

# Home Environment and Oral Competence in English: A Study of Secondary Level Students of Mau District



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## Abstract

Taking into account the most neglected and less focused area of English language teaching and learning, this descriptive survey was conducted in Mau district of Eastern Uttar Pradesh, with the objectives to assess the oral competence of secondary level students, to compare the oral competence of rural and urban school students, and to study the oral competence with respect to different dimensions of home environment of the students. For attaining the objectives, the sample of 250 students from different Government schools of Mau district was selected by using systematic random sampling technique. In order to collect and analyze the required data, Test of Oral Competence, Home Environment Scale and Rubrics for Assessing Oral Competence were developed and administered by the researcher. The data were analyzed qualitatively by using Percentage and Mean Scores. The results revealed that the students had low level of oral competence including all its dimensions such as vocabulary, accuracy and appropriacy, pronunciation and organization. It was found that urban school students were better than their rural counterparts. It was also disclosed that oral competence of students was influenced by their home environment and its different dimensions.

**Keywords:** English, Oral Competence, Locality, Home Environment.

## Introduction

“Language is a great force of socialization probably the greatest that exists.”

**-Sapir (1921)**

Language is a unique feature of human beings which is being used for expression of thoughts, feelings and emotions since times immemorial which can be called as an essential prerequisite for human growth and development. Popularity of a language depends upon its utility and usage in daily life. English has acquired an international dimension by becoming the language of the world trade, science, technology, engineering and a host of other fields. English or any other language is not a content-based subject, but a skill-oriented subject where mastery of the content is not required but practices involving interactive usage of language. A person learns mother tongue not after reading a book, but through repeated practice and exposure. It is necessary to develop the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing. Later on, the learners will develop the competence in using the language for effective communication. Objectives of English language teaching range from the development of language skills to enrichment of competence and proficiency in language, enrichment of vocabulary, development of their interest and aesthetic sense.

Among four skills, speaking skill is the productive skill which is less focused and most neglected skill in school education. But importance of oral skills cannot be denied as it becomes the basis of effective communication. In order to be competent communicator, one has to develop oral competence which entails mastery of vocabulary, sentence structure, grammar and reproduction of sounds, pronunciation of words, intonation, rhythm, stress and elliptical usage; it calls above all for fluency.

Two distinct aspects of speech ability are a meaningful expression through range of vocabulary and manner of utterance including fluency, correctness of grammar and sounds. On the basis of specific components

of speaking skill, major areas of errors can be stated as that of pronunciation (omission, interchanges of letters, substitution of letters, and omission of consonants), intonation, stress, fluency, coherence or organization and vocabulary. A child must be given proper environment and exposure to acquire the skills with minimum errors.

### **English Language Competence and Home Environment**

In general, competence is a dimension of behaviour which is related to good performance in one's work. It encompasses knowledge, skill and ability possessed by a person. Language competence adds the ability and skill in performing language related tasks. Competence in language implies the knowledge of the rules of grammar and the ability to perform English language tasks related to the language skills like listening, speaking, reading and writing and their sub-areas also with minimum level of errors. After acquiring these language skills, learners gain the practical ability to perform certain tasks related to these skills. All English language skills are enriched if suitable and encouraging atmosphere is available at home. It includes exposure in the target language, materials, parent-child relationship, and socio-psychological environment, etcetera.

Home environment includes educational and economic background, physical, psychological and social environment with parental attitude, involvement, encouragement, motivation, understanding, acceptance, cohesion, conflict, moral-religious emphasis, expressiveness, independence, control, support, organization etcetera. The environment varies from place to place and culture to culture. In urban parts of India, parents at home provide suitable and conducive learning environment to their wards but the picture becomes worse when the situation of rural parts is discussed. There are many small districts in almost every state of India which lack proper exposure and opportunities for creating supportive and suitable environment especially in the case of English language learning which affect their oral language competence. Mau district is situated in the Eastern Uttar Pradesh which is not so developed as compared to its Western counterpart. Government schools are not so good in providing the adequate facilities. These schools do not have competent teachers and lack desirable exposure and opportunities. That might be the reason of rising enrolment in private schools. In Uttar Pradesh, enrolment in private school was 32.2 percent in 2006 which has increased to 52.8 percent in 2014 (ASER Centre, 2014). Apart from schools, children do not get exposure and opportunities at home too because most of these children are first generation learners and their parents involve them in small manual works to earn money which make them absent from schools. According to ASER Report (2014), in primary schools of Uttar Pradesh, with children of 6-14 year, only 50 to 59 percent children were attending the school. This condition adversely affects the overall achievement and academic performance of students especially of Government schools.

