

## **INITIAL SOCIOLINGUISTIC PROFILE FOR EFL STUDENTS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This research paper encompasses elements, including EFL learners' social background, learning context, information about ethnicity, region, gender, and motivation. By analyzing these concepts, we can have a better understanding of language challenges, specific needs, and social factors that impact on language learning process. Besides, we will examine factors, including students' age, prior instruction, language level, instructional context, and assessment types with the example of a public secondary school in Tashkent. This paper aims to show how these elements and factors are important to consider while learning, teaching, and assessing language.*

**Key words:** *EFL students, gender, ethnicity, region, social background, evaluation.*

### **1. Sociolinguistic profile of a group of learners**

Learners are studying at a public secondary school in Tashkent. Looking at the learners' ethnicity, fourteen students are Uzbek, and two learners came from different nations. They are a Russian girl (Irina) and a Turkish boy (Ahmet). The number of students is sixteen, and they are in the eighth grade. In the classroom, there are two genders: male and female students. If we look at the age profile of the learners, they are fourteen years old. The learners are adaptable and receptive to immersing themselves in language learning. As famous researcher Moskowitz said to enhance the spoken language, learners must feel the language immersion, which means they should apply this language quickly and meaningfully to their surroundings (1978). Learners have different linguistic backgrounds, including Uzbek, Turkish, and Russian. When it comes to the instructional context, they are studying English as a foreign language (EFL). Their current English level is A2 according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). A2 level is equal to the upper-elementary level. Most of the learners are bilingual, as they can speak Uzbek and Russian fluently. Most of the learners' home language is Uzbek, however there are two students, whose first language is different (Russian and Turkish). Apart from this, learners can show their code-switching and bilingual abilities as they can speak more than one language. Whenever they come across linguistic problems or language challenges in English, they ask for help using

Uzbek and Russian. The duration of each class is 45 minutes. Students have classes three times a week. There are four terms within the year. After completing each term, learners are graded by writing summative and formative assessments. Looking at the evaluation process, there are two assessment types, including formal and informal. Formal evaluation includes tests, essays, quizzes, and final exams, which are graded with a rubric. Informal assessment encompasses classroom discussions, group projects, presentations, and short writing activities. Besides, group work and pair work are applied to foster not only English itself but also to enhance important skills, including collaboration and critical thinking skills.

### **Subgroup 1**

#### **(Gender and social status)**

In my group, nine girls and seven boys are learning a language. Gender can indeed influence the language learning experience. For instance, in some countries, there might be misconceptions and stereotypes about which gender is dominant or accomplished at language learning or language skills. In my class, girls tend to be more active than boys. Sometimes, it is challenging to select well-suited topics for both girls and boys as they have different interests and preferences. For example, boys tend to speak about sports, politics, and business, while for girls, it is enjoyable to discuss fashion, different shows, and movies (Eckert, 2003). The thing that I spot in my classroom is learners' social expectations. As a language instructor, I always try to give my students equitable opportunities, well-suited topics, and support to empower all my students to succeed in English.

It is important to note that understanding learners' social background in an English class is crucial for educators to create an inclusive learning environment where all learners can feel flexible and confident (Wardhaugh, 2014). When it comes to the social background of the learners, most of my students are from high-income families (70%), but some students who come from low-income families (30%). Romain stated that language instructors can meet learners' needs and educational challenges more deeply if they have a better understanding of social equity and poverty, which are intersected with linguistics (2009). Students coming from high-income families have more parental support as their parents provide support for language learning outside the school, such as tutoring. We know that learners from low-income families can face difficulties, related to access to resources, books, and educational support. For supporting less advantaged students, school authorities and governing bodies often provide educational and financial support. As a teacher, I ensure that all my students have equitable access to language materials, resources, and technology, regardless of their social background.

Two of the learners, who came from Russian and Turkish ethnicity, are of the same religion as the other students.

