristics. Therefore, family economic capital had differential effects on the academic outcomes of the students.

Parental Education and English Achievement

Bivariate analyses revealed that students whose parents had the highest level of education outperformed students with lower levels of parental education. Multivariate analyses included only father's education as a predictor. The analyses showed that students from the highest level of father's education were around 3 times (on average) more likely to obtain higher scores/grades in English in the proficiency test as well as in SSC English than the students whose fathers had no formal education.

The association between father's education and English achievement substantiates the relationship between parental education and academic achievement established in the literature (Biddle 2001; Considine and Zappalà 2002; Li 2007; Sullivan 2000, 2001). The qualitative data generated by the parent study corroborated the role of parental education in schooling and academic outcomes (see Author 2009). For instance, many of the students from low and below average family capital backgrounds noted that their parents were not educated enough to

express what grades they expected of their children in the SSC examination because they were not familiar with the terminology used in measuring educational achievement. Moreover, although all parents, irrespective of their levels of education, did indeed encourage their children, those with no formal education or only low levels of education were unable to make informed decisions about the academic and career expectations of their children. DuBois (2001) explained how parental education influenced children's self-concepts and academic goals:

[P]arents lacking in educational attainment may be significantly less likely to engage in behaviours and practices that are important for cultivating self-resources for learning among youth, including both favourable perceptions of oneself as a student and a tendency to set challenging goals or standards for what constitutes success in the academic realm. (161)

Li (2007) provided more detailed explanations, by dividing parents into two categories based on their levels of education and their involvement in their children's education:

In sum, the academic parents with high levels of educational attainment were able to provide quality support for and involvement with their children through direct reinforcement of improved academic performance, or general academic guidance, setting high expectations for school performance, verbal encouragement to interactions regarding learning English. (Li 2007, 292-293)

These explanations apply to the differential English achievements of the students based on differences in their parents' levels of education in the present context.

Limitations of the Research

The findings of the study as reported and discussed in the previous sections, should, however, be interpreted in the light of its limitations. The sample for the questionnaire survey was not a representative sample. However, this was a deliberate choice in terms of empirical investigation and methodology. The goal of the larger study was to explore the teaching and learning of English and academic achievement in a rural, peripheral area in relation to students' family educational resources. The study exemplified case study research in that it explored relationships between a range of learner-internal and -external factors and the students' English achievement within a geographically bounded location. Although the findings may not be generally applicable to the whole country, they should have application to other areas of rural Bangladesh, because the socio-economic situations prevailing in other rural sub-districts are by and large similar to those in Nadiranga.

Secondly, drawing a sample from a largely disadvantaged and socio-economically relatively homogeneous region also meant that the findings did not show wide differences between the respondents in terms of their family capital situations and consequently, differences in their English achievement (see Ripple and Luthar 2000). However, although the differences in the students' achievement were not always wide, and there were weak to modest, though still

significant, associations between different variables, the fact that there were differences and that the differences were significant mean that the students' family capital factors did influence their levels of academic achievement. On the other hand, the advantage of focusing on a largely disadvantaged community is that we can understand the aggregate performance of the students from the region. As shown in Figure 2, the vast majority of students either failed English (37%) or ended up with very low grades (42%, C and D) in the SSC examination. The students' collective performance data showed that there were shortcomings in the teaching and learning of English in the region, and only a small number of students were able to overcome the limitations of these unfavourable circumstances by means of their family investment in education and/or their determination and hard work.

Implications and Further Research

Implications

The findings of the present study, with all its limitations, have implications for the policy and practice of L2 English teaching in Bangladesh and other developing societies. In the case of Bangladesh in particular where the study was located, the results suggest that:

- 1) the poor English achievement of students in rural Bangladesh means that English teaching has consumed national resources and has occupied a large portion of curricular space, but has not produced desirable outcomes;
- 2) the outcomes of English teaching have undermined the government objectives of developing human capital (Author and 2008); and
- 3) the principles of social justice underlying the introduction of English for all students have been undermined because there were differences in the academic achievement of the students in terms of their family backgrounds. If English proficiency is a significant factor in accessing social benefits, many of the students participating in the present study would be denied access to those benefits because of their low levels of English achievement.

