

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS' FAMILY BACKGROUND AND THEIR ENGLISH SPEAKING SKILL

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### Abstract

This study examines the influence of family background on grade six students' English language speaking skill in Kandy educational zone, Kandy district. The study is designed to identify the relationship between the parents' education level and the performance of students in English language speaking as well as to examine the relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the children's performance in English language. The data was collected using observations, questionnaires and focused group discussions. This study was undertaken using random sampling method considering two grade six classes consisting of forty students from Mahamaya Girls' College and Gothami Girls' College, Kandy and the parents of these selected participants were given an open ended questionnaire to find their socio-economic and education background. Ten ESL teachers were also taken under two focused group discussions to examine their perceptions towards second language learner's family background and English language speaking competency. Classroom observations were conducted once a week for a duration of two hours over a period of three months. The data were analyzed and presented through tables and bar graphs. The key findings of the study revealed that there was a significant difference in the English speaking skill based on the parents' education and socio-economic level. Students who had parents with higher educational and socio-economic level, performed well in their English language speaking whereas parents with low socio-economic background and less exposure to English language had low self-confidence in their ability to communicate in English, providing minimum exposure and support to their children.

**Keywords:** Socio-economic and education level of parents, teachers' perception, English language speaking

## 1. Introduction

English is a global language and it has become a vital necessity for secondary level learners. Speaking is one of the most important skills among the other basic skills; listening, reading and writing that needs to be developed and enhanced among ESL learners as it is considered the most productive and demanding skill. According to Muriel (1976: 25-27), the spoken form of language, that is the basic speech, occurred long before the writing in the history of language, as it occurs in the development of every child. Therefore, people all over the world strive to achieve good English education for themselves and their children. Learning English can be influenced by a number of

factors such as learner background, teaching methods and parents' attitudes towards English language. Studies have shown that there is a powerful relationship between the child's family background and his/her achievement in life. The child's family and domestic environment greatly affect his/her language and literacy development and educational achievement especially during the child's early years. As stated by Weigel (2005), the importance of home environment promotes the development of the young learners' language literacy because they may have more exposure at home to become familiar with literacy materials, observe the literacy activities of others, independently explore literate behaviors, engage in joint reading and writing activities with other people and benefit from the teaching strategies that family members use when engaging in joint literacy tasks. (DeBaryshe, Binder, Buell, 2000, 119-120). Parental involvement is considered an essential factor on the second language acquisition of a child. The education level of parents is an important predictor of children's educational and behavioral outcomes (Davis-Kean, 2005, MCCartney Taylor, 2002). The family social economic status including parents' education level, would predict the quality of family interactions and child behavior. As stated by Kimto in Makindo (1999) the relationship between secondary school students and academic performance showed a strong and positive correlation between parents' level of education and student's achievement motive. Cantu (1975) in a study of 73 Mexico American pupils found that the parent's education attainment, income level and environment proved to be highly significant in determining the child's level of education attainment. Moreover, according to Hochschild Nathan (2003) economical position of parents is also one of the major factors that can greatly influence on the educational aspirations of their offspring. Thereby, this study examined the relationship between educational and socio-economic background of the parents on grade 6 students' English language speaking proficiency in two different selected government schools; Mahamaya and Gothami Girls' schools in Kandy. Research question:

I. What is the influence of parent's level of education on the children's performance in English language?

II. What is the relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the children's performance in English language?

Research objectives:

I. To examine the relationship between parent's level of education and the children's performance in English language.

II. To examine the relationship between the socio-economic status of the parents and the children's performance in English language

## 2. Methodology

### Sample selection

The participants were selected from Mahamaya Girls' College which is a leading national school and Gothami Girls' College which is also a popular school in Kandy educational zone, Kandy district.

