Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences Research

Horizon JOURNALS

BP Services

The Relationship between Omani High School Students' Home Environment and their English Academic Achievement

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ARTICLE INFO

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doi® **Crossref** Content

ABSTRACT

English language academic achievement (ELAA) is an important aspect of education, and understanding the factors that influence it can have significant implications for both students and educators. In this study, the authors investigated the relationship between the home environment of Omani Grade 12 students and their English proficiency. Three dimensions of the home environment backgrounds are considered: educational, socio-economic, and technological. The research is based on a pilot study to develop a quantitative data collection tool. Four key findings on the impact on English academic achievement emerged from the research. First, the educational status of the family has a significant impact. Second, family's social status has no effect. Third, the financial and technological status of the family does not have an impact. Four, the home environment has less of an impact on the English language achievement of females than males. Based on these, it is recommended that the Omani Ministry of Education establish a system for ongoing communication between schools and parents. Teachers should take students' backgrounds into account to identify challenging home environments.

Introduction

The success of children is influenced by various factors, including their social background or home environment. Many scholars believe that the home environment is one of the most important factors in a child's success in life (Kumar & Lal, 2014; Olszewski, Kulieke, & Buescher, 1987; Rak & Patterson, 1996). In regards to academic achievement at school, research has shown that the home environment is closely related to students' success. Adewale (2012) states that "the responsibility of training a child always lies in the hands of the parents" (p. 230).

The relationship between students' social background and their academic performance is a topic that has been studied extensively by many scholars. There are numerous articles, dissertations, and research studies on this topic, with some researchers finding positive correlations and others finding no correlation at all. For example, Hill et al. (2004) argue that the parents' socio-economics influence the academic achievement of the children, while Adewale (2012) found that socioeconomic and educational background of the parents have no effect on students' academic achievement. These examples illustrate that this is a controversial topic

that is dependent on various factors such as context, the population of the study, and the quality of the data collection.

Grade 12 is a critical and crucial stage for students in Oman as it often determines their future. After this stage, students have two options: obtaining good grades and pursuing higher education or completing grade 12 and entering the job market. English is considered a vital course, and for some students, it is considered the most challenging subject at school. Studies have shown that a majority of students struggle in this subject to achieve the required grades for acceptance into higher education institutions. Al-Issa (2006) explains the problems that students encounter: "When students in Oman exit high school, they generally encounter problems with using English communicatively (Al-Issa, 2005). They lack grammatical competence (how to use the structure and form of the language), discourse competence (how to provide cohesion and coherence across sentences and utterances), sociolinguistic competence (how to interact), and strategic competence (how to make the most of the language you have, especially when it is deficient) (Hymes, 1972). Omani students are exposed to substantial teaching of grammar rules, so grammatical competence is their least problematic area." (p. 19)

In addition to the challenges students face in mastering the English language, other factors also impact their performance. One of these factors is the social background of the students. Ogunshola and Adewale (2012) argue that any factors that affect the development of a child's environment will directly affect their academic performance. For this reason, the authors aim to investigate the correlation between Omani high school students' home environment and their English academic achievement.

The current study is correlational as the researchers examine the relationship between independent variables (educational background, socioeconomic background, technological background, gender) and the dependent variable (English language achievement). The data collection and instruments are based on this research design. As such, four variables (educational background, socioeconomic background, technological background, gender) are examined in relation to the students' academic achievement.

The aim of this research is to investigate the relationship between Omani high school students' home environment and their English academic achievement. This study is

focused on Grade 12 students as this is an important stage at school. To achieve the present aim, four objectives have been set:

> R.O. 1: To evaluate the relationship between the socioeconomic background of the family and the student's English language achievement.
> R.O. 2: To evaluate the relationship between the educational background of the family and the student's English language achievement.
> R.O. 3: To evaluate the relationship between the technological background of the family and the student's English language achievement.
> R.O. 4: To evaluate the relationship between gender and the student's English language achievement.

These four objectives lead to the following questions:

> R.Q. 1: What is the relationship between the socioeconomic background of the family and students' English academic achievement?
> R.Q. 2: What is the relationship between the educational background of the family and students' English academic achievement?
> R.Q. 3: What is the relationship between the technological background of the family and students' English academic achievement?
> R.Q. 4: What is the gender effect on students' English academic achievement?

The researchers address students' performance, an issue that concerns students, parents, teachers, administrators, and thus the whole society. Furthermore, this study will impact Omani parents who have children in Grade 12 as they may benefit from the results of this study. The research is anticipated to be a pioneer in this field in Oman and will lead to further research related to the same topic.

However, this study has some limitations such as being conducted in one city in Oman, relying on online questionnaires which may not have been answered seriously by some students and having a small sample size. Therefore, it is recommended that future research investigate a larger population within Oman and conduct more interviews to provide more reliable and comprehensive results.

Literature Review

The literature review section of the research paper is meant to provide an overview of existing studies and research on the topic of the relationship between home environment and academic achievement. It is established

that the home environment plays a crucial role in determining a child's success in life, and that success in education is closely connected to the social background of the student.

Research supports the theory that there is a relationship between social background and academic achievement. Studies traditionally focus on family status variables such as socioeconomic status and parents' level of education as predictors of children's academic achievement (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013). Other studies emphasize the role of socioeconomic status in influencing personality, learning, and development of the individual and their academic achievement (Singh & Choudhary, 2015).

Different researchers approach the topic of home environment in different ways. For example, Okioga (2013) and Ogunshola and Adewale (2012) examine the socioeconomic status of the parents and family, while Egunsola (2014) focuses on the educational qualification of the parents and home location. This highlights that the concept of home environment can be presented in different ways depending on the context. However, to the best of the researchers' knowledge, there is no research conducted in the Omani context.

In this research, three main dimensions of the home environment are examined: educational background, socioeconomic background, and technological background. In this literature review, the authors present a general overview of each dimension, and then present findings from previous studies regarding each dimension.

The educational background of the parents and family is a crucial aspect of the home environment that has been studied extensively in the literature. According to Diaz et al. (2004), the influence of family educational climate is determined by the amount and style of help that children receive from the family, which is influenced by elements such as communication dynamics, effective relationships, attitudes towards values, and expectations.

The literature presents various perspectives on the relationship between parental educational background and student academic achievement. Some studies conclude that there is a significant correlation between the two variables. For example, human capital literature links the educational attainment of children to the background of the parents, and accordingly, parents' in educational attainment is a resource input in their children's human capital (De Serf, 2002). John et al.

(1994) also argues that parental educational background can be expressed in the frequent use of English at home. Additionally, Saifi and Mehmood (2011) and Egunsola (2014) found that students from educated families tend to perform better than those from uneducated families.

Saifi and Mehmood (2011) found that the majority of studies have concluded that there is a positive correlation between parental education and student academic achievement. However, some other studies have found no correlation or even a negative correlation between parental educational background and student academic achievement. Adewale (2012) conducted research in Nigeria and found that the socio-economic and educational background of parents is not a significant factor in students' academic performance.

The socioeconomic background or status of the parents and family is a key aspect of the home environment. This concept combines both social and economic elements, such as a person's work experience and their family's economic and social position in comparison to others (Okioga, 2013). Research on this topic often includes socioeconomic status as it plays a crucial role in the home environment and can greatly impact an individual's personality, learning, and academic achievement (Ramasamy, 1990). Literature also includes the educational and occupational status of the family as part of the socioeconomic status, as it can be determined by factors such as family income, parental education level, occupation, and social status within the community (Demarest et al., 1993).

Research on the relationship between socioeconomic background and academic achievement has yielded mixed results. While many studies have found a correlation between the two factors, others have found no significant relationship. De Serf (2002) found that household income is a strong predictor of educational achievement. Saifi and Mehmood's (2011) research suggests that a stable socioeconomic status can create a positive learning environment, leading to higher academic achievement. Egunsola (2014) also found that parental economic status has an impact on students' performance, in addition to educational qualifications and home location. Furthermore, Paret (2006) states that "On average, students from lower socio-economic groups (particularly those from unskilled manual backgrounds) and who are from low-income families achieve less well in a range of tests, examinations, and assessments than those who are from higher socio-economic groups and who are not from low-income families." (p. 48)

A correlation between socioeconomic status and academic achievement is reported in numerous studies (Kainuwa & Yusuf, 2013; Okioga, 2013; Singh & Choudhary, 2015), with research indicating that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds tend to perform better academically. However, some studies (Adewale, 2012) have found conflicting results and suggest that other factors such as parental education and occupation may play a larger role.

