

The Sociolinguistic Factors Affecting English Language Use Among Students

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Received: 30 August 2026; **Accepted:** 21 September 2026; **Published:** 30 September 2026

Abstract: English is increasingly used as an academic, professional, and digital lingua franca, yet students do not use it uniformly across social settings. This article examines the sociolinguistic factors associated with students' English language use, focusing on proficiency, peer networks, teacher encouragement, language attitudes, socioeconomic access, residential background, and communicative context. The paper is designed as a complete model research article and uses a reproducible simulated dataset of 240 university students to demonstrate an analytically coherent quantitative study without representing simulated observations as real human-participant data. A structured questionnaire framework is proposed, and the illustrative analysis includes descriptive statistics, correlations, proficiency-group comparisons, and multiple linear regression. English use is strongest in academic tasks and online communication and weakest in home and family interaction. In the multivariable model, self-rated proficiency, peer-network English use, teacher encouragement, positive attitudes toward English, socioeconomic access, and urban background are all positively associated with overall English use, whereas year of study is not statistically significant. The findings are interpreted through sociolinguistic perspectives on language choice, social networks, identity, linguistic capital, accommodation, and translanguaging. The article argues that English use among students is better understood as a socially situated practice than as a direct reflection of competence alone. Pedagogically, institutions can increase meaningful English use by expanding low-risk interactional opportunities, supporting multilingual repertoires, developing inclusive English-medium practices, and reducing access inequalities. The study also outlines a framework that can be adapted for empirical research in specific universities, regions, or multilingual communities.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics; English language use; university students; language attitudes; code-switching; peer networks; English-medium instruction.

Introduction: The use of English among university students has become a major concern in sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, and higher education. In many countries, English functions simultaneously as a subject of study, a medium of instruction, a language of academic publication, a resource for digital participation, and a form of cultural and professional capital. Students may therefore encounter strong institutional incentives to use English even when it is not the language most commonly used in their families or local communities. At the same time, the expansion of English does not produce uniform behavior. Some students use English frequently with

classmates, teachers, and online contacts, whereas others restrict it to examinations, presentations, written assignments, or interactions in which English is explicitly required. These differences raise a central sociolinguistic question: what social, contextual, and attitudinal factors shape students' actual use of English?

A purely linguistic explanation would emphasize vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and proficiency. These factors matter, but sociolinguistic research shows that language choice is also connected to identity, interpersonal relationships, institutional norms, topic, setting, audience, status, and access to

valued social networks. Labov's (1972) work established that linguistic variation is systematically related to social structure rather than random deviation. Fishman (1972) likewise emphasized domains of language use, arguing that speakers select languages differently according to participants, settings, and topics. Gumperz (1982) demonstrated that switching between codes can organize interaction and communicate social meanings. Later approaches expanded this insight by treating language as a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), identity work (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; Norton, 2013), accommodation to interlocutors (Giles et al., 1991), and flexible multilingual practice rather than a simple choice between autonomous language systems (García & Wei, 2014).

For students, English use is particularly sensitive to context. A learner may speak English confidently during a classroom presentation but shift to a local language in informal peer talk. Another may rarely speak English face to face but use it extensively on social media, gaming platforms, or professional networking sites. Students may also code-switch because a concept is easier to express in one language, because a teacher's policy encourages a particular language, because peers associate English with prestige or distance, or because the local language better communicates solidarity. Recent empirical studies reinforce the importance of these contextual relationships. Moradi and Chen (2022), for example, reported that positive attitudes toward English and code-switching were related to Chinese undergraduates' bilingual language practices. Yuan et al. (2025) found that attitudes toward English learning, English-medium instruction, and first-language use interact with biographical and contextual factors. Luporini et al. (2024) showed that attitudes toward classroom code-switching vary according to proficiency and communicative function, while Mu et al. (2023) linked English-as-a-lingua-franca communication intentions to motivation and attitudes toward varieties of English. More recently, Alsulami et al. (2026) reported that postgraduate EFL students used code-switching for both cognitive and social purposes, illustrating that even advanced students draw strategically on more than one language.

Despite this growing literature, studies of student English use often isolate one factor at a time. Some

focus on motivation, others on code-switching, proficiency, English-medium instruction, or identity. This fragmentation can obscure the way these factors operate together. A student with high proficiency may still avoid English if peers disapprove of its use in informal settings. Conversely, a moderately proficient student may use English often because teachers create supportive opportunities and friends regularly communicate in English. Socioeconomic resources can influence access to private schooling, digital media, travel, books, and language courses; urban environments can increase contact with diverse speakers and institutions; and university policies can either normalize or constrain multilingual practices. An integrated sociolinguistic model therefore needs to consider individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural influences simultaneously.

The present article develops such a model around seven factors: self-rated English proficiency, peer-network English use, teacher encouragement, attitudes toward English, socioeconomic access, urban or non-urban background, and year of study. It also compares English use across five communicative settings: classroom interaction, peer interaction, online and digital communication, home and family life, and academic tasks. The distinction between overall use and context-specific use is important because aggregate measures can hide meaningful domain differences. English may be common in academic writing but uncommon at home; a single frequency score would flatten this sociolinguistic pattern.

The study is guided by four research questions: (1) How frequently do students use English across academic, peer, online, and family contexts? (2) What relationships exist between English use and proficiency, peer practices, teacher encouragement, attitudes, socioeconomic access, residential background, and year of study? (3) Which factors make independent contributions to English use when considered simultaneously? and (4) How can the observed patterns be interpreted in relation to sociolinguistic theories of domain, identity, social networks, linguistic capital, and multilingual practice?

