

# Social Context as an Indirect Trigger in EFL Contexts: Issues and Solutions

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Received: November 23, 2011

Accepted: December 31, 2011

Published: March 1, 2012

doi:10.5539/elt.v5n3p73

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/elt.v5n3p73>

## Abstract

This paper investigates the value of the social context and its role in learning a second language in different contexts. Social context is believed to be able to influence attitude and motivation. It also provides learning opportunities which give rise to learner's outcomes. In fact, students acquire a language by using it in social interaction with speakers of that language. Nonetheless, significance of social context is mostly ignored or underestimated in most EFL countries because this social context is naturally missing and there is a lack of severe demand for acquiring the second language. Therefore, the final outcome of second language learning is not satisfactory. This paper is a step towards investigating the issues in respect to the social context of EFL countries as an indirect but essential trigger in second language learning. Especially in foreign language classrooms, learners have limited social interaction with their teacher or peers in their target language since that language is not used as a means of communication among them outside or even inside classrooms. Besides investigating the issues, this paper provides suggestions which help improve social contexts in EFL countries.

**Keywords:** Social context, EFL contexts, Learning opportunities, Motivation, Attitude

## 1. Background

Social interaction is an integral process in language learning based on Vygotskian sociocultural theory which claims that human cognition is formed through social activity (Lantolf & Johnson, 2007; Cheon 2008). In other words, students acquire a language by using it in social interaction with speakers of that language. Based on Mondada and Pekarek Doehler, learning is rooted in the learner's participation in social practice and continuous adaptation to the unfolding circumstances and activities that constitute talk-in-interaction. Moreover, social context is not simply a background variable affecting the learning, but also an essential part of cognitive development itself (Mondada and Pekarek Doehler, 2004, p. 501). Similarly, Jacknic claims that context of learning influences learning processes profoundly; therefore, accepting the occurrence of learning in context is not adequate because the context shapes cognitive development (i.e., learning) (Jacknic, 2008). Therefore, broadening the context of social interaction from a classroom setting to intercultural communication seems to be needed based on the sociocultural approach (Kinging, 2004; Thorne, 2006).

In 1989, Spolsky proposed a learning model in which some conditions were established which were claimed to affect learning a second/foreign language. Attitudes and learning opportunities were also considered to be affected by various factors. Based on Spolsky's model, attitudes of various kinds appear in learners as motivation that joins with personal characteristics which all together justify the use a learner makes of accessible learning opportunities.

The interaction between learner and learning opportunities determines the outcomes for the learner (Spolsky, 1989, p. 28).

It is worth mentioning that second language learning takes place in a social context. This social context shapes learning in two ways. Primarily, the social context leads to learner's attitudes towards both the target language community and the learning situation. This leads to the development of motivation in learners. Secondly, both **formal** and **informal** learning opportunities are influenced by the social context. In fact, the availability of formal and informal opportunities depends on the social context (Spolsky, 1989, p. 26). Formal situation refers to the institutionalized educational opportunities which are often provided by a society for language learning. Moreover, this is the social context as the source of informal opportunities for language use and learning. Informal situations can provide chances for learners for interacting with the speakers of the target language (Spolsky, 1989, p. 26). Language is principally a social mechanism. This is why languages are learned in social contexts. Although language learning is an individual process, it certainly occurs in society. For this reason, learning is significantly affected by the social factors indirectly. It is crucial to deem on these effects and center on the ways which can help us enhance EFL contexts where learning the second language occurs.

## 2. Importance of the Social Context

Learning occurs through social interaction with others within specific contexts and communities (Fagan, 2008). Social factors influence the achievement, and students in a classroom learn in a social situation affected by social influences from outside the classroom. Social context is crucial in development of attitudes towards the target language, its speakers, and the language learning situation. Consequently, motivation develops. Learning opportunities are also determined by the social context. In line with this, students are believed to be social beings participating in structured social networks. The social context and its relation with (learners or) social being are highlighted in this perspective. It is in this social context that the learner's language is occurring. It also provides the structuring of the learning opportunities mentioned above (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 27). Similarly, Lantolf and Johnson (2007) assert that the argument is not that social activity influences cognition, but that social activity is the process through which human cognition is formed (p. 878).

