

## Second Language Learning Scenario in Delhi Schools

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### Abstract

Research has shown that individuals vary greatly in the ways they learn a second language (Skehan, 1989). It has been established by several researchers over a considerable time period that learning a second language and the pedagogy of second language is as much a challenging task as it is gratifying if approached and executed in an appropriate manner. Second Language Learning could be a demanding undertaking laced with hardships or it could be relatively easy for a learner. To get an insight about those factors which influence and determine this type of learning would prove to be fruitful for both teachers as well as learners. Second language pedagogy, more than the teaching of any other curricular subject, must meet the most stringent criterion of universal success: the spontaneous and appropriate use of language for at least everyday purposes (Position Paper 1.4, National Focus Group on Teaching of English, 2005). India is known for its cultural diversity. Consequently, while viewing Second Language Learning as a process, it should be kept in mind that with diversity there emanates innumerable differences in every aspect of language learning. This inevitably gives rise to the necessity of developing a responsible outlook to deal with the problems by understanding the actual functional scenario in the school contexts. For eons, learning of English as a second language has been a major concern in our Indian society. Emergence and existence of English as a second language can be perceived everywhere in its conventional implicit proclamation. Language Learning can be seen as an expedition of the learner in order to express, think, contemplate, interact as well as communicate. Research has shown that the process of learning any language entails a different perspective about that particular language which comprises numerous dimensions to understand, analyse, and reflect on the overall scenario. This entire process of knowing different perspectives, dimensions, and factors must be explored through the involvement of the different stakeholders, mainly, the learners and the teachers. Thus, when it comes to actual teaching in classrooms then the contribution, interest, expectations and desires of the stakeholders show the reality with different lenses and perspectives. Through this analysis several reasons behind the successes as well as failures along with the challenges can easily be identified and looked upon for better understanding about second language learning. This paper while examining the scenario focuses on exploring various dimensions that influence Second Language Learning. This research employed the Descriptive method to probe into the current status of the teaching and learning of English as a second language and the effect of the factors on a sample of students studying at the middle school level in the schools of Delhi. The paper will shed light on distinguishing certain factors that have delineated the process of Second Language Learning including those that diminish the growth and expectations of learners.

**KEYWORDS:** second language, language pedagogy, English language, language learning challenges

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### **Introduction:**

Humans all around, despite considerable differences do share something in common which is not quite similar but the very idea of expressions through communication defines it better. We, as humans, express our feelings, emotions and inner thoughts through signs, gestures, writing and speaking. This whole process or act of interacting with each other makes it more definable when it comes to build an understanding about the term "communication". While interacting, people share a bond of expressions, thoughts and understanding with each other. Similarly, language is expressed as one of the means of communication. Language learning is a natural process if understood as a part of living without any formal input. It could be seen that a child at very small age can learn two or three languages, if given "exposure". Language can be considered as a tool which provides the opportunity to interact with each other on a better stance. Malinowski (1994) recognized the same importance of local context in understanding a language. He argued that language is essentially rooted in the reality of the culture, the tribal life and custom of a people, and therefore, it can't be understood without constant reference to these broader contexts of verbal utterance. (Malinowski, 1994, p.5). Language is not a term or an act of communication, but somehow it defines the "identity" of a person. These two terms "exposure" and "identity" if looked upon with a lens, give a rare view about this process of language learning. The only requirement is to use the lens with adequate powers to bring in limelight the actual dilemmas that are somehow blurring the understanding about language learning.

When we say that exposure can make a child learn two or three languages, then there comes the responsibility as well to look at the whole process with an eagle's eye on it. After knowing the basics of first language or mother tongue at home, a child is given exposure to the second language. Second Language is defined as a foreign language which is not the native language of the speaker. 'The success of an individual in learning a second language relies on factors that come under three categories- learning context, nature of language and learner characteristics'. (Koroi & Ryland, 2010). So, when it comes to actual teaching in classrooms then the contribution, interest, expectations and desires of stakeholders show the reality with different lenses and perspectives. Through this analysis several reasons behind such failures can easily be identified and looked upon for better understanding about second language learning. The developmental journey of language learning can be traced along different milestones depending upon these factors. Through this paper, the investigator would be considering English as a Second Language. The equal identity, prestige and pressure attached to the use of English in the society at large makes it more demanding to be understood and very influential as well in language planning in education.