Because no institution, country, or participant dataset was specified for the requested article, the quantitative section uses a transparent simulated dataset. This choice allows the article to demonstrate a complete

research design, statistical workflow, tables, figures, and interpretation without making false claims about data collection from human participants. The numerical findings should therefore be read as an illustrative model to be replaced or validated with empirical data before submission as original research. The broader theoretical synthesis, instrument design, analytical logic, and cited literature remain directly useful for developing a real sociolinguistic study.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Language Choice, Domains, and Multilingual Practice

Sociolinguistics begins from the premise that language varies with social life. Labov (1972) showed that phonological and stylistic variation patterned with class, attention to speech, and social evaluation. Although student English use differs from classic variationist studies of pronunciation, the underlying principle is comparable: linguistic behavior reflects socially structured choices. Speakers do not simply possess a language and deploy it at a constant rate. They adjust speech according to setting, audience, purpose, norms, and the social meanings attached to available codes. In multilingual educational settings, English is one resource within a broader repertoire, and its use can index academic orientation, cosmopolitan identity, institutional status, expertise, or interpersonal distance.

Fishman's (1972) domain perspective is especially relevant. Domains organize recurring constellations of participants, places, and activities, such as family, friendship, education, religion, and employment. Different languages may become expected in different domains because communities develop relatively stable norms about appropriate language choice. For students, the classroom and academic-task domains often privilege English when textbooks, lectures, assessments, or institutional policies are English-medium. The family domain may privilege a home language associated with intimacy and intergenerational continuity. Peer domains are more fluid because language choice can signal solidarity, stance, humor, group membership, or educational identity. Digital spaces further complicate domain boundaries because students may encounter global English content while communicating with local friends

in mixed codes.

Code-switching research demonstrates why shifts between English and other languages should not automatically be interpreted as failure. Gumperz (1982) described conversational code-switching as a contextualization resource through which speakers mark quotation, emphasis, addressee selection, personalization, contrast, or social alignment. Ferguson (2003) later reviewed classroom code-switching in multilingual and postcolonial settings, emphasizing pedagogical, managerial, and interpersonal functions. Contemporary work similarly suggests that students may use the first language to clarify complex material, manage classroom relationships, or express identity. Alsulami et al. (2026) found that postgraduate EFL students reported cognitive and social reasons for classroom code-switching. Luporini et al. (2024) also showed that attitudes toward teacher code-switching vary across proficiency levels and functions. These findings challenge rigid assumptions that maximizing English necessarily means prohibiting other languages.

Translanguaging perspectives push this argument further by questioning the idea that multilingual speakers always operate with neatly bounded languages. García and Wei (2014) conceptualize translanguaging as the strategic deployment of an integrated linguistic repertoire. Canagarajah (2011) likewise demonstrated how multilingual writers shuttle across language resources in complex ways. In this view, the relevant question is not simply whether students use English or another named language, but how they combine available resources to accomplish academic and social goals. Nevertheless, measuring English-use frequency remains useful when institutional expectations, learning opportunities, or exposure are specifically at issue, provided that the measure does not frame other languages as deficient.

Language choice also has an identity dimension. Bucholtz and Hall (2005) argue that identity is produced relationally through interaction rather than merely carried into communication as a fixed demographic category. Norton (2013) develops a related concept of investment in language learning: learners' engagement depends not only on motivation but also on their access to identities, communities, and resources that make participation meaningful. A student may value English for future employment while feeling uncomfortable

using it with friends who interpret English as pretentious. Another may actively use English because it supports an imagined professional identity or membership in an international academic community. Thus, attitudes toward English can reflect both personal orientation and social evaluation.

Bourdieu's (1991) concept of linguistic capital helps explain why English may be unequally distributed across students. Languages and varieties acquire value within particular markets. In many educational and professional markets, English carries symbolic and material advantages, but access to high-quality English instruction, international media, tutoring, travel, and elite educational institutions is not evenly distributed. Students from more advantaged backgrounds may accumulate greater exposure before entering university. This does not imply a deterministic relationship between socioeconomic status and language behavior; rather, socioeconomic resources can structure opportunities for acquiring and using valued linguistic resources. The same logic applies to urban residence when cities provide denser contact with English-medium institutions, multinational workplaces, tourists, international schools, or digital infrastructure.

Peer networks constitute another powerful mechanism. Social-network approaches in sociolinguistics emphasize that language norms circulate through relationships. Dense local networks may preserve community norms, while looser or more diverse networks can facilitate new linguistic forms and practices. Among students, peer English use may normalize English conversation, create practice opportunities, and reduce fear of negative evaluation. Conversely, if a friendship group strongly favors the local language, a student may have little reason to use English regardless of formal proficiency. Moradi and Chen (2022) illustrate this social dimension by showing that bilingual students use code-switching to express solidarity, emphasis, intentions, and experience. Peer behavior can therefore be both a source of exposure and a norm that regulates what feels socially appropriate.

Teacher behavior and institutional language policy influence the interactional ecology of the classroom. Teachers determine who speaks, how errors are treated, whether multiple languages are permitted,

and whether English is used for genuine discussion or only for recitation. A supportive teacher can lower participation risk by accepting accented English, valuing intelligibility over native-speaker imitation, and designing collaborative tasks that require meaningful exchange. By contrast, punitive correction or inflexible English-only rules can make students less willing to speak. Yuan et al. (2025) found that English-medium instruction attitudes were connected with motivation and broader language attitudes, while students also regarded code-switching as necessary in some contexts. Such evidence suggests that institutional encouragement is most effective when it expands communicative opportunity rather than simply policing language choice.

