

Impact of Social Background on Learning English as a Second Language

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Abstract: *It has been a subject of debate for many years in India that how many languages can be learnt by pupils and at what stage the study of English Language should be commenced? To understand the issue, one should know the purposes of the second language learning mainly English to have clear perspective of the Second Language Learning. While learning Second Language, there is high impact of Social Background of the Learner. So, the present research paper focuses on the various aspects of Social Background which influence the language learning of the students.*

Keywords: Language Learning, Influencing Factors, Motivation, Language Aptitude, etc.

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning any language is a natural and social phenomenon. India is a multilingual country in which English is an alien language. Indians need to take special efforts to learn English as a second language where they face many difficulties and hurdles. To understand the problems of Indians learning English, there is need to study the process of Language Learning.

Mankind, being a born learner, starts learning while he/she is a baby and continues until his/her death. Smith H. P. In his book *Psychology in Teaching* Says, "Learning is the acquisition of new behaviour or strengthening or weakening of old behaviour as the result of experience"(260). With proper stimulation and incentives, there are virtually no limits to men's ability to learn. Hence, a man, primarily, is endowed with limitless ability to learn.

Ability to speak and write a language is God's gift to mankind. Though Learning Language is a natural phenomenon, it cannot be denied that it is a complex matter. Robert Lado in his book *Language Teaching: A Scientific Approach* remarks, "Language learning is complex. It ranges acquisition of simple automatic skills to an understanding of abstract conceptual and aesthetic meaning, all occurring in the same sentence"(280).

Learning a language implies learning of the four basic skills- Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing. Linguists admit the complexity of learning of a language. There is no unanimity on how the process of Language Acquisition takes place.

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Till the end of nineteenth century, psychology had dominated education. It is only in the twentieth century that a sociological concept of individual has come to be accepted. Whether and individual is learning within a family or in school, whether he is at play or elsewhere, he is not isolated individual, but an individual in interaction with other individuals. According to this approach, any study of the educational system must go beyond the individual and give sufficient consideration to the complexity of individual-group interaction. There is no one ideal type of education for all but it differs from society to society, from group to group because of different socio-cultural environment and different needs of different societies and groups.

It is important to study the impact of Social Background on the language development of student and particularly the second language learning.

III. LEARNING THE SECOND LANGUAGE

Learning the second language is much more difficult and complex than learning the first language. The first language learning is comparatively simple because the learner is constantly exposed to his first language at his home and in the



society at large. Being badly in the communicative need and having a strong desire to express himself to gratify his essential needs, the learner picks up the first language with the help of plenty of models around to imitate. Henu Ronald Ward Hough in his book *TESOL: Current Problems and Class-room* aptly remarks “Languages are not taught; they are learnt for they are too complicated to be taught”(13).

Learning the second language is not an unconscious activity, rather, it is a deliberate activity, a social accomplishment. Reasons of this are obvious:

1. The child, after learning his mother tongue, has means of communication and does not feel any urgency to learn the second language.
2. Its exposure is restricted as the classroom is the only place where the second language is taught and heard and the teacher is the only model to imitate.
3. As stated by William Little wood in his book *Foreign and Second Language Learning*, “Language development depends upon the concepts a child forms about the world” (14)

In the case of second language learning, the child has already formed the concept about the world while learning his mother tongue. Hence, while learning the second language, he has to develop an awareness for the new concepts and their relationship with the second language.

Thus, learning the second language is much more complex activity than that of the first language. It is certainly not a mere formation of automatic habits.

The Purpose of the Second Language Teaching/ Learning in Indian Schools:

It has been a subject of debate for many years in India that how many languages can be learnt by pupils and at what stage the study of English Language should be commenced? To understand the issue, one should know the purposes of the second language study mainly English to have clear perspective of the Second Language Learning.

It is the admitted fact that regional languages are important but it does not mean that the national language of the country can be ignored completely. Above all, the study of foreign language i.e., English has its own importance. Now the question arises which language should be given the top most position in the country? Regional language or mother tongue of the student should be given first preference because it is the most suitable language as a medium of instruction for the child to begin its study. The national language of the country should come at number two and the study of English should come after the national language.

While learning Second Language, there is high impact of Social Background of the Learner. So, the present research paper focuses on the various aspects of Social Background which influence the language learning of the students.

