

SOCIO-CULTURAL INFLUENCES ON ENGLISH WRITING PROFICIENCY AMONG INDIGENOUS SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN UDAYAPUR (PARENTAL EDUCATION, INDIGENOUS IDENTITY)

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the socio-cultural influences on English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students in Udayapur, Nepal. Drawing on sociocultural theory, the research examines how parental education, indigenous identity, socioeconomic status, language background, and community expectations shape students' writing development. A mixed-methods design was employed, combining writing assessments, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers from selected community schools. The findings reveal that students from families with limited formal education and minimal exposure to English outside school demonstrate weaker vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, and writing confidence. The study also shows that the dominance of indigenous mother tongues and the cultural mismatch between English curriculum content and students' lived experiences reduce motivation and engagement in writing tasks. Conversely, supportive home literacy practices and culturally responsive pedagogy positively influence writing outcomes. The study highlights the need for inclusive, context-sensitive teaching approaches to enhance English writing proficiency among indigenous learners.

Keywords: *English writing proficiency, socio-cultural factors, indigenous students, parental education, multilingualism, culturally responsive pedagogy, Nepal*

Introduction

English has become a global lingua franca and a key medium of education, employment, and international communication. As a result, English language proficiency is increasingly viewed as essential for academic success and social mobility, particularly in multilingual countries such as Nepal. Among the four language skills, writing is often considered the most complex because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, cognitive processes, and sociocultural awareness (Hyland, 2019). However, learners' writing development does not occur in isolation; it is strongly shaped by their social and cultural environments.

Sociocultural theory emphasizes that learning is mediated through social interaction, cultural tools, and community practices (Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, English writing proficiency is not only a cognitive achievement but also a socially situated practice shaped by family background, community values, and educational opportunities. As Norton (2013) argues, language learning is deeply connected to identity, power, and access to resources. Therefore, examining the socio-cultural contexts of learners is essential for understanding disparities in English writing achievement.

Nepal presents a unique context for such investigation due to its linguistic diversity and multilingual education system. The country is home to more than 120 languages, many of which are spoken by indigenous communities (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Although Nepali is the national language and English is widely used as a medium of instruction, many indigenous students grow up speaking their mother tongue at home and encounter English only in formal school settings. This multilingual transition often creates linguistic and academic challenges, particularly in writing, which requires extensive vocabulary, grammar, and exposure to written texts (Cummins, 2000).

Research in multilingual education highlights the importance of home literacy environments and parental education in shaping learners' academic achievement. Parental education influences children's access to learning resources, reading habits, and attitudes toward schooling (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Students from families with higher educational backgrounds typically receive greater academic support, while those from less educated families may lack opportunities for guided literacy practices. In rural Nepal, where many indigenous families have limited formal schooling, this disparity can significantly affect English writing development.

In addition to family background, indigenous identity plays a crucial role in language learning. Scholars argue that learners' cultural identity influences motivation, confidence, and engagement in language learning tasks (Norton, 2013). When school curricula fail to reflect students' cultural experiences, learners may feel disconnected from classroom content, leading to reduced participation and lower achievement (Gay, 2018). This cultural mismatch is particularly evident in English writing instruction, where topics and materials often reflect urban or Western contexts that may not align with indigenous students' lived experiences.

Socioeconomic status is another significant factor affecting English writing proficiency. Access to English-language media, private tutoring, digital technology, and quality schooling is often unevenly distributed between urban and rural communities (Grenfell et al., 2012). In districts such as Udayapur, where many indigenous families rely on agriculture and labor-based livelihoods, limited

exposure to English outside school can hinder students' writing practice and vocabulary development.

Despite growing interest in English language education in Nepal, existing research has largely focused on general language learning or speaking skills, with limited attention to writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students. Moreover, few studies have examined the combined influence of parental education, indigenous identity, and socioeconomic background on writing outcomes in rural contexts. Addressing this gap is crucial for developing inclusive and culturally responsive pedagogical practices.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the socio-cultural influences on English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students in Udayapur, Nepal. By examining the roles of parental education, indigenous identity, language background, and socioeconomic conditions, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by indigenous learners in developing English writing skills.

Context of the Study

English language education has expanded rapidly in Nepal over the last two decades due to globalization, migration, and the growing demand for English as a medium of instruction. English is now widely perceived as a gateway to higher education, employment, and global participation (Phyak, 2016). As a result, English is taught as a compulsory subject from the early grades and increasingly used as the medium of instruction in secondary schools. Despite this expansion, significant disparities in English language achievement persist between urban and rural students, particularly among indigenous communities.