Proficiency remains an important part of this picture. Students who can retrieve vocabulary quickly, understand interlocutors, and formulate complex ideas in English face lower communicative costs. Yet proficiency is both cause and consequence of use. Frequent interaction can improve fluency and confidence, while greater proficiency can encourage more interaction. Cross-sectional studies therefore should avoid treating the direction of influence as settled. Luporini et al. (2024) found differences in attitudes toward code-switching by proficiency level, and the 2017 study of Korean undergraduates reported that classroom language-choice attitudes were related to motivation and proficiency. The implication is that proficiency may influence not only what students can say but also how they evaluate English-only and multilingual practices.

Attitudes and motivation provide a psychological bridge between social meaning and behavior. Gardner (1985) distinguished integrative and instrumental orientations in second-language learning, while Dörnyei (2005) broadened motivational research by focusing on learner self-concepts and dynamic individual differences. Ajzen's (1991) theory of planned behavior, although not specific to language, offers a useful general framework: attitudes, perceived norms, and perceived behavioral control shape intentions and behavior. Applied to student English use, positive attitudes may increase willingness to use English, peer and teacher norms may provide subjective social pressure, and proficiency may contribute to perceived control. However, actual language behavior remains

situational, because intentions are filtered through immediate interlocutors and communicative demands. English as a lingua franca research further questions the assumption that students' goal must be native-speaker conformity. In multilingual universities, English is frequently used between speakers who have different first languages. Mu et al. (2023) found that motivation and acceptance of diverse English varieties were related to intention to engage in English-as-a-lingua-franca communication. This finding is important because students may avoid English when they believe only native-like speech is legitimate. A more pluralistic view can expand participation by recognizing that intelligible, adaptive communication is a valid outcome. It also aligns with translanguaging approaches by treating multilingual competence as a resource rather than interference.

Taken together, the literature suggests a multilevel model. Proficiency represents linguistic capacity; attitudes represent evaluative orientation; peers represent interpersonal norms and opportunities; teachers represent classroom-level affordances; socioeconomic access and residential background represent structural opportunity; and communicative domains represent situational constraints. These dimensions interact. A student with positive attitudes but limited access may lack practice opportunities. A proficient student in a peer group that disapproves of English may reserve it for academic tasks. A teacher may create supportive classroom conditions that partially compensate for unequal exposure outside university. The present study therefore examines these factors jointly rather than treating any single variable as a sufficient explanation.

3. Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses

The conceptual framework integrates five sociolinguistic ideas: domain, social networks, linguistic capital, identity/investment, and accommodation. Domain theory predicts that English-use frequency will vary according to setting and participant configuration. Social-network theory predicts that students embedded in English-using peer groups will use English more frequently because their networks provide both opportunity and normative reinforcement. Linguistic-capital theory predicts that socioeconomic and educational access may be associated with English use

because English has exchange value in academic and employment markets and because access to learning resources is stratified. Identity and investment perspectives predict that positive attitudes toward English will be more consequential when students associate English with desirable identities and future participation. Accommodation theory predicts that students modify language choices in response to interlocutors and perceived expectations, making teacher and peer behavior central rather than peripheral.

These perspectives also imply that English use should not be interpreted as a simple hierarchy in which more English is always better. Students may appropriately use a home language with family, employ code-switching to clarify difficult academic content, or shift languages to establish solidarity. The outcome of interest is therefore not linguistic purity but the availability and patterned use of English when students have reasons or opportunities to use it. The framework treats multilingualism as normal while asking which social conditions increase or decrease students' access to English interaction.

Based on the literature, six directional hypotheses are proposed for the illustrative quantitative model. Higher self-rated proficiency is expected to predict more English use because it reduces communicative difficulty. Greater peer-network English use is expected to predict more use because it increases exposure and establishes group norms. Stronger teacher encouragement is expected to predict more use by expanding classroom opportunities and reducing participation anxiety. More positive attitudes toward English are expected to predict more use because students are more willing to invest in English-speaking identities and activities. Greater socioeconomic access and urban background are expected to show smaller positive associations because they can provide additional exposure and resources. Year of study is included as a control variable, but its effect is expected to be less consistent because progression through university does not guarantee increased informal English use.

4. Methodology

Research design. The article uses a cross-sectional quantitative design supplemented by a qualitative

interpretive framework for discussing plausible sociolinguistic mechanisms. The numerical dataset is simulated for demonstration, not collected from human participants. The simulation contains 240 cases, a sample size large enough to illustrate descriptive comparisons and multiple regression while remaining realistic for a university questionnaire study. The design can be converted into an empirical project by administering the proposed measures to consenting students and replacing the simulated observations with actual responses.

Participants and sampling framework. A real implementation could recruit undergraduate students across multiple faculties and years of study using stratified or cluster sampling. In the illustrative sample, 117 cases are coded female, 119 male, and 4 as other or prefer not to say. The distribution by year is 62 first-year, 61 second-year, 70 third-year, and 47 fourth-year students. A total of 149 cases are coded as having an urban background and 91 as non-urban. These categories are included to demonstrate how basic demographic variables could be incorporated without assuming that gender or residence mechanically determines language choice.

