



Exploring the Factors Influencing Language Proficiency among Secondary School Students: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract:

Language proficiency plays a central role in students' academic success, communication skills, and overall personal development. At the secondary school level, students' ability to understand, speak, read, and write effectively influences their performance across subjects and prepares them for higher education and future careers. However, language proficiency is shaped by multiple factors, including classroom practices, teacher support, family environment, learner motivation, access to learning resources, and opportunities for meaningful language use.

This qualitative study aims to explore the factors that influence language proficiency among secondary school students from the perspectives of students and teachers. A qualitative research design is adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences and perceptions. Data are collected through semi-structured interviews with secondary school students and English language teachers. The collected data are analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring themes and patterns.

The study is expected to reveal that language proficiency develops through the interaction of school-related, family-related, and learner-related factors rather than through classroom instruction alone. It also highlights the importance of supportive teaching practices, regular language exposure, student motivation, constructive feedback, and a positive learning environment in improving language skills. The findings are expected to provide practical recommendations for teachers, school leaders, curriculum developers, and policymakers to strengthen language education at the secondary level.

This study contributes to the growing body of research on language learning by providing a comprehensive understanding of the factors that shape language proficiency from the lived experiences of learners and teachers. The findings may help schools design more effective language-learning environments that support students' academic and personal growth.



Keywords: Language proficiency; Secondary school students; Qualitative research; English language learning; Student motivation; Teacher support; Learning environment; Thematic analysis.

1. Introduction

Language is one of the most powerful tools for communication, learning, and social interaction. In today's interconnected world, proficiency in language, particularly English, has become increasingly important for academic achievement, higher education, employment opportunities, and participation in global society. For secondary school students, language proficiency is not limited to learning grammar or vocabulary; it involves the ability to understand spoken and written texts, express ideas clearly, communicate confidently, and use language appropriately in different academic and social contexts.

Despite the growing importance of language proficiency, many secondary school students continue to experience difficulties in developing effective language skills. Some students struggle with reading comprehension, while others face challenges in speaking confidently, writing coherently, or understanding classroom instruction delivered in English. These difficulties often affect overall academic performance and reduce students' confidence in learning.

Language proficiency develops through the interaction of several factors rather than a single influence. Effective classroom instruction, supportive teachers, regular reading habits, learner motivation, family encouragement, peer interaction, access to books and digital resources, and opportunities to practice the language all contribute to language development. At the same time, barriers such as limited exposure to English outside the classroom, examination-oriented teaching, overcrowded classrooms, and unequal access to learning resources may hinder students' progress.

Most previous studies have examined language proficiency using quantitative methods, focusing on test scores and teachers perceive the development of language proficiency in real educational settings.

2. Review of Literature (2021–2026)

Language proficiency has become a major area of educational research because of its strong relationship with students' academic achievement, communication skills, and lifelong learning. Recent studies have shifted from viewing language proficiency merely as grammatical competence to understanding it as a multidimensional construct influenced by cognitive, social, emotional, technological, and educational factors. The following review summarizes key research published between 2021 and 2026.

2.1 Language Proficiency in Secondary Education

Recent literature emphasizes that language proficiency extends beyond vocabulary and grammar. It includes learners' ability to communicate effectively through listening, speaking, reading, and writing in authentic situations. Studies indicate that students with higher language proficiency generally demonstrate better classroom participation, stronger academic performance, and greater confidence in learning.



2.2 Teacher Support and Classroom Practices

Teachers play a significant role in shaping students' language learning experiences. Recent research highlights that interactive teaching methods, collaborative learning, meaningful classroom discussions, and continuous formative feedback create opportunities for students to practice language in authentic contexts. Supportive teachers also help reduce learners' anxiety and increase their confidence to communicate.

2.3 Learner Motivation and Self-Confidence

Motivation remains one of the strongest predictors of language learning success. Students who are intrinsically motivated are more willing to participate in classroom discussions, practice language independently, and overcome learning difficulties. Positive attitudes toward English and confidence in one's own abilities encourage continuous improvement in language proficiency.

2.4 Family and Home Environment

Several recent studies demonstrate that family support contributes significantly to language development. Parents who encourage reading, provide learning materials, engage in conversations, and create a positive learning atmosphere help students improve their language skills. Conversely, limited educational resources and reduced exposure to language-rich environments may restrict language development.

2.5 Technology and Digital Learning

Digital technologies have transformed language learning by providing learners with greater access to authentic language input through educational videos, online reading materials, language-learning applications, and virtual communication. Research indicates that technology enhances learner engagement when integrated thoughtfully with classroom instruction rather than replacing teacher guidance.