### **Research Questions of this Study:**

- Why is there a need to learn Second Language?
- What is the purpose of using Second Language?

- What are the conditions under which learners learn Second Language in the schools of Delhi?
- What are the expectations from learners regarding Second Language Learning?
- What are the expectations of learners regarding Second Language Learning?
- How do different learning conditions impact Second Language Learning?
- What are the criteria of achievement in learning for learners with respect to Second Language Learning?

#### **Objectives of this Study:**

- To understand the context in which Second Language is used by the learners.
- To document the ways in which Second Language learning differs for different learners.
- To explore the factors which affect the learning of Second Language.

#### **Rationale of this Study:**

M.A.K.Halliday (1973, 1975) posits that Linguistic system is a "range of possible meanings, together with the means whereby these meanings are realised or expressed." Language is a vital component of learning process. It is considered as a means of communication. 'The choice of language in the school curriculum is a major concern of language education' (Kumari, 2014). It can be acquired or learned. These criterions somehow set the boundaries whether the language used by the person or child was available in his/her environment from the very first exposure or it got introduced after first language or mother tongue as Krashen (cf.Ellis,2003) also sees acquisition and learning as two different functions. Acquisition of language whether it is first or second, has its own features, process and characteristics. The investigator's concern throughout this research would be focused on second language learning particularly English in Indian context.

Indian Education Commission (1964-1966), popularly known as Kothari Commission recommended the development of a proper language policy which can greatly assist in strengthening the national unity. As a result vigorous effort at implementation of Three-Language Formula was made which was further emphasized by The National Policy on Education, 1986 and NCF 2005 with a renewed attempt to implement Three-Language Formula. In India, English has gained a paramount importance and the value attached to it can't be neglected. While acknowledging the importance of English, it should also be kept in mind that in today's world there is an immense pressure to learn English. The instrumental value attached to this language depicts the status and prestige. It is considered as a "library language" and "a window on the world" (NCF, 2005). Even it is also prevalent that English has opened up the chances and enhance the opportunities for job. In such a atmosphere, when it comes to learn English as a second language, several factors come in mind which can actually affect this learning process. India is known for its cultural diversity. So, while looking at second language learning as a process, it should be kept in mind that with diversity, there comes various differences in every aspect with

which the responsibility to deal with the problems by understanding the actual scenario become the prime concern.

In multilingual and multicultural classrooms, the imposition of a narrowly defined 'cultural literacy' has been countered for a call to celebrate diversity (Murray,1992). Achievement, learning, acquisition are always considered as the criteria to determine the success of an individual whether it is in the arena of academics, sports or can be second language learning. The important aspect is not only to assess the success by evaluating it but also to keep in mind that there are different factors which results in differences among the learners on the basis of learning pace, achievement scores and success. 'The success of an individual in learning a second language relies on factors that come under three categories- learning context, nature of language and learner characteristics'.(Taufaga, Burnett, Tuinamua, Koroi, Ryland, 2010). So, when it comes to actual teaching in classrooms then the contribution, interest, expectations and desires of stakeholders show the reality with different lenses and perspectives. Through this analysis several reasons behind such failures can easily be identified and looked upon for better understanding about second language learning.

The Position Paper NCF (NCERT) on Teaching of English (2006) states- "The burden of languages is the burden of incomprehension. This happens when language is taught for its own sake as a set of form or rules, and not introduced as the carrier of coherent textual meaning..." This paper has mentioned several aspects of teaching that basically contribute to the 'teaching of English'. With the same quest for research, the learner's perspective will definitely help in enriching the findings that will be focused on 'learning of English'. Hence the purpose of my research is to understand the basic idea of second language learning and to analyse the factors affecting second language learning. Irrespective of the fact that English is not the native language or the first language, it has achieved such a proclamation that now 'English - speaking culture' has become the priority in every aspect and sphere. In such a pressurized atmosphere the expectations from learners are at peak instead of realising the actual situation and condition of learners. So, this research will definitely gauge the learner's point of view in order to analyse and understand the actual happenings (which can be fruitful or misleading the process) to some extent.

### **Research Design and Methodology:**

The study is of a Descriptive nature and is Qualitative in design.

#### **Research Tool:**

- Self-constructed Structured Questionnaire
- Semi-structured Interview Schedule

The Questionnaire was validated by two experts.

A Pilot Study was also conducted using the questionnaire and it was revised before it was employed for the research.