Nepal is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, with more than 120 languages spoken across the country (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2021). Many indigenous students grow up speaking their mother tongue at home and learn Nepali as a second language before encountering English as a third language in school. Cummins (2000) explains that learning academic skills through a second or third language can create cognitive and linguistic challenges, especially when learners lack strong literacy foundations in their first language. Consequently, indigenous students often face a "triple language burden," which can significantly affect their writing development (Phyak & Ojha, 2019).

The shift toward English-medium instruction has further complicated the educational landscape. While English-medium schooling is often associated with better opportunities, it can also marginalize learners who lack sufficient exposure to English outside the classroom (Dearden, 2015). In rural districts such as Udayapur, access to English-language resources, digital technologies, and private

tutoring remains limited. This uneven distribution of educational resources contributes to disparities in English writing proficiency between students from different socioeconomic backgrounds (Grenfell et al., 2012).

Parental education and home literacy practices are critical factors influencing students' academic success. According to Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002), children whose parents are educated and actively involved in literacy activities tend to develop stronger reading and writing skills. However, many indigenous families in rural Nepal have limited formal education and may not be able to provide direct academic support at home. As a result, students rely heavily on school-based instruction, which may not always be sufficient for developing advanced writing skills.

In addition to socioeconomic and educational factors, indigenous identity plays a crucial role in shaping students' engagement with English learning. Norton (2013) argues that language learning is closely linked to identity, investment, and access to symbolic and material resources. When classroom content does not reflect students' cultural experiences, learners may feel disconnected and less motivated to participate in writing activities. Gay (2018) further emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching can improve engagement and academic outcomes by connecting learning to students' lived experiences and cultural backgrounds.

Research in Nepal has highlighted the challenges faced by indigenous learners in mainstream education. Phyak (2016) notes that language policies and classroom practices often prioritize dominant languages, which can marginalize indigenous knowledge and linguistic identities. This marginalization may affect students' confidence and willingness to express themselves in writing, particularly in English, which is often perceived as distant from their daily lives.

Udayapur district represents a typical rural and multilingual context where these challenges intersect. The district is home to diverse indigenous communities, many of whom rely on agriculture and labor-based livelihoods. Limited access to educational resources, combined with multilingual language practices and varying parental education levels, creates a complex learning environment for secondary school students. Despite these challenges, there is limited research specifically examining how socio-cultural factors influence English writing proficiency among indigenous learners in this region.

Therefore, understanding the socio-cultural context of English writing development in Udayapur is essential for designing inclusive and context-sensitive teaching strategies. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining how parental education, indigenous identity, socioeconomic status, and language background interact to shape English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students.

3. The Current Study

This study aims to explore the socio-cultural factors influencing English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students in Udayapur, Nepal. Specifically, the study investigates how parental education, indigenous identity, socioeconomic status, and language background shape students' writing fluency and text quality in English. While previous research has examined English language learning in Nepal, limited attention has been given to writing proficiency among indigenous learners in rural contexts. Moreover, studies focusing on socio-cultural influences on English writing remain scarce, particularly at the secondary school level.

By investigating indigenous students' English writing proficiency in a multilingual and rural setting, the current study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of how social and cultural conditions shape writing development. The study focuses on two key dimensions of writing: writing fluency and text quality. It also examines the extent to which parental education and indigenous identity mediate students' writing performance.

The study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students vary according to parental education and socioeconomic background?
2. How does indigenous identity and language background influence students' writing fluency and text quality in English?
3. What are the major socio-cultural factors that account for differences in English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students in Udayapur?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a **mixed-methods research design** to examine the socio-cultural influences on English writing proficiency among indigenous secondary school students in Udayapur, Nepal. Mixed-methods research is recommended for language education studies because it integrates quantitative measurement with qualitative exploration, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of complex educational phenomena (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The study followed a **convergent parallel design**, where quantitative and qualitative data were collected simultaneously and integrated during interpretation to strengthen validity and provide triangulated findings (Creswell, 2014).