### **Review of Literature**

The child spends most of his/her time at home or in schools so major portion of learning is affected by the atmosphere being provided at both the places. There is much theoretical and empirical work that suggests that home environment plays an important role in learning. It is being acknowledged in all countries that whatever be the structure of schools and the facilities rendered by the government, the family is to play the most crucial role in the development of the child. In her article, Sharma (2011) described home environment as all sorts of moral and ethical values and emotional, social and intellectual climate set up by the family members to contribute to the wholesome development of an individual.

Tizard and Hughes (1984) found home as a powerful learning environment for a child with their presentation of concepts such as the encouragement of incidental learning as a natural reaction to their environment, individual attention from adults and the close relationship between parent and child as an important factor in learning experiences. In their study, Sharma and Yadav (2013) found that parent's involvement in language teaching helps them learn language skills. Students' family background and home environment affect their performance in school.

According to Murali (2009), while producing something in school "students are mentally discouraged due to the family conditions. Family background and environment play vital role in success of learning process".

Livingston (2012) in an article put that the students are "discouraged from speaking English because of their rural social background".

Bahrani and Soltani (2012) stated that teachers and students in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom gave emphasis on grammar and vocabulary but not on the skills for using them appropriately. They further said that lack of opportunities for practicing the target language discouraged them for learning second language.

Rabbani (1984) examined the Psycholinguistic problems of Oriya Speakers in English with the objective to do an error analysis of English of the Oriya speaking pupils studying in Oriya medium schools as well as in English medium schools. The study revealed that the Oriya speakers made errors in production of several English words, sounds and features of spoken language like intonation, stress and use of long vowels and central vowels. The researcher attributed the causes of errors to interference or influence of Mother Tongue.

Puri (1984) investigated the influence of environment as a factor to promote academic achievement of students. The main objectives of the study were to examine the pattern of general academic achievement in English language of higher secondary students and to study the main effects of variables of environmental facilities on general academic achievement and achievement in English language. The study concluded that the effect of environment on both general academic achievement and achievement in English was significant.

A study on the effect of deprivation on language ability of children studying in Municipal Corporation Schools was conducted by Deshpande (1985) with the objective to study the effect of socio cultural, socio economic and experimental deprivation on the language ability of the children. The major findings of the study showed that deprived children were seriously found incompetent in aspects of language ability. The study showed that language ability of children was more seriously affected by experimental deprivation than their socio cultural and socio economic deprivation.

Gardener (1985) worked on social psychology and second language learning and the role of attitude and motivation in it. He questioned whether sociable individuals were better at learning second languages than those who were introvert and shy by nature. He concluded that language learning is a social psychological phenomenon and it is important to consider carefully the conditions under which it takes place. He said that considerable attention must be directed towards the contexts in which language proficiency is developed. It describes about the importance of language exposure in the environment.

Thejovathi (1995) studied the environmental factors affecting the acquisition of English language skills at high school level in Guntur district, Andhra Pradesh. The major objective of the study was to find out relationship between linguistic, home, social and cultural environment and acquisition of comprehension skills in English. The study revealed that there existed positive relationship between above mentioned variables and comprehension skill in English. Spurr (2001) supported the idea of developing and nurturing the language skills at home as well as at school. It was recommended that parents can help in nurturing the language skills by providing input rich environment at home like their emotional support, personal involvement and encouragement to learn language.