The third dimension of the home environment that affects students' academic achievement is the technological status of the family and parents. With the increasing role of technology in education, the availability and accessibility of technology at home can greatly impact a student's performance. Research on this dimension is limited, but some studies have included technology as a part of educational background (Egunsola, 2014) or socioeconomic background (Saifi & Mehmood, 2011). However, there is little research specifically focusing on the impact of technology on academic achievement. Studies have shown that technology advancements such as powerful personal computers can greatly impact the way people live and learn in today's information age (Gulek & Demirtas, 2005). Additionally, research has found that technology use in education is most effective when it is related to specific subject areas and focuses on student construction of knowledge (Lei & Zhao, 2007).

Methodology

The previous section discussed the relationship between students' background and academic achievement as presented in the literature. Different findings were presented from these studies, depending on the context, population, and other variables considered. However, it is challenging to apply these results, even those from studies conducted in the Middle East, to Oman as each location has its own unique factors. Thus, in this study the researchers aim to specifically investigate this relationship in Oman and provide findings that can assist parents and stakeholders in understanding the impact of home-environment on students' academic performance. The research is focused on the English academic performance of high school students, taking into consideration the role of gender as a variable. A quantitative method is used and a questionnaire is employed as the data collection tool. The questionnaire went through multiple stages of evaluation and was reviewed by three experts in English Education. It was then distributed to a sample of 60 12th-grade students in three stages, with feedback and comments from participants being collected to improve the questionnaire.

The methodology for this study includes using a quantitative approach, utilizing a questionnaire as the data collection tool. The questionnaire has undergone multiple evaluations and revisions with the help of experts in the field of English Education. The sample for this study includes 300 Grade 12 students from 10 public schools in the Ad Dakhiliyah governorate, with a pilot study being conducted with 60 students (30 males and 30 females). The choice of this number is based on (Browne, 2004). The questionnaire used in the study is adapted from a previous study by Van der Slik, Driessen, and De Bot (2006) and has been refined and tested for validity and reliability with similar groups in the Ad Dakhiliyah governorate.

The procedure of data collection was as follows, first, the researchers distributed questionnaires to the students at school after dividing them into three groups (20 each group) for quality purposes (Reliability). Then after collecting the questionnaires, the researchers conducted interviews with the students to ask them about their comments on the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed after the first semester and at a time that was suitable to the students as the students' impression of the English language was very important to answer the questions. All students had already received their results from the first semester, and as such could clearly share their impressions through the questionnaire. The original questionnaire consisted of 35 questions, after conducting validity and reliably tests, the adapted one consisted of 28 questions.

Regarding data analysis, the correlation between pairs of the four independent variables (educational background, socioeconomic background, technological background, and gender) and the dependent variable (English language achievement) were measured with descriptive analysis where each question with its answers is presented and describe, and interpretations and final conclusions are given for each dimension. In addition, the results are set in comparison with the findings found in the literature. The quality assurance of the research is achieved through credibility, transferability, and confirmability for the quantitative method.

Findings

In this section, the responses to the different questions are presented, described, and analyzed.

Personal information

The presented pie chart shows the distribution of the responses among the cities within the Ad'Dakhilya region. 42 participants, 21 men and 21 women, from each Wilayah are involved in this questionnaire.

The pie chart represents the responses to the question related to gender. The responses show that 50% are men and the same percentage is women.

The figure above states the final mark in the English language subject in the Spring semester of 2022. This is the most important question that the whole research is based on. The pie chart reveals that around 32% of the students got "D". This category is dominant among other categories. On the other hand, 22.6 % got an "A" and around 80 students got a "B". The second dominant category is the "C" which contains 25.8 % of the participants. 9.7% got an "F" which means they did not pass the English language subject. The total percentage of the students who got 80-100 is over 32%, 80 students of those are women, while 22 are men. The opposite is true for the "F" students, 4 students out of 5 who got an "F" are men while 1 student only is women.

The shown figure presents the distribution of responses regarding the number of family members in the house. Over 37% of the participants have 4-7 family members. Around 25% of the students have 1-3 family members and it is the same percentage for those who have 8-12 family members. The lowest percentage is 12.5% for those who have 13 family members and above.
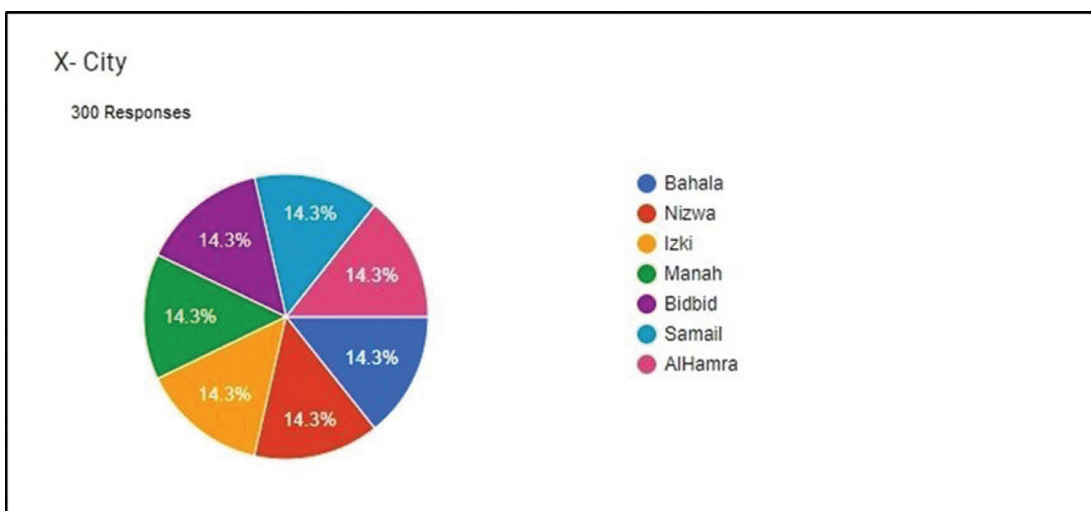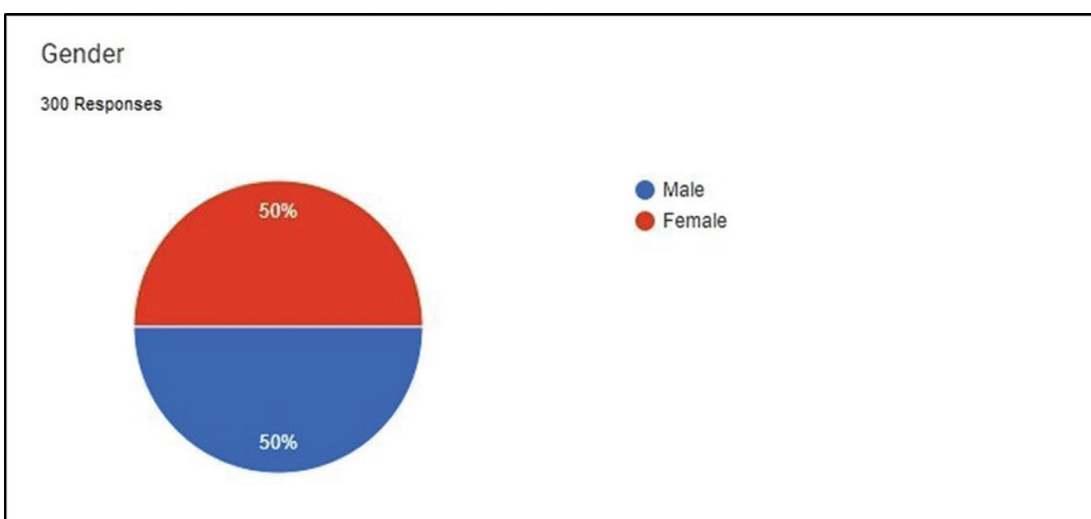
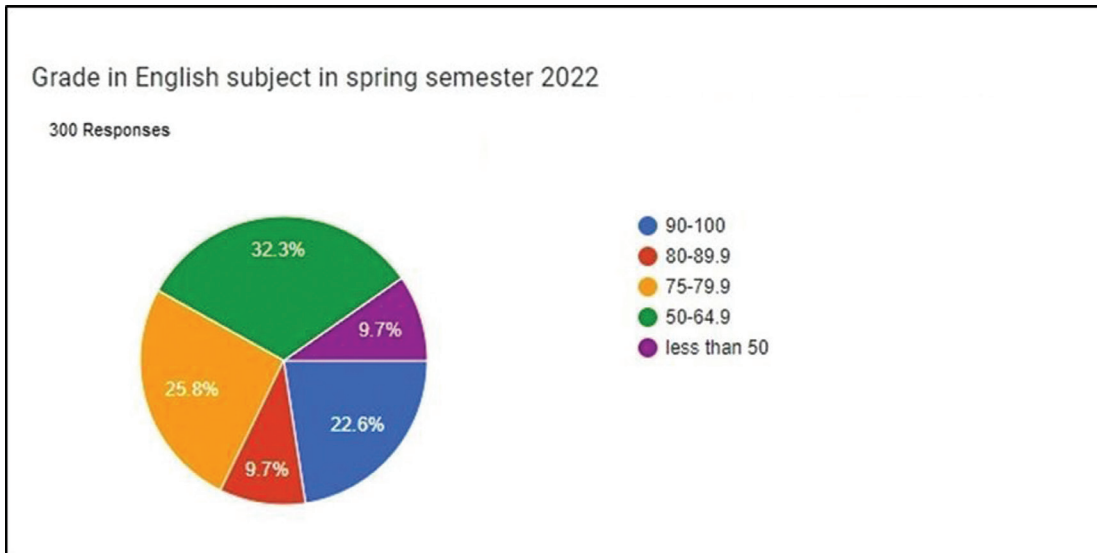