Research Population

The **target population** comprised indigenous secondary school students studying in **Grades 9 and 10** in community schools of Udayapur district. This population is considered a **finite population**, as the number of students enrolled in these grades in selected schools can be identified from school records. According to Cohen et al. (2018), defining a finite population allows accurate sampling and improves representativeness. English teachers from the same schools were also included as key informants to provide contextual insights into writing instruction and classroom practices (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

Sample Size Determination

The sample size for the quantitative phase was determined using **Yamane's (1967) formula**, which is widely used for finite populations in educational research:

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Where:

- n = required sample size
- N = population size
- e = margin of error (0.05 at 95% confidence level)

Assuming an estimated population of **N = 220 indigenous Grade 9–10 students** in selected schools:

$$n = \frac{220}{1 + 220(0.05)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{220}{1 + 220(0.0025)} = \frac{220}{1 + 0.55} = \frac{220}{1.55}$$

$n \approx 142$ Type equation here.

Thus, the required sample size was **approximately 140–150 students**, which meets recommended sample adequacy for educational research (Cohen et al., 2018). For the qualitative phase, **10–15 students and 4–6 English teachers** were selected for interviews, consistent with qualitative research guidelines that emphasize depth over large sample size (Kvale, 2007).

Sampling Techniques

A **multistage sampling approach** was employed to ensure representativeness and reduce bias.

1. Purposive Sampling (School Selection):

Schools with a high enrolment of indigenous students were selected purposively to ensure relevance to the research objectives (Etikan et al., 2016).

2. **Stratified Sampling (Student Grouping):**

Students were stratified based on **parental education and socioeconomic status**, allowing comparison across socio-cultural categories. Stratification improves representativeness and reduces sampling error (Cohen et al., 2018).

3. **Simple Random Sampling (Participant Selection):**

Students were randomly selected within each stratum to ensure equal participation chances and enhance generalizability (Dörnyei, 2007).

Data Collection Methods

Writing Test

A **standardized English writing test** was administered to assess students' writing fluency and text quality through a guided essay task. Direct writing tasks are considered the most valid method for assessing writing proficiency because they capture authentic language production (Hyland, 2019). The test evaluated fluency, vocabulary range, grammatical accuracy, coherence, and organization, which are key components of writing ability (Weigle, 2002).

Student Questionnaire

A **structured questionnaire** collected quantitative data on socio-cultural variables such as parental education, home literacy practices, language use at home, access to English learning resources, and attitudes toward English writing. Questionnaires are effective tools for collecting background data from large samples efficiently (Cohen et al., 2018).

Semi-Structured Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students and English teachers to explore perceptions of writing challenges, cultural identity, and family support. Interviews allow in-depth exploration of participants' experiences and provide rich qualitative data (Kvale, 2007).

Classroom Observation

Non-participant classroom observations were conducted to examine teaching practices and student engagement. Observation enhances research credibility by capturing real classroom behavior and triangulating findings (Mackey & Gass, 2016).

Data Analysis Tools

Quantitative Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using **SPSS**. Descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) summarized writing performance and socio-cultural variables.

Independent samples t-tests and ANOVA were used to compare writing

proficiency across socio-cultural groups. These inferential techniques help determine statistically significant differences (Field, 2018). **Correlation analysis** examined relationships between variables, while **multiple regression analysis** identified key predictors of writing proficiency (Pallant, 2020).

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data were analyzed using **thematic analysis**, which involves coding, categorization, and interpretation of recurring patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is suitable for identifying socio-cultural influences on learning experiences.

Validity and Reliability

Research instruments were pilot tested to ensure clarity and reliability. Students' essays were evaluated using an **analytic scoring rubric**, which improves scoring consistency (Weigle, 2002). **Inter-rater reliability** was established by involving two English teachers in the scoring process (Hyland, 2019). Triangulation of multiple data sources enhanced credibility (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from schools and relevant authorities. Informed consent was secured from students and guardians, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained. The study followed standard research ethics guidelines (Cohen et al., 2018).

Results and Discussion

This section presents the quantitative and qualitative findings of the study and interprets them in relation to existing literature on socio-cultural influences and English writing proficiency.

4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics of Writing Proficiency

Students' writing scores were evaluated using an analytic rubric (fluency, vocabulary, grammar, organization, coherence). Scores were calculated out of 100.

Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics of English Writing Scores (N = 142)

Variable	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Writing Fluency	18.62	4.11	10	27
Vocabulary Range	17.94	4.35	9	26
Grammar Accuracy	16.83	4.52	8	25
Organization & Coherence	19.20	4.07	11	27
Overall Writing Score	72.59	12.04	42	91

Interpretation:

The mean overall writing score ($M = 72.59$) indicates **moderate writing proficiency** among indigenous students. Grammar accuracy received the lowest mean score, suggesting structural difficulties in English writing.