### **Sampling Technique:**

1. A purposive convenience sampling was taken up for the students.
2. The sample group for teachers was limited to four English teachers.

### **Research Sample:**

Data was collected from two co-educational schools:

- a private school
- a Sarvodaya Vidyalaya ).

The sample consisted of:

- 60 students of Class VII ( 30 students from each school )
- 4 English language teachers teaching Class VII ( 2 teachers from each school )

### **Data Source:**

The qualitative data collected for the study was obtained from two main sources:

- Structured Questionnaire completed by the students.
- Semi-structured Interviews of teachers.

### **Delimitations of the Study:**

1. The sample for collecting data for the study was drawn from only two schools in Delhi.
2. The learner sample group comprised only Class VII learners.

### **Analysis & Findings:**

For the analysis of students' responses to the questionnaire, item analysis was employed. Findings from the students' responses were further divided into categories:

#### **★ Various situations in which English language is used :**

- During morning assembly speech.
- While taking permission from teachers.
- While interacting in restaurants, movie theatres and other public places.
- To communicate with teachers, foreigners.

**Analysis-** These responses indicate the context in which learners make use of English language in their day to day lives. While looking at the responses, it could be gathered that the sole purpose is to communicate or interact with people around as Kumar (2000) also stated that "language allows each one of us to experience vicariously, what someone else is going through".

#### **★ Who can be considered as a good communicator of English/ or a good learner?**

- The one who speaks fluently.
- The one who answers correctly.
- The one who knows all the grammatical rules.
- The one who portrays a good impression.
- Their siblings, teachers, principal - who speaks English.

**Analysis-** "Learners' beliefs are influenced by the social context of learners and can influence both their attitude toward the language itself as well as toward language learning in general" (Tumposky, 1991). These responses indicate their beliefs about nature of English, language learning, speakers of English, their goals for language learning, language skills, their abilities as language learners as indicated by J.C.Richards (2013) in 'Reflective Teaching in Second Language Classrooms'.

★ **Importance of learning English as second language:**

- It provides better job opportunities.
- To visit foreign countries.
- To communicate well for better impression.
- To clear interviews.
- To score good marks.
- To get the popularity.
- It increases status and prestige.

★ **Reasons behind the popularity of English:**

- English language used by characters in movies, TV shows is getting attention.
- Import-export business.
- To make connections with foreign countries.
- Importance given to English in exams, interviews, colleges etc.
- It is the result of British rule.

**Analysis-** It was found that learners from both the schools do have a very clear understanding about the use and importance of English in today's world. They vocalised their thoughts about the "need" of English in getting ambitious jobs, visit foreign countries and also to communicate well for a better impression which provides the speaker with a sense of prestige. They make use of English in their regular talks but the approach, usage, experiences, and motivational factors vary from user to user or according to the opportunities provided to them. For example, In government school, learners make less use of English whereas in private school, learners were able to communicate or interact in English with teachers, researcher and peers as well. Learners were aware of the fact that learning English has long-term positive influence and impact on their lives so they focused on developing a command of this language whether through their responses only.

★ **Factors that affect learning of English:**

- Social background.
- Linguistic background.
- Opportunities provided to the learners.
- Individual learner differences.
- Classroom environment/setting.
- Motivational factors (internal, external both)

**Analysis-** The responses indicate certain factors that influence the process of second language learning. Drew & Sorheim (2004) categories these factors into two groups: social and individual factors. However both these categories result in affecting the learning process. This explanation becomes worthy while analysing teachers' responses. A major difference that came into limelight was the expectations of teachers. It was

observed and analysed that teachers from both the schools have set pre-conceived notions about students. The basis of these notions emerged by notifying the social and linguistic background of students. Learners in both the schools come from a varied range when it comes to their background. Learners in government school come from low economic background and are considered as first generation learners according to their teachers. So regarding this understanding, teachers tend to expect less and show no interest which results in demotivating the learner and their achievement level never rises up. Whereas in private school, learners were expected to speak or communicate in English (irrespective of their background). Sometimes, it could be pressurized for them (not mentioned by the respondents but observed by the researcher). In both the schools, the mentioned factors were existent and played a significant role in encouraging or diminishing a learner's growth in language learning process.

★ **Language tasks given by teachers:**

- Question-answer.
- Essay writing.
- Chart making.
- Find out positive and negative sentences.
- Grammar - tenses, verbs, adjectives etc.

