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THE ROLE OF REGIONAL AND SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUND IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY FROM KHOREZM REGION

Azadova Maftuna Bahodir qizi
Ingliz tili o'qituvchisi. Muhammad al-Xorazmiy nomidagi ixtisoslashtirilgan maktab, Urganch filiali
E-mail: azadovamaftuna3@gmail.com
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Annotation. This thesis looks at how a student's home region and family economic background affect speaking in English lessons. The study lasted one term and involved 8th-grade students at an IT-specialized school in Urgench, Khorezm region. Students from rural areas and from state schools spoke less in class than students from Urgench city and from private schools, even when their English level was similar. The findings suggest that silence in class is often about confidence and earlier access to good teaching, not about ability. The thesis ends with four simple ideas that teachers can use to make speaking activities fairer.

Keywords: EFL classroom; classroom participation; regional background; socioeconomic status; speaking confidence; Uzbekistan

1. Introduction

Two students with the same English level can behave very differently in the same classroom. One raises a hand at every question, while the other stays silent even when they know the answer. Language level alone does not explain this. Where a student grew up, what kind of school they attended before, and how much personal attention they received all play a role.

This thesis is based on a one-term classroom study of 8th-grade students at an IT-specialized school in Urgench. The students come from all over Khorezm region, both cities and villages, because they are admitted through a competitive entrance exam. This makes the class a good place to see how different social backgrounds appear in one group. The main question is simple: how do regional and socioeconomic background affect the way students take part in English lessons?

2. Main Part

Regional background

The first clear pattern was related to where students came from. Students from rural areas spoke less in oral activities than students from Urgench city. They often waited before answering, and they usually gave correct answers only when the teacher asked them directly. City students, on the other hand, volunteered often, even when they were not sure they were right.

This difference does not seem to come from weaker English. It is more likely linked to differences in dialect and vocabulary, and to lower confidence (Mesthrie, Swann, Deumert, & Leap, 2009). Bourdieu (1991) explains that people who speak a less prestigious way of speaking often feel that their words carry less value. Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986) also showed that anxiety in the foreign language classroom can make learners avoid speaking. So a quiet student is not always a weak student. Often the student is simply afraid of sounding wrong in front of others.

Socioeconomic background

The second pattern was connected to family income and earlier schooling. Students who had studied in private schools with small classes usually had stronger speaking skills when they arrived. Their teachers could give them personal attention. Students from state schools more often needed

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extra support, especially in speaking and pronunciation, which are often given less time in large, grammar-focused classes. Still, motivation was about the same in both groups. This shows that the gap comes from earlier access to resources, not from attitude or effort (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2014).

How the two factors work together

The two factors also add to each other. Rural students from low-income families had little contact with English outside the classroom and also had little personal instruction before. As a result, they felt the least confident compared with city students from wealthier families. This is important because it shows that we should not treat the two factors separately. Money-based help alone will not solve the confidence problem linked to dialect and identity. In the same way, focusing only on regional identity can hide a real gap in earlier teaching quality. Norton (2013) notes that a learner's willingness to speak depends on how safe and accepted they feel in the group, which fits what was seen in this class.

What teachers can do

Based on these findings, four practical steps are suggested. First, teachers can mix students from different regions and backgrounds in groups. This way, students learn from each other and the pressure of "catching up" does not fall on one person. Second, teachers can give sentence starters or ready answer patterns for speaking tasks. This kind of support is known as scaffolding (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976), and it makes speaking easier without pointing out weaker students in front of the class. Third, teachers should not correct regional pronunciation or word choice in a way that makes students feel ashamed. Clear communication matters more. Fourth, extra help sessions should be open to everyone as a normal part of the course, not as a special class for "weak" students.

3. Conclusion

Regional and economic differences among students are part of their social situation. They are not personal failures. When teachers see this, they can treat the variety in their classroom as a strength for language learning. These backgrounds do not change what students know, but they do change how safe students feel when they show it. If teachers ignore this, they may take silence for lack of ability.

This study covered one school, so more research is needed. Studies in several specialized schools, together with interviews with students, would show whether the same patterns exist elsewhere in Uzbekistan.

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