

# CAUSES OF PROBLEMS IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE AS PERCEIVED BY HIGHER SECONDARY STUDENTS

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## ABSTRACT

*English as a second language (ESL) becomes inseparable and unavoidable in Indian Education system. To learn a second language, a physical, intellectual and emotional involvement is needed to successfully send and interpret linguistic messages. This study is an analysis of some causes of the problems in learning ESL. The objectives of the study were to find out the leading cause of the problems in learning ESL; to find out whether there was any significant difference in the causes of problems faced by the students on the bases of different attributive variables such as sex, locality, habit of reading English dailies and habit of listening to English news. The methodology employed in gathering information was a survey method. SeWi's Scale on Causes of Problems in Learning ESL, prepared by the authors, consisting of 59 statements, was used as tool. The sample comprised 400 students covering 207 boys and 193 girls. The collected data were treated using mean, t test and ANOVA. The result of this study indicated that the Environment was the leading cause for the problems in learning ESL. Comparing to girls, boys perceived more problems. Another major finding was that rural students perceived more problems than urban students. Lack of reading habit and listening tends to confront several problems in learning ESL. Recommendations in the light of findings are also discussed in this article.*

*Keywords: English as a Second Language, Perception, Learning.*

## INTRODUCTION

Language is a very important means of communication. It is very difficult to think of a society without language. It sharpens people's thoughts and guides and controls their entire activity. It is a carrier of civilization and culture (Bolinger, 1968). In the case of the mother tongue, the child learns it easily, due to the favourable environment and by the great amount of exposure to the language. But, learning a second language requires conscious efforts to learn it and the exposure to the second language in most cases is limited (Bose, 2007). Majority of the students have favoured classroom instruction for the second language acquisition (James, 1996). There are so many factors affect the process of learning a second language, including attitude, self-confidence, motivation, duration of exposure to the language, classroom conditions, environment, family background, and availability of competent teachers (Verghese, 2009). Here the authors took up a study on analysing the various reasons for the problems faced by the second language learner. The reasons identified were:

environment, attitude and teacher's competence.

Environment and family background play vital role in success of learning process. For example, countries like India, where majority of the people are farmers, have the poor background in education. Moreover, the income of majority of the families is not adequate. Hence, the parents are not interested in giving good education background to their children. In contrast, they are willing to engage the children in some jobs in order to earn money. This is the very basic reason and the affecting factor in teaching. Attitude is yet another affective factor in learning a second language. Attitude is the way that you think and feel about something. The successful acquisition of a second language seems to some extent, contingent upon learners' views of the language learning environment, the learning situation, and how they view the target language and its speakers (Narayanan *et al.*, 2008). Like the environment and attitude, teacher's competence is also a variable factor that affects the second language learning. He should be proficient in the language; his knowledge of and

expertise in methods and techniques of language teaching should be of a reasonably high standard (Verghese, 2009).

## Review

The major findings of the reviewed studies were: i) teachers experienced great difficulty in making students understand English (Jayashree, 1989); ii) there was significant relationship between the problems faced by the students in pronunciation, learning grammar, knowledge of sentence pattern, habit of hearing news, rectification of homework, memorization without understanding, remedial teaching and different variables regarding sex, locality and type of management (Singaravelu, 2001), and iii) Structural differences between English and Malay have also been identified as another problem faced by the students in learning English. Environment that is not conducive to language learning further adds to the problem (Jalaluddin *et al.*, 2009).