### Study participants

The study consisted of randomly selected 40 grade 6 students from two Sinhala medium classes, their parents and 10 ESL teachers of the same schools as the study participants. A questionnaire was used to collect data and interpret findings in terms of parents' income and education level. Two focused group discussions were carried out to examine the perception of the teachers towards the learner performance with different economic backgrounds. A period of 3 months observation was carried out during the English periods to observe students' performance in speaking skill. Further a pre-test was administered at the beginning of the study to obtain an idea of language proficiency of these ESL learners.

### Data Analysis

Data has been presented using bar charts considering the parents' level of education through their

A/L and O/L English language results, parents' occupation and their monthly income level, language used by parents when speaking to their children and students' pre-test marks. Qualitative data were gathered by observing the learners' ongoing behavior in the classroom and thematic analysis was used to derive the data from the focused group discussions with the teachers.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### Parents' level of education

The study investigated the influence of family background on grade six children's performance in

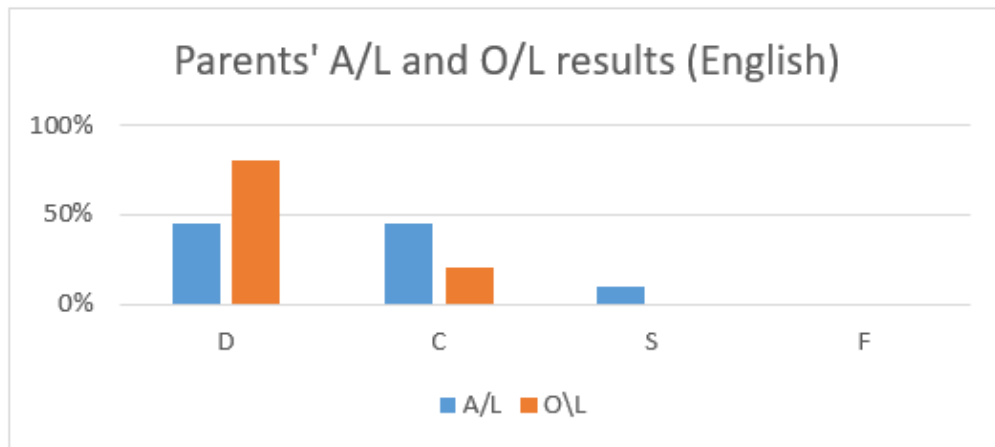


Figure 1. Parents' O/L A/L results (Mahamaya Girls'College)

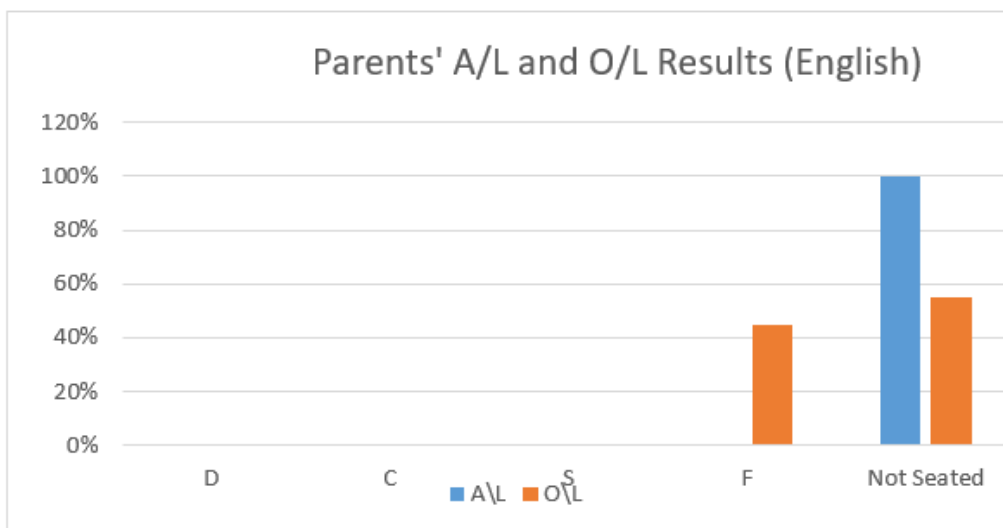


Figure 2. Parents' O/L A/L results (Gothami Girls'College)

English language speaking in Kandy educational zone, Kandy district. Forty questionnaires were distributed among parents to find their education level in English language and socio-economic background.