In terms of L2 teaching practice, the present study suggests that the poor English achievement of students has something to do with their family economic and cultural resources. The family contribution is crucial, particularly in the context of: a) the poor quality of school English teaching, and b) the absence of outside-school learning opportunities in the rural community. These two factors led students to rely on PT-E which requires substantial family resource investment. In order to bring about positive changes in the existing levels of learner English in rural areas, and to reduce the influence of the family on their academic outcomes, there is no alternative to improving the quality of English teaching at school. For this to happen, it is essential to increase opportunities for the professional development of school English teachers.

Moreover, the findings imply that academic underachievement of disadvantaged students is not only an educational problem, but also a social and economic one. Schools are not in a position to directly address socio-economic issues. Nevertheless, they should embrace the question of inequality in English learning outcomes and devise mechanisms for the reduction of inequalities within their limited resources and capacities. More feasibly, schools can arrange formal and informal activities that can contribute to the students' positive self-perceptions, and encourage them to develop higher but realistic expectations in terms of future education and career, and motivate them to work hard despite the adverse circumstances. Introducing academic counselling in rural schools could be useful for giving students appropriate expectations, hope and motivation. The study has implications for theory and research in SLA. To these Bangladeshi learners, English learning involved much more than the question of attitudes toward and/or motivation for the language (Gardner and Lambert 1972), or the question of the opportunity to communicate with others (Norton 2000; Norton Peirce 1995). These learners were occupied with more basic questions of economic, cultural and social resources, and the issues of affordability and access, and how these issues influenced their English learning outcomes. A cognitivist perspective on SLA may view these socio-economic issues as simply unrelated to developing learners' L2 system. However, it can be argued that a comprehensive understanding of the SLA processes, particularly in developing societies, would require accommodating these issues in research and theory-building.

Finally, the findings of the study would recommend a critical assessment of the ubiquitous discourses of the benefits of English which often provide justification for introducing more and earlier English in the school curriculum in the developing world. Although the findings of the study may not be generalised, they provide indication that the old nexus between English and social elitism may not have weakened even in the context of wider spread and popularity of English in the world.

Further Research

Admittedly, the present study represents a modest attempt at exploring the relationships between L2 learners' social world and their English learning experiences and outcomes. Larger scale studies involving nationally representative samples from Bangladesh and other developing countries are required to construct more substantial and reliable empirical evidence. At the same time, future research may also focus on the following issues:

- 1) The present study used English achievement in general as the outcome variable. This may or may not be related to the students' ability to use the language for functional purposes (Author 2008). Studies are required to investigate students' communicative ability in relation to their social backgrounds;

- 2) Research is required to investigate the role of school factors and explain how they relate to learner-internal and -external factors. Larger-scale studies involving all these factors have the potential to design a comprehensive model of academic achievement in English in rural contexts involving school and home factors; and
- 3) Research that focuses on urban-rural comparative samples will be useful in authenticating the findings as well as the methodological tools explored in the study.

References

- Akbari, Ramin. 2008. "Transforming Lives: Introducing Critical Pedagogy into ELT Classrooms". *ELT Journal* 62: 276-283.
- Biddle, Bruce J. 2001. "Poverty, Ethnicity, and Achievement in American Schools". In *Social Class, Poverty, And Education: Policy and Practice*, Bruce J. Biddle (ed), 1-29. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Cherian, Varghese I. 1991. "The Relationship between Parental Income and Academic Achievement of Xhosa Children". *The Journal of Social Psychology* 131: 889-891.
- Considine, Gillian, and Gianni Zappalà. 2002. "The Influence of Social and Economic Disadvantage in the Academic Performance of School Students in Australia". *Journal of Sociology* 38: 129-148.
- Crystal, David. 1997. *English as a Global Language*. Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Davies, Paul. 2009. "Strategic Management of ELT in Public Educational Systems: Trying to Reduce Failure, Increase Success". *TESL-EJ* 13: 1-22.
- DuBois, David L. 2001. "Family Disadvantage, the Self, and Academic Achievement". In Bruce J. Biddle (ed), *Social Class, Poverty, and Education: Policy And Practice*, 133-173. London: Routledge Falmer.
- Evans, Karen. 2007. "Concepts of Bounded Agency in Education, Work, and the Personal Lives of Young Adults". *International Journal of Psychology* 42: 85-93.
- Feinstein, Leon, Kathryn Duckworth, and Ricardo Sabates. 2008. *Education And The Family: Passing Success Across The Generations*. New York: Routledge.
- Gardner, Robert C., and Wallace E. Lambert. 1972. *Attitudes and Motivation In Second- Language Learning*. Rowley: Newbury House.
- Gargesh, Ravinder. 2006. 'South Asian Englishes'. In Braj B. Kachru, Yamuna Kachru, and Cecil L. Nelson (eds). *The Handbook of World Englishes*, Pp 90-113. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Hamid, M. Obaidul. 2009. *Sociology of Language Learning: Social Biographies and School English Achievement in Rural Bangladesh*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
- Hamid, M. Obaidul. 2010. "Fieldwork for Language Education Research In Rural Bangladesh: Ethical Issues And Dilemmas". *International Journal of Research & Method in Education* 33: 259-271.
- Hamid, M. Obaidul. 2011. "Planning for Failure: English and Language Policy and Planning in Bangladesh". In Joshua A. Fishman and Ofelia García, (eds). *Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity: The Success-Failure Continuum in Language and Ethnic Identity Efforts*, Vol II, 192-203. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hamid, M. Obaidul, and Richard B. Baldauf Jr. 2008. "Will CLT Bail Out The Boggled Down ELT in Bangladesh?" *English Today* 24: 16-24.
- Hamid, M. Obaidul, Roland Sussex and Asad Khan. 2009. "Private Tutoring in English for Secondary School Students in Bangladesh". *TESOL Quarterly* 43: 281-308.
- Kachru, Braj B. 1990. *The Alchemy Of English: The Spread, Functions, And Models Of Non-Native Englishes*. Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press.
- Lareau, Annette. 2007. "Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families". In Alan R. Sadovnik (ed) *Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader*, 325-354. London: Routledge.
- Li, Guofang. 2007. "Home Environment and Second-Language Acquisition: The Importance of Family Capital". *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 28: 285-299.

