

The influence of Grade point Average and Socioeconomic Status on Learning Strategies

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Abstract: *A variety of different factors seem to have an influence on both second language learning difficulties as well as learning strategies. The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of different socio-economic status and grade point average on learning strategies and learning difficulties in second language acquisition (SLA) process. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was used to gather data, i.e. a survey method was applied. The research sample included 206 high school participants. The results showed that a socioeconomic status did not have a significant influence on the students' second language acquisition difficulties. However, the students' grade point average significantly affected second language acquisition difficulties and also language learning strategies. The results of this study may help instructors to tailor instructions and content to students' needs and their preferable styles of learning. Taking into consideration students' learning difficulties and learning strategies in designing and implementing classes may significantly improve teaching and learning outcomes.*

Keywords: *learning strategies, learning difficulties, socio-economic status, GPA level, second language acquisition.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

Many factors make English language instruction in a foreign language context such as the one in Bosnia and Herzegovina largely important. As the country strives to become a part of international bodies and an equal member in the international community, the significance of the mastery of the English language is increasingly emphasized (Bećirović, 2017). As Wu (2001) points out, the English knowledge has become highly important worldwide since it plays an important role in all fields of modern life, starting from business or science to communication between members of different cultures. With the growing number of educational institutions in the country that are oriented towards international education, it becomes natural that learners in Bosnia and Herzegovina are expected to reach an advanced level of proficiency in the English language by the time they finish their high schools. Thus, there is a need to investigate all possible factors influencing the process of reaching higher levels of proficiency, including socioeconomic status, learning strategies and average grade.

Ariani and Ghafournia (2016) suggest that in the process of language acquisition a socio economic status plays one of the major roles. However, the literature on the relationship between socioeconomic status and language learning does not include many empirical studies. On the other hand, there are numerous research papers that deal with the relationship between socioeconomic status and motivation for language learning presenting a bridge to the language learning process. Khansir et.al. (2016) investigated to what extent a higher socioeconomic status can influence motivation for language learning. After investigating 10 year old students they realized that “when parents were at the high level of the economical status, participants could have better situation in dealing with English learning” (2016, p. 749) mainly because students could be more reinforced by their parents’ financial support and the level of language success is increased as the family’s economical level is increased. In almost similar investigation conducted in Chile, Kormos and Kiddle (2013) found that “social class has an overall medium-size effect on motivational factors” (2013, p. 400).

Next, language learning strategies, i.e. tactics making a new cognitive demanding linguistic system simpler (Selinker, 1972), appear to be one of the psycholinguistic processes that shape interlanguage system. Likewise, Abhakorn (2008) deals with the learners’ strategies, also known as a cognitive model of learning, as one of the possible factors in the L2 acquisition process. Learning presents an active, ongoing, and dynamic process in which a learner “shapes” the information that he/she receives, connects it with the previous ones, retains the parts he/she thinks are important and uses it for further learning. Strategic knowledge refers to the information about what strategies are likely to be effective in achieving the learning goal (Flavell, 1979, p. 909). In other words,

strategic knowledge is general knowledge about the nature and utility of strategies (Wenden, 1987, p. 580). More precisely, it includes information about the strategies as such, why they are useful and specific knowledge about when and how to use them. The implications in learning English as a second language that may negatively influence students' achievement are situations when the teaching methods used do not match students' preferred learning styles, or the teaching content does not match students' levels.

Following, GPA (Grade Point Average) is a very important factor in the process of language acquisition. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines GPA as "the average obtained by dividing the total number of grade points earned by the total number of credits attempted" (Merriam-Webster.com, 2017). The relationship between GPA and other factors such as gender, age, and language proficiency has been investigated by Pan (2005). She explored the relationship between these factors and found a significant correlation between GPA and other three factors (2005, p. 109-121). She also investigated the connection between GPA and language learning strategies. The results in her study showed that "the higher the proficiency level, the greater the variety of learning strategies used" (Pan, 2005, p. 120).

The purpose of this study is to investigate how GPA and socioeconomic status influence second language learning difficulties and strategies among high school students. In order to investigate the impact of these factors the study employed quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. The identification of those factors and relationships enables easier understanding of the situations and steps that need to be taken into consideration in order to create a better SLA environment and improve the existing one.

2. THE PRESENT STUDY

Based on the aforementioned aim, the following research questions guided the study:

RQ 1 Is there any statistically significant difference in second language acquisition difficulties based on the students' socio-economic status?

RQ 2 Is there any statistically significant difference in second language acquisition difficulties based on the students' GPA?

