

Thematic Article

The Effects of Family Background on the Processes of Foreign Language Learning in Hungary

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Abstract

In Hungary, the academic achievement of schoolchildren is very strongly influenced by their family background, a statement often quoted in connection with PISA surveys (Róbert, 2004). Although the effects of family background have mostly been studied in connection with key competences, it is easy to see that they are also likely to influence foreign language learning, possibly to an even greater extent (Csapó, 2001). The aim of our paper is to provide an overview of theoretical and empirical findings related to the family background of Hungarian schoolchildren on different aspects of language learning: language choice, individual differences and success in language learning. We hope to provide a meta-analysis of empirical studies and their results, however it needs to be noted that their number is relatively scarce. We would also like to inspire future studies exploring similar, under-researched topics. Research into the effects of family background is imperative, as it appears to play a pivotal role in ensuring equal opportunities in language education.

Keywords: language learning; family background; maternal education; language choice

Introduction

Examining the relationship between family background and academic performance is an important area in Hungarian education, as presented by the National Education Conference at the University of Debrecen in 2020, where this was one of the core topics. It is widely known that parental background affects school performance, and this correlation seems particularly strong in Hungary, as evidenced by PISA surveys (Róbert, 2004). Although the effects of family background have been investigated primarily in the context of acquiring core competencies, it is not difficult to recognise that these factors play a role, even a major role, in foreign language learning (Csapó, 2001). The aim of this article is to review the theoretical and empirical data that have been published in Hungary in recent years on the impact of family background in connection with the diverse processes involved in foreign language learning. The exploration of this particular topic comes from having identified strong correlations in the field of native language competencies, as well as the realisation that there is no comprehensive work about the effects of family background in the field of language pedagogy. Therefore, this review is particularly important given the pressing need to identify future research directions that can encourage and motivate researchers to pursue studies on similar topics. The theoretical background of this article is devoted to the role of family background in education, especially the results of the PISA and PIAAC surveys. This is followed by a summary of the language learning process, which paves the way for the presentation of the empirical results in the next section. The empirical section discusses the relationships between language choices, and describes the process and the effectiveness of foreign language learning, in which family background plays a key role. The final section explores directions for future research which may help to better understand the role of the family in foreign language learning.

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The role of family background in education

The study seeks to answer the central question of what mechanisms are revealed in relation to family background and foreign language teaching. However, since the wider scope of our research is the relationship between family background and education as a whole, we consider it important to present an overview of the achievements in the field of more general education, and to examine whether these can be applied in the narrower field of language teaching. The topic is significantly evidenced by the fact that several studies have examined the relationship between social background variables and school performance. Maternal education seems to be particularly prominent in examining the effects of family background, as it often has a 20% greater impact on children's school performance than paternal education (Peter et al., 1997; Smith et al., 1997), or any other factor in the family environment. The nature and size of the mother's vocabulary as well as the kind of books they read to their children or the stories they tell are of particular importance, as maternal education profoundly determines cognitive abilities and modes of thought through the use of the native language. The above relationship clearly plays a role in the relationship between socioeconomic background and academic achievement: researchers have pointed out the importance of recognising and possibly eliminating adverse effects (Lacour et al., 2011). Numerous studies have shown that a positive classroom environment, a supportive parent-teacher relationship and skills-oriented curriculum modification can reduce the drop-out rate for disadvantaged learners (Allington, 1991; Shields, 1991).

Research results testify the relationship between family background and academic achievement. Hungary is an especially important research forum because, although the relationship between family background and school performance is recognised on the international stage, the kind of family a child is born into is particularly important in this country (Buda, 2017). The importance of family background in Hungary, compared with international benchmarks, is particularly well demonstrated by the effects of the family background index (FBI) on the reading test results of all the results of the 2015 PISA survey. While the relationship between the family background index and reading performance is rather low in several OECD countries, 6% in Norway and 8% in Estonia, it is over 20% in Hungary.

It is clear that the effects of family background, especially the impact of parental education on the child's school performance can be detected in every country. This effect is crucial because the extent of the above relationship can determine the child's future through cultural capital and patterns (attitudes toward learning, value of knowledge) provided by parents (Polonyi et al., 2021; Buda, 2017).