In terms of the respondents' levels of education, the study found that 80% of the parents had D Passes for the O/L English paper while 45% had D passes for A/L English paper. 45% had C passes for the A/L English paper while 20% had C passes for O/L English paper. 10% of the parents had S

passes for A/L English paper. The results imply that majority of the respondents had good level of English education. It has been shown by their professions.

In terms of the respondents' level of education, the study found that none of the parents had sit for the A/L English paper while 55% had not sit for the O/L English paper with a failure rate of 45%. The results indicate that the majority of the respondents had not sit for English papers and other respondents had failed the English subject. It depicts that they had low levels of English education.

**Parents' Occupations**

From the research findings, it is clearly evident that most of the parents were employed as medical officers. The occupation that they were involved in had impacted greatly on the child's development of second language learning. The study further disclosed that 50% of the parents were doctors, 20% as lecturers and 15% of the respondents were accountants and lawyers. In Mahamaya Girls' College all selected parents were graduates. Therefore, they had a moderate knowledge in English language.

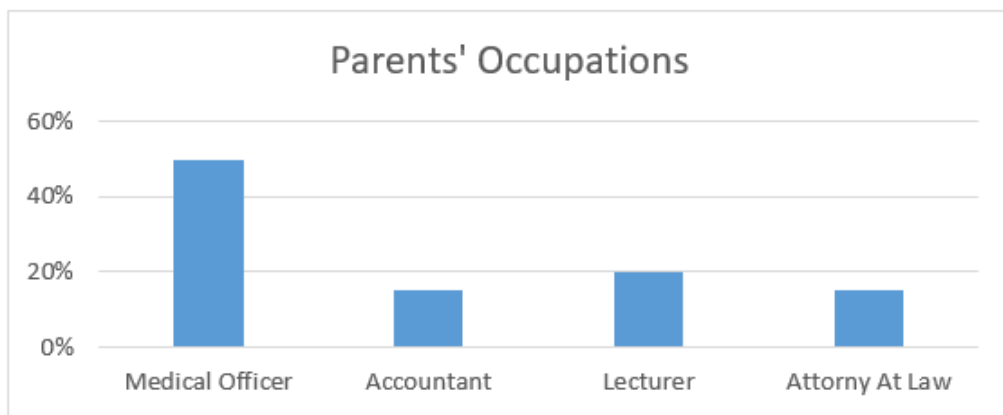


Figure 3. Parents' Occupations (Mahamaya Girls'College)

In the light of research findings, it clearly depicts that most of the parents were employed as casual workers. 25% of parents employed as laborers, 20% as nurses and army officers, 15% as drivers while 10% of the respondents were engaged in businesses and tailoring as a form of occupation. Most of the respondents did not sit for the A/L English paper. Therefore, their English education level is lower than the parents of the Mahamaya Girls' College.