RQ 3 Is there any statistically significant difference in language learning strategies based on the students' GPA?

The following null hypotheses were tested:

H01 There is no statistically significant difference in second language acquisition difficulties between the students with different socio-economic status,

H02 There is no statistically significant difference in second language acquisition difficulties between the students with different GPA and

H03 There is no statistically significant difference in language learning strategies based on the students' GPA.

2.1. PARTICIPANTS

The research sample consisted of 206 high school student. The participants were selected from all four high school grades. The research sample includes 125 males (60.7 %) and 81 females (39.3%). All participants were from Bosnia and Herzegovina. A detailed summary of the sample according to socio-economic status and GPA level is presented in the table below.

Table 1 Descriptive analysis of the participants

		N	Percentage
Socio-economic status	Low	15	1.5
	Middle	124	61.7
	High	67	36.9
GPA groups	2.5-2.9	10	4.9
	3.0-3.4	10	4.9
	3.5-3.9	31	15.0
	4.0-4.4	39	18.9
	4.5-5.0	116	56.3

2.2. INSTRUMENTS AND PROCEDURE

The instrument used for data collection was built on Rebecca Oxford's Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (Oxford, 1990) and Dörnyei's Motivation questionnaire (You & Dörnyei, 2016). The parts from the aforementioned instruments were utilized and adapted for this research. The questionnaire consisted of 40 statements and a 5-point Likert scale was used. The students could choose one out of five statements (strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree and strongly disagree). The questionnaire is composed of the following subscales: second language impact on mother tongue ($\alpha = 0.51$), motivation difficulties for acquiring second language ($\alpha = 0.50$), negative impact of school environment and atmosphere ($\alpha = 0.97$), target language difficulties ($\alpha = 0.86$), passive learning strategies ($\alpha = 0.64$), individual strategies ($\alpha = 0.65$), and language skills strategies ($\alpha = 0.50$). The questionnaire containing 40 items was distributed to the high school students in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and they needed around 20 minutes to fill it out.

In order to minimize the possibility of false responses the students were informed that the questionnaire was completely anonymous and would not have any effect on their grades or school status. They were also told that the results would be used just for the purpose of this study.

2.3. DATA ANALYSIS

The collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v. 23). Following the guidelines for the questionnaire analysis, frequencies and means were computed to ascertain the types and frequencies of the implications and language learning strategies expressed by the participants. Firstly, descriptive analysis including mean, standard deviation (SD) and frequencies was employed. A one way ANOVA was used to show the differences between the study groups.

3. RESULTS

The first research question focused on the differences of second language acquisition difficulties between three different levels of socioeconomic status, namely low, medium, and high.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of differences based on socio-economic status

Socio-economic status	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low	15	3.42	.56
Middle	124	3.25	.47
High	67	3.27	.49
Total	206	3.27	.48

A one-way ANOVA between subjects was conducted to compare second language acquisition difficulties among students with different socio-economic status. The results showed that there was an insignificant difference $F(2,203) = 1.18, p = .450, \eta^2 = .008$. The group of students of low socio-economic status had the highest mean ($M = 3.42, SD = 0.14$) and the lowest mean was achieved by the group of middle socioeconomic status ($M = 3.27, SD = 0.47$) Therefore, the results showed that the students' socio-economic status did not have a significant effect on second language acquisition difficulties and the first null hypothesis was supported. However, a one-way ANOVA between subjects showed that socio-economic status had a significant influence on the difficulties in terms of second language impact on mother tongue $F(2,203) = 3.86, p = .023, \eta^2 = .037$, and on motivation difficulties for acquiring second language $F(2,203) = 4.84, p = .009, \eta^2 = .046$, and did not significantly affect the school environment and atmosphere $F(2,203) = 0.556, p = .574, \eta^2 = .005$ and target language difficulties $F(2,203) = 0.522, p = .594, \eta^2 = .005$.

The second research question referred to the differences in second language acquisition difficulties among five different GPA groups of students.

Table 3 Descriptive statistics of differences based on GPA

GPA	N	Mean	Std. deviation
4.5-5	116	3.42	.48
4-4.5	39	3.11	.41
3.5-4	31	3.10	.51
3-3.5	10	2.98	.21
2.5-3	10	3.05	.37
Total	206	3.27	.48

A one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare second language acquisition difficulties among students with different GPA levels. There was a significant difference at $p < .05$ between the students of different GPA levels $F(4,20) = 6.65, p < .001, \eta^2 = .117$. The students with the highest GPA (4.5-5.0) reported the most difficulties $M = 3.42$ ($SD = 0.48$), while students with GPA 3.0-3.5 reported the least difficulties $M = 2.98$ ($SD = 0.21$). Thus, GPA proved to have a significant impact on second language acquisition difficulties and the second null hypothesis was refuted. Post hoc Tukey HSD (Table 4) showed that the GPA group 4.5-5.0 was statistically significantly different from all other GPA groups except the group 2.5-3.0. The differences between the 2.5-3.0 group and all other groups were insignificant.