Factors Influencing Learning the Second Language:

The Second Language is alien to the child’s context and environment. Hence, learning the second language is influenced by various factors. They can be summed as:

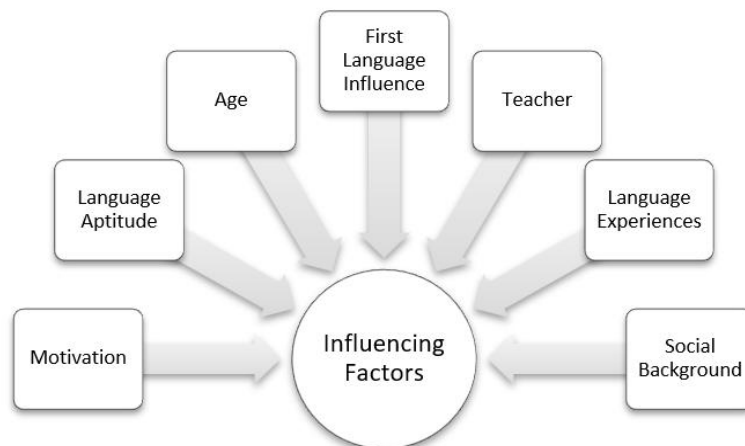


Figure1.1:



These are some of the important factors influencing the second language learning. While learning English as a second language, these factors affect the English learning capacity of the student.

The Social Background and Language Development:

Man is primarily a social animal. His life gets meaning only if it is collective and co-operative. For proper growth of mankind, the sense of belongingness first to family, then for the neighbourhood, the community, the nation and the world is essential. Self-realization and self-expression is possible only in the context of society. Human nature and personality are the results of sociological behaviour and reactions. The contact with other human beings influences the thoughts and actions of the man through which he/ she learns to act, react, interact, adjust, readjust and respond.

Education is a manmade process influenced by the social structure. The social influences play vital role in the education process as the biological, psychological and philosophical factors.

The language development of child is also largely influenced by the social factors. A child may be endowed with potentialities for language growth, yet the direction, rate and quality of his language development depends mainly upon the human group to which he belongs as well as his social environment. Language development among children, belonging to the different social groups, varies the way of their thinking, acting and living is different. The community, institution, the governmental agencies and mass media also affect the language development of the child as language teaching and learning takes place within the sociological context. Following diagram shows the impact of social context on language learning.

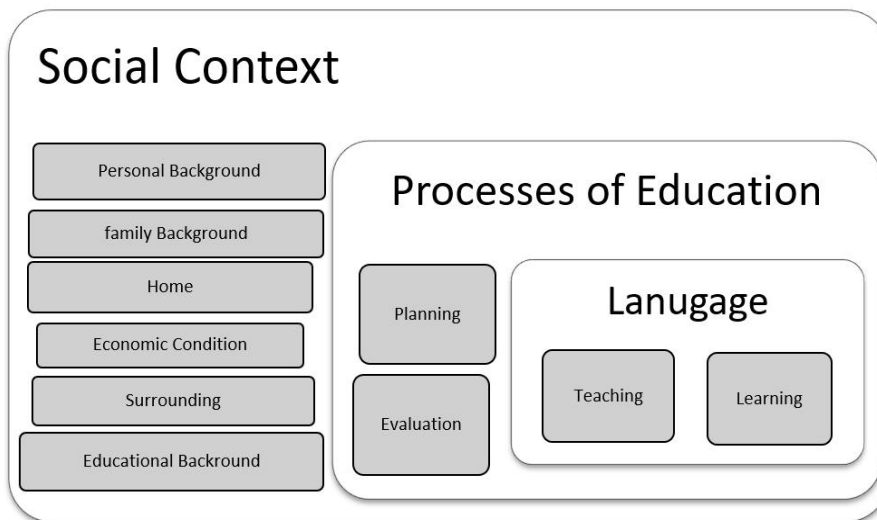


Figure1.2: Social Background and Language Development

Any type of human learning is the outcome of innate ability and social background. While, learning English language which is alien to Indian students, social background influences in a great extent.

Social background includes personal background like religion, caste, locality, occupation. The family background is also part of social background. The nature of family, total members in the family, the condition of family come in this category. The third aspect of social background is Home. The type of home and facilities available in the home are the important components of home. Another important factor of social background is Economic condition. Surrounding and educational background are also the parts of social background. All these factors collectively influence on the learning in general and language learning ability in particular.

IV. CONCLUSION

Every Indian classroom is full of pupils from various social background. They vary in social, economic and educational levels. Their problems and needs are also different to each other. Their social background affects their educational achievement in general and English language learning in particular.



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