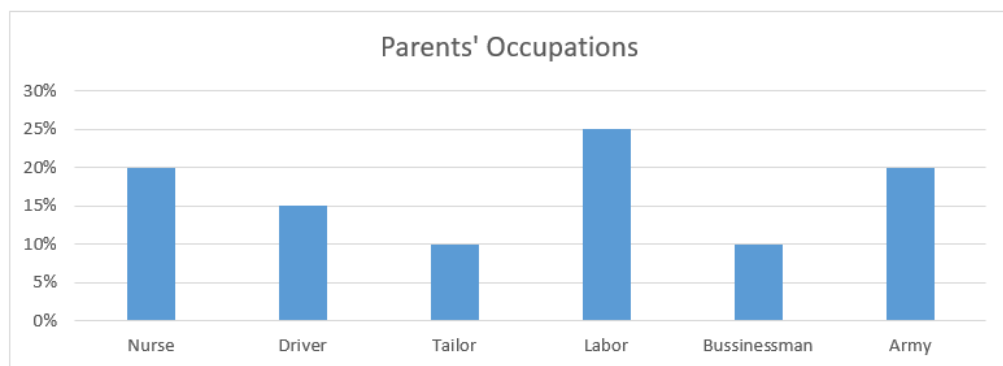


Figure 4. Parents' Occupations (Gothami Girls'College)

**Parents' monthly income level**

From the research data, it is evident that the majority of the parents earn between Rs.250,000-500,000. Another 10% earn between Rs. 200,000-250,000. These parents had a good monthly income to support their child's English language education. They sent their children to private English tuition

classes. In addition, majority had the membership of the British Council Library. From the research

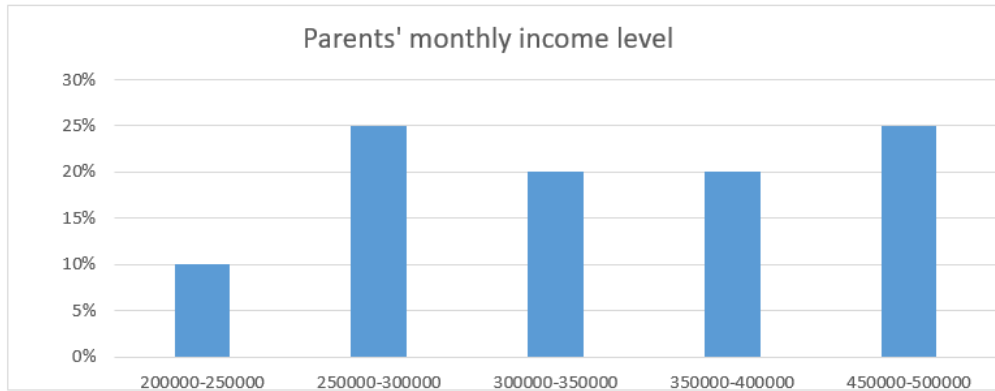


Figure 5. Parents' monthly income level (Mahamaya Girls'College)

data it is clearly evident that, majority of the parents earn between Rs.15000- 30000. Another 25% earn between Rs.30000-45000. While the rest 20% earn between Rs.5000-15000. This reveals that the lower income level could be a reason for the poor performance in English language for their children. Parents have a significant role in providing the materials and financial support to their children in English language learning.

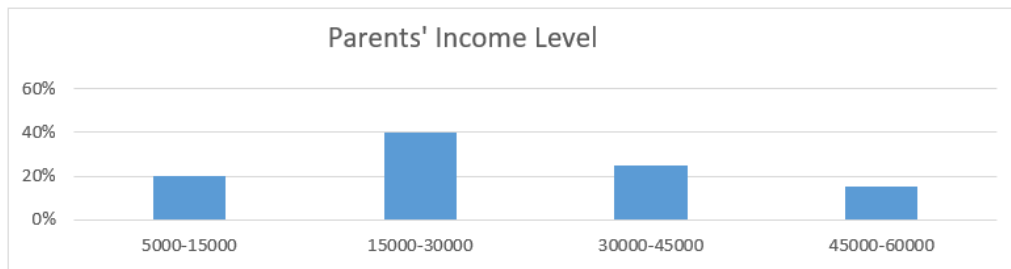


Figure 6. Parents' monthly income level (Gothami Girls'College)

## Communication between parents and the children

Table 1. Language usage (Mahamaya Girls' College Kandy)

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Sinhala	0	0%
English	17	85%
Sinhala and English	3	15%
Total	20	100%