Pravinchandra (2002) made an attempt to study the oral expression of Gujarati learners of English with objectives to identify errors in terms of deviance, to study efforts of teachers to improve oral expression, to analyse and find out the sources of errors and finally to suggest remedial measures to improve oral expression of students. The findings of the study showed that highest rate of deviance was found in pronunciation of vowel sounds followed by pronunciation of consonant sounds and unclear pronunciation. Teachers' effort was found unsatisfactory as no teacher worked on bringing improvement in oral expression of students. The study suggested that for better oral expression, consonant sounds must be practised well. He also suggested that oral drills and exercises could be used to improve learners' pronunciation.

In their book 'Essential Speaking Skills', Baker and Westrup (2003) stated that students' speaking skill or communication skill is affected by their personal and cultural differences. Every culture uses different levels of language. Their social status, sex, age and level of education may affect the language especially specific words and levels of

formality they use. According to them, "In some culture, students are not expected to speak until they are asked to do so by the teacher. This makes it more difficult for students to practise conversation in the classroom." They were of the view that personal nature and characteristics of an individual put an impact on language learning.

Hasan (2004) found the same result in his study where schools' total negligence of speaking and listening skill was responsible for poor communication skill of students.

Gakhar and Bawa (2006) studied the effect of intelligence, socio-economic status, domicile and type of school on the achievement of students in English grammar. The study found that students belonging to high socio economic group made less number of errors in English grammar and secured high scores on the achievement test. Students from urban areas and private schools performed better in English achievement test. The students with high intelligence performed better than the students with low intelligence. More Individual attention, regularity in assigning and checking home-work in Private schools were given as reasons for better performance of the Private school students.

Guofong (2007) studied home environment and English as a second language acquisition. He emphasised on social theory of family capital given by Coleman (1988) which stated that family environment included three distinct forms of capital which were physical or financial capital (socio-economic standing), human capital (individual's level of educational attainment) and social capital (network of social relationships). He conducted an ethnographic study in order to explore in depth the home environment of four Chinese immigrant families in a university town in Western Canada. The study analysed the relationships between parental human capital and levels of parental involvement, and between family social capital and access to familial and community resources. The study showed that physical capital was not the crucial factor to influence language learning but the choices of investment could influence the acquisition of second language. Under the second category, it was found that human capital like parents' educational experiences were reflected in their intense involvement in their children's English language learning at home. It was further added that 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, verbal encouragement or interaction regarding learning English. Under the last category, it was found that if parental human capital was not complemented by social capital, it became irrelevant to the child's educational growth. The social capital generated through the families' social interactions and relationships within the families and/or with the communities was directly linked with the children's access to second language learning. The findings supported the theory of Coleman (1988) that not all investment of family capital was beneficial to children's education.

David (2008) investigated the socio-cultural, psychological and economic factors that contributed to students' academic achievement in English language in a district of Kenya. The researcher selected 150 secondary level students and 10 teachers of English as sample for collecting data. The results showed that in Kerio Valley negative cultural attitude and inadequate resources were major causes of poor achievement in English language. Cultural practices like early marriages and cattle rustling contributed significantly to poor level of achievement. Ee Chop Ler (2010) investigated the rural cultural problems and its effect on learning English language. The findings of the study revealed that peer pressure, motivation, attitude towards English, teaching methodology and school culture were the major reasons for poor English learning. The study concluded that cultural factors adversely affected English language proficiency of rural students.

Rathod (2012) wrote a paper on social factors in second language acquisition. He said that social contexts influence the second language proficiency indirectly mediated by various variables including attitude towards target language and opportunities to practice that language in real life situations. Later in his work, he gave the list of relevant factors as prior knowledge of second language, language attitude, parent support and interest in children's progress, intrinsic motivation, quality of classroom interaction, peer group and learners' diverse needs and goals. All these variables affect second language learning in various direct and/or indirect ways.