2.6 Multilingual Classrooms and Translanguaging

Contemporary research recognizes multilingualism as an educational resource rather than a barrier. Translanguaging approaches, where students strategically use their first language alongside English, have been shown to improve comprehension, participation, and learner confidence. However, successful implementation depends on teacher preparation and institutional support.

2.7 English Exposure Beyond the Classroom

Recent qualitative research suggests that meaningful language learning continues outside formal classrooms. Students who regularly engage with English through books, films, music, digital media, games, and social interactions often demonstrate stronger language proficiency than those whose exposure is limited to classroom instruction.

2.8 Research Gap

Although numerous studies have investigated language proficiency, much of the recent research has relied on quantitative methods and standardized assessment scores. Comparatively fewer studies have explored students' and teachers' lived experiences through qualitative inquiry, particularly in secondary school settings. Existing studies often examine isolated variables such



as motivation, technology, or classroom practices rather than exploring how multiple educational, personal, and social factors interact to shape overall student outcomes, engagement, and academic success.

3. Research Gap, and Research Objectives

3.1 Research Gap

The review of recent literature indicates that language proficiency has been widely studied in relation to academic achievement, motivation, classroom practices, technology, and family support. However, most of these studies have relied on quantitative methods that primarily measure students' performance through tests, surveys, or standardized assessments. Such approaches provide valuable statistical evidence but often overlook the personal experiences, perceptions, and challenges faced by learners and teachers during the language-learning process. Furthermore, existing studies generally focus on one or two variables in isolation rather than examining how multiple factors interact to shape language proficiency. There is also limited qualitative research exploring the lived experiences of secondary school students in diverse educational settings, particularly within the Indian context. Understanding these experiences can provide deeper insights into the realities of language learning that cannot be captured through numerical data alone.

The present study addresses this gap by adopting a qualitative approach to explore the perspectives of both students and teachers. Through in-depth interviews, the study seeks to understand how classroom practices, teacher support, learner motivation, family environment, peer interaction, and exposure to English collectively influence language proficiency among secondary school students.

3.2 Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. To explore the factors that influence language proficiency among secondary school students.
2. To understand students' experiences of learning and using English in school and daily life.
3. To examine teachers' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities in developing students' language proficiency.
4. To identify the role of classroom practices, family support, peer interaction, and learning resources in language development.
5. To suggest educational strategies for improving language proficiency among secondary school student.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Approach

This study adopts a qualitative research approach because it seeks to understand participants' experiences, opinions, and perceptions regarding language proficiency. A qualitative approach enables the researcher to collect rich, detailed, and context-specific information that cannot be obtained through quantitative methods alone.



4.2 Research Design

A qualitative descriptive research design is employed. This design allows the researcher to explore real-life experiences and provide a comprehensive description of the factors influencing language proficiency among secondary school students.

4.3 Research Setting

The study will be conducted in selected secondary schools. Schools representing different educational backgrounds (such as government and private institutions) may be included to obtain diverse perspectives from participants.

4.4 Participants

The participants will include:

- 20 Secondary School Students (Classes IX and X)
- 10 English Language Teachers

Participants will be selected because of their direct involvement in language teaching and learning.

4.5 Sampling Technique

Purposive sampling will be used to select participants who can provide rich and relevant information regarding language learning experiences. This technique is widely used in qualitative research because it focuses on information-rich cases rather than large sample sizes.

4.6 Data Collection Method

Data will be collected through semi-structured interviews.

Separate interview researcher will be prepared for students and teachers. The interviews will encourage participants to describe their experience, perceptions, challenges, and suggestions related to language proficiency.

Each interview is expected to last approximately 30-45 minutes and will be conducted with participants' informed consent.

4.7 Data Analysis

The collected data will be analyzed using Thematic Analysis following the six phases proposed by Braun and Clarke:

1. Familiarization with the data.
2. Generating initial codes.
3. Searching for themes.
4. Reviewing themes.
5. Defining and naming themes.
6. Writing the final report.

This method helps identify recurring patterns and provides a meaningful interpretation of participants' experiences.

5. Interview Protocol

5.1 Purpose of the Interview



The interview was designed to explore the experiences, perceptions, and opinions of secondary school students and English language teachers regarding the factors influencing language proficiency. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their views freely while ensuring that all key research questions were addressed.