Figure 1. City

Figure 2. Gender

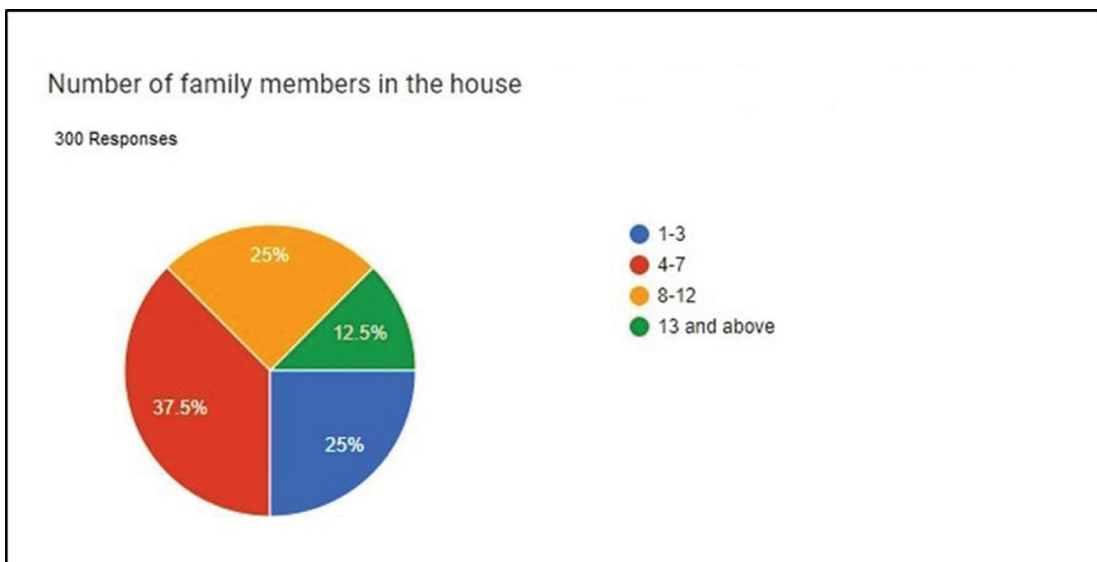**Figure 3.** Final grade in English language subject

Figure 4. Family members

Social background of the family

The first question related to the social background of the family is about the marital status of the parents. 85% of the respondents' parents are still married, while 7% of the respondents' parents are divorced. 8% selected "other" which indicates that either the father or the mother passed away.

The presented pie chart describes the responses to the second question related to the social background of the family. The question is about whether the weather parents are alive or passed away. The majority (around 90%) say that their parents are still alive while 6% say that the father passed away. 4% say that the mother passed away.

The presented pie chart represents the responses of the participants regarding their beliefs about their family's social background on their English language academic achievement. Over 42% of the participants think that there is no effect of their family's social background on their English language level. 35.7 % have a neutral situation toward this relationship. 14.3% think that they are affected positively by their family's social status, and 95% of these participants got "A" and "B" in the English language subject. 7.1% is the only percentage for those who believe that they are affected negatively by their family's social status, all these students got "D" and "F" in the English language subject. Accordingly, over 77% of the students think that there is no direct relationship between their family's social background and their English language academic achievement.
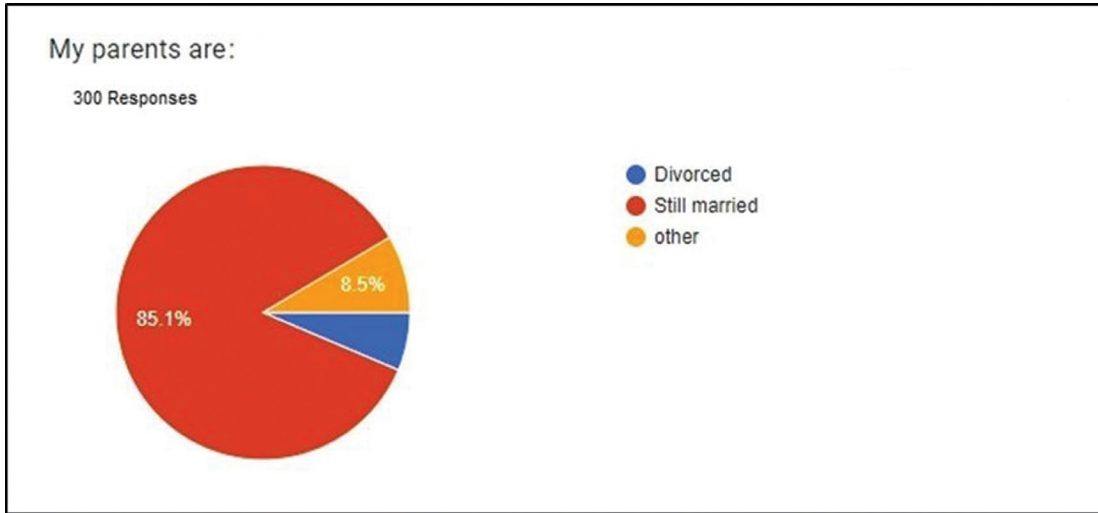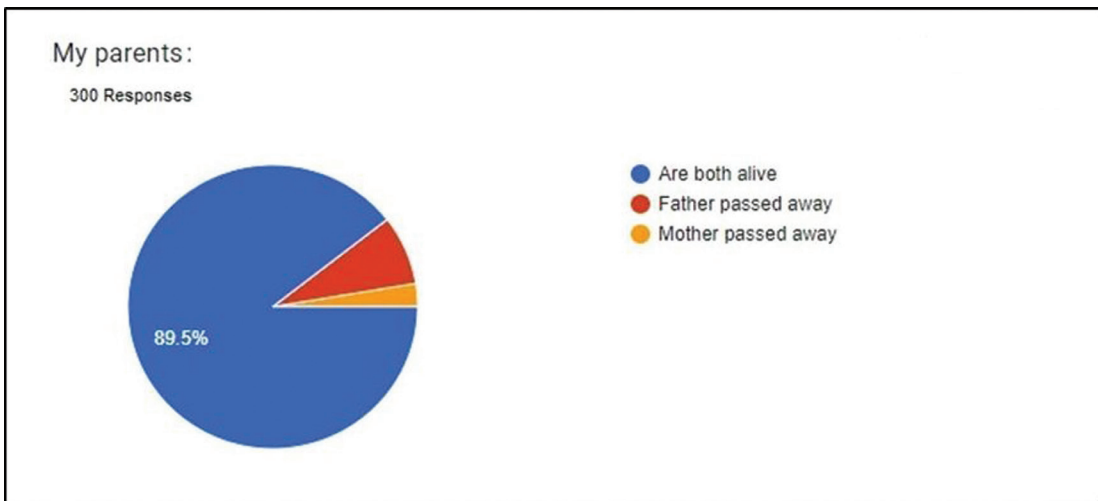
My parents are:

300 Responses

Legend:
- Divorced (blue)
- Still married (red)
- other (yellow)

85.1% — Still married
8.5% — other

Figure 5. Marital status

My parents:

300 Responses

Legend:
- Are both alive (blue)
- Father passed away (red)
- Mother passed away (yellow)

89.5% — Are both alive

Figure 6. Parent existence

Overall, I believe that my family's social background affected my acquisition of English language.