Instrument. The proposed questionnaire has four sections. Section A records demographic and educational background variables. Section B measures English use across settings with items such as “I use English when discussing course content with classmates,” “I use English when communicating online,” “I use English when completing academic tasks,” and “I use English with family members at home.” Responses are recorded on a five-point frequency scale from 1 (very rarely/never) to 5 (very often). Section C measures explanatory variables using short multi-item scales: self-rated proficiency, peer-network English use, teacher encouragement, attitudes toward English, and socioeconomic access. Section D contains optional open-ended questions asking when students choose English, when they avoid it, and how they feel about code-switching. In an empirical study, scale reliability should be examined with Cronbach’s alpha or omega, and construct validity should be assessed through factor analysis where sample size permits.

Operationalization. Overall English use is modeled as a continuous index ranging from 1 to 5. Self-rated

proficiency captures students’ perceived ability to understand and express ideas in English. Peer-network English use measures how often close classmates or friends use English in interaction. Teacher encouragement reflects whether instructors invite discussion in English, create opportunities to speak, and respond supportively to errors. Attitude toward English reflects perceived usefulness, enjoyment, future value, and comfort with English. Socioeconomic access is treated as an index of educational and material opportunities relevant to language exposure, such as access to devices, internet connectivity, supplementary instruction, books, and English-language media. Urban background is coded 1 for urban and 0 for non-urban residence prior to university. Year of study ranges from 1 to 4.

Simulation procedure. To maintain internal consistency, all illustrative numerical results come from one seeded simulation. Each explanatory scale was generated on a one-to-five range with approximately normal variation, then overall English use was generated as a function of proficiency, peer English, teacher encouragement, attitude, socioeconomic access, urban background, year of study, and random error. Context-specific measures were derived from the same underlying use score with domain-specific adjustments. The random seed ensures that the tables and figures can be reproduced exactly. The simulation was intentionally calibrated so that no single variable explains English use completely, reflecting the sociolinguistic expectation that language behavior is multi-causal.

Data analysis. Descriptive statistics summarize the sample and the distribution of each scale. Mean English-use scores are compared across five contexts. Pearson correlations describe bivariate relationships among continuous variables. Proficiency is also grouped into lower, intermediate, and higher bands for an intuitive descriptive comparison. Multiple linear regression estimates the independent association of each predictor with English use while holding the others constant. Unstandardized coefficients are reported with standard errors, p values, and 95% confidence intervals. Model fit is summarized with R-squared and adjusted R-squared. Because the data are illustrative, inferential statistics demonstrate analytical procedure rather than population inference.

Ethical considerations. No human participants were recruited and no personal data were collected for this model article, so institutional ethics approval was not applicable to the simulated analysis. A real study would require voluntary informed consent, confidentiality protections, secure data handling, the right to withdraw where applicable, and local institutional review procedures. Researchers should also avoid deficit framing. Lower English use at home, for example, should not be treated as a problem in itself, because language choice in family settings may reflect valued linguistic and cultural practices. The ethical purpose of studying English use is to understand access and opportunity, not to devalue students' other

languages.

Analytical limitations are built into the design. Cross-sectional data cannot establish causality, self-reported language use may differ from observed behavior, and broad categories such as urban background or socioeconomic access simplify complex social realities. A stronger empirical design would combine questionnaires with recorded interaction, interviews, or language diaries. Longitudinal data would be especially useful for distinguishing whether proficiency leads to greater use, greater use leads to proficiency gains, or both processes reinforce each other over time.

Table 1. Illustrative sample characteristics (N = 240)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender: Female	117	48.8%
Gender: Male	119	49.6%
Gender: Other/prefer not to say	4	1.7%
Urban background	149	62.1%
Non-urban background	91	37.9%
Year 1	62	25.8%
Year 2	61	25.4%
Year 3	70	29.2%
Year 4	47	19.6%

5. Results

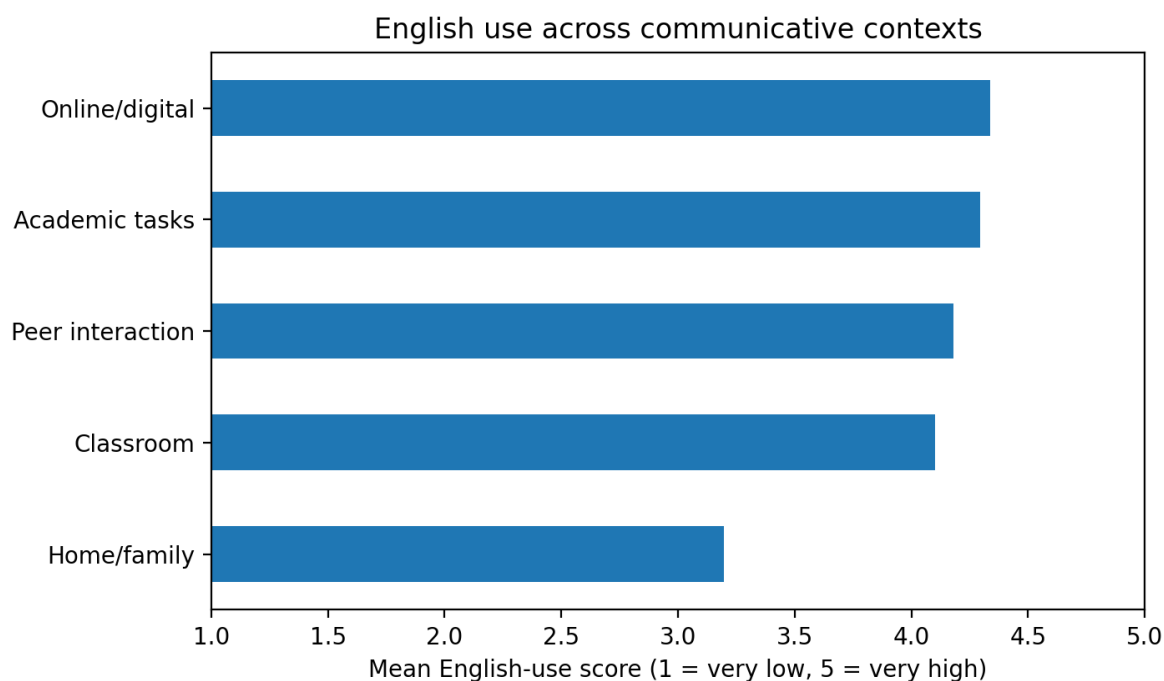
Descriptive profile. Table 1 summarizes the illustrative sample. The gender distribution is relatively balanced, with 117 female and 119 male cases, while four cases fall in the other/prefer-not-to-say category. Third-year students form the largest year group, and 62.1% of the sample is coded as having an urban background. The purpose of these variables is descriptive and analytic; the study does not assume that demographic categories carry fixed linguistic meanings outside their social contexts.