Singh (2015) investigated the problems of teaching English in rural and semi-urban areas. She quoted Cope et al. (2014) that rural students particularly suffer from experiential deficiencies which gradually results in involvement gap which is a gap between what a rural student perceives as his/her life experiences and what is taught in the classrooms. She further described the hurdles in teaching and learning English to the first generation learners as mother tongue interference, different socio-cultural milieu, and psychological inhibition in speaking English, poor infrastructure and facilities provided by schools, lack of teaching aids etcetera. She also quoted Sharma (1999) that more emphasis on conceptual content as compared to stylistic content is another reason for students' poor command over English. She suggested solutions for these problems as developing interest of students, using positive remarks, giving them more time to answer, giving primacy to oral work in the classroom etcetera.

#### **Significance of the Study**

The grip of English language in the world has become stronger with modernization and globalization of education and technology. It should be developed because all medical, technological and even agricultural education is imparted mainly through English. That is the reason of its being called as an academic language and a language of opportunities. This importance of English cannot be neglected in the present time and hence, this study on assessment of oral competence in English is most relevant in the

present context. Though it is a world language, its condition in Government schools is deplorable. It is being neglected by teachers, parents as well as children. The researcher was compelled by these conditions to think as to how the situation could be made better. For this, it is mandatory to know the current status of oral competence in English in Government schools along with the probable factors which influence it directly or indirectly.

The studies of Dasgupta (1975) and Mohanty & Dash (1997) show clearly that Socio-Economic status of child affects his/her written competence. Not only these factors but one research of Desai (1986) has given the result that main cause of errors is weak teaching or total neglect of teaching in some schools by teachers. Some researches as Darus & Subramanium (2009) and Narayanan et al (2008) show that language errors are more if the child is from non-English background or it is his/her second language. After reviewing relevant researches, the researcher found that none of the researches are done in rural area of Mau District where students are deprived of better exposure to and opportunities for academic success. These areas need more researches to better understand their real problems and to bring appropriate solutions for improvement.

If the child gets proper environment in school, he/she is deprived of that at home because of the incompetence of parents and lack of their direct involvement (Sharma & Yadav, 2013). Their homes do not provide adequate exposure and stimulating conditions for better learning. But the question arises like what are the main areas which affect development and learning of English language. Many studies have come to the conclusion that socio-economic status of child affects their academic achievement including English language. But very few of them have given different dimensions of sociological and psychological environment which are responsible for poor performance in English language classroom. It was considered worthwhile to assess oral competence in English among secondary level students of Mau district and to know what basic areas of errors in spoken English are prevalent in that particular region.

#### **Objectives of the Study**

The objectives of the study were:

1. To assess the oral competence of secondary level students;
2. To compare the oral competence of rural and urban school students; and
3. To study the oral competence with respect to different dimensions of home environment of the students.

#### **Operational Definitions of the Terms Used:**

1. Oral Competence in English: It refers to the ability to speak in English with proper use of vocabulary, correct pronunciation, coherence, accuracy and appropriacy as assessed on a rubric developed by the researcher.
2. Home Environment: It refers to the psycho-social climate of home as assessed by Home Environment Scale developed by the researcher.

**Methodology**

The study adopted the descriptive survey method. All secondary school students of Mau district, Uttar Pradesh, studying in class IX UP Board Government schools constituted the target population. Out them, 250 students were taken as sample of the study. Schools were selected randomly by lottery method and from each school; students were selected using systematic random sampling technique. For the present study, required data were collected by using following tools which were constructed by the investigator herself:

**Test of Oral Competence**

A test was constructed by researcher with series of pictures which were used for oral presentation. In order to analyze it objectively, Rubric (Scoring Guide) was prepared with different dimensions of oral work such as vocabulary, accuracy and appropriacy, pronunciation and organization of ideas.

**Home Environment Scale**

A scale was prepared by the researcher to collect data regarding socio-psychological environment of home as perceived by students. It consisted of ten dimensions such as Freedom of Expression, Social Isolation, Reward and Punishment, Active Recreational Orientation, Cognitive and Emotional Support, Parental Attitude, Parental Involvement and Encouragement, Second Language Exposure, Stimulation and Opportunities, Motivation to Learn Second Language and Access to Modern Amenities

**Data Analysis**

For analysis of oral competence, the investigator has constructed Rubric. The collected data were analyzed qualitatively using Percentage and Mean Score. The analysis was done with the help of MS Office Excel 2007.