300 Responses

Legend:
- Positively (blue)
- Neutral (red)
- Negatively (yellow)
- No effect (green)

42.9% — No effect
14.3% — Positively
35.7% — Neutral
7.1% — Negatively
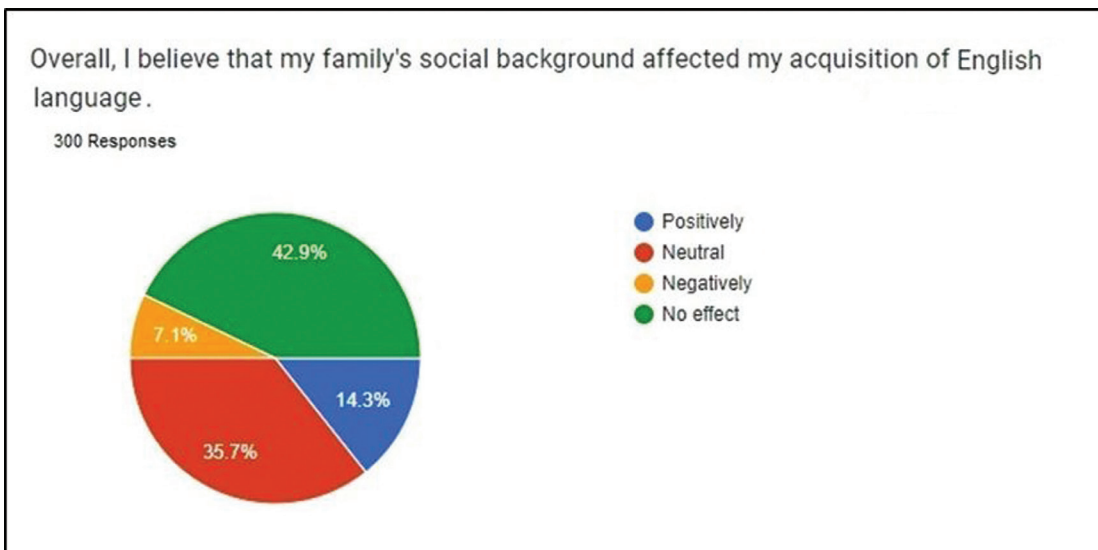
Figure 7. The effect of family social background on English achievement

Educational background of the family

The first question regarding the family's educational background is about the father's educational certificate. The majority of the respondents' fathers, around 40%, hold a preparatory and/or secondary degree. 30.4% of the participants responds that their fathers got a Diploma and/ or a Bachelor degree. A few numbers of students' fathers, 8.7%, got Masters and/ or PhD degree. On the other hand, 21.7% do not have any educational degree. The major note is that 92% of the students who got "A" and "B" in the English language subject are those whose fathers hold Diploma, Bachelor, and PhD degrees.

In this figure, the population responds to the father's occupation. The percentage is divided almost equally between the stated occupations. 13.3% goes for "teacher", 16.7% goes for "engineer", 16.7% goes

for the military, and the same percentage goes for "administrative". 10% only do not have a job and around 27% have other occupations.

The responses in the pie chart are related to the participants' opinions towards their fathers' English language level. 44.4% who are almost half of the participants think that their fathers' English language level is "weak". 22.2% think their fathers have a "good" English language level. Around 28% think their fathers have "very good" and "excellent" English language levels and 90% of these students got "A" and "B" in the English language subject. A percentage of less than 7 goes for "other" which means that either they do not their father's English language lever or their fathers are dead.

The responses in the pie chart above are related to the participants' opinions towards their mothers' English
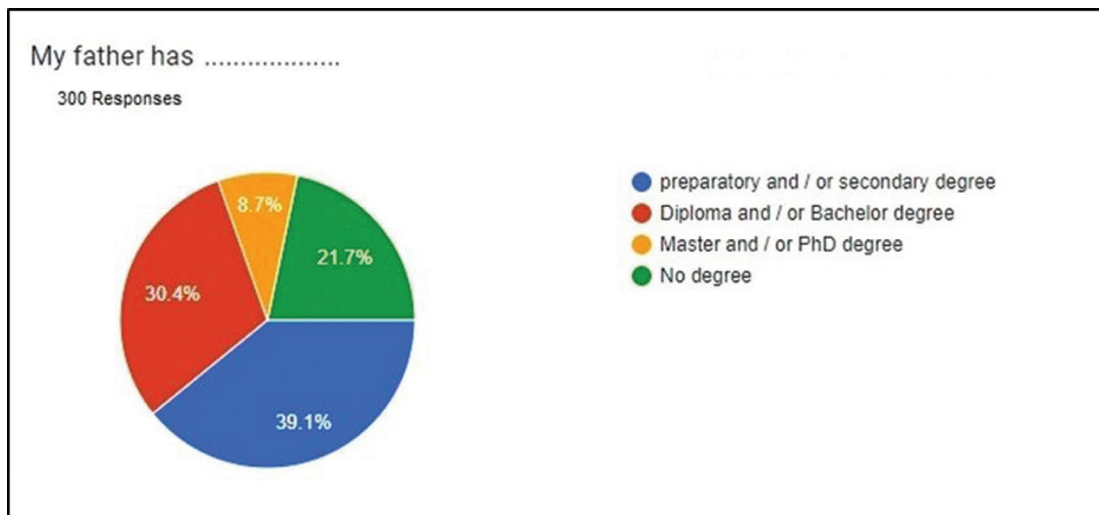

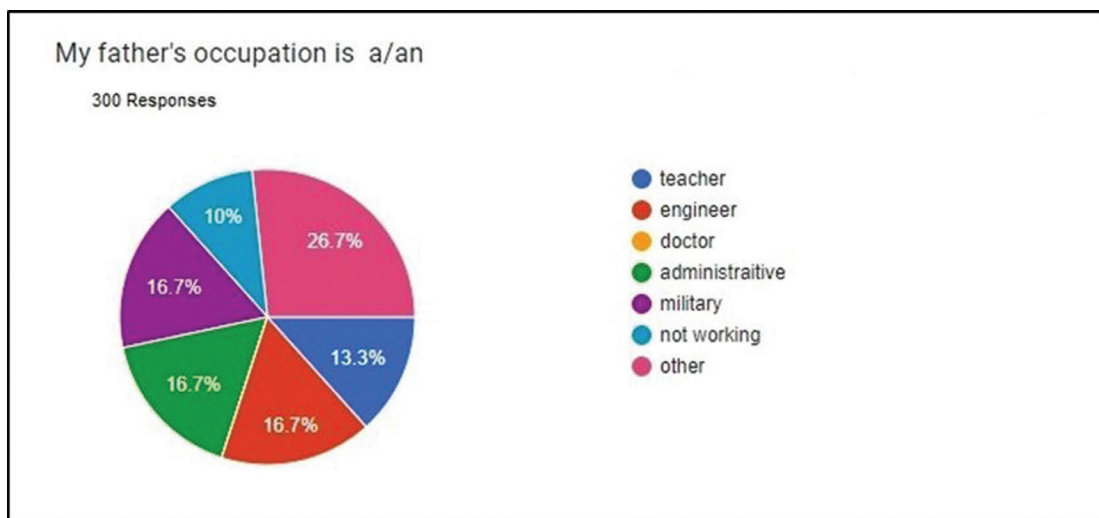**Figure 8.** Father's educational degree
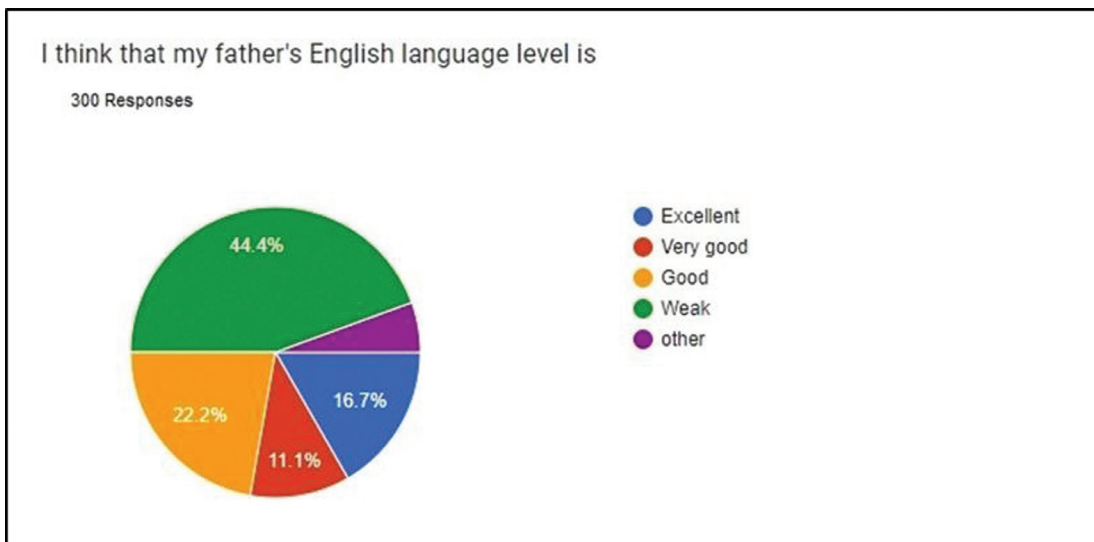