Overall English use has a mean of 3.94 on the five-point scale ($SD = 0.50$), suggesting relatively frequent use in the simulated sample. Mean self-rated proficiency is 3.34 ($SD = 0.73$), peer-network English use 3.57 ($SD = 0.70$), teacher encouragement 3.65 ($SD = 0.67$), positive attitude toward English 3.95 ($SD = 0.56$), and socioeconomic access 3.14 ($SD = 0.91$). The comparatively high attitude score reflects a context in which students broadly perceive English as useful, although positive attitudes do not imply that English is appropriate or preferred in every domain.

Table 2. English use across communicative contexts

Context	Mean	SD
Academic tasks	4.29	0.57
Online/digital communication	4.34	0.53
Peer interaction	4.18	0.57
Classroom interaction	4.10	0.60
Home/family interaction	3.20	0.61

Note. Scores range from 1 (very low/rare) to 5 (very high/frequent).

**Figure 1. English use across communicative contexts**

Contextual variation. Table 2 and Figure 1 show clear domain differences. English use is highest for online/digital communication ($M = 4.34$, $SD = 0.53$) and academic tasks ($M = 4.29$, $SD = 0.57$), followed by peer interaction ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 0.57$) and classroom interaction ($M = 4.10$, $SD = 0.60$). Home and family use

is substantially lower ($M = 3.20$, $SD = 0.62$). This pattern is consistent with domain theory: English becomes more frequent where academic requirements, digital content, or heterogeneous peer networks increase its functional value, while home interaction remains more strongly associated with familiar local or family languages.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics and correlations among continuous study variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
English use	3.94	0.50	—					

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
Proficiency	3.34	0.73	0.42	—				
Peer English	3.57	0.70	0.26	-0.08	—			
Teacher support	3.65	0.67	0.31	0.02	-0.03	—		
Positive attitude	3.95	0.56	0.25	-0.13	0.06	0.02	—	
SES access	3.14	0.91	0.19	-0.01	0.05	0.00	0.06	—

Note. Correlations are shown below the diagonal. All values are based on the simulated dataset.

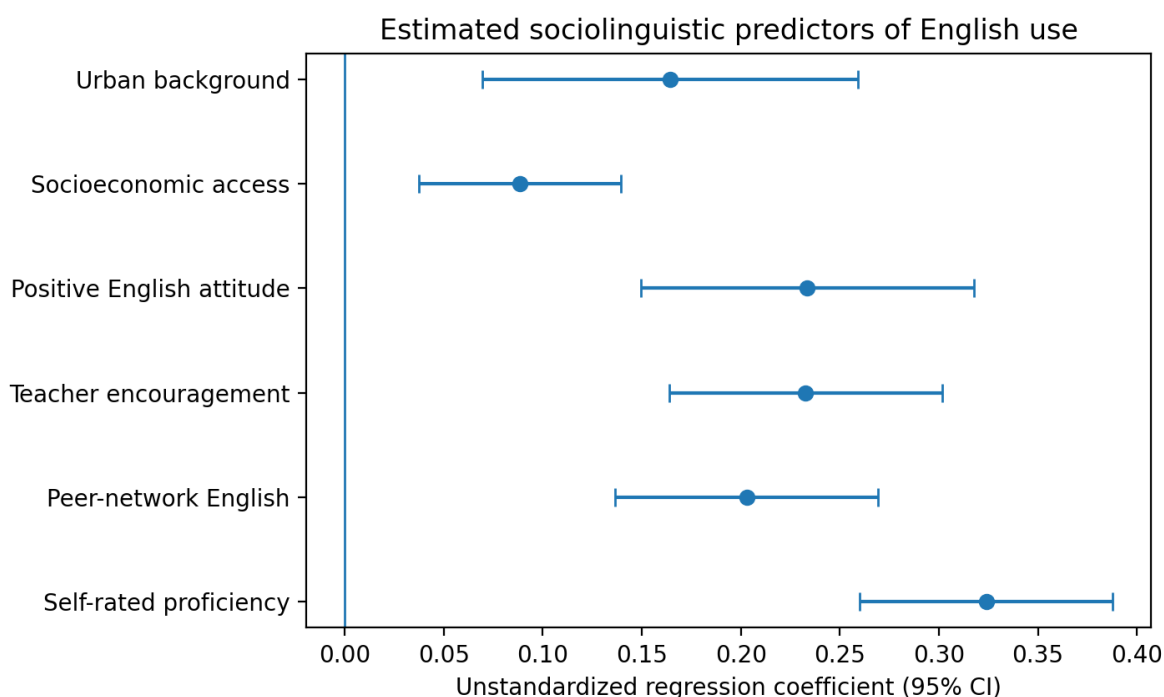
Bivariate relationships. Table 3 presents correlations between overall English use and the main continuous predictors. Proficiency has the strongest bivariate correlation with English use ($r = .424$), followed by teacher encouragement ($r = .314$), peer-network English use ($r = .257$), positive attitude ($r = .246$), and socioeconomic access ($r = .190$). These associations are moderate rather than extreme, which supports the assumption that English use reflects several overlapping influences. The predictors themselves are only weakly correlated in the simulated sample, reducing concerns about multicollinearity and making their separate regression coefficients easier to interpret.