The importance and strength of this relationship is demonstrated by another example: Vári et al. (2001) concluded that in addition to family background, the role of education can also be demonstrated in children's literacy achievements. Vári et al. emphasised that low cognitive abilities in Hungary are associated with low educational attainment, which is the result of a child growing up in an environment characterised by a low level of literacy. Their research also touches on a serious issue, namely the inability of the Hungarian school system to integrate disadvantaged children, i.e. to bring them up to an appropriate standard, or compensate for their backwardness; a factor that affects children's performance in the long run. In contrast, in Scandinavian countries, there is a general aspiration to address family background deficiencies through school education and the joint and coordinated effort of society as a whole (Vári et al., 2001).

The permanence of this effect is demonstrated by the fact that family background continues to play an important role, even in the PIAAS survey conducted among the adult population (16-65 years). Of all the examined countries, Hungary showed the strongest relationship between family background and level of performance in reading comprehension (Lannert, 2020), something that often recurs in the PISA surveys (Lannert & Holb, 2020). In Hungary, this relationship is so strong that it negates the effects of other background factors that are considered internationally important (economic changes, changes in family structure, etc.) (Lannert, 2003). Research results suggest that social inequalities are accompanied by inequalities in educational standards (Mogyorósi, 2010), allowing for a sociological interpretation of a disadvantaged status. In their pedagogical approach to children's disadvantaged status, Fejes and Józsa (2005) emphasise that this status is not only a socio-economic concept, as a child with a good financial family background may also be disadvantaged due to changes in family structure, or suffer from linguistic disadvantages or discrimination (Réthy, 2004). Linguistic disadvantage manifests itself in all areas of education, including foreign language learning and its special features.

Nótin (2018) claims that the factor of linguistic disadvantage plays an important role in the academic performance of the pupils. Native language disadvantage can be interpreted as the children's competence in reading comprehension. Fejes and Józsa (2005) point out that children's mother tongue disadvantages are a

consequence of the mother's low level of education. Consequently, the proportion of children with low socio-economic status decreases as the mother's educational attainment increases. Researchers also emphasise that previous research has typically focused on two dimensions: financial and emotional disadvantages. Oláh Örsi (2005) takes a sociolinguistic rather than pedagogical sociology approach to linguistic disadvantages.

He highlights the fact that one of the main consequences of linguistic disadvantage is the general understanding of the text, as pragmatic language users, thus it is not possible to narrow the gap between those with and without linguistic disadvantages. The measurement of linguistic competence and linguistic achievement shows a continuous increase when considered in the context of different school types. Oláh Örsi points out that the survey of competencies suggests that reading comprehension and school performance are interrelated. Réger (2002) emphasises the central role of cultural embeddedness in overcoming linguistic disadvantage:

“... acquisition of socio-cultural knowledge and knowledge of language and language use are closely interrelated processes, where socialisation takes place via rules of language and language use. The road to language is also the road to the world: it is an integral part of the development process during which a young child becomes capable of understanding and interpreting the linguistic as well as behaviour rules of their social environment and then becomes capable of meeting the expectations of adults surrounding them both in their linguistic and non-linguistic behaviour” (Réger, 2002: 87).

Cognitive abilities and reading comprehension competence, especially attention and attention retention, are inherently related to family background, home, and disadvantaged status (Cedeno et al., 2016). Stress accompanying disadvantaged status often leads to disturbances of attention in memory and in the learning processes (Neville et al., 2013; Stevens et al., 2009). Farah and Hackman (2012) have pointed out that disadvantaged status is also accompanied by weaker stimulation as these children have access to fewer toys and books, hear fewer stories read to them, and have much fewer cultural experiences. Lower levels of cognitive stimulation also affect the formation of learning competencies (Farah et al., 2012). Furthermore, chronic stress has a negative impact on learning since it influences executive functions in the brain on a hormonal level (Hackman et al., 2010), which are responsible for problem-solving, decision-making, planning and working memory.

In Hungary, the problematic relationship between the family background index and education is often pervaded by segregation (Kertesi et al., 2005), the situation of minorities (Havas et al., 2002) as well as the link between the focus on disadvantaged status and school achievement (Csapó, 2003; Vágó, 2002). Determining disadvantaged status is complex because the concept is broad and relative, where causes, circumstances and symptoms often overlap and merge (Fejes et al., 2005). In the analysis of the term ‘disadvantaged status’ it is essential to consult the work of Kozma (1975) as the concept of ‘disadvantaged situation’ can be attributed to him, in research conducted in the Hungarian language.