Figure 9. Father's occupation

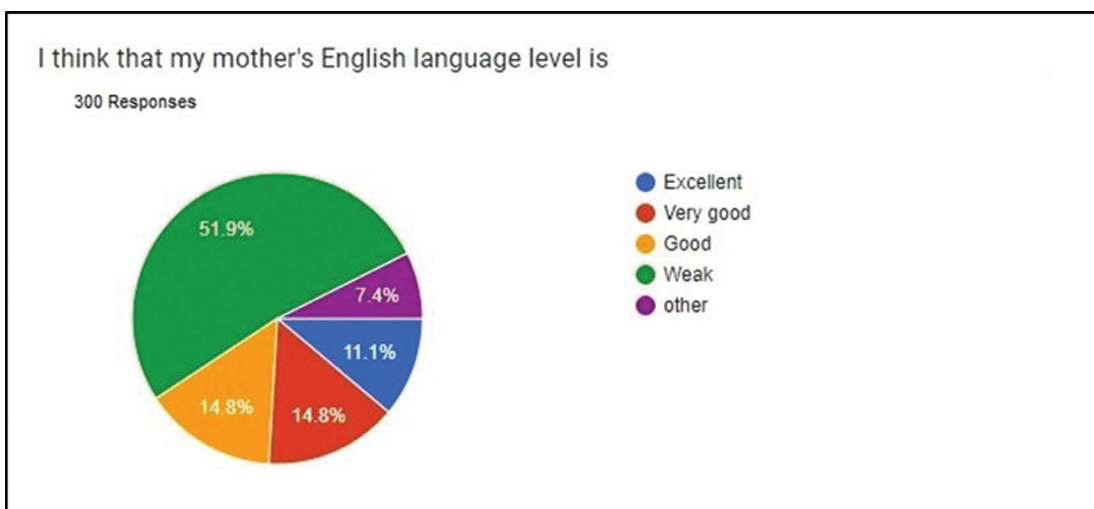**Figure 10.** Father's English language level

Figure 11. Mother's English language level

language level. 60% who are more than half of the participants think that their mothers' English language level is "weak". 14.8% think their mothers have a "very good" English language level, and it is the same percentage for those who think that their mothers' English language is "good". 11% only is the percentage for those whose mothers are excellent in English, 94% of these students got "A" and "B" in the English language subject.

The last question in the section of the educational background of the family is about the participants' beliefs regarding the effect of the educational background of their families on their English language acquisition. One-third of the overall participants think that there is a positive effect of their family's educational background on their English language achievement. 54% of this category got "A", 40% got "B" and 6% only got between "C" and "D". On the other hand, the pie chart shows that 25%

of the respondents believe that their English language achievement is affected negatively by their family's educational background. The majority of this percentage, 92%, are those who got from "F" to "C" in the English language subject.

4.2.1.4 Financial background of the family

The first question in the third section is about the average income of the family per month. More than one-third respond that the average income is between 500 to 900 Omani Rials. 30% get between 900 to 1200 Omani Rials. 21.7% got more than 1200 Omani Rials. 13% only get less than 500 Omani Rials.

The second question in the financial background section is about the evaluation of the family's financial status.
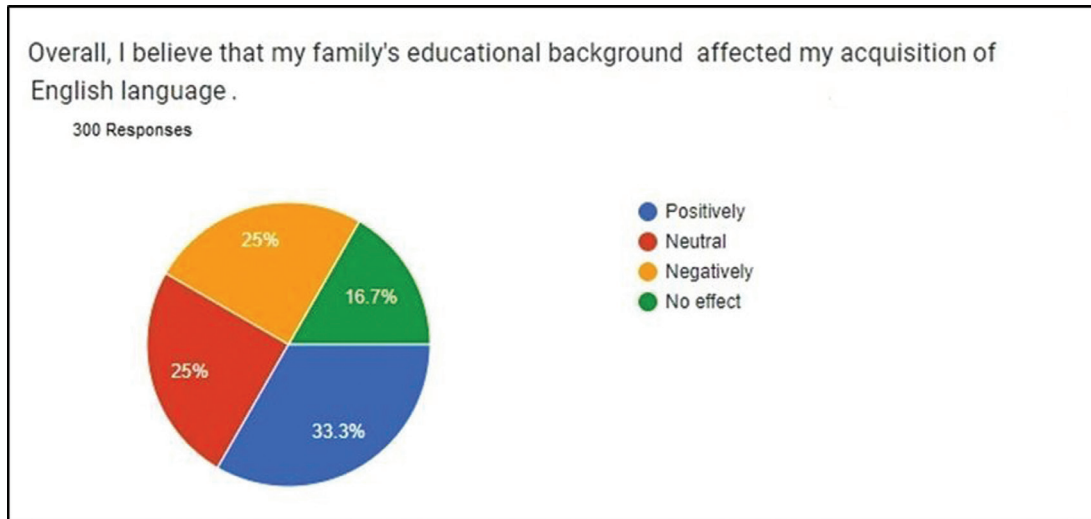
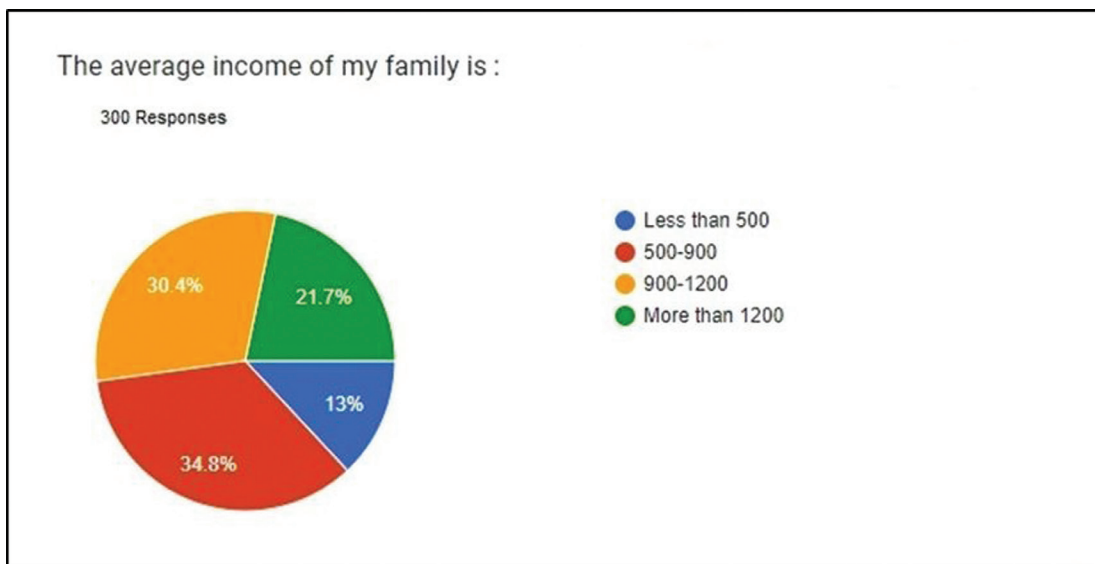**Figure 12.** The effect of family educational background on English achievement