Proficiency-group comparison. When self-rated proficiency is divided into descriptive bands, lower-proficiency students ($n = 32$) have a mean English-use score of 3.62 ($SD = 0.49$), intermediate students ($n = 103$) have a mean of 3.79 ($SD = 0.46$), and higher-proficiency students ($n = 105$) have a mean of 4.18 ($SD = 0.43$). The gradient is consistent with the expectation that greater perceived proficiency lowers the cost of communicating in English. At the same time, the overlap implied by the standard deviations indicates that proficiency alone does not determine behavior; some lower-proficiency students use English frequently, and some higher-proficiency students may use it selectively.

Table 4. Multiple linear regression predicting overall English use

Predictor	B	SE	p	95% CI
Self-rated proficiency	0.324	0.032	< .001	[0.260, 0.388]
Peer-network English use	0.203	0.034	< .001	[0.137, 0.269]
Teacher encouragement	0.233	0.035	< .001	[0.164, 0.302]
Positive attitude toward English	0.234	0.043	< .001	[0.149, 0.318]
Socioeconomic access	0.089	0.026	< .001	[0.038, 0.140]
Urban background	0.164	0.048	< .001	[0.069, 0.259]
Year of study	0.031	0.022	0.166	[-0.013, 0.074]

Model fit: $R^2 = 0.498$; adjusted $R^2 = 0.483$; $F(7, 232) = 32.86$, $p < .001$.

Figure 2. Estimated sociolinguistic predictors of English use

Multivariable model. Table 4 reports the multiple regression predicting overall English use. The model explains 49.8% of the variance (adjusted R-squared = 48.3%), $F(7, 232) = 32.86$, $p < .001$. Proficiency is the largest independent predictor ($B = .324$, $SE = .032$, $p < .001$). Holding other factors constant, a one-point increase in self-rated proficiency is associated with an estimated .324-point increase in the English-use index. Peer-network English use is also significant ($B = .203$, $SE = .034$, $p < .001$), as are teacher encouragement ($B = .233$, $SE = .035$, $p < .001$) and positive attitude toward English ($B = .234$, $SE = .043$, $p < .001$). Socioeconomic access has a smaller positive coefficient ($B = .089$, $SE = .026$, $p = .001$), and urban background is associated with a .164-point higher use score ($SE = .048$, $p = .001$).

Year of study is not statistically significant after the other variables are controlled ($B = .031$, $SE = .022$, $p = .166$).

Figure 2 visualizes the estimated coefficients and their 95% confidence intervals. The pattern reinforces the central finding: students' English use is related not only to proficiency but also to the social ecology surrounding them. Peer practices, teacher behavior, attitudes, and structural access retain independent associations even when proficiency is included. In substantive terms, the model depicts English use as an interaction between ability, opportunity, social norms, and perceived value rather than a simple outcome of years spent studying the language.

Table 5. Sociolinguistic interpretation of the main illustrative findings

Factor	Pattern	Sociolinguistic interpretation
Proficiency	Strong positive association	Lower linguistic processing costs; greater perceived control
Peer-network English	Positive association	Network norms, exposure, solidarity, and opportunities for practice

Factor	Pattern	Sociolinguistic interpretation
Teacher encouragement	Positive association	Institutional affordances, reduced participation risk, interactional opportunity
Positive attitudes	Positive association	Investment, future orientation, perceived value of English
Socioeconomic access	Smaller positive association	Differential access to instruction, media, technology, and enrichment
Urban background	Smaller positive association	Greater potential exposure to diverse institutions and speakers
Year of study	Not significant in full model	Time in university alone does not guarantee communicative opportunity
Communicative domain	Substantial variation	Language choice shifts with audience, purpose, setting, and local norms

6. Discussion

The illustrative findings support a sociolinguistic interpretation of English use as contextually organized social practice. The strongest descriptive result is the difference between domains. Students use English most in academic and digital spaces and least in the home/family domain. This is precisely the kind of patterned variation that domain theory predicts. Academic tasks often contain explicit incentives for English, including textbooks, assessment rubrics, disciplinary terminology, and institutional expectations. Digital environments expose students to transnational content and may connect them with wider audiences. Family settings, in contrast, are organized around intimacy, shared history, and established local-language norms. Lower English use at home should therefore not be read as resistance or deficiency; it may simply represent appropriate language choice within a multilingual repertoire.

Proficiency is the strongest predictor in the regression, which is unsurprising but theoretically important. Speakers who perceive themselves as more proficient can formulate ideas more rapidly and take greater conversational risks. Yet proficiency accounts for only part of the model. Its coefficient does not eliminate the

effects of peers, teachers, attitudes, socioeconomic access, or residential background. This pattern illustrates why student language use cannot be reduced to competence. A student may know English but still have few interlocutors with whom English feels natural, while another may use English regularly despite imperfect grammar because the surrounding network supports experimentation. Proficiency and use are also likely reciprocal: frequent use can build fluency, and growing fluency can make future use easier.