This relationship between the individual learner and the social context of learning is considered as dynamic, reflexive and constantly changing. Such relationship was traditionally controlled by the fixed learner characteristics (Mitchell & Myles, 2004, p. 27-28). Yet, motivation, anxiety, etc are considered to be continuously changing in the course of second language experience and available interaction given that language learning is a collaborative matter and the knowledge is constructed socially at first place through the interaction. Subsequently, a learner's second language learning can be definitely affected all through the contact and exposure to the social context (Spolsky, 1989).

## 3. Sociocultural Theory

Sociocultural theory clarifies that the development of higher-order processes (of learning) are rooted in experience in the socially situated context that is present in all human activities (Hawkins, 2008). Sociocultural theory is considered as the affective aspect of communicative process. It is the intersection of culture and affect (Brown, 2007, p. 188). By learning another language besides L1, personal and transactional barriers will be presented by two cultures in contact. In this case, sociocultural theory endeavors to determine how the learners overcome these barriers. Moreover, it attempts to clarify the relationships exist between culture learning and second language learning. Learner's engagement with their social and linguistic environments needs to be accentuated because the target language interaction cannot be viewed simply as a source of *input* for autonomous and internal learning mechanisms according to sociocultural disciplines (Mitchell, Myles, 2004, p. 193). In sociocultural perspectives, the role of the interpersonal and interactive environment is definitely emphasized in learning the second/foreign language (Cheon 2008). Hence, it is essential to create an interactive learning environment in which learners can associate with each other and construct their L2 performance collaboratively through peer assistance (Cheon 2008).

## 4. Socially-Oriented Conditions Affecting L2 Learning

Throughout the Spolsky's model of second language learning, the requirements for a general theory of second language learning are examined by stipulating and considering the **conditions** under which languages are learned and a learner may produce the final linguistic outcome. Based on Spolsky's Linguistic Outcome Condition, *someone knows a second language if one or more criteria (conditions) are met* (Spolsky, 1989). Although various topics are covered by these conditions, **social context** in which a second language is learned seems more relevant and crucial in setting the other conditions. The social conditions proposed by Spolsky are claimed to affect attitudes to and opportunities for learning. The social context of a second language has importance in that it has a greater complexity comparing to that of a first language and it can increasingly cause variability which is concerned with variations that occur in the performance of the individual second language learner.

The first socially-relevant condition known as the *Number of Speakers* condition proposed by Spolsky stipulates that *the number of people who speak a language as a first or second language influences the desire of others to learn it*". This can be regarded as the first criterion for the relative value of each language for communicating with other people. It is also a criterion to select a foreign language to be taught in schools (1989, p. 133).

Similarity between the first and the second language gives rise to the second socially-relevant condition known as *Language Distance* condition claiming that *the closer two languages are to each other genetically and typologically, the quicker a speaker of one will learn the other*" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 21). This condition deals with the relationship between several languages in the community. If this relationship is closer, the learning time of speakers will be shorter.

Yet other conditions deal with the kinds of language involved and the dimensions considered for them. Spolsky (1989, pp. 133-135) states that only a language with the feature of standardization can be **taught formally** and that **only** a language with the feature of vitality can be learned **informally**. Based on this, two necessary conditions are proposed: *Standard Language* condition says that *"formal teaching situations are possible only with standardized languages"*. Standardization refers to the existence of a set of norms for correct use of the variety and a standardized writing system for the variety. And *Vitality* Condition specifies that *"Informal learning situations are possible only with languages with vitality"*. Vitality deals with the existence of a community of people speaking the variety who have acquired it as their first language (Spolsky, 1989, p. 133). These essential features bring about vital implications for second language learning particularly regarding the learning opportunities.

Another set of conditions which work in conjunction with the Number of Speakers condition is introduced by Spolsky to justify different reasons for **setting a value** on a variety and explain the social pressures to encourage the language to be taught and learned i.e. the conditions are **on a social decision to teach a language**. This set includes *Official Use* condition highlighting that *people prefer to teach or learn a language which is officially used or recognized*. Also, *Modernized Language* condition claims that *people prefer to teach or learn a language which is standardized and which has been modernized*. Finally, *Great Tradition* condition says that *people prefer to teach or learn a language which has a desirable Great Tradition (including a religion) associated with it* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 136). Then the social and political status of a variety in a society will be important in determining goals and opportunities for learning and individual attitudes to the target language and its speakers.