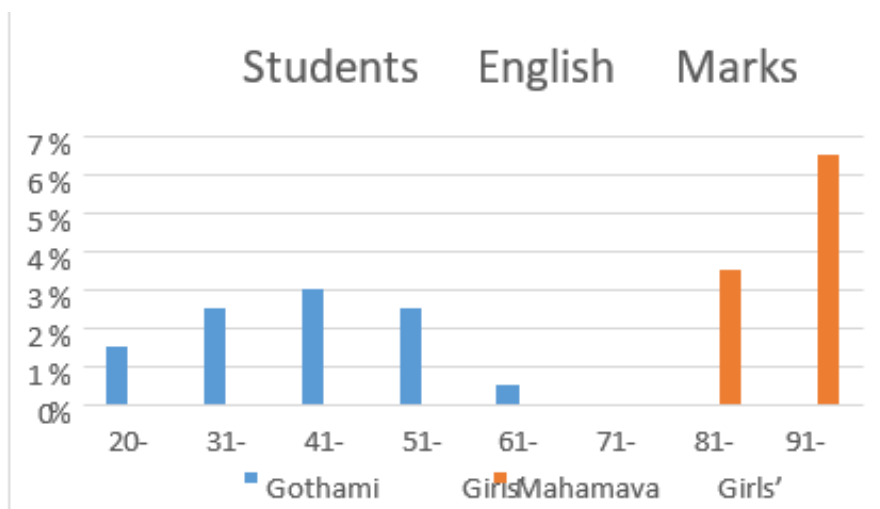
Table 1 clearly shows that the majority of parents wanted their children to gain English language proficiency in comparison to Sinhala language. 85% of them were using only English when speaking to children while 15% were using both Sinhala and English. Almost all the parents used English for daily conversations.

The above table shows that the majority of the parents use Sinhala (mother tongue) to speak with their children. They had no preference for English Language.

**Table 2.** Language usage (Gothami Girls’ College Kandy)

Language	Frequency	Percentage
Sinhala	20	100%
English	0	0%
Total	20	100%

In order to correlate the findings to the performance of the students, English marks of second term test in 2019 were taken into consideration. Figure 7 shows the performance of English language learning of the students. When considering the marks of the Gothami Girls’ College, 30% of the students obtained marks between 41-50 while 25% between 31-40 and 51-60 marks.



**Figure 7.** Students’ English Marks (2019)

### Students’ Performance in English Language Learning

All the students obtained marks below 70. All the students obtained marks more than 80 in Mahamaya Girls’College. 65% obtained marks between 91-100 and 35% obtained marks between 81-90. It was apparent that the students from Mahamaya Girls’ College performed well in English language. Teachers’ perception on the influence of family background for learner performance in English language learning. Two focused group discussions consist of five teachers per each group were conducted. The teachers of Mahamaya Girls’ College revealed that the parents came to school to inquire the students’ progress. The mode of communication between parents and the teachers was English. According to the teachers, parent’s/guardian’s level of education influences the child’s performance in English language speaking in a positive manner. Teachers pointed out that there was a correlation between the parents’ level of education and the students’ performance in English language speaking.

### 4. Conclusion

Considering the findings of this study it reveals that the poor performance of English language can be attributed to the two variables—education and socio-economic level of the parents. The results revealed that the majority of students who had high socio-economic level performed well in their English speaking skill. Moreover, it could be concluded that the parents of Gothami Girls’ College

have to take extra efforts to improve English language speaking skills. Grade six children in the Gothami Girl's College might require additional help to perform better but the parents may not be in a proper socio-economic level. The teachers' inputs should be incorporated effectively in order to improve performance in English language speaking. The teachers insistently advised the parents to limit the use of L1 at home. It was evident that different parents who had outstanding performance in English, motivated their children and supported them in English language learning as the parents were more confident in providing assistance to their children. This is noted as an advantage for their children because they were from an English-speaking background. In contrary, the parents with low English language education background were unable to support their children in English language learning.

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