It is clear that family background plays a major role in education; in fact, the phenomenon is possibly even more pronounced in language learning. It is worth reviewing a pedagogical sociology study, conducted in the late 1990s. Andor's analysis (2000) suggests that the research conducted in 1997 with the help of a questionnaire, clearly concluded that educational attainment had a dominant effect on foreign language proficiency in Hungary. According to the results of a national representative study by the Hungarian Academy of Sciences 97% of fathers with 8 years of primary education (the statutory period in the Hungarian education system) did not speak a foreign language, whereas only 31% of fathers with a university degree claimed having no knowledge of a foreign language. Similar values can be assigned to mothers, supporting the conclusion that higher levels of education is associated with higher levels of foreign language skills (Andor et al., 2000). Andor (2000) concludes that not only cultural advantages but also disadvantages that are passed down to younger generations.

The process of language learning

In a linguistically and culturally homogenous country such as Hungary, learning foreign languages is, in most cases, the result of conscious decisions, as the majority of the Hungarian population is monolingual. When the language learner is a child, this decision is made by the family, more specifically the parents, so obviously the family background shapes the time when the child should start learning a language. However, schools also teach foreign languages; thus, children are required to learn their first foreign language in grade 4 in primary school, which may be followed by another language depending on the type of school (National Curriculum, 2020). At the same time, results of an earlier national survey show that in many schools, children begin learning

a foreign language as early as the first grade (Albert et al., 2018). This shift to an earlier starting point raises problems in the sense that the National Curriculum only regulates language teaching only from grade 4, which means that no information is available on the content or form of foreign language teaching in the first three grades (Öveges et al., 2018).

However, one of the aims of introducing foreign language teaching at increasingly lower grades may be to make schools more attractive to parents by pointing out the relationship between this phenomenon and family background. Parents' preference for early and effective foreign language teaching has led to the development of dual language schools (i.e. schools in which a part of the curriculum is taught in a foreign language), which emerged as a result of a "grassroots social initiative" (Kovács et al., 2020: 152). In other words, parents who were concerned about their children's foreign language education contributed greatly to the emergence of this type of school.

Although we have no knowledge of existing empirical research examining parental beliefs and assumptions about their children's language education, we can hypothesise that parents' enthusiasm for an early start is due, in part, to widely known observations about immigrant children. These children tend to master a new language at a native level, unlike their parents, who almost never succeed. Although these observations were confirmed by empirical data in a second language setting in the 1980s (Johnson et al., 1989; Patkowski, 1980), the relevance of research findings in a foreign language setting, and the question of whether the prevailing public education system is similar to the Hungarian one, are highly questionable (Lambelet et al., 2015; Munoz, 2010). Learning foreign languages outside the framework of public education (either before or in addition) requires heavy financial sacrifices, so the role of family background is likely to continue to be emphasized in exploiting these foreign language teaching opportunities.

When parents make a decision about the time their children should begin learning a foreign language, they choose a language that probably reflects their views about its usefulness, in addition to their own personal preferences. We believe that by making these decisions, parents strive to promote their children's best possible progress, ensuring some kind of advantage over their peers who do not speak foreign languages. This makes it likely that they will support the learning a foreign language they find useful; however, other personal preferences may also play a role in their decisions.

However, children need to learn and master a foreign language. During the process of foreign language learning, a number of factors can play a role in influencing success. We will use an umbrella term and refer to such factors as *personal variables*. In applied linguistics research, the two factors most likely to affect success in foreign language learning are language learning aptitude and motivation (Dörnyei, 2005; Dörnyei et al., 2015).

Researchers view language learning aptitude as a constellation of diverse cognitive components that make foreign language learning faster and easier (Carroll et al., 1959). Carroll's (1981) classic theory lists four components of language learning aptitude: phonetic coding ability, inductive language learning ability, grammatical sensitivity, and associative memory. These variables are measured by the language aptitude tests available in Hungary: MENYÉT (Ottó, 2002), and a version of which has been adapted to younger language learners (Kiss, 2004; Kiss et al., 2005). In recent years, the set of components that can be linked to foreign language learning aptitude (Miyake & Friedman, 1998) has been extended to include working memory (Baddeley, 1986). At the same time, there is a growing tendency to perceive the construct of foreign language learning aptitude as a dynamic concept. This view argues that the different profiles of language learners can only be properly interpreted with a language learning task placed in the context of the teaching process (Robinson, 2012). Since language learning aptitude is primarily a cognitive variable, parents may have an influential role that can be inherited or activated by the environment.