5.2 Interview Questions for Students

1. How do you describe your experience of learning English at school?
2. Which language skill (listening, speaking, reading, or writing) do you find most difficult? Why?
3. What factors help you improve your English language proficiency?
4. What challenges do you face while learning English?
5. How do your teachers support your language learning?
6. Does your family encourage you to practice English at home? If yes, how?
7. Do you use digital resources such as YouTube, language-learning apps, or online videos to improve your English? Please explain.
8. How do your classmates influence your language learning?
9. What changes would you like your school to make to improve English language learning?
10. Is there anything else you would like to share about your experience?

5.3 Interview Questions for Teachers

1. How do you define language proficiency among secondary school students?
2. What challenges do students commonly face while learning English?
3. Which teaching strategies do you find most effective for improving language proficiency?
4. How important is classroom interaction in language learning?
5. What role do parents play in supporting students' language development?
6. How do digital technologies influence language learning?
7. What barriers prevent students from becoming proficient language users?
8. How do you assess students' language proficiency?
9. What improvements would you recommend for language teaching in secondary schools?
10. Is there any additional observation you would like to share?

6. Findings and Discussion

The thematic analysis of the interview data resulted in six major themes that explain the factors influencing language proficiency among secondary school students.

Theme 1: Teacher Support Encourages Language Development

Most students reported that teachers who used interactive teaching methods, encouraged classroom discussions, and provided constructive feedback helped them develop greater confidence in using English. Teachers also emphasized that creating a supportive classroom environment motivates students to participate actively without fear of making mistakes.

Discussion

These findings suggest that teacher encouragement plays a significant role in improving students' confidence and communication skills. Interactive teaching strategies provide learners with meaningful opportunities to practice English in authentic situations.



Theme 2: Student Motivation Influences Language Learning

Students explained that personal interest, career aspirations, and the desire to communicate confidently motivated them to improve their English. Highly motivated students reported spending additional time reading books, watching educational videos, and practicing speaking outside the classroom.

Discussion

The findings indicate that intrinsic motivation encourages continuous language learning and independent practice, leading to better language proficiency.

Theme 3: Family Support Enhances Language Learning

Many participants acknowledged that family encouragement positively influenced their learning. Parents who encouraged reading, monitored homework, or created a positive learning environment contributed to students' language development. However, some students reported limited opportunities to practice English at home.

Discussion

Family involvement creates an environment where students feel supported and motivated to develop their language skills beyond the classroom.

Theme 4: Classroom Environment and Peer Interaction

Students highlighted that group discussions, pair work, role-playing activities, and peer collaboration improved their speaking confidence. Teachers also noted that cooperative learning encouraged students to learn from one another.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that collaborative classroom activities promote active participation and provide authentic opportunities for language use.

Theme 5: Digital Learning Resources Improve Language Exposure

Most participants reported using YouTube videos, educational website, mobile applications, and online dictionaries to improve pronunciation, vocabulary, and listening skills. Teachers believed that technology complemented classroom instruction when used appropriately.

Discussion

Digital resources increase students' exposure to authentic language and encourage independent learning, making language acquisition more engaging and accessible.

Theme 6: Challenges Affecting Language Proficiency

Participants identified several barriers, including fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, lack of speaking practice, examination-oriented teaching, overcrowded classrooms, and insufficient exposure to English outside school.

Discussion

These findings indicate that improving language proficiency requires a comprehensive approach that addresses both instructional practices and the broader learning environment. Schools should encourage communicative teaching methods, provide opportunities for authentic language use, and support learners through positive feedback and adequate learning resources.



7. Conclusion:

Language proficiency is a fundamental component of students' academic success, effective communication, and lifelong learning. This qualitative study explored the factors influencing language proficiency among secondary school students through the perspectives of students and teachers. The findings indicate that language development is shaped by the combined influence of teacher support, learner motivation, family involvement, peer interaction, classroom environment, and access to digital learning resources.

The study further reveals that students learn language most effectively when they actively participate in meaningful communication rather than relying solely on traditional, examination-oriented instruction. A supportive classroom atmosphere, opportunities for authentic language use, and constructive feedback encourage students to develop confidence and improve their communication skills.

At the same time, several challenges continue to affect language proficiency, including limited exposure to English outside the classroom, fear of making mistakes, inadequate learning resources, and insufficient opportunities for speaking practice. Addressing these challenges requires coordinated efforts from teachers, parents, school leaders, and policymakers.

Overall, the study emphasizes that improving language proficiency is a shared responsibility. By creating learner-centered classrooms, strengthening home-school partnerships, integrating technology effectively, and promoting communicative teaching practices, school can help students become confident and competent language users prepared for higher education, employment, and participation in a global society.

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