## 5. Attitude

It seems clear that second language learning benefits from positive attitudes and that negative attitudes may lead to decreased motivation and to unsuccessful attainment of proficiency" (Brown, 2007, p. 193). According to social psychologists, attitudes of the learner towards the target language, its speakers and the learning context play an important role in succeeding or failing to learn a language. Similarly, Krashen highlights that those with attitudes more conducive to second language acquisition will not only seek and obtain more input, they will also have lower filter. They will be more open to the input, and it will strike deeper (Mitchell and Myles, 2004, p.48.). According to Gardner (1985), attitudes are of two kinds: attitudes to the people who speak the target language and attitudes to the practical use to which the learner assumes he can learn. Attitudes do not have direct influence on learning, but they lead to motivation which does (Spolsky, 1989, p. 149). By specifying a typical and graded condition, Spolsky asserts that *a learner's attitudes affect the development of motivation* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 23). Spolsky argues that attitude is derivable from social context, and motivation is expressed in the learner's strategies in a specific learning situation. "The outcomes of attitude conditions ... need to be stated as motivations rather than as linguistic outcomes. Thus, favorable attitudes to speakers of a language, its culture, and its country lead to integrativeness and favorable attitudes to school, to a language as a school subject, and to the person who teaches it, lead to positive motivation" (Spolsky, 1989, p. 157). The attitudinal factor then interacts with the learner's personal abilities to determine the use of available opportunities for language learning.

## 6. Motivation

Motivation is a significant affective variable described by Brown (2007, p. 168) as "a star player in the cast of characters assigned to second language learning scenarios around the world". Countless studies and experiments have demonstrated that motivation is a key in second language learning. Among different behavioral, cognitive and constructivist perspectives on motivation, the last one gives further emphasis on social context as well as individual personal choices (Williams & Burden, 1997, p. 120). Moreover, each person is motivated differently and acts uniquely in their environment. But these unique acts are conducted within a cultural and social milieu and cannot be completely separated from that context (Brown, 2007, p 169). The condition set by Spolsky namely *Motivation condition* underlines that *the more motivation a learner has, the more time he or she will spend learning an aspect of a second language* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 23). Motivation in the present context refers to the combination of effort plus

desire to achieve the goal of learning plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language (Gardner, 1985, p. 149). Carroll (1962) suggested that the critical factors are aptitude, opportunity or method, and motivation, the latter predicting the amount of time a learner would apply to the task of language learning. Carroll's formula may be rewritten as a set of graded conditions: The original simple formula suggested this by considering linguistic outcome as the result of summing ability, motivation, and opportunity: the more of any one that is present, the less the others are needed.

Such motivation which makes a learner spend more time learning an aspect of second language will determine the amount and level of input he encounters which will in turn determine his progress. The frequency of forms in the speech exposed to the learner can affect the language he produces. Spolsky then offers another socially-relevant condition known as *Exposure condition* which claims that *the more time spent learning any aspect of a second language, the more will be learned* (1985, p. 166). It is the fact that the outcome of language learning largely depends on the amount and kind of exposure to the target language. After precisely dealing with the input notion, Spolsky states another relevant condition namely *Comprehensible Input* condition affirming that *the learner is expected to understand; therefore, the speaker makes an effort to see that language is comprehensible* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 193). In order for people to learn a language they need not to understand each and every word in each and every utterance they hear. But rather, they need to understand it as meaningful items if they tend to integrate a structure/lexical item into their productive capacity.

### 7. Types of Motivation

Two types of motivation are labeled instrumental and integrative according to Gardner and Lambert's original work on attitudes and motivation. The instrumental side of the dichotomy refers to acquiring a language as a means of attaining instrumental goals (Brown, 2007). The integrative side describes learners who desire to integrate themselves into the culture of L2 group and involve in social interchange in that group. Many studies have been carried out to demonstrate which type of motivation works better in L2. However, it is believed that both integrative and instrumental orientations are important factors in successful L2 learning. The degree of impact of either of orientation will depend on individual learners, educational contexts, **cultural milieu**, teaching methodology, and **social interaction** (Brown, 2007).

The specific effect of integrative motivation can be observed in the following condition set by Spolsky: *Integrative orientation, a cluster of favorable attitudes to the speakers of the target language, has a positive effect on the learning of a second language, and in particular on the development of a native-like pronunciation and semantic system*. Many studies, however, have looked for influence of this motivation on all aspects of second language learning and not limiting it to semantics and pronunciation. Yet, the other relevant condition is *Instrumental Language Learning or Teaching* which highlights that *if you need to speak to someone who does not know your language, you can learn that person's language or help that person to learn your language*.