### **Subgroup 2.**

#### **(Region, motivation)**

Most of my students were born and studied in Tashkent which is the capital of Uzbekistan. There is no difference at all in pronunciation and vocabulary as students speak standardized Uzbek. Teachers often model and encourage students to speak standardized language. Sometimes, outside the classroom and in casual conversations, male students use mixed language (such as Russian, English, and Uzbek) contractions to convey the meaning, but female students, most of the time, use standardized language. As Fisherman concluded, while communicating with others, female students try not frequently to use dialects and contractions while delivering a speech to sound more formal, while males tend to use more informal language (Labov, 1963). Also, two students came from other regions, these students are Irina (Russia) and Ahmet (Turkey). Irina uses mixed language frequently to interact with their peers because she is not proficient in Uzbek. However, when she interacts with teachers, she tries to speak according to literary norms. For Ahmet, it is not challenging to speak and learn in Uzbek. Turkish and Uzbek have similarities in pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary because both languages belong to the Turkic language family. Apart from that, learners have “bilingual intelligibility” as they know more than two languages and they can understand and switch back and off while expressing themselves (Deumert, 2011).

“Motivation in language learning is influenced by different external and internal factors which are personal interests, cultural values, social identity, and perspectives about linguistic dominance in society” (Mesthrie et al., 2009). Learners have both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation to learn a language. Also, this motivation in learners is often shaped by social dominance and fostering educational opportunities. Another factor that plays a pivotal role in fostering motivation is social perspectives about dominant language and accent. In Uzbekistan, Russian and English are considered dominant languages. People who are fluent in these languages, often have more educational and professional opportunities. Additionally, these languages are highly valued by employers as well. For learners, it is enjoyable to feel the progress and learn new information in English. By being proficient in English, they want to get global citizenship which is important for learners to achieve their long-term goal. Some of them are learning English to get access to prestigious local and international universities. According to these universities’ requirements, every candidate must have a language certificate that shows a level of proficiency in English. A

## **2. Sociolinguistic Profile of the Learning Context**

Learners are studying at public schools in Tashkent. In the school setting, there are loads of teachers and students from diverse backgrounds. For example, there are teachers from Canada, China, Kyrgyz, and Russia. Looking at the students, there are Turkish and Russian students. This diverse linguistic background at school helps create a vibrant atmosphere within the context. At school, it is common to use standard Uzbek language in a formal setting among teachers and students. However, to communicate, learners often use mixed language that includes both Uzbek and Russian. Therefore, students use contractions actively. It is often the case that some of the learners are not proficient in Russian, so these learners feel marginalized and neglected especially when they ask something in Uzbek but her/his peers respond using the Russian language. Russian is a dominant language after Uzbek. The primary reason dates back to the history. At that point in the past, Uzbekistan was a colony of Russia, and the Russian government implemented policies to impose the Russian language on the Uzbek people. These days, people also often use Russian mainly in urban regions. “Language proficiency is, to a large extent, a consequence of age” (Deumert, 2011). There is adequate information that our ability to learn a language proficiently depends on age. The earlier we start learning a language early, the better the results we achieve. We know that the language learning process will be a bit slow after puberty. We can encounter learners who are fluent in both Russian and have a better level of English. These learners started learning early and the private kindergarten programs and teachers helped them to learn quickly and proficiently. Students from less advantaged families in Uzbekistan often attend public kindergartens or do not attend at all. Moving into a school setting, students who are fluent in Russian and have a better level of English attend private kindergartens or use private tutoring programs. Because of the social condition, students from less advantaged families did not have such kind of opportunities. Yet still, the school offers loads of language programs and courses that help improve languages for learners. In turn, these free courses and language programs not only help enhance language but also avoid discrimination among learners. The school’s urban location comes in handy for learners as they can make use of different resources and technological tools such as e-libraries, computer labs, various platforms, and apps. Besides, there are enough spaces for conducting lessons outside. Due to the diverse linguistic background, the school conducts festivals and celebrates local and international holidays to foster inclusivity in school.

## **3. Sociolinguistic Profile of the Context where English will be used Educational transition / Expectations for standard language**

In my classroom, students are learning English to apply to local and international universities after a secondary school education. The students are aware that higher educational establishments require overall academic proficiency critical thinking, and strong writing skills. Also, learners are expected to have advanced vocabulary, and they should write academically, focusing on grammar, clarity, and word precision. As a language instructor, I try to help my students improve their grammatical accuracy, conversational fluency, and writing skills by conducting workshops for them.