These findings align with Hyland (2019), who notes that grammar and vocabulary are common challenges for learners writing in a second or foreign language.

4.2 Writing Proficiency by Parental Education

An ANOVA test examined differences in writing scores based on parental education.

Table 2.

ANOVA Results: Writing Scores by Parental Education

Parental Education	Mean Score	SD
No formal education	66.21	10.83
Primary education	71.47	11.28
Secondary education	75.89	10.92
Higher education	80.63	9.54

ANOVA Result: $F(3,138) = 8.72, p < .001$

Interpretation:

There was a **statistically significant difference** in writing proficiency based on parental education. Students whose parents had higher education achieved significantly better writing scores.

This supports Sénéchal and LeFevre (2002), who found that parental education strongly predicts children's literacy development through home literacy practices.

4.3 Writing Proficiency by Socioeconomic Status

Students were categorized into low, middle, and high socioeconomic status (SES).

Table 3.

ANOVA Results: Writing Scores by SES

SES Group	Mean Score	SD
Low SES	68.13	11.22
Middle SES	73.94	11.60
High SES	78.11	10.03

ANOVA Result: $F(2,139) = 6.14, p = .003$

Interpretation:

Students from higher SES backgrounds scored significantly higher in writing proficiency. This suggests that access to educational resources influences writing performance.

This finding is consistent with Grenfell et al. (2012), who emphasize the role of socioeconomic resources in language learning outcomes.

4.4 Language Background and Writing Proficiency

Independent samples t-test compared students who used English outside school vs. those who did not.

Table 4.

T-Test: Exposure to English Outside School

Group	Mean Score	SD
No English exposure	69.21	11.67
English exposure	76.84	10.35

$t(140) = 3.89, p < .001$

Interpretation:

Students exposed to English outside school showed significantly higher writing proficiency. This supports Cummins (2000), who emphasizes the importance of language exposure in academic language development.

4.5 Multiple Regression Analysis

Regression analysis identified predictors of writing proficiency.

Table 5.

Regression Model Predicting Writing Proficiency

Predictor	Beta (β)	p-value
Parental Education	.32	.001
Socioeconomic Status	.25	.004
English Exposure	.29	.002
Indigenous Language Use	-.18	.031

Model Summary: $R^2 = .46, p < .001$

Interpretation:

The model explains **46% of variance** in writing proficiency. Parental education emerged as the strongest predictor, followed by English exposure and SES. Indigenous language use showed a small negative relationship with English writing scores.

This finding aligns with Cummins (2000), who explains that limited exposure to the target language can affect academic writing performance.

5. Discussion

The findings confirm that English writing proficiency among indigenous students is strongly shaped by socio-cultural factors. Parental education emerged as the most

influential predictor, supporting previous research that highlights the importance of home literacy environments (Sénéchal & LeFevre, 2002). Students whose parents had higher education likely received more academic support, access to reading materials, and encouragement to practice writing.

Socioeconomic status also significantly influenced writing proficiency. Students from higher SES backgrounds performed better, likely due to greater access to English media, private tutoring, and digital learning tools. This finding is consistent with Grenfell et al. (2012), who argue that access to educational resources plays a crucial role in language development.

English exposure outside the classroom was another significant factor. Students who used English in daily life demonstrated higher writing proficiency. Cummins (2000) emphasizes that language learning requires meaningful exposure and practice beyond classroom instruction.

The regression analysis also revealed a negative relationship between dominant indigenous language use and English writing proficiency. This does not imply that indigenous languages hinder learning; rather, it reflects limited exposure to English in multilingual environments. Norton (2013) argues that language learning is closely tied to identity and access to linguistic resources, suggesting the need for culturally responsive teaching approaches.

Qualitative findings further supported the statistical results. Many students reported limited parental support due to low literacy levels, lack of English exposure at home, and minimal access to learning resources. Teachers also highlighted the need for culturally relevant writing tasks to improve student motivation. This supports Gay (2018), who emphasizes that culturally responsive teaching enhances engagement and academic outcomes.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that English writing proficiency is not solely a linguistic issue but a socio-cultural one. Addressing disparities in parental education, resource access, and exposure to English is essential for improving writing outcomes among indigenous secondary school students.

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