All the motivational and attitudinal conditions can be summarized in one condition set by Spolsky known as *Language Values condition*. This condition stresses that *the social and individual values which underlie language choice rules also determine the value an individual assigns to the learning of a specific language*. These values translate into attitudes which lead to the development of the degree and kind of motivation that has such an important influence on the amount of effort a learner is prepared to make in learning an L2. The attitudinal factor is not independent but interacts with the learner's personal abilities to determine the advantage taken of the opportunities presented for language learning and use. Hence, the social situation indirectly affects L2 learning by determining the learner's attitudes and motivation. The social context also determines the existence and kinds of situations and opportunities that are available for formal and informal second language learning (Spolsky, 1989, p. 164).

### 8. Social Context and Learning Opportunities

So far, it has been highlighted that social context leads to attitudes which appear in learners as motivation that connect with other personal characteristics all of which explains the use made by learner out of the available learning opportunity. Meanwhile, we need to directly concentrate on the other parallel role of social context which provides formal or informal opportunities. The society provides educational opportunities (formal situations) whose availability depends on the social context i.e. when there is formal instruction in a school, the social context and various parent factors determine parents' rationales and goals. The social context with parents' rationales and goals determine the school's rationales and goals. The school's rationales, goals, and priorities account for formal learning. It is also the social context that is the source of informal opportunities for language use and learning. Informal situations are available in different kinds and amount according to social conditions which determine the potential opportunities for a learner to interact with speakers and writers of the target language. Thus, the social context

determines the nature of possibilities for social intercourse and other communicative transactions (Spolsky, 1989, p. 26).

### 9. Social Context and Informal Learning Conditions

Informal learning is also called natural language learning in which the individual picks up a second language in the environment where it is used. Such learning occurs through communicating with the others as the central purpose since the language is used for communication in informal learning. The learner encounters fluent speakers of the target language whose language used is free and normal, and the context is the real outside world. Spolsky's conditions of natural learning include *Communication condition* saying that *the language is being used for communication* which provides a necessary kind of practice for the learner because he has to make use of his language for communicating successfully. The other condition is the *Fluent Speakers condition* which expresses that *many speakers in the environment are fluent and native* through which the learner encounters a variety of forms and styles to match his own knowledge with. *Open Area condition* also asserts that *the learning occurs in the open or in unconstrained areas*. Natural context obviously provides contextual clues for comprehending the language and facilitates understanding the rules in different physical and social contexts. Yet, the other condition known as *Uncontrolled Language condition* affirms that *the language is normal and uncontrolled*. As mentioned earlier, a learner encounters a variety of forms and natural styles which are normal and not bookish. Finally, Spolsky stipulates *Comprehensible Input condition* saying that *the learner is expected to understand; therefore, the speaker makes an effort to see that language is comprehensible*. Although mentioned before, it is worth restating that the learner is expected to understand, hence, the speaker tries to maintain a language that is comprehensible.

### 10. Social Context and Formal Learning Conditions

Formal or classroom learning occurs in a situation where only the teacher has the dominance and controls the exposure which leads to learning. The language in this type of learning is used only to teach and meaningless drills are the focus. Instead of encountering fluent speakers, only the teacher is fluent whose language is controlled and simplified. The context here is the closed four walls of the classroom rather than a real milieu. The conditions of formal learning include *Learning Goal condition* claiming that *the language is being used so that it can be learned*. Since the goal is learning, the tasks are divided to smaller chunks for the learner to understand more easily which will give more time for memory and adequate practice. Moreover, *teacher Model condition* highlights that *only one speaker (the teacher) is fluent; the majority in the environment (classroom) are not*. The results are the learner's having time to adapt to one style at a time and lack of competition from other speakers better than the learners to make them feel inadequate. *Classroom condition* is also set by Spolsky maintaining that *the learning takes place in a closed physical space, a single classroom*. It is believed that controlled acoustics affecting hearing and comfortable physical surroundings for a better concentration can positively influence learning. *Simplified Language condition* set to express that *the language is simplified and controlled*. Consequently, the teacher can make sure that the used language is within the capability of the learner. The last related condition to formal learning is the *Drill Input condition*. According to this condition, *the learner is expected to learn; therefore ample practice is given to develop automatic control*. Without practice, learning looks uneven; with it, there is systematic development of fluency and accuracy (Spolsky, 1989, pp. 171-3).