**Result and Discussion****Objective 1**

To assess oral competence of secondary level students

**Table 1:****Percentage of Students Having Different Levels of Oral Competence**

Levels of Oral Competence Dimensions	Low Level		Average Level		High Level	
	N*	%**	N	%	N	%
Vocabulary	119	47.6%	94	37.6%	37	14.8%
Accuracy and Appropriacy	118	47.2%	113	45.2%	19	7.6%
Pronunciation	135	54%	95	38%	20	8%
Organization	169	67.6%	77	30.8%	4	1.6%
Overall	125	50%	94	37.6%	41	16.4%

\*Number of Students

\*\*Percentage of Students

On the basis of the data collected from Test of Oral Competence and its analysis by using Rubrics for assessing Oral Competence as reflected in the table given above, it was found that out of 250 students, 125 students had low level of oral competence which was 50 per cent of the total sample. It was found that students' overall oral competence was of low level. The same table also shows the level of different dimensions of oral competence. The first dimension of oral competence was vocabulary. The data showed that students did not have appropriate and accurate stock of vocabulary for their oral work. Their vocabulary was weak that included repetition of words only. The second dimension of oral competence was accuracy and appropriacy. The data clearly showed that students did not have knowledge about the practical usage of grammar in oral work and their presented oral work lacked appropriacy in the given context. In pronunciation, result showed that 54 per cent students had low level of pronunciation in their oral work which was highest in percentage. The reason for poor pronunciation might be lack of practice in speaking English and negligence of this skill in classroom activities. The results regarding organization showed that students were poor in organizing their oral work. The reason might be lack of oral practices in classroom and at home. The observation of researcher showed that students' unfamiliarity and discomfort in the use of English language hindered

their oral performance. There might be lack of understanding and knowledge of English sounds and its usage.

**Objective 2**

To compare the oral competence of rural and urban school students.

The comparative analysis of data was also done with respect to the locality by calculating mean scores of rural and urban school students. The comparative analysis is shown in table:

**Table 2: Mean Scores of Rural and Urban School Students' Oral Competence**

Locality of School	Rural	Urban
Number of Students	117	133
Overall Oral Competence	23.05	24.26
Vocabulary	6.02	6.35
Accuracy and Appropriacy	5.97	6.03
Pronunciation	4.51	4.88
Organization	6.38	7.01

The locality of school had affected their oral competence significantly with difference of 1.21 mean score which showed that urban school students were better than rural school students. In every dimension of oral competence, urban school students were better than rural school students. The reason might be the different exposure and environment students get from different locality.

**Objective 3**

To study the oral competence of students with respect to their Home Environment.

Oral competence of students was studied in the light of their home environment which consisted of ten (10) dimensions. The data obtained is given in the following table:

Table 3: Mean Scores of Oral Competence with Respect to Different Dimensions of Home Environment