Another individual variable that strongly affects the success of language learning is motivation. Motivation determines why people decide on something, how long they are willing to sustain the effort, and how hard they will persevere (Dörnyei et al., 2003). Although motivation is seen primarily as an affective variable, theories describing motivation in foreign language learning are quite complex because they take into account the combined effects of several variables. One such factor is the language learning milieu, which encompasses the narrower social environment of the language learner including family and friends. The concept of milieu played a critical role in the early stages of motivation research (Gardner et al., 1979), and was considered an important factor in subsequent research in foreign language learning (Csizér et al., 2012; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Kormos et al., 2010).

Deci and Ryan's (1980) self-determination motivation theory also reveals effects that are external to the language learner and potentially come from the parents. The author's use the concept of 'extrinsic motivation'

to describe a situation in which motivation comes primarily from external sources. However, extrinsic motivation can be integrated into the self through the process of self-regulation and become partly intrinsic. Nevertheless, even in this integrated form, it should be considered as an external factor as it does not stem from one's internal motivation. Although this theory is widely used by researchers investigating foreign language learning motivation (Noels et al., 2019), it can actually be applicable to the entire process of socialisation.

Parental influence can also be detected in Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) Foreign Language Motivational Self System Theory. In this theory, Dörnyei interprets motivation in foreign language learning as possible selves and their influences. A special role is assigned to the "Ideal Self", which includes the language learner's desires and future hopes: this is the language learner's ideal self they strive for. The other possible self, included in the theory, is the "Ought-to Self", which is the future self-image of the learner, formed by people (parents, teachers, etc.) who have a hierarchical relationship with the language learner. However, the foreign language learner has not internalised this self-image, and they do not perceive it as their own, which makes it difficult to predict how it will affect language learning. The third pillar of language learning is Foreign Language Learning Experience, which determines the motivational potential of the language leaning situation. In this model, the terrain of parental influence is clearly the "Ought-to Self".

Naturally, by the end of the foreign language learning process, the question of efficiency arises, a term that is difficult to define. The actors involved in the language learning process, i.e., the language learner, the parent, and the institution may have different definitions of success, which, in turn, may have different measures. So, when we intend to examine the effects of family background and parental influence in terms of foreign language learning efficiency, it is not clear whether we should be examining the grades obtained, the results of the competence survey, the successful language examinations or perhaps the language learner's subjective ideas (sense of success or failure). This difficulty may be due to the fact that extremely few empirical studies are available to us.

A meta-analysis of empirical results

Language choice

Language choice is particularly important in language learning, not only because it can underpin or erode the learner's motivation for several years (Csizér et al., 2010), but also because early language learning experience and impressions can have long-term effects (Csizér, 2020). Yet, relatively little research offers measurement results on this topic. One of the few exceptions is a series of studies conducted by Nikolov and Csapó, in which the effects of family background on language choice were systematically measured and they were interested to learn about the differences between language learners choosing English as opposed to those who chose German as a second language. Their results indicated that learners from higher socio-economic status were more likely to start learning English in primary school, while those from lower status families were more likely to learn German (Nikolov et al., 2018).

We assume that this relationship can be explained by the fact that language choice in Hungary is influenced by factors that may not be present in other countries (Nikolov, 2009). In disadvantaged regions, it is particularly common for young learners, especially those with learning abilities and disadvantaged ones, to be placed into German-speaking groups. Csapó (2001) identifies the following factors that may influence language choice:

- the part of the country a learner is studying in
- the size of the settlement they live in
- maternal (parental) education
- the learner's achievements based on the level of abilities and tests.

Petneki (2001) concludes that children who live in larger settlements and have a higher-level maternal education typically learn English. The results of our own study on foreign language leaning aptitude (Szabó, 2020) suggest a general trend in schools in disadvantaged regions as well as in schools in smaller settlements to include weaker students in the German group. Given that the results of language learning aptitude tests show better results in all components among English learners, we consider the practice of dividing larger groups into smaller ones based on learners' results to be a much more reasonable explanation.

In addition to parents, the role of siblings has emerged during early foreign language learning. In an interview-based study by Kormos and Csizér (2005), some learners reported that they were interested in language learning when they saw their siblings learning a language and using language books for this purpose.

Instead of examining early foreign language choice, a study by Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006) examined factors that affected learners' foreign language choice in the final years of their primary school education, i.e., what language they would learn in secondary school. Their results show that family background indirectly influences foreign language choice through several factors, as suggested by measurements. Using structural modelling, the researchers concluded that the milieu, i.e. the narrower social environment influences ideas about motivation, which in turn, influences language choice. In the same model, milieu showed a relationship with language learners' linguistic self-confidence and an assessment of how vital a foreign language community was to them, revealing the complexities of the influence of family background.