- Liando, Nihta V. F. 2007. *Motivation in an Indonesian EFL Context: Individual Attributes, Social Cultural Background, and Teachers' Behaviours*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia.
- McKay, Sandra L., and Wendy D. Bokhorst-Heng. 2008. *International English in Its Sociolinguistic Contexts: Toward A Socially Sensitive EIL Pedagogy*. London: Routledge.
- Norton, Bonny. 2000. *Identity and Language Learning: Gender, Ethnicity and Educational Change*. Harlow: Longman/Pearson.
- Norton Peirce, Bonny. 1995. "Social Identity, Investment and Language Learning". *TESOL Quarterly* 29: 9-31.
- Pegrum, Mark. 2004. "Selling English: Advertising and the Discourses of ELT". *English Today* 20: 3-10.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 1994. *Cultural politics of English as an international language*. London: Longman.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 2001. *Critical Applied Linguistics: A Critical Introduction*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 2004a. "History: After 1945". In Michael Byram (ed.) *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning*, 275-282. London; New York: Routledge.
- Pennycook, Alastair. 2004b. "Critical applied linguistics". In Alan Davies, and Cathy Elder (eds) *The Handbook Of Applied Linguistics*, 784-807. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Pittaway, Daniel S. 2004. "Investment and Second Language Acquisition". *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 1: 203-218.
- Rahman, Mohammad A., Mohammad Asaduzzaman, and Abdur Rahman. (ed.) 2005. *Millennium Development Goals: A people's progress report, Bangladesh*. Dhaka: People's Forum on MDG, Bangladesh.
- Rassool, Naz. 2007. *Global Issues in Language, Education and Development: Perspectives from Postcolonial Countries*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Ripple, Carol H., and Suniya, S. Luthar. 2000. "Academic Risk Among Inner-City Adolescents: The Role Of Personal Attributes". *Journal of School Psychology* 38: 277-298.
- Sadovnik, Alan R. 2007. "Introduction". In Alan R. Sadovnik (ed) *Sociology Of Education: A Critical Reader*, xiii-xvi. New York: Routledge.
- Sirin, Selcuk R. 2005. "Socioeconomic Status and Academic Achievement: A Meta-Analytic Review of Research". *Review of Educational Research* 75: 417-453.
- Sullivan, Allice. 2000. *Cultural Capital, Rational Choice, and Educational Inequalities*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Oxford University, Oxford, UK.
- Sullivan, Allice. 2001. "Cultural Capital and Educational Attainment". *Sociology* 35: 893-912.
- Tollefson, James W. 1991. *Planning Language, Planning Inequality*. London: Longman.
- Tollefson, James W. 2000. "Policy and Ideology in the Spread of English". In Joan K. Hall, and William Eggington (eds) *The Sociopolitics of English Language Teaching*, , 7-21. Clevedon; Buffalo; Toronto: Multilingual Matters.