Dimensions of Home Environment	Levels	Mean Score (Overall)	Mean Score (Vocabulary)	Mean Score (Accuracy and Appropriacy)	Mean Score (Pronunciation)	Mean Score (Organization)
Freedom of Expression	Low	26.71	6.20	5.73	4.47	6.63
	Average	28.15	6.27	5.96	4.68	6.71
	High	29.70	6.53	6.40	5.02	6.79
Social Isolation	Low	27.65	6.11	5.98	4.62	6.59
	Average	28.17	6.33	6.02	4.68	6.65
	High	27.65	5.88	5.83	4.70	6.87
Reward and Punishment	Low	26.58	5.90	5.81	4.46	6.46
	Average	28.41	6.23	6	4.76	6.76
	High	28.99	6.47	6.10	4.79	6.82
Active Recreational Orientation	Low	26.65	5.82	5.79	4.6	6.43
	Average	28.64	6.37	5.98	4.59	6.89
	High	29.3	6.58	6.3	5.04	6.78
Cognitive and Emotional Support	Low	26.33	5.86	5.62	4.40	6.31
	Average	28.14	6.25	5.98	4.66	6.76
	High	30.54	6.62	6.64	5.28	7.15
Parental Attitude	Low	25.76	5.66	5.66	4.27	6.28
	Average	27.63	6.16	5.69	4.60	6.66
	High	30.98	6.81	6.83	5.27	7.16
Parental Involvement and Encouragement	Low	26.78	6.03	5.64	4.38	6.69
	Average	28.35	6.24	6.06	4.76	6.63
	High	28.79	6.30	6.25	4.93	6.77
Second Language Exposure, Stimulation and Opportunities	Low	26.86	5.83	5.76	4.55	6.43
	Average	28.10	6.32	5.98	4.73	6.74
	High	29.87	6.67	6.37	4.85	7.09
Motivation to Learn Second Language	Low	27.05	5.86	5.89	4.45	6.64
	Average	27.86	6.24	5.88	4.77	6.54
	High	29.16	6.50	6.17	4.83	6.93
Access to Modern Amenities	Low	26.54	5.89	5.71	4.60	6.13
	Average	27.99	6.14	5.98	4.63	6.81
	High	29.15	6.51	6.13	4.87	6.97

The data in table 3 shows that students' oral competence was affected by freedom of expression provided by family members. The mean scores of each group were different from one another. Where low freedom of expression were provided, students had low level of overall oral competence, vocabulary, accuracy and appropriacy, pronunciation and organization which were increasing with increasing levels of freedom of expression.

It also showed that if families isolate their children and do not have interaction with them, it will affect their oral competence. It is clear that high and low levels of social isolation affected oral competence negatively and its average level affected oral competence positively. Rewards and punishment are always associated with motivation of the learner and considered effective in bringing positive changes in the behaviour of the learners. It is clearly depicted that if parents and other family members provide high level

of reward and low level of punishment, their children were able to produce English language in proper oral form. Students' overall oral competence, vocabulary, accuracy and appropriacy, pronunciation and organization were affected by the levels of reward and punishment given by parents and others at home. It is disclosed that in the different dimension of oral competence students' mean scores were increasing with increasing levels of active recreational orientation provided at home. It is indicated that there were differences of mean scores among different groups of students with respect to provision of cognitive and emotional support at home and their parents' attitude. Overall oral competence along with its all dimensions was affected by the levels of cognitive and emotional support and parental attitude provided at home. It shows that parents' positive attitude towards English language and education put an impact on development of oral expression of their children.

It was revealed that with increasing level of parental involvement and encouragement, students' oral competence also got affected positively and it was found that second language exposure, stimulation and opportunities at home had influences on the development of oral competence of the children. It is being indicated that the parents' motivation for their child to learn second language had significant impact on the oral competence of the child in that language. It can be inferred from the data that students can perform better in speaking skill if they are getting proper motivation to learn English language from parents and family members.

The data also indicated that there were differences in the mean scores of students belonging to different levels of home environment where access to modern amenities was being provided. This means that the high, average and low level of accessibility to modern amenities to students were different from one another in relation to their overall oral competence and other related dimensions.

### Conclusion

From analysis of the study, it can be concluded that majority of the students have low level of oral competence in English. It was also found that there are differences in oral competence of English among students studying in schools situated in rural and urban localities. Locality of school plays an important role in enhancing or hindering the development of oral competence among students. In addition to that, this study also concluded that oral competence got influenced by the environment of home. Therefore, it can be said that talent and creativity in children will flourish only if they get stimulating and supportive environment in surroundings of their family. The psychological and sociological factors like motivation, attitude, involvement, encouragement, cognitive and emotional support, reward and punishment, second language exposure and opportunities, access to modern amenities, etcetera play vital role for the development of human beings and success thereof. It was revealed through the study that students with high levels of positive parental attitude, motivation, acceptance, involvement, cognitive and emotional support showed

better levels of oral competence in English than low and average levels of the same dimensions.

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