### **Nature of English in Academic Context**

In an academic setting, learners should use standardized language and they should know a specific set of terminology according to an area that they choose. Besides, learners are expected to write academic articles and writing as well. For writing, not only learners should have strong writing and argumentation skills, but also they should know discourse patterns such as introduction, method, result, discussion, and conclusion. My learners' level now is a bit low for academic writing, however, in writing and speaking lessons, we often cover these topics and structural patterns by analyzing and observing academic articles and writing.

### **Racial or Ethnic Demographics**

Most of my students are planning to study at local universities, however, there are some students are intending to study abroad. Learners know that the university context encompasses students from diverse ethnic demographics such as Black skin people, White people, Asians, and Africans. It will be difficult for students to adapt to a new social environment, norms, and people from different cultures. However, students can have a better understanding of cultural norms, communication styles, and values by raising cross-cultural awareness. I should acknowledge that school textbooks and curriculum include topics that cover cross-cultural understanding which is beneficial for students.

### **4. Pedagogical implications**

Taking into consideration students' gender, I often avoid using gender stereotypes during the class and also try to select textbooks and language materials which is free from these stereotypes. Providing equitable opportunities to students regardless of their sex helps to create an inclusive environment within a classroom. I should mention that topics, that are related to gender diversity, are not allowed to be discussed in school and classroom settings. Social status is also an important factor that instructors should not ignore. Instructors make sure that all learners have equal access to resources and technological tools. Teachers must treat all learners equally so that learners feel respected and valued in class regardless of their status.



Almost all learners are from the same region. As an instructor, I can easily integrate local content, including traditions, history, and culture. And it assists in fostering their social identity. As McKay claimed, “all pedagogical decisions regarding standards and curriculum should include elements of local content and should be based on social factors” (2008). We have students from diverse cultural backgrounds as well. They are a Russian girl and a Turkish boy. These two learners have different perspectives and communication styles as well. I try to apply different approaches to explore the diverse learning styles of these students. Motivation is another aspect that we should pay attention to. My learners have both intrinsic and instrumental orientations to learn. Brown mentioned that intrinsic motivation is more long-lasting than extrinsic motivation because the former comes from within the individual and gives enjoyment and pleasure. Some students are learning a language for a reward or getting a high-paying job (1991). As an educator, we should keep the balance between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation to promote engagement. For language assessment, I provide my students with constructive feedback that focuses on both the strengths and weaknesses of my learners. Besides, I always promote self-reflection and apply authentic tasks.

### **5. Assessment implication**

For evaluating my learners’ outcomes, I use two types of approaches, which are norm-referenced and criterion-referenced. Looking at the norm-referenced, which means external assessment, I address already available tests, and written exercises. External assessment is useful for both language instructors and students. Instructors can measure learners’ progress easily without too much effort to create a test. Also, it is essential to provide a test and questions that are similar to those tests found in IELTS and CEFR exams. To meet my learners’ specific language needs, I address criterion-referenced assessment, which is internal assessment. Besides, we have formative and summative assessments to monitor learners’ language achievements. The important point that instructors should consider while conducting the assessment is taking into account students’ social and cultural backgrounds, diverse learning styles, and preferences. Apart from this, the assessment should be valid and reliable to measure as it helps learners to demonstrate their knowledge. Taking ethical considerations is another factor. I mean that whenever we conduct assessments, we should make sure that the test content is free from cultural stereotypes and social bias, and respect learners’ social identities.

### **CONCLUSION**

The instructor plays a crucial role in advocating for the students. Whether learners have linguistic challenges or specific needs, the instructor helps overcome or

meet the demands of the learners. By having a better understanding of learners' sociolinguistic profile, the instructor can create a flexible, inclusive atmosphere where all students who have diverse language backgrounds can feel confident. I believe that teachers not only give practical guidance but also she/he helps learners achieve their long-term and short-term goals. It is not enough for me as a teacher to know only about learners' language level and age. For me, language instructors should be aware of learners' goals, interests, social backgrounds, and cultural and social identities. These aspects assist in building a close bond between teacher and student. Material and method selection, identifying learners' motivation, designing a test, and providing equitable opportunities for all learners regardless of their social status – all of these are my duties as a teacher. I have to help my learners overcome not only language challenges but also personal problems in the classroom. The professional should discover and see their students' full potential. Also, he/she should be encouraged to grow and give confidence as well.

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