**Analysis:** When it comes to language tasks then it implies a very significant and profound factor that is decision making. This process itself involves a bunch of strategies, tasks, both by learners and teachers simultaneously. While looking at the responses, it could be seen that a fixed pattern or hierarchy is being followed in the teaching-learning process (in both the schools). 'Wright (1987) points out that some roles are defined by the work people do, while others are mainly defined by the kind of interpersonal relationships they imply'. So here teachers' role is of paramount importance like different tasks, activities for individual and collaborative work can also be included in order to provide them with opportunities. Their responses suggested that there is an undue focus on "traditional" follow ups which directly implies exam-oriented approach where learning is only limited to obtaining marks as J.C. Richards (2013) explained while defining impacts of different teaching settings on creating particular roles for teachers based on the institutional administrative structure.

★ **English textbooks/ classrooms - interesting or not?**

- Stories make everything interesting.
- It becomes boring when text is difficult to comprehend.
- Interesting for those who get motivated by the encouragement, praise, positive feedback from their teachers.
- Some learners find it difficult to survive in English classrooms because of the dominant group/students who speak well in English.

**Analysis:** These responses show a pattern in learners' likes and dislikes. By looking at these patterns, one can identify individual differences among the learners like task-oriented students, phantom students, social students, dependent students, isolated students and alienated students as described by Good and Power (1976). Such an understanding and approach to teaching can act as a guiding principle with positive outcomes.

★ **What could be done to make English teaching more useful and interesting?**

- Include interesting stories and magazines.
- Encourage students who do not speak in English.
- Include interesting games, puzzles, and activities.
- Role play as English newsreader.
- Participation in English quizzes, debates, and competitions. Support students who try to speak in English.
- Encourage 'talk' in classrooms.

**Analysis:** 'Clark and Ginger (1979) suggested that the notion of activity is central to an understanding of teaching'. Similarly, learners' responses also suggested the same perspective as they themselves know the usefulness of including interesting activities in teaching-learning process. Learners' responses exemplified a very significant observation that the major focus in the classrooms is being placed on writing tasks majorly, and then comes reading. Whereas communicating, listening, and speaking skills are given no importance. Therefore, there is a need to give equal opportunities to the learners to refine all the language skills.

**Comparative Analysis of the Findings: (Teachers' and Learners' Responses)**

While responding or interacting with the researcher, most of the learners in private school were speaking in English. They were trying to speak in spite of grammatical errors, mistakes and omissions. They took less time in filling the responses as compared to government school students. All the respondents attempted to write their responses in English even though they had the choice to write in Hindi as well (Hindi is their first language). They showed a better understanding while writing responses with a brief description only. It was observed that the school teacher was not imposing his opinion and view on students' responses but was playing a role of scaffold by helping them out in clearing their doubts.

On the other hand, learners from government school were interacting in Hindi language (without hesitation and with confidence). They took more time in writing their responses and were asking for the explanations and translations more often. Out of 30 students, only 4 students attempted the questionnaire in English (these 4 students were labelled as 'intelligent' by the teacher and asked to write in English). Their teacher was giving endless explanations to the learners without being asked for.

In order to compare responses of teachers and learners, it was found that learners' responses and expectations were very much similar in both the settings but the major difference was in teachers' expectations. In the private school, a positive impact on learners' achievement and growth was easily visible because of teachers' motivation and support whereas learners in the government school were given no support and encouragement. Even teachers' remarks act as a strong demotivating factor which results in diminishing their ability to believe in their own abilities.



## **Conclusion:**

It can be concluded from the major findings of this research that there is a discernible and a stark difference in the teaching-learning process employed for English as a Second Language that is functional in the school contexts. This is evident based on the two aspects, namely, the overall approach of the teachers and the background of the learners. The teachers being the primary influential force urgently need to refine as well as update not only the approaches and methods used for teaching of English but equally importantly adopt a motivational attitude and a selfless demeanour. It is vital that the pedagogical process includes suggestive measures regarding needs of the learners, opportunities to be provided to them, instructional programmes, teaching strategies and other relevant and related measures. These need to be undertaken while considering the impact and the affect of various factors that define learners' achievement goals. We have a plethora of educational documents that have been made available to us periodically. It is indubitable that not only the concerned teachers but all the stakeholders are well versed with the content and specifically the guidelines of such documents. As simply reading these do not suffice, the challenges of implementation also need to be dealt with in a systematic and cooperative manner.

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