Research results are also available about the foreign language choice of dyslexic language learners. For such learners, the choice of a foreign language can be influenced not only by parents' convictions about each language, but also by their ideas about learning, where one of the biggest difficulties is spelling. Researchers point out that dyslexic children can learn foreign languages more easily if the spelling is more transparent (Kormos et al., 2010). However, in a study comparing schools, Kontráné Hegybíró and Kormos (2010) found that although there were schools that followed this reasoning and offered German or Italian to dyslexic students, some schools chose to teach English due to its status as a *lingua franca*.

When discussing learners with learning difficulties, the question of exemption should be raised: it is necessary to examine the situations and the reasons why parents decide for their children to be made exempt from learning a foreign language. It seems certain that in the long run exemption will have several negative consequences, as in Hungary, learning and speaking a foreign language can be a major prerequisite for finding a job and achieving personal success. This means that instead of exemption, learners with learning difficulties should be taught foreign languages in ways that can help them achieve this.

The process of foreign language learning

A national study by Dörnyei, Csizér and Németh (2006), examined the issue of language choice and how much effort learners were willing to invest in learning each language and how much this was influenced by their social environment. Their comparative results clearly show that there is a marked difference in the strength of the milieu between the different languages. English showed the most positive effects in areas such as the student's self-confidence in language learning, language vitality, and instrumental motivation. Although these results are not up-to-date, they appear to be problematic as a large number of students learn two foreign languages simultaneously, and a lack of family support can reduce the effectiveness of learning a language other than English.

Csizér and Galántai (2012) examined how teachers and parents influenced learners' self-image and, in turn, foreign language learning motivation. Based on structural analysis, their results clearly show that parental influence has much greater and more diverse effects than teacher influence. They studied learners' Ideal and Ought-to Second Language Selves, as well as their Language Learning Experience, based on Dörnyei's (2005, 2009) Second Language Motivational Self System. Teachers had a significant influence on the language learning experience, while parents had a major influence on all three factors. Several conclusions can be drawn from the results. The language learning experience also seems to be a social construct for school education and parents play a crucial role in this process. As for the language learning selves, it is not surprising that parents, as an extrinsic factor, strongly influence the development of the Ought to Second Language Self. As the Ideal Second Language Self comprises ideas concerning learners' long-term ideas, the question about the internalisation of motivational factors and the role of parents in this process can be raised. The self-determination theory of motivation (Noels et al, 2019) argues that the extent to which language learners internalise different motives in the motivation process is particularly important because it reinforces the positive effects of motivation, and this process can also be strengthened by parents.

The role of milieu has also been studied in dyslexic learners, based on qualitative and quantitative data (Kormos et al., 2010). The results were contradictory in terms of how positive a role families play in facilitating the foreign language learning process of dyslexic children (Csizér, 2010). While the qualitative data suggested that the existence of a strong family background seemed fundamentally important to dyslexic learners, and, conversely, the lack of this led to failures in language learning, this finding was not corroborated by the results of the questionnaires. The quantitative results suggested that dyslexic students received less help from their families than their non-dyslexic peers; the difference was particularly significant among students learning German.

Effectiveness of foreign language learning

As mentioned earlier, the effectiveness of foreign language learning has always been a complex concept, which does not lend itself to an easy definition. The attempt to define effectiveness is further nuanced by whose point of view comes into focus. The language learner, the language teacher, the parent, and the head of the institution may have different interpretations of this term with different expectations: does it manifest itself in a language examination, a school leaving examination, is it an added value to the institution, institutional statistics, or does it refer to the linguistic progress made by a learner with learning disabilities?

In her research on the language aptitude of young, disadvantaged learners, Szabó (2020) studied the factors influencing language effectiveness. Her research focused on comparing maternal education and foreign language aptitude as well as effectiveness. Regarding the effectiveness of foreign language learning, she compared the effectiveness factor of the learner's grade with the results of the English language proficiency test and the young learners' language aptitude test (Szabó, et al., 2019). This latter study focused on the factors of proficiency, aptitude and school grade (Szabó et al., 2019). In addition, the results of the National Competency Test were explored (2018), which provide a good basis for school-level comparison and can be particularly useful in a disadvantaged region.