Peer-network English use is independently associated with students' own English use. Sociolinguistically, peers provide both opportunity and normative pressure. Repeated interaction creates local expectations about which codes are acceptable for jokes, academic discussion, casual conversation, or identity performance. If close friends commonly use English, individual students have more chances to practice and less risk of appearing socially marked. If peers strongly prefer another language, English may be reserved for formal situations. This finding aligns with work showing that bilingual practices serve interpersonal functions such as solidarity and emphasis (Moradi & Chen, 2022). It also suggests that

interventions focused only on individual motivation may have limited effects when peer norms remain unchanged.

Teacher encouragement is similarly important. In the model, teacher encouragement has an independent association comparable in magnitude to positive attitudes. This emphasizes the institutional production of language opportunity. Teachers can create interactional spaces in which students use English for authentic purposes rather than merely answer display questions. Supportive correction, group discussion, project work, peer explanation, and acceptance of diverse accents can reduce the social cost of participation. At the same time, encouragement should not be equated with a punitive English-only policy. Ferguson (2003) and later code-switching research show that strategic use of students' other languages can support explanation, classroom management, and interpersonal relationships. Alsulami et al. (2026) likewise report that advanced postgraduate students perceive cognitive and social benefits in code-switching.

The positive association between attitudes and English use is consistent with motivational and identity-based accounts. Students who view English as useful, enjoyable, or connected to future goals are more likely to invest effort in situations where English is optional. However, attitudes are socially produced rather than purely personal preferences. English may be associated with upward mobility and international participation, but it can also be associated with elitism, exclusion, or cultural distance in particular communities. Bourdieu's (1991) notion of linguistic markets is useful here: the value of English depends on the social field in which it is used. A university may reward English heavily in examinations while a friendship group rewards local-language solidarity. Students navigate these competing markets rather than acting on a single stable attitude.

The socioeconomic-access coefficient is smaller but remains significant. This pattern is sociologically plausible because language learning resources are unequally distributed. Reliable internet access, private tutoring, English-medium schooling, books, media subscriptions, travel opportunities, and quiet study space can all shape exposure. Structural advantage may therefore accumulate before students enter university. The finding should not be interpreted as an

inherent difference between socioeconomic groups. Instead, it points to differences in opportunity. Universities can respond by expanding free language-support services, open-access materials, digital infrastructure, conversation programs, and inclusive extracurricular opportunities that reduce dependence on private resources.

Urban background also retains a modest association after other predictors are held constant. Urban residence can increase contact with English through institutions, workplaces, tourism, international media, and linguistically diverse populations, but the category is only a rough proxy. Rural and non-urban communities are heterogeneous, and digital connectivity can substantially reduce geographic differences. A real study should therefore replace a simple urban/non-urban binary with more specific measures of exposure, mobility, school type, internet access, and community language ecology. The purpose of the variable here is to illustrate how spatial context may intersect with language use rather than to essentialize place.

Year of study is not significant in the multivariable model. This result is useful because it challenges the assumption that simply spending more years at university automatically increases everyday English use. Academic progression may improve disciplinary knowledge without changing peer-language norms or family practices. Students in later years may even specialize into networks where a local language remains dominant outside formal academic work. The result therefore directs attention from duration of study toward the quality and distribution of communicative opportunities.

The domain pattern also contributes to contemporary debates about English-medium instruction. Yuan et al. (2025) report that students' positive attitudes toward English learning and English-medium instruction coexist with perceived need for code-switching. This combination is not contradictory. Students can value English for academic advancement while also recognizing that strategic first-language use supports comprehension. Likewise, Luporini et al. (2024) show that attitudes toward code-switching differ according to proficiency and function. An effective policy should therefore distinguish between creating substantial opportunities for English use and enforcing

monolingual behavior. The former can increase participation; the latter may suppress questions, reduce conceptual depth, or disadvantage students who are still developing proficiency.

English-as-a-lingua-franca perspectives also help interpret the results. Mu et al. (2023) show that acceptance of different English varieties relates to willingness to engage in lingua-franca communication. Students may participate more readily when they understand that successful English communication does not require a native accent. Native-speaker ideology can increase anxiety and silence speakers who are otherwise capable of communicating effectively. Teachers can counter this by exposing students to diverse accents, assessing intelligibility and communicative effectiveness, and discussing English as a plural global resource.

Translanguaging adds a further layer. A frequency measure necessarily counts occasions of English use, but multilingual interaction often includes blended practices that do not fit a strict either/or model. Students may begin an explanation in English, insert a local-language term for humor or cultural specificity, then return to English. From a translanguaging perspective, this does not represent failed English use; it is an adaptive use of the full repertoire. Thus, the quantitative outcome should be complemented by qualitative data showing how and why students combine languages. Language diaries, classroom recordings, stimulated-recall interviews, or focus groups would help distinguish productive multilingual strategies from avoidance caused by lack of confidence or exclusion.

The model therefore supports a layered explanation. At the individual level, proficiency affects communicative control and attitude affects willingness. At the interpersonal level, peer practices regulate opportunity and social acceptability. At the institutional level, teachers organize participation and model language norms. At the structural level, socioeconomic and spatial contexts distribute resources and exposure. At the situational level, domains shape which language is expected and useful. These levels should not be treated as competing explanations; they are interconnected parts of the same sociolinguistic ecology.