Table 4 Analysis of variances between different GPA scores

Multiple Comparisons						
Dependent Variable: Overall Implications						
(I) GPA	(J) GPA	Mean Difference (I-J)	Tukey HSD		95% Confidence Interval	
			Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
4.5-5	4.0-4.5	.30*	.08	.00	.07	.54
	3.5-4.0	.31*	.09	.00	.06	.57
	3.0-3.5	.43*	.15	.04	.01	.84
	2.5-3.0	.36	.15	.12	-.05	.78
4-4.5	4.5-5.0	-.30*	.08	.00	-.54	-.07
	3.5-4.0	.01	.11	1.00	-.29	.31
	3-3.5	.12	.16	.94	-.32	.57
	2.5-3.0	.05	.16	.99	-.39	.50
3.5-4	4.5-5.0	-.31*	.09	.00	-.57	-.06
	4.0-4.5	-.01	.11	1.00	-.31	.29
	3.0-3.5	.11	.16	.96	-.34	.57

	2.5-3.0	.04	.16	.99	-.41	.50
3-3.5	4.5-5.0	-.43*	.15	.04	-.84	-.01
	4.0-4.5	-.12	.16	.94	-.57	.32
	3.5-4.0	-.11	.16	.96	-.57	.34
2.5-3	2.5-3.0	-.06	.20	.99	-.63	.50
	4.5-5.0	-.36	.15	.12	-.78	.05
	4-4.5.0	-.05	.16	.99	-.50	.39
	3.5-4.0	-.04	.16	.99	-.50	.41
	3.0-3.5	.06	.20	.99	-.50	.63

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

As for the subscales of second language difficulties, GPA had a significant influence only on target language difficulties $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .139$ and did not have a significant influence on second language impact on mother tongue $p = .147$, $\eta^2 = .033$, on motivation difficulties for acquiring second language $p = .124$, $\eta^2 = .035$, school environment and atmosphere $p = .413$, $\eta^2 = .019$.

The third research question was related to the differences in language learning strategies between five different GPA groups. In order to answer this question, a one-way between subjects ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that in terms of overall usage of language learning strategies there was a significant difference $F(4,201) = 2.87$, $p < .024$, $\eta^2 = .054$. The group of students with GPA 4.0-4.5 reported the highest mean $M = 2.73$ ($SD = 0.37$), while students with GPA 4.5-5.0 reported the lowest mean $M = 2.51$ ($SD = 0.41$). GPA also had a significant influence on passive learning strategy $F(4,201) = 2.76$, $p = .029$, $\eta^2 = .052$. where the group 4.0-4.5 reported the highest mean $M = 2.63$ ($SD = 0.68$), and the group 4.5-5.0 reported the lowest mean $M = 2.24$ ($SD = 0.73$). GPA did not have a significant influence on individual learning strategies and on the language skills strategies. Regarding the subscale of individual learning strategies the highest mean was again reported by the group with GPA 4.0-4.5 $M = 3.13$ ($SD = 0.74$), and the lowest by the group with GPA 2.5-3.0 $M = 2.73$ ($SD = 0.43$). As for the language skills strategies the group with GPA 2.5-3.0 reported the highest mean $M = 2.77$ ($SD = 0.51$), while the lowest mean was reported by the group with GPA 4.5-5.0 $M = 2.35$ ($SD = 0.59$).

Table 5 Descriptive results of learning strategies

GPA groups		Report			
		Overall Lang. learning strategies	Passive learning strategies	Individual Strategies	Language Skills Strategies
4.5-5	Mean	2.51	2.24	3.06	2.35
	Std. Dev.	0.41	0.73	0.64	0.59
4-4.5	Mean	2.73	2.63	3.13	2.55

	Std. Dev.	0.37	0.68	0.74	0.60
3.5-4	Mean	2.62	2.44	2.97	2.55
	Std. Dev.	0.33	0.58	0.85	0.46
3-3.5	Mean	2.70	2.60	3.03	2.50
	Std. Dev.	0.42	0.64	0.65	0.86
2.5-3	Mean	2.67	2.54	2.73	2.77
	Std. Dev.	0.33	0.63	0.43	0.51
Total	Mean	2.58	2.38	3.04	2.44
	Std. Dev.	0.39	0.71	0.69	0.60