Figure 13. The average income of the family
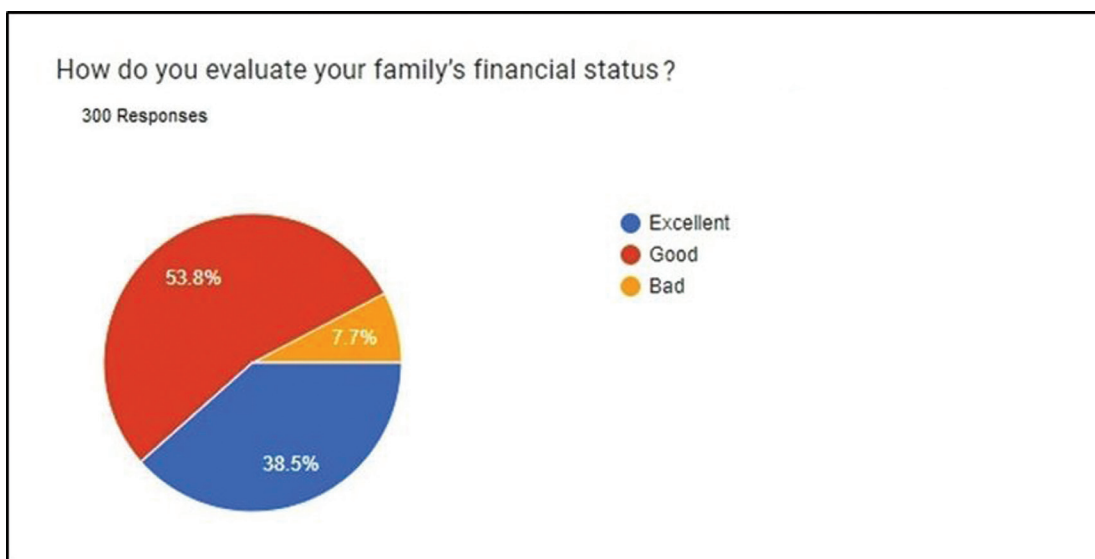

Figure 14. Evaluation of family's financial status

More than half of the students think that their family's financial status is "good", while 38.5% say it is "excellent". 7.7% only say it is "bad".

As shown in the pie chart, the final question in the economic status of the family section is related to the participants' beliefs regarding the effect of this home-environment side on their English language achievement. The responses vary, around 43% say that there is no effect of their family's financial background on their English language performance. 35.7% are neutral about this fact while 14.3 only say that it affects their English language achievement positively. On the other hand, 7.1%, which is the least percentage, say that there is a negative effect from the financial status of their families on their English language academic achievement at school.

Technological background of the family

This figure presents the results of the first question of the third home-environment dimension, the technological background of the family., it asks if the father uses a smartphone. Around 85% of the participants responded with "yes:" while 7.7% responded with "other" which means their fathers passed away. A small percentage, 8%, respond with "no".

Like the previous figure, this figure presents the results of the second question related to the third home-environment dimension, the technological background of the family, it asks if the mother uses a smartphone. 79% of the participants responded with "yes:" while 7.7% responded with "other" which means their mothers passed away. A percentage of 8 responded with "no".
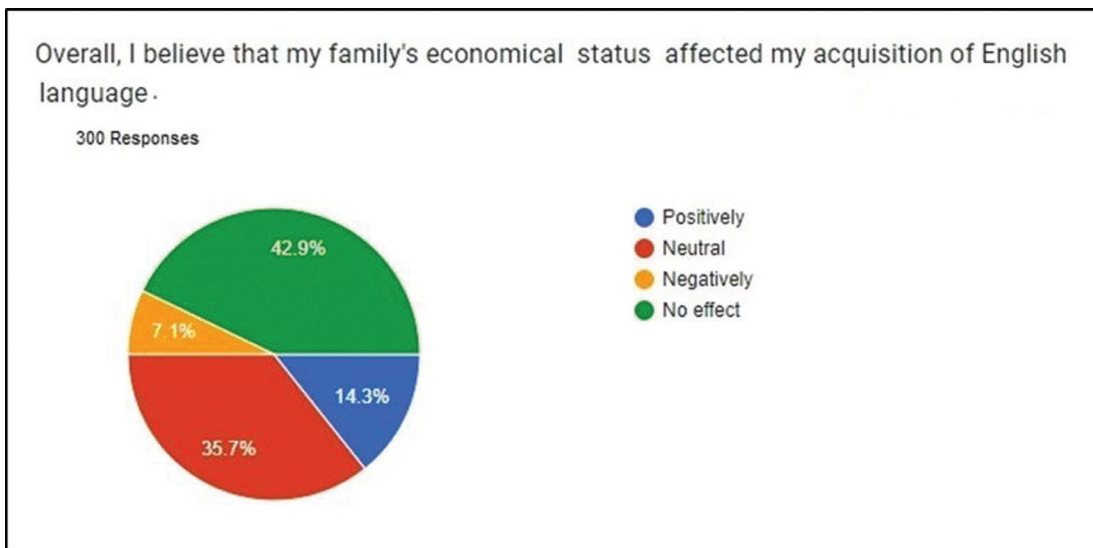

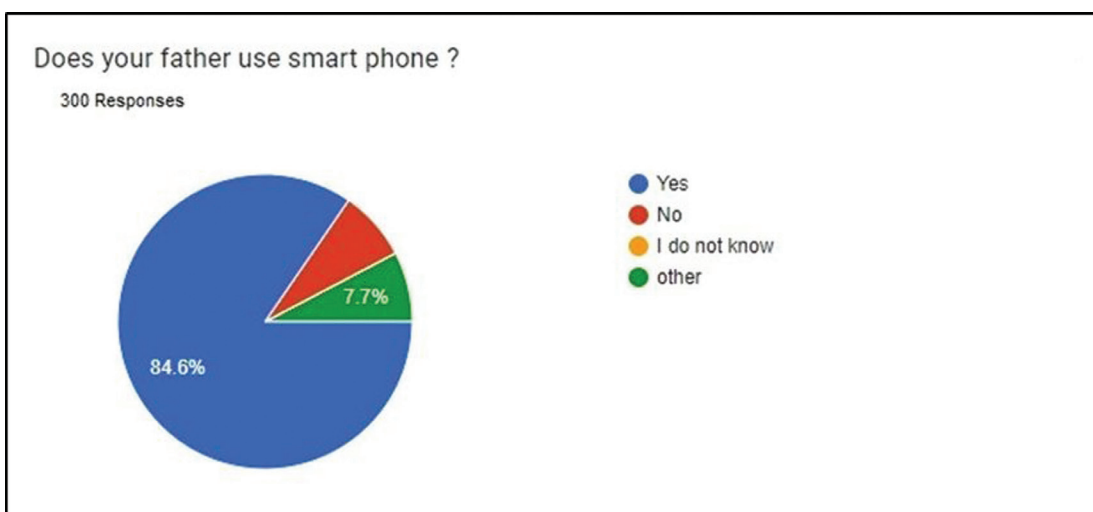**Figure 15.** The effect of family economic status on English achievement
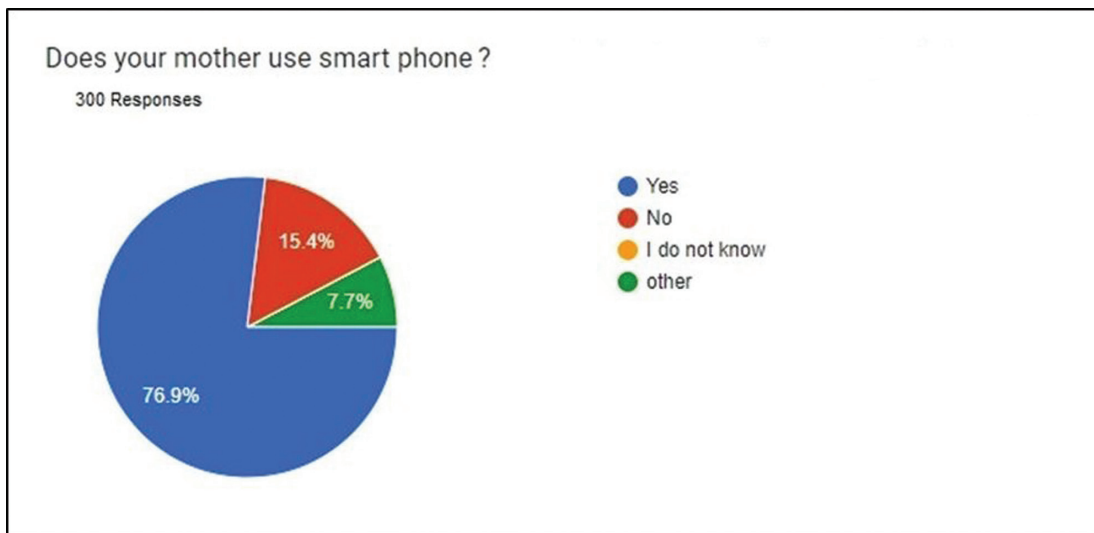