### 11. Formal/Informal Learning and Final Linguistic/Non-Linguistic Outcomes

Although natural conditions need to be imposed on formal teaching, we need to know that in one way natural language learning situations are restrained in the social control over the linguistic context. The results of various studies support the general view that there is benefit in formal instruction because it provides options in two important areas including manipulation of input and the production tasks set to learners (Spolsky, 1989). The results of studies done by Long (1988) provide further support saying that formal instruction is the most effective way for adults to learn an L2 concluding that formal L2 instruction has positive effects on SLA processes on the rate at which learners acquire the language and on their ultimate level of attainment (1988:135). Although there are obvious advantages in informal language learning, there are also great advantages in the conditions of formal instruction. Spolsky brings this last condition known as *Formal language Learning-Teaching condition* which states that *in formal language learning situations, multiple opportunities to observe and practice the new language can be provided. The more these match other relevant conditions (the learner, the goals, and the situation), the more efficient the learning will be*. Appropriate formal L2 teaching would not only provide the best set of opportunities, but would also do this in a way that exploits previous knowledge, recognizes language differences, takes advantage of individual student capacities, respects learners' personalities, and benefits from positive attitudes and minimizes negative ones (Spolsky, 1989, p. 200). The interplay between language learner and learning opportunity determines the learner's success in achieving the linguistic outcomes such as linguistic and communicative competence of a

variable nature and non-linguistic outcomes. Linguistic Outcome Condition of the learning is defined as follow: *Someone knows a second language if one or more criteria are met.* The criteria are specifiable: as underlying knowledge or skills, analyzed or unanalyzed, implicit or explicit, of individual structural items which integrate into larger units such as functional skills for specified purposes or as overall proficiency, productive or receptive, with a specified degree of accuracy, with a specified degree of fluency and with a specified approximation to native speaker usage of one or more specified varieties of language. Non-linguistic outcomes include changes of attitude and satisfaction or frustration of personal learning goals that have been determined personally or socially.

## 12. Social Context in EFL Countries: Issues and Solutions

There is a set of criteria that needs to be met according to Linguistic Incline conditions of Spolsky's for learning to take place. If this happens, the natural interrelated elements of the language would help learning to happen through the natural social course. The reason why there should be a better way of learning an L2 is maybe on account of having sufficient and frequent access to the information and technology resources introduced internationally and to integrate with people all around the world more effectively to enhance the relationships and transfer and share knowledge in/through a global village. Such things will definitely occur if there is a single known language learned. For an EFL context to provide a natural social context, there are few suggestions presented as follow which seem quite relevant to various types of conditions set by Spolsky and might affect learning efficiently.

### 12.1 Political Standpoints

The political belief in some EFL countries is that English (as an L2) may devalue their own cultures, languages and identities. We think that learning a second language can give us a new identity and help us know about culture of the target language. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily diminish those nations' values and cultures. Moreover, in some countries, English is the language of Imperialism and considered to be the voice of enemy! In Iran, as an example of a typical EFL context, English is regarded as a foreign language due to political, cultural, and religious features. Considering its origin, most people believe that English belongs to America. So, this is the first stereotype that exists in the country. Also, the political chaos in relation that has existed between Iran and America may not dispose the Iranian government to have a positive view towards the English language. As a result there are some people in positions of influence in Iran who genuinely believe that English is language of the enemy (Dahmardeh, 2006). Moreover, it is observed in many EFL countries that politicians never interview or use English officially.

Whatever the reason might be (inability to speak or unwillingness, etc), employing English as a second language can fulfill some conditions stipulated by Spolsky (discussed earlier) which can positively foster L2 learning. Primarily, the *official Use* condition will be met claiming that *people prefer to teach or learn a language which is officially used or recognized.* If in EFL countries, English is not used by politicians, people will not be encouraged to learn a second language because the need is not felt for it. In addition to this, "*Language Values*" condition will be met saying that *the social and individual values which underlie language choice rules also determine the value an individual assigns to the learning of a specific language.* To sum up, the individuals attitudes (in form of values) will be improved resulting in better development of the degree and kind of motivation which per se has its own positive impact. It is the social context affecting politicians' decisions on second language learning by improving the learner's attitudes and motivation (Spolsky, 1989). Politicians know well that the students are the future of their countries and if they have access to the knowledge of the day, they can definitely improve and develop their countries more efficiently. Therefore, their positive attitude and contribution will definitely make a dream come true. For doing so, politicians can voluntarily (or mandatorily) participate in English interviews, conferences, etc and use a second language to show students that nothing is impossible! They can also pass laws so that in some places/situation using the second language must be mandatory. These would enhance L2 learning and motivate people and employees to learn the L2. Similarly, they can also affect their children and let them know the value of knowing an L2. In a nutshell, politicians can have an essential role in fulfilling the conditions to improve second language learning.