4. CONCLUSION

We anticipated that there is no statistically significant difference in L2 difficulties between students belonging to three major socio-economic groups, or that this socio-economic status does not affect the language acquisition process. The results showed that this hypothesis was supported. There can be a number of reasons for such results, but we believe that they might be mainly attributed to the fact that the most participants study at a private school with strict procedures regarding paying and students are forced and inspired by their families or tutors to struggle and force for the success regardless of their socio-economic status. Moreover, the school administration struggles to treat all students equally which is more probably recognized by the students. These results are even more indicative when we compare them with our previous research on related topic. Delić, Bećirović and Brdarević-Čeljo (2018) investigated gender differences in second language acquisition difficulties and found out significant differences. This is without doubt interesting for this research mainly because Bosnian cultural identity, according to Bećirović (2012), is not gender-biased, and, on the other hand, socio-economic status is an extremely important variable in this community in general (Foco, 2002).

By the second null hypothesis we supposed that there was no statistically significant difference in second language acquisition difficulties between students with different GPA scores. We were interested in the students' grade-point average (GPA) because we believe GPA is important for many reasons. GPA shows how hard-working a student is, how much he or she knows, and what his or her strengths and weaknesses are. Students may find that improving their study skills can have a positive effect on their overall academic performance. The findings indicated the existence of a significant difference based on GPA groups and the null hypothesis was rejected. The research of Rizvić and Bećirović (2017) also showed that GPA had a significant influence on willingness to communicate in English as a foreign language in the Bosnian-Herzegovinian EFL context. Besides the refutation of the null hypothesis, we were also surprised by the group that had the highest mean. Among five different groups based on GPA the highest mean had the group 4.5-5.0, that is the students

with best grades and achievements. Here we also anticipated that lower achievement groups would have the highest mean but that was not the case. The results showed that the group with the lowest mean is the GPA group 3.0-3.5 group. What is indicative here is that the students from the group that had the highest mean, i.e. the group 4.5-5.0, comprised more than half of the total number of sampled students, exactly 56.8 %. This means that more than half of the students had some implications in terms of some of the categories that had been examined.

By the third hypothesis we predicted that there was no statistically significant difference in language learning strategies based on the students' GPA. According to the results, GPA had a significant influence on learning strategies. However, Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo and Dubravac (2018) found that GPA had an insignificant influence on reading strategies and Bećirović, Brdarević-Čeljo, and Sinanović (2017) found that grade level and gender had a significant influence on metacognitive reading strategies. The research conducted by middle school participants showed that grade level and social context had a significant effect on learning strategies while gender did not (Brdarević-Čeljo & Asotić, 2017).

Many researchers suggest that educators need to take into consideration the needs and background of each learner in order to be able to employ methodologies that guide students in using strategies which enhance their L2 learning process (Montano, 2017). Learning strategies are not always feasible to promote L2 proficiency in advance students; these can be rather used by students with a lower level of language proficiency (Oxford, 2003). As we discussed in the review of literature, and as the definitions of individual strategies state, each student adopts and creates his/her specific way of learning. In the case of this research we did not have any significant correlations between individual strategies. There can be a possibility that our sample students did not actually have much differentiated strategies or that, due to experience of having much time spent together, they adopted similar learning strategies which did not differ significantly. Each student has a certain degree in which he or she organizes and follows his own way of learning. As presented in Table 5 individual strategies had the highest mean ($M = 3.04$) which indicates that those strategies that each individual adopts for him/herself are mainly used to overcome implications in learning.

It is helpful for each individual to reveal which strategies work best for them so the teacher or the facilitator can organize a lesson with the most dominant strategies. There are supported arguments that some strategies work better than others for learners but there can always be exceptions that teachers need to be aware of. To do this all must be included, that is students, teachers, and educational institutions. Educators should explain useful learning strategies to students, raise their awareness of the importance of effective strategy usage,

and what is the most important, the purpose of an appropriate strategy for them. What can also be implemented is that teachers first identify already used strategies and those that can be added then try to incorporate them in the learning process later. In that way, a learner with strategy-adopted way of learning would become an autonomous and independent learner.

Lecturers should emphasize skills such as analyzing and evaluating content, using typographical features, summarizing text and using reference materials. Typically, lecturers should analyze the strategies they teach, and find out in which contexts these strategies should be applied. They should also provide students with opportunities to practice these strategies. According to Mokhtari and Sheorey (2002), teachers and mentors can use a combination of direct and indirect strategy training.

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