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## Parental Role in learning ESL in developing countries

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### Introduction:

This article attempts to propound the significance of the parent's role how they contribute and make the leaning of English a successful experience for their child. In developing countries like Pakistan, English has acquired the status of second language and "Second language refers to language which is required by a person in addition to his mother tongue (Cook 2001). Parental involvement in learning English of their child creates possibilities to enhance the proficiency and on the other hand, obstructs the constraint of lack of proficiency in second language among the parents as their own level of education is identified low in these countries. They are unable to help the child directly in their second language acquisition.

The first part of the article has encompassed the potential and latent role of parents in their child acquisition of English, and the second part envisages that relationship between the socio-economic status (SES) of the parents and the child's learning second language is identified. SES of the parents refers to the occupation, level of education, material sources and social class in the stratification of society. Family SES directly conditions a child life chances, better or worse, more or less, financial support for his education, and so on

(Cronbach 1977). The central issue in the developing countries is the parents who are having nominal level of education and struggling economically, too. Low level of Education and lack of language proficiency are indicated as barriers. Some practical recommendations are also given in the conclusion after the findings and the results drawn in a study conducted to assess the SES of the parents and their role in the English learning of their child in the two cities of the province of Punjab in Pakistan. Findings have indicated that majority of the students who attended the government schools, belonged to the families where parent's level of education and sources of income are marginalized.

Around the globe, the users of English are great in number more than any other language. Today, English is a global language spoken by many people from different countries and cultural backgrounds. The learning of English is considered to be an absolute need because it helps to have access to the benefits of modernization, technological progress and better integration with the world. They hold the viewpoint:

The English is the language of international communication par excellence (for example it greatly outdistances its nearest competitor as the language in which the most scientific papers are written) cannot be denied as a reflection of thought, can it be denied that in countries where English is not the mother tongue, it is the world's most commonly taught language (Harrison 1985).

But the fact cannot be denied that second language learning is a complex process because it is not as isolated phenomenon. Environmental and contextual factors have a definite impact on it:

Language development appears to be affected by both socio-cultural environmental factors and individual neurophysiologic factors. Perception, conception, language and motivation are all affected by these out of school influences (Lemlech 1984).

Language learning requires context and without any doubt, home makes the first context for a child that is influential. It is considered to be informal domain, yet the most influential. Parental support seems to be a critical factor with younger children (Crystal, 1996). Parents provide enriching cultural and social experiences for learning the second language at early stages. Parents are influential in the child's attempts to learn a second language (Gardener, 1985). They lay the foundation of subsequent learning if the older children start de-emphasizing the role of parent and focus attention on movies, television, books, video games and school. But it is the parent who have initially communicated the attitudes, provided the opportunities for interethnic contacts, experiences and inter group attitudes. As a result he/she gets to know how to react to other people and group. Before he/she joins the language class, he/she is ready to bear and control any language learning situation and processes of second language acquisition. The child's first language models are in the home. Socio-economic class, cultural priorities, and the number of siblings in the family affect the encouragement the child receives (Lemlech, 1984).

Another argument appears to be very apt and justified "the language of majority of classroom is impoverished, limited and unfulfilling to that of other settings" (Heath in Mercer, 1988) but in contrast to it "the children's homes are rich with shared experiences, ranging from routine family events to television program (Heath in Mercer, 1988).

Regarding the influential role of parents, it is relevant to refer to the comprehensive and detailed research by renowned psychologist R.C Gardener who has done a lot of research on second language learning. He has identified two roles of parents, the active role and the passive role. He has suggested,

Parents play an active role when encourage their children to do well, when they monitor their language learning performance, and when they reinforce any success identified by the school. The mother who teaches additional words or

phrases, or comments on some aspect of pronunciation is obviously displaying an active role (Gardner, 1985).

The second role by Gardener was referred to as the passive role and it is. It is considered to be more delicate and subtle than the “active role” mentioned firstly. Passive role is concerned with the area of variable “attitudes” towards second language community and these attitudes include both positive and negative. According to him, the parent’s positive attitude toward the community tends to serve as integrative motive in the child. But the negative attitude can hinder the development even in the situations where they might actively promote second language, achievement. If they express negative attitude and opinions about second language community, the child would also develop attitude towards second language community and as a result success can not be achieved. In this way, the passive role may be more determinant factor. So the conclusion is drawn:

Parents who feel that the instrumental value of language study in most important tend also to feel that they provide the most encouragement, but it is the parents with favorable attitudes toward the other community and language learning that promote cultural exchanges (Gardener, 1985).

The integrative motive has its own value because it leads to the provision of a warm and supportive environment to the child. The child certainly develops positive attitudes towards the study of language and gets success.