### 12.2 Educational System

Studies that examine both L1 and L2 within the same community generally seek to investigate the discontinuity of language behaviors between home and school, and the implications for education in terms of student success or failure and pedagogical practices. Given that communities have culturally specific ways of learning and using languages, school is a form of secondary socialization for many language learners (leung, 2008). In most ESL contexts (like Malaysia), teaching English (and exposure) begins from primary school whereas in most EFL contexts formal learning does not begin earlier than secondary (or Middle school). In Iran and many other EFL countries, educational policies are decided primarily by the central government; all major educational policies concerning the school systems, the curriculum standards, the compilation of textbooks, and the examination system are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and training (Ghorbani, 2009). Moreover, few hours of formal instruction

in English, employing improper methods and lack of emphasis on communication are other issues (Gholami, 2011).

In addition to this, the Ministries of Education dictate all the decisions regarding the textbook selection and the exams. According to Jahangard (2007), students' aural and oral skills are not emphasized in Iranian prescribed EFL textbooks. The main focus is to make students pass tests and exams. Also, most teachers skip the oral drills in the prescribed books because productive abilities of the students are not tested (Ghorbani, 2009). Similarly, according to Namaghi (2006), there are **Socio-Political** forces which help determine teachers' work in EFL contexts like Iran. They cannot change the prescribed textbooks appropriating them for communicative purposes. Teachers cannot even develop tests with positive washback on teaching and learning because of the national testing system. The process of teaching and learning is controlled by grade pressures from students, parents and school principals. Consequently, teachers become implementers of prescribed initiatives without resource to their own professional knowledge and experience (Namaghi, 2006).

Considering the prescribed textbooks, based on a study executed by Groiss and Toobian (2006), in the Iranian school textbooks the West is depicted as an entity with a multitude of sins. It occupies whole continents, annihilates or oppresses their indigenous inhabitants, plunders their wealth, impoverishes and maltreats them. Western nations exploit the colonized countries for their own economic benefits, promote opium and slave trade, and try to impose their own cultures and erase local ones. In another research by Open Source Centre-hosted, executed about *Iranian textbooks* by Science Applications International Corporation (31 December 2007), through textbooks, Iran hopes to transform school children into pious Muslim citizens with little regard for the world beyond Iran. Iranian students are not learning as much as they could about international standards of human rights as envisioned by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and United Nations conventions on civil, political, social and economic rights.

All these typical issues of EFL contexts will definitely decrease the chance of fulfilling some fundamental conditions proposed by Spolsky (1989). Firstly, people's attitudes of the target language in EFL countries (like Iran) will grow negatively. This in turn affects the development of motivation. As asserted by Spolsky, the more motivation a learner has, the more time he or she will spend learning an aspect of a second language (Spolsky, 1989, p. 23). A clear consequence of spending more time on L2 learning is accomplishing the exposure condition of Spolsky emphasizing that the more time spent learning any aspect of a second language, the more will be learned. In line with this, two aforementioned conditions namely the integrative orientation and the instrumental language learning or teaching will be maintained in the abovementioned situations of EFL countries (Gholami, 2011). As it was mentioned earlier, schools can provide formal learning opportunities, and this is itself affected by the social context. However, the school can play an important role in strengthening the students' knowledge of the second language and provide a type of social context within itself. By changing and revising the English teaching program in EFL contexts, besides the mentioned conditions which are met less ostensibly, many other conditions would be fulfilled in order to improve learning English. Allotting more time to L2 at schools, changing the prescribed books for a good, training and familiarizing the teachers with the latest communicatively oriented methods and beginning formal instruction of English early in the primary schools are some suggestions which we believe can help enhance and improve EFL countries English learning and teaching.

First result of this will be fulfilling Standard Language condition because it is only available through schooling. Learning Goal condition of Spolsky will be also observed because if the language is used, it can be learned accordingly. The educational system needs to hold workshops and in-service training for the available teachers and help them learn and speak the language more fluently and accurately. This per se will fulfill the Teacher Model condition which says that only one speaker (the teacher) is fluent; the majority in the environment (classroom) are not. This lets learners adapt to one style at a time