## Significance of the Study

English is being treated as a world language because of its vast presence all over the world. At this juncture, learning English gains currency. Majority of Indian students, particularly from rural place considers this seven-letter word as a magical and a mystical word. The moment they hear something in English they start feel discomfort. Twelve years of school study do not make students mastery over English. While they are in schools English is not taught properly. As majority of the students are hailed from rural areas, bilingual method is adopted in language classes. This method helps only to slow learners to some extent. Moreover, this act reduces the real learning process as a whole. To learn English requires constant practice and patience. The kind of feeling that prevails among students is that it is not possible to achieve fluency or mastery over English language. This kind of tendency prevents students from learning English. Most of the students study English from the examination point of view, so they are not able to produce even a single sentence without grammatical error. Furthermore adequate practice is not given to students to learn a language. Exposure too is far less to them. The investigator has tried to analyse several problems in learning English because for Indians, English has a special

place. It is not a foreign language to us; it is a second language. Knowledge of English is necessary if one wants to come up in life. Besides being a link and library language in India, it is major window of the modern world. This is all the more true where the advanced countries have opened their doors for recruiting technically qualified persons. Only those who have a command over the English language is given a job.

In this context, causes of problems of higher secondary students in learning English is an important area for study as it would help the pupils identify the problems which will hinder their learning in English and also make them learn English with ease and comfort.

## Objectives

The objectives of the current study are:

- To identify the leading cause for problems in learning English as a second language.
- To find out the significant difference, if any, in the causes of problems in learning English with regard to sex, locality of school, optional subject, habit of reading English newspaper and habit of listening to English news.

## Method

This research aims at studying various causes for the problems in learning a second language. Hence this study involved data collection through survey method.

## Population and Sample

The population was the students of +1 in the State Board Schools in Thoothukudi district, Tamil Nadu. From the population, 400 students comprised of 207 boys and 193 girls were selected as sample, following stratified random sampling technique. The selected sample was from rural and urban areas of Thoothukudi district.

## Tool Used

The authors constructed a questionnaire on causes of problems in learning English as a second language. After constructing the questionnaire, it was consulted with experts in teacher education for establishing content validity. Based on their suggestions few questions were modified to avoid ambiguity. Thus content validity was established. The questionnaire was administered to 120

pupils from +1 students parallel to the proposed sample, studying both in rural and urban areas in Thoothukudi district. The responded questionnaires were collected and scored with the help of a scoring key. By using the item whole analysis, the total scores obtained by each student were correlated with the total score for each item. The correlation was calculated using the Pearson product moment correlation formula. The items with validity indices of 0.20 and above were selected for the final draft. Finally, co-efficient of reliability was estimated using the Spearman-Prophecy formula. The co-efficient of reliability calculated for SeWi's scale on causes of problems in learning was 0.3.

### Statistics Used

The collected data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, Pearson product moment correlation, t-test, ANOVA, and Post hoc ANOVA test.

### Data Analysis

It is inferred from Table 1 that 'Environment' is the leading cause for the problems in learning English as perceived by +1 students while comparing it with the other two dimensions namely Attitude and Teacher's Competence.

The analysis of the difference in perception about cause of problems in learning ESL with regard to sex, locality of school, optional subject and habit of reading English Newspaper is evident from the Tables 2,3,4 and 5.

Since for the dimensions 'Attitude', 'Environment' and 'Teacher's Competence' there is significant result, post-hoc test is attempted and the results are tabulated in the Tables 5 (a), (b) & c).

Dimension	N	Total Score	Rank
Environment	400	70.860	I
Attitude	400	75.055	II
Teacher's Competence	400	76.42	III

Table 1. Leading Causes of Problems in Learning ESL

Dimension	Sex	No.	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Environment	Boys	207	68.33	8.375	5.658	0.000**
	Girls	193	73.58	10.137		
Attitude	Boys	207	71.61	9.002	7.504	0.000**
	Girls	193	78.75	10.006		
Teacher's Competence	Boys	207	75.68	10.221	1.367	0.173
	Girls	193	77.22	12.298		

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 2. Difference in Perception about Causes of Problems in Learning ESL with regard to Sex

Dimension	Locality of School	No.	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Environment	Rural	241	70.15	9.023	1.824	0.069
	Urban	159	71.94	10.339		
Attitude	Rural	241	73.64	10.068	3.487	0.001**
	Urban	159	77.20	9.890		
Teacher's Competence	Rural	241	75.17	10.888	2.759	0.006**
	Urban	159	78.32	11.636		