Several limitations matter. First, the dataset is

simulated, so the numerical results cannot be generalized to any population. Their function is to demonstrate how a complete study could be analyzed and written. Second, even with real data, cross-sectional regression would show association rather than causation. Teacher encouragement could increase English use, but students who already use more English may also perceive teachers as more encouraging. Third, self-report measures are vulnerable to recall and social-desirability bias. Direct observation may produce different frequency estimates. Fourth, broad scales can obscure differences across disciplines, gendered interactional expectations, ethnic or linguistic groups, and specific institutional policies. Finally, treating English use as a single overall outcome risks valuing frequency without considering quality, purpose, or communicative success.

Future research should therefore use mixed methods and longitudinal designs. Repeated surveys across an academic year could test how changes in peer networks or confidence relate to changes in English use. Social-network analysis could map who communicates with whom and which relationships carry English practices. Classroom observation could examine whether teacher encouragement translates into equitable participation or concentrates speaking opportunities among already confident students. Qualitative interviews could investigate identity, stigma, aspiration, and the perceived social meanings of English. Comparative studies across universities could also examine how institutional language policy interacts with local linguistic ecologies.

7. Pedagogical and Institutional Implications

The findings suggest several educational implications. First, universities should create frequent, low-stakes opportunities for purposeful English interaction. Conversation circles, peer mentoring, collaborative projects, poster sessions, discipline-specific discussion groups, and student clubs can broaden English use beyond formal assessment. Such activities should prioritize meaning and participation rather than constant correction.

Second, teacher development should include sociolinguistic awareness. Instructors benefit from understanding code-switching, translanguaging, accent diversity, and the relationship between language

anxiety and classroom power. Rather than treating students' first languages as obstacles, teachers can use them strategically while ensuring that students receive substantial opportunities to formulate ideas in English. Flexible scaffolding is especially important when content complexity exceeds current language resources.

Third, institutions should reduce resource inequalities. Free access to language-learning platforms, writing centers, pronunciation support, digital devices, internet connectivity, and trained peer tutors can help students who have had fewer opportunities before university. English enrichment should not depend primarily on the ability to purchase private courses.

Fourth, peer ecology deserves explicit attention. Programs can mix students across linguistic and disciplinary groups, support international-local student partnerships, and design tasks that make English a practical bridge language without devaluing local languages. This approach changes opportunity structures rather than simply telling students to "speak more English."

Finally, evaluation should be context-sensitive. Higher English-use frequency is not inherently desirable in every setting. Family and community languages carry identity, knowledge, and social relationships. The educational goal is to expand students' repertoires and agency so that they can use English effectively when it serves their purposes while maintaining other languages that matter to them.

8. Conclusion

This article examined the sociolinguistic factors affecting English language use among students through an integrated framework linking proficiency, peer networks, teacher encouragement, attitudes, socioeconomic access, residential background, and communicative domain. Using a transparent simulated dataset of 240 students, the model demonstrates how a university-based study can move beyond a narrow proficiency explanation and analyze English use as a socially situated practice. The illustrative results show that English use is highest in academic and digital contexts and lowest at home, while proficiency, peer English use, teacher encouragement, positive attitudes, socioeconomic access, and urban background each make independent positive

contributions. Year of study contributes comparatively little after these factors are considered.

The broader implication is that students do not use English merely because they know it. They use it when settings, relationships, identities, institutional norms, and resources make English possible, useful, and socially meaningful. Sociolinguistic theory therefore adds explanatory depth to language-education research by connecting individual behavior with the communities and structures in which communication occurs. Policies that seek to increase English use should expand meaningful opportunities, support diverse Englishes, normalize strategic multilingual practice, and address unequal access rather than relying on English-only rules.

For empirical application, researchers should replace the simulated observations with locally collected data, validate the questionnaire in the relevant linguistic context, obtain ethical approval, and complement self-report measures with interviews or observation. Such work can reveal not only how often students use English, but also why they choose it, what identities and relationships those choices express, and how educational institutions can support multilingual students more equitably.

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 21. Appendix A. Proposed Questionnaire Items
 22. Section A: Background information. Suggested items include age range, year of study, field of study, languages used regularly, schooling background, place of residence before university, and optional indicators of access to educational resources.
 23. Section B: English-use frequency (1 = never/very rarely; 5 = very often). (1) I use English when asking or answering questions in class. (2) I use English when discussing academic topics with classmates. (3) I use English when preparing presentations or written assignments. (4) I use English when communicating on social media or online platforms. (5) I use English when watching, reading, or listening to digital content. (6) I use English in informal conversations with friends. (7) I use English with family members. (8) I use English when communicating with people from different linguistic backgrounds.
 24. Section C: Explanatory scales (1 = strongly disagree; 5 = strongly agree). Proficiency: "I can explain complex ideas in English," "I can follow extended English conversations," and "I can communicate in English even when I do not know every word." Peer network: "My close friends often use English," "English is normal in my peer group," and "I have friends with whom English is a useful shared language." Teacher encouragement: "My teachers create opportunities to speak English," "My teachers respond supportively when students

make errors,” and “English is used for meaningful interaction rather than only tests.” Attitudes: “English is useful for my future,” “I enjoy communicating in English,” and “I feel comfortable using English with people who speak it differently from native speakers.” Socioeconomic access: items can assess reliable internet, devices, private or supplementary language instruction, books/media, travel or exchange opportunities, and prior access to English-medium education.

- 25.** Section D: Open-ended prompts. (1) In which situations do you choose English even when another language is available? Why? (2) In which situations do you avoid English? Why? (3) How do your friends respond when someone speaks English? (4) When does code-switching help you communicate or learn? (5) What could your university do to create better opportunities for English communication without discouraging other languages?