Figure 16. Father's usage of smart phone

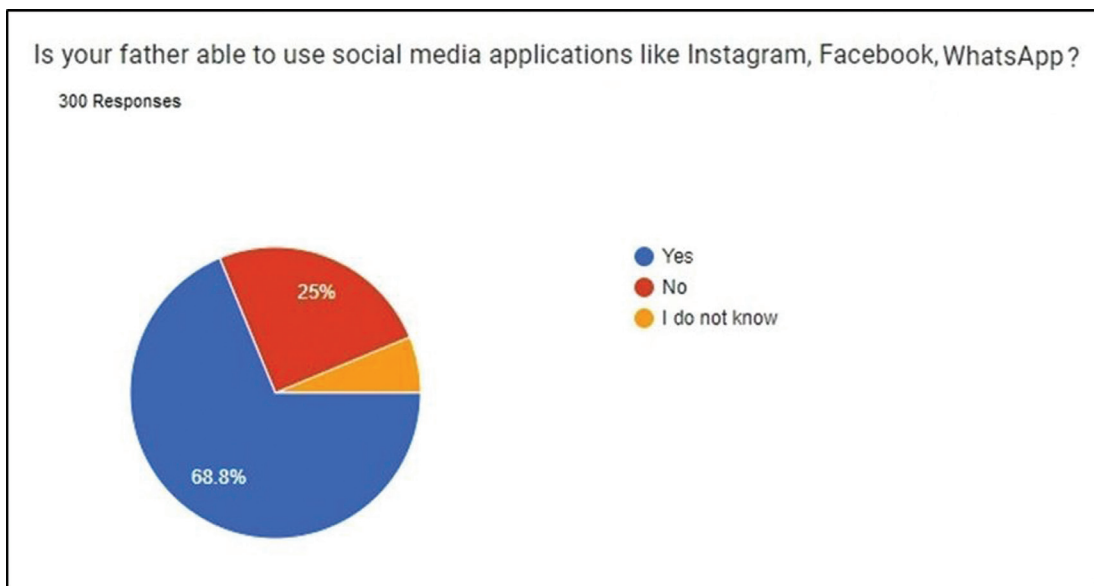**Figure 17.** Mother's usage of smart phone

Figure 18. Father's ability to use social media

This pie chart describes the responses to the third question in the technological background section which is about the father's ability to use social media applications. 68.8% responded with "yes", and 25% responded with "no". Almost 8% of the participants chose "I do not know". According to the figure, the majority of fathers, 68.7 %, are capable of using social media.

According to the shown pie chart, over 85% of the population respond with "yes" to the question asking about the existence of Wi-Fi at home. 14.3% only respond with 'no'.

This figure shows the results of the parent's perception of their children using social media during their study. 35.7% say that their parents encourage them to use social

media applications. However, over 42% respond with the opposite, they say that their parents do not think it is a good way to learn English. 7.7% say that they are not allowed to use any kind of social media application.

The results in this figure are related to the question asked to the participants about their evaluation of their parents' technological background. 55.6% respond with "good", 22% respond with "poor", 16.7 responds with "fair", and 7% only respond with excellent.

The last question in the technological background section is related to the respondents' beliefs regarding the effect of their family's technological background on their English language academic achievement. The majority of the participants are neutral,47.4%. 36.8% say that there is
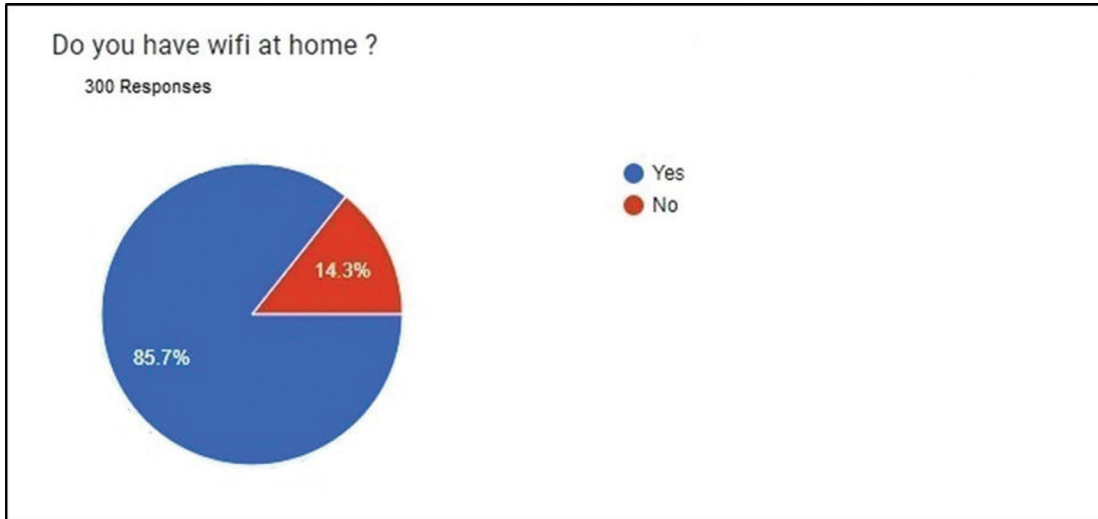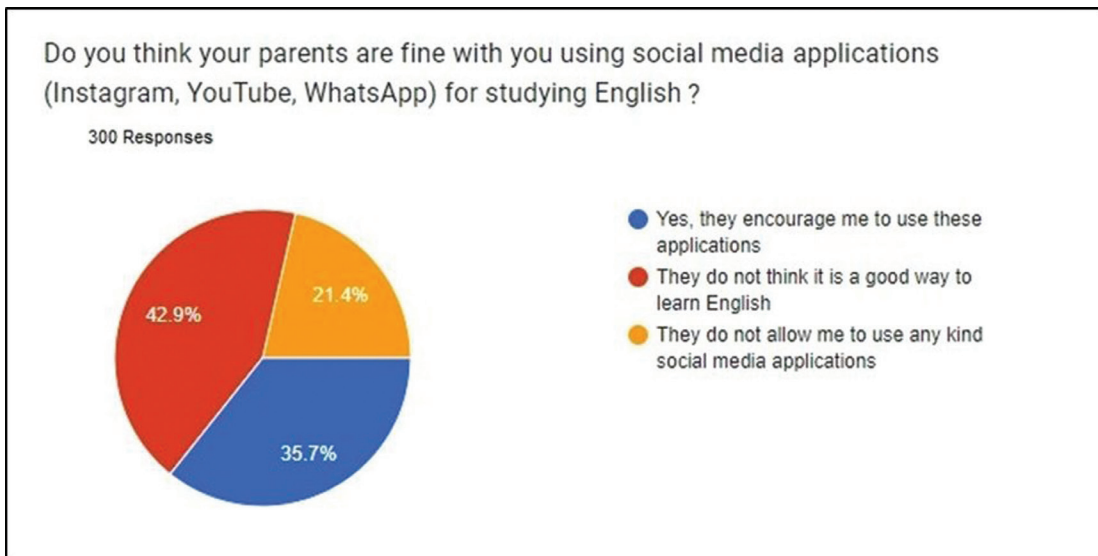
Figure 19. availability of WIFI at home

Figure 20. Parents' allowance of using social media during the study
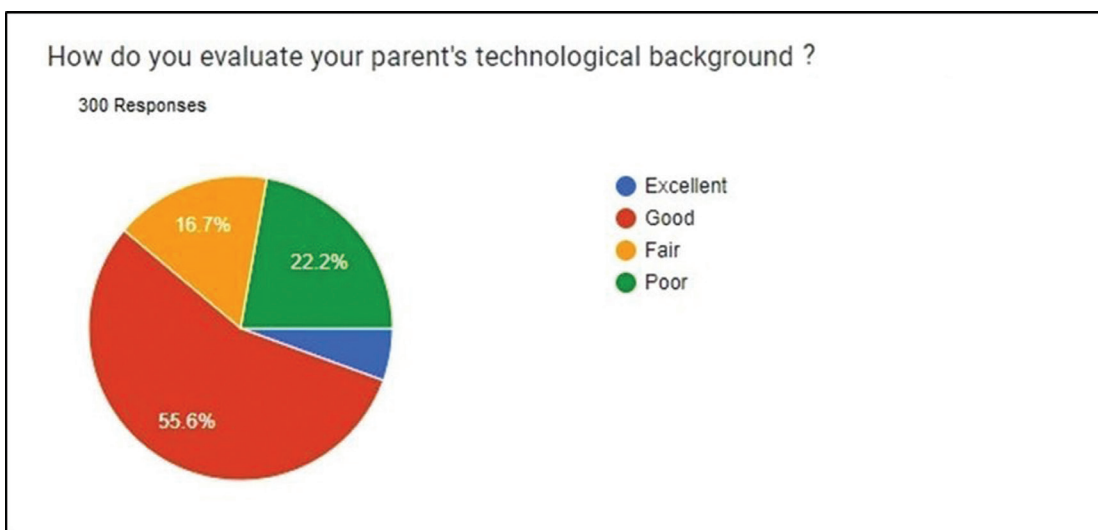