The active involvement of parent in child’s learning language has directly impact on his proficiency in language. The Behaviorists also recognize the parental role according to the basic principal of the theory,

Children’s productive speech is shaped by different reinforces and punishments supplied by environmental agents (e.g. parents). Behaviorists assume that children’s speech that more closely approximates adult speech will be rewarded,

while meaningless or in appropriate speech will be ignored or punished (Gleason 1997).

So the importance of parental role in the process of acquiring second language is undeniable. Reinforcement and motivation to learn the target language are the attributes which necessarily increase the proficiency and learning process and it is the parents who contribute a lot. They motivate the children to learn; they reinforce the language the child uses and also ensure the provision of extensive opportunities to be exposed to target language. It is advisable for the parents not to neglect or ignore their crucial part.

The influencing role of parents makes contribution in number of ways in second language learning. Mother or father can assume the roles of a friend, a facilitator or a teacher with the early reading experiences at home which later on can turn into formal literacy instruction. The constant support is certainly crucial sustaining the child's confidence and sense of achievement. His/her performance in language in the school will be better. Mostly parents like to check and help in doing homework and in this way their involvement reinforces what the children have learned in the classroom.

### **Involvement of parents at early age of the child:**

“We might define early stage learning heavily lexical. That is, it is the learner's job to get words and other units of language to express meaning and to find ways to these units together to express prepositions” (Van Patten in Freed, 1991). And parents do this job when tutor their children and guide them how to use a dictionary.

In addition, talking to children in English, telling them stories and listening their stories are the techniques which enhance the listening and speaking skills of the child. If parent ask him/her to write letters to relatives or family friends in English that also improves his/her writing skills. He /she is

encouraged and appreciated on getting good results. So the child with all his experiences at home also exhibits good performance in language class at school. He has the advantage having experience with two languages and becomes more interactive in his language class. He has certainly the advantage over peers who have little experience with second language.

### **Involvement of parents at the mid stage of the children**

Mid stage is clearly distinguishable from early stage by student's incorporation of morphology and some syntactic elements (Van Patten in Freed 1991).so, at this stage the learner requires more opportunities and facilities to be exposed to target language. It is the Parents who arrange the supply of English newspapers weekly/monthly so that he may become familiar through community. They visit public libraries along with the children to choose English books. They make frequent visitation to a book center where magazines, comics, strips are available. The provision of the facilities is possible only if the parents spend their time, energy and money also. The child may be urged to watch T.V programs in English or to listen radio English programs under their supervision to increase the proficiency. Constant motivation and provision of facilities simulate them to learn.

### **Involvement of parents at advance stages of the child:**

The more advanced stages of acquisition build on previous stages (Van Patten in Freed 1991). This stage demands more time and more exposure to meaningful language and thus more focused skills are needed for language learning. English would be needed for commerce, legal purpose, literature course and so on. So the parent's role becomes more crucial as they are to provide a full supportive atmosphere for learning. The parents must show respect for the target language so that their children

can be motivated to learn more and more. In this way, attitudinal motivation of the parents works.

### **Contact with institution:**

Majority of the parents like to visit the institutions and teachers to get information about the progress of their children they are making. Another interesting but effective role for the parent is as an advocate in bringing positive changes in school if they feel so. Advocacy efforts can be made on the part of the parents if they want to add or eliminate some part of syllabus or content. Many parents regularly manage to visit the teacher and as decision makers, they talk about and discuss the courses and methodologies to make more suitable and appropriate.

The second part of the article deals with the role of SES of the parents in the learning English of children. There is an essential relationship between the parent's socio-economic status and child's proficiency in second language. Basil B. Bernstein in his famous study raised the question of the relationship between the linguistic rule system and the cultural system. It is the role of family through which the process of socialization makes orientation of the child as cultural being and enables him/her to establish this relationship.

Without a shadow of doubt the most formative influence upon the procedures of socialization, from a sociological viewpoint, is social class. The class structure influences work, educational rules and families into a special relationship with each other and deeply penetrates the structure of life experiences within the family (Bernstein in Minnis 1971:231).

So, Bernstein has argued that social class is ascribed to a child by parents and their linguistics patterns develop either as restricted code or elaborated code according to social class. Bernstein's study is about working class children and their proficiency in native language in terms of roles. "Where codes are restricted, the socialized has less access to the grounds of his socialization (P: 233)". So, it suggests that Bernstein has

accounted for the importance of relationship of two variables i.e. social class and language performance. Same is applied in the case of second language learning.

With the reference to the study of Labov, Micheal Stubbs has illustrated “In his original work on the social stratification of English in New York, Labov (1966) found strong correlations between speaker’s social class and their use of phonological variables (1989).

In developing countries like Pakistan, many parents are not English proficient or they are having low proficiency because their level of education is low. The school can not expect from these parents to help their children in the second language they themselves have not mastered. However, parents are keen that their children should learn English because of its instrumental and integrative value. A study was conducted to assess the SES of the parents whose children read in schools administered by the government.