According to one of Szabó's (2020) findings, the cluster analysis of the dimensions of foreign language competence, characteristic of disadvantaged 5th and 6th graders, yielded three groups of learners: "good", "medium" and "weak", which described three grades of achievement. Since the focus of the present study is to explore the role of family background, it is worth examining the distribution of clusters relative to social groups. The group with the weak learners had a prominent ratio of pupils with the worst social status, whereas the ratio of learners who performed well was over-represented with pupils from the highest social status.

Examining the role of family background and maternal education as part of the process, it was found that children whose mothers held a college or university degree performed best on language efficiency tests. Children whose mothers' highest level of education was an elementary school certificate had the weakest performance in all areas (Szabó, 2020).

A study by Józsa and Nikolov (2005), made it clear that parents' educational attainment significantly determines a learner's foreign language learning effectiveness. Their research supports the assumption that the higher the level of education parents receive, the higher the language effectiveness of the learners. As noted earlier in connection with the foreign language choice available to school learners, learners who learn English come from higher socio-economic backgrounds, which may contribute to better learner performance (Csapó et al., 2002; Józsa et al., 2005).

Direction for future research

A review of the literature reveals that Hungarian-speaking researchers who investigate issues in language pedagogy face numerous challenges if they want to get a thorough picture of how family background influences the process of learning a foreign language. It would be necessary to have up-to-date data available at a national level, pertaining to each step of the language learning process, which would then inform the academic community and decision makers. In addition to clarifying specific issues related to the foreign language learning process, it would be important to explore parents' opinions and other factors that are responsible for determining when a child should begin learning a foreign language. The limited data available made it clear that the majority of children in Hungary start learning foreign languages earlier than the 4th grade (Albert et al., 2018), which is probably related to family background. This appears to contradict the National Curriculum regulation (NAT, 2020).

In terms of language choice, we also need to collect new data on first and second languages and take parental views into account because they decide which languages their children should learn as they progress from primary to secondary school. We have found no data on direct or indirect influences on the foreign language learning process. In terms of individual differences, we have some research findings only on motivation, but these are not very recent. Likewise, we have limited knowledge about the relationship between language learning efficiency and parental background and have no information about what families understand by success in foreign language learning, and what they think about the importance of foreign language proficiency and language examinations. Further research is indispensable to explore the effectiveness of language examinations more broadly, as the long-term motivating power of language examinations seems questionable (Csizér et al., 2019).

When examining the content of foreign learning process, we should also consider examining the forms and content of explicit and implicit learning (Ellis et al., 2009) and conduct research on how the family environment influences the two complementary processes. We believe that the family environment has a particularly strong influence on implicit learning because experiences outside of formal education can be effective and can be quite diverse among learners from different family backgrounds. However, it is not clear what modes of action are at work and what results they may bring.

In terms of methodology, dynamic systems theory is gaining ground in language pedagogy research, which is a shift away from the traditional quantitative/qualitative dichotomy (Ortega et al., 2017). We believe that a thorough examination of the effects of the family environment would be particularly valuable using an arsenal of complex dynamic systems research that could help us gain a more accurate picture of the extremely multifaceted processes involved.

Further research should not ignore disadvantaged students and those with various learning difficulties. Although our study cited the results of dyslexic learners because only these are covered in our national comparative studies (Kormos et al., 2010), several previous studies on deaf learners have touched upon the role of the milieu in the learning process. However, discussing deaf language learners would be unreasonable without a thorough treatment of the first language; therefore, this topic is beyond the scope of this paper (Csizér et al., 2020; Kontráné Hegybíró et al., 2019).

Summary

In this paper, we undertook the task of summarising some of the research results, obtained in Hungary, which seek answers to how the family environment influences the different processes of foreign language learning in different groups of language learners. Our review shows that a great deal of work needs to be done to get a more accurate picture of the effects of family background. Based on the available data, it seems certain that, given the importance of family background, learning a foreign language is no exception compared to other areas of education. Parents play an important role in choosing when their child starts learning a foreign language; moreover, they influence language choice and, through motivational processes, the overall process and effectiveness of foreign language learning. Although the factors listed above are good examples to highlight the importance of family background, we need more targeted research to explore the exact processes. For example, we can assume that there is a relationship between maternal education and native language competence and other individual variables such as language aptitude, but it would be desirable to support these assumptions with empirical data. It would also be useful to highlight the reasons for differences in the effectiveness of foreign language learning, which may be cognitive or affective by nature. Only by gaining a better insight into this area can we improve equality of opportunity.

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