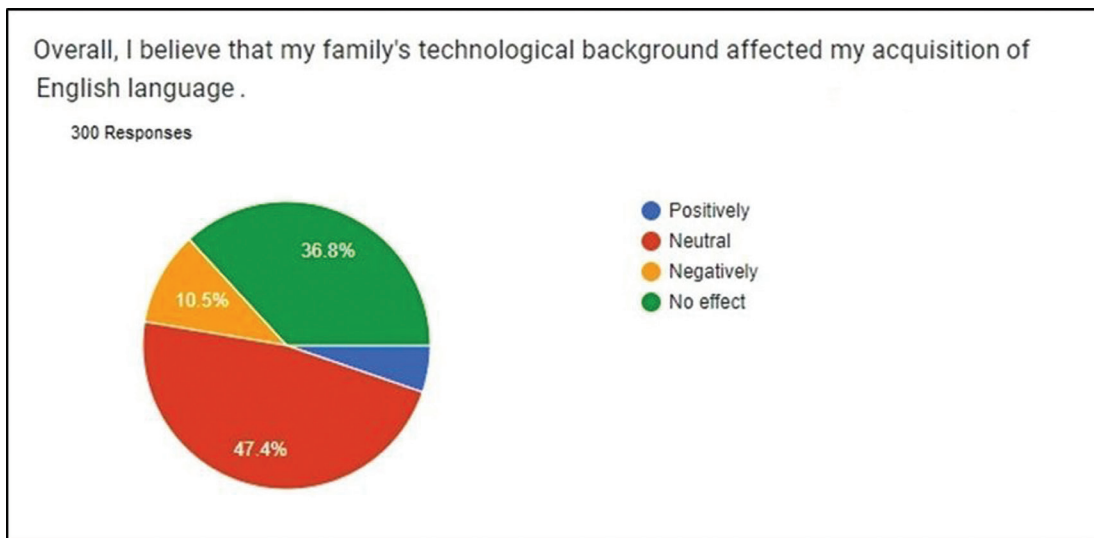**Figure 21.** Evaluation of Family technological background

Figure 22. The effect of family technological background on English achievement

no direct effect. 10.5% say there is a negative effect. On the other hand, 6% only say that there is a positive effect.

4 Gender

The table above illustrates the distribution of responses regarding gender and final mark in English. The table shows that around 22.6% of the participants got an "A" in the English language subject. The results show that 85% of these students are women while 15% only are men. In addition, women constitute 82% of the total number of students who got a "B" in the final mark of the English language subject. Accordingly, the majority of "A" and "B" students are women as they constitute around 83% of the "A" and "B" categories. On the other hand, the majority of men got "C", "D" and "F". These three categories constitute around 67% of the total number of participants for both men and women. Men constitute 78% of this number, and 22% goes to women. According to the stated statistics, women got better marks in the English language subject than men students.

Discussion

After taking the students' responses into account, it is crucial to view these against the literature. This section provides a discussion in light of previous studies. As witnessed from the results obtained from the questionnaires, educational status plays a major role in academic achievement in English. By relating figure 1 with Figures 8,9,10,11 12, and 13, it can be clearly seen that the majority of students who obtained high marks in English come from educated families. Figure

Table 1. Gender Vs Final mark in English language subject

Mark/gender	Men	Women	Total (%)	Total (number)
90-100 (A)	2	12	22.6%	14
80-89.5 (B)	2	4	9.7%	6
75-79.5 (C)	7	8	25.5%	15
50-64.5 (D)	14	5	32.3%	19
Less than 50 (F)	4	1	9.7%	6

Source: Adapted from (Alrashdi, 2023).

13 also shows that the majority of students (57%) think that the educational status of their family is the most relevant and effective factor to their academic achievement. The literature supports this (Masrom, 2015; Muthoni, 2013; Okioga, 2013;) as educated parents may transmit their knowledge to their children which can translate into academic achievement. An important point mentioned in the literature (Lindholm-Leary & Borsato, 2006; Marjoribanks, 2005) is that parents who are well educated tend to be financially comfortable. Furthermore, they will have sufficient knowledge of technology which may benefit their children's education. Therefore, this factor is the key to the other factors. As evidenced in the literature (De Serf, 2002; Egunsola, 2014; Finnie & Mueller, 2008), there is mounting support to the claim that the educational status of the family plays a significant role in academic performance. However, Adewale (2012) concludes his research by noting that parental educational status does not play a big role in academic achievement. This view is rare among the literature.

Based on the findings, it is challenging to measure the social status of the students as there are not enough students who have social cases like divorce, or death.

However, there is only one student scoring higher than 80 whose father passed. Therefore, it is difficult to reach a conclusion based on a single case. Regarding the economic status of the family, the data indicates that the majority of students in the poorer category obtained high marks in their English language course. This suggests that the financial status of the family does not play a determining role in academic performance in English. This is supported by the findings of the interviews where respondents claimed that they did not pay a huge attention to their financial status as education is free in Oman. However, in the literature, the majority of papers reporting on the financial status supports that it plays a significant role in academic achievement. Egunsola (2014), Saifi and Mehmood (2011), and De Serf (2002) are examples of publications supporting this view. All noted that educational achievement is correlated with the financial status of the family. On the other hand, Ogunshola and Adewale (2012), who conducted their research in Nigeria, reported that "socio-economic is not a significant factor besides the educational background of the parents" (p. 23). It can be inferred that the effect of financial status on academic achievement depends on other variables such as the context and the age of the examined population. In other words, there is no financial effect as education is free in Oman. As such rich and poor families have access to the same education in Oman.

Based on the results emerging from the data, it is challenging to draw a clear conclusion. As demonstrated in Figure 9, the majority of students (90%) are allowed to use technology at home and thus have access to the Internet. During the interviews, parents explained that technology is important to education, but it is not the determining factor to the success of students. The literature (Gulek & Demirtas, 2005) supports this idea as technology may affect the students' achievement, but this comes under the educational status of the parents since there is no technology without education and knowledge.

The results of the questionnaire show that females perform better academically than males. Exactly 77% of students who obtained 80 and above are females. Previous studies (Buchmann & DiPrete, 2006; Changchun & Xiaotian, 2008) found that females are less affected by their social background than boys. This could result in them investing greater efforts to study since they have fewer opportunities in higher education and the job market. However, Saifi and Mehmood (2011) reported that "there are no significant differences in Academic Achievement of male and female adolescents" (p. 268).

This contradicts the results of the present study and may be due to cultural and contextual differences.

Conclusion

The focus in this research paper was the investigation of the relationship between Omani high school students' home environment and their English academic achievement. Three main dimensions were investigated. These were: educational background, socio-economic background, and technological background. It also drew attention to gender as a variable that may affect this relationship. Based on careful interpretation and analysis of the findings of this research and relating them to literature, five key findings are presented. First, the educational status of the parents and family plays a significant role in the English academic achievement of Omani twelve-grade students. Second, it is not possible to determine the effect of the social status of the family on the English academic achievement of Omani Grade 12 students. Third, financial status does not play a significant role in the English academic achievement of Omani Grade 12 students. Fourth, the technological status of parents and family does not play a significant role in the English academic achievement of Omani Grade 12 students. Finally, females' English language achievement is less affected by their home environment than males. Based on the main results of this research, there are four significant recommendations stated for stakeholders, teachers and parents. First, the Omani Ministry of education should provide a complete system that enables the school to continually communicate with the parents. Second, teachers should consider individual differences and backgrounds of students (Dhanapal, Salman, & Ong, 2022) in order to provide additional help to those from unfavorable backgrounds. In other words, teachers should consider the effects of the home environment on students. Third, parents should consider the importance of having an educational qualification that will not only help them to be successful but also will help to drive their children's success in the future. They should also further care about their children's performance in English from an early stage. Finally, the authors recommend that researchers interested in this field conduct additional research in this area as it is a sensitive subject warranting further investigation in the Omani context.

Acknowledgements

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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