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 3. Difference in Perception about Causes of Problems in Learning ESL with regard to Locality of School

Dimension	Optional Subject	No.	Mean	SD	t value	P value
Environment	Science	217	72.01	9.739	2.621	0.009**
	Arts	183	69.50	9.323		
Attitude	Science	217	76.35	8.919	2.797	0.005**
	Arts	183	73.52	11.248		
Teacher's Competence	Science	217	77.14	11.371	1.388	0.166
	Arts	183	75.57	11.149		

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 4. Difference in Perception about Causes of Problems in Learning ESL with regard to Optional Subject

Variable	Dimension	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	P value
Habit of Reading English Newspaper	Environment	Between	2733.789	3	911.263	10.553	0.000**
		Within	34196.371	396	86.354		
Newspaper	Attitude	Between	2718.766	3	906.255	9.376	0.000**
		Within	38278.024	396	96.662		
Competence	Teacher's	Between	3471.497	3	1157.166	9.683	0.000**
		Within	47323.943	396	119.505		

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

Table 5. Difference in Perception about Causes of Problems in Learning ESL with regard to the Habit of Reading English Newspaper

### Findings

- 'Environment' is the leading cause for the problems in learning English as perceived by +1 students while comparing it with the other two dimensions namely 'Attitude' and 'Teacher's Competence'.
- Boys perceived more, the 'Environment' and 'Attitude' as the cause of problems in learning ESL than girls.
- There is no significant difference in perceiving 'Teacher's Competence' as the cause of problems in

Habit of Reading English newspaper	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	24	65.63		
Daily	291		70.21	
Occasionally	47		71.83	
Frequently	38			77.95
Sig.		1.000	0.419	1.000

Table 5 (a). Post Hoc test for the Dimension 'Environment' with regard to Habit of Reading English Newspaper

Habit of Reading English newspaper	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	24	69.42		
Occasionally	291		74.66	
Daily	47		74.68	
Frequently	38			82.13
Sig.		1.000	.991	1.000

**Table 5 (b). Post Hoc test for the Dimension 'Attitude' with regard to Habit of Reading English Newspaper**

Habit of Reading English newspaper	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	24	69.33		
Daily	47	73.66	73.66	
Occasionally	291		76.53	
Frequently	38			83.50
Sig.		.067	.224	1.000

**Table 5 (c). Post Hoc test for the Dimension 'Teacher's Competence' with regard to Habit of Reading English Newspaper**

learning ESL with regard to sex.

- There is no significant difference in perceiving 'Environment' as the cause of problems in learning ESL with regard to locale of school.
- The pupils, whose school is in rural area, perceived more, the 'Attitude' and 'Teacher's Competence' as the cause of problems in learning ESL than urban pupils.
- The students, who have taken Arts as their optional subject, perceived more, the 'Environment' and 'Attitude' as the cause of problems in learning ESL than Science students.
- There is no significant difference in perceiving 'Teacher's Competence' as the cause of problems in learning ESL with regard to optional subject.
- There is significant difference in perceiving 'Attitude', 'Environment' and 'Teacher's Competence' as the cause of problems in learning ESL with regard to the habit of reading English newspaper.
- For the dimensions 'Attitude' and 'Environment', the students who never read the English newspaper perceived more problems in learning ESL than those who read occasionally, daily and frequently. Also, the students who read the newspaper occasionally and daily perceived more problems than the students who read the English newspaper frequently.
- For the dimension 'Teacher's Competence', the

students who never read the English newspaper perceived more problems in learning ESL than those who read occasionally and frequently. Also, the students who read the newspaper occasionally and daily perceived more problems than those who read the English newspaper frequently.