### **Sample and procedure of the study:**

A sample of 200 students including male and female was taken from the government schools of two major cities (Lahore and Rawalpindi) of the province of Punjab. They were the students of grade 7 in government high schools attached with primary sections and their ages ranged between 13 to14. Five boy schools and five girl schools from each were selected and questionnaire was served to 10 students in each school to get their responses. In tables 1 2 and 3, the responses are about the level of education of father, his occupation and mother level of education.

**Table 1: Level of education of student’s father**

Level of Education	No	%
Illiterate	18	9
Under Matric	32	16
Matric	60	30
Intermediate	30	15
Graduation	24	12

Professional education	5	2.5
No response	31	15.5

**Table 2: Father’s occupation**

Profession	No	%
Workers	125	62.5
Bankers	5	2.5
School teachers	25	12.5
Doctors	1	0.5
Professors	5	2.5
Shopkeepers	39	19.5

**Table 3: Level of education of student’s mothers**

Level of Education	No	%
Illiterate	44	22
Under Matric	44	22
Matric	49	24.5
Intermediate	15	7.5
Graduation	15	7.5
Masters	12	6
No response	21	10.5

## Results & Findings:

Table “1” indicates that 70% (150/200) of the fathers were not graduates which suggested that level of education is below and they could not teach English to their children.

In Table “2”, it is identified that majority of the student’s fathers (62.5%) were workers, 19.5 were bankers, teachers, doctors and professors which suggested that a vast majority of the fathers have limited sources of income while a minority of fathers enjoyed a good economic status.

Table “3” shows the level of education of the mothers that 85.5% had the education level below graduation and they could not teach English to their children.

The students were given three more questions to answer. To question, How do you go to school? 38% (75/200) of the students answered that they go to school on foot and a vast majority of students nearly 59.5% made no answer which suggested that they had no access to the facility of any

conveyance due to the financial constraints of the parents. According to the answers of question, “Do your parents ask you to watch English programmes M. T.V, V.C.R. or V.C.P”?, parents 76-10% parents never persuaded their children to watch English movies or programme to get more exposure in target language so that they may be more proficient in second language. It, again referred to their financial constraints which restricted the opportunities of having facilities like T.V., V.C.R. or V.C.P. However, in responses to question 3, “Do your parents encourage to read extra, English Story books”?, 58% of the parents are found to encourage their children to read extra English story books because they can get the books from school library. They could not afford themselves, yet parents are keen that their children should study English.

In addition, I myself visited to the parents who sent their children to Government Schools, and asked them if they wanted their children to learn English. The desirability level of the parents were found be very high i.e. 99%. When they were asked if some compensatory classes are arranged at school, they are willing to send them. Again 99% responded positively.

So it is inferred that their high desirability level of the parent can compensate the barrier of their own deficiency in English, if they help them teaching the first language. Child's first language is of vital significance, if child has become able to grasp over his first language, he/she learns a second language quite easily. Definitely his first language supports success in second language learning. Cognitive benefits of simultaneous language development work here and success in the results of second language learning is achieved.

Using the home language allows the parents to pass on cultural concepts and literacy skills and enhance learning and in the long run, contributes to acquisition of English. The use of home language is an effective tool for the parent involvement activities. (<http://www.nwrel.org/archive/sirs3/c46html>)

The simultaneous language learning allows the children to continue to learn the academic concepts in their native language as they gradually learn the second language at the same time.

### **Suggestions:**

It is important to conclude with some of the practical suggestions which may help and guide the parents to involve in the process of second language learning of their children.

- Government in collaboration with the community should take steps to introduce and implement the adult literacy classes in English. It may help the parents become familiar with the language.
- It is also suggested that these language classes be flexible to allow working parents to join such programmes. These can be into two shifts. In the morning they can attend who are not working and bring their children to school in the morning. So it would be convenient for them to stay for literacy classes and who work in the morning, can be the part of these programmes in the evening.
- Free schooling may be provided to the needy students and hidden cost which includes school clothing, meals and transport, equipment and materials should not be received by the families who cannot afford.
- Free school meals in “cafeteria entitlement” should be introduced for the children of poor families because majority of children in Government schools come from disadvantaged background.
- Transport cost or bus fare may be granted to the deserving students who come to school from a distance.
- There should be no cut-backs in the provision of help to those who are poor and needy. Local education authorities may be allocated extra-money to provide the deprived children additional financial support so the

students can buy the required materials and equipments for second language learning.

- Educational maintenance allowance may be provided to the students who are supposed to be the helping hands in earning bread to their families so that they can concentrate to better learning.
- The school should provide a conducive atmosphere for learning. The availability of maximum learning opportunities may be ensured which also eliminate the inadequacy at home.

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