- There is significant difference in perceiving 'Attitude', 'Environment' and 'Teacher's Competence' as the cause of problems in learning ESL with regard to the habit of listening English news (Table 6, 6a, 6b and 6c).
- For the dimensions 'Environment', 'Attitude' and

Variable	Dimension	Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	df	Mean of Squares	F	P value
Habit of Listening to English News	Environment	Between	3323.552	3	1107.851	13.054	0.000**
		Within	33606.608	396	84.865		
	Attitude	Between	2543.710	3	847.903	8.732	0.000**
		Within	38453.080	396	97.104		
	Teacher's Competence	Between	2453.693	3	817.898	6.700	0.000**
		Within	48341.747	396	122.075		

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level

**Table 6. Difference in Perception about Causes of Problems in Learning ESL with regard to the Habit of Listening to English News**

Habit of Listening English news	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	14	61.36		
Occasionally	305		70.32	
Daily	61		72.62	
Frequently	20			80.30
Sig.		1.000	.348	1.000

**Table 6 (a). Post Hoc test for the Dimension 'Environment' with regard to Habit of Listening to English News**

Habit of Listening English news	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	14	65.29		
Occasionally	305		74.82	
Daily	61		75.98	
Frequently	20			82.60
Sig.		1.000	.658	1.000

**Table 6 (b). Post Hoc for the Dimension 'Attitude' with regard to Habit of Listening to English News**

Habit of Listening English news	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
Never	14	66.79		
Daily	61		76.13	
Occasionally	305		76.42	
Frequently	20			84.00
Sig.		1.000	0.921	1.000

**Table 6 (c). Post Hoc test for the Dimension 'Teacher's Competence' with regard to Habit of Listening to English News**

'Teacher's Competence', the students who never listen English news perceived more problems in learning ESL than those who listen news occasionally, daily and frequently. Also, the students who listen the news occasionally and daily perceived more problems than the students who listen English news frequently.

## Recommendations

The government should often conduct in-service training to train the teachers to use English language in classrooms. They should try to bring reforms in the pattern of examination. Separate marks could also be allotted to test the spoken language of the students. An attempt should also be made to give rewards to the rural students for those who performed well in English examination. Government should facilitate all schools with language laboratory. The Government may encourage the management to develop the aural and oral skills of the students.

The educational officers should arrange guidance and orientation programmes in English. They may encourage the management of the schools to conduct reading test in English. Often they have to supervise the way of providing English education in schools. By the way of supervision, they can give suggestions for improvement in the curriculum. They have to motivate the teachers to imbibe the culture of referring dictionary among the students.

Management should often insist the teachers to assess the development of students' proficiency in English. The information on students' development in English should be communicated to parents at regular intervals. They may arrange special coaching classes for slow learners and rural students. They may also encourage the students to read English news during prayer hours. The key role of the management is to insist the English teacher to converse in English with the students even in and outside the school campus. To impart the spoken aspects of the language, they should allot separate period for spoken English. If time permits, they could also extend the duration of the English class.

English teachers have to encourage the students to communicate in English. They may impart the spoken aspects of the language once/twice in a week. Teachers should create student-friendly and learner centered

environment. They should motivate students for participative learning. They should also strengthen the communication skills of the students by making them to raise their doubts in English. While taking classes, the teacher should pay individual attention. They should stimulate the interest of the pupils to read English newspapers and magazines.

Children are more successful when their parents are involved in their education. Parents have to create conducive atmosphere to learn English. Their role is to encourage their children to communicate in English even at home. They should provide English newspapers, journals and magazines to enrich the reading skill of their children. They may also encourage them to listen to English news and to watch English programmes.

The mind of the students should always be ready to learn. They should read English newspapers, journals, novels, etc., as per the advice of their parents and teachers. They should also develop their habit of listening to English news and referring dictionary. They should not study English from an exam point of view. If they study English from an exam point of view, they may not be able to write on their own. The conversation with their parents, teachers and peers should always be in English. To learn English, opportunities have to be utilised by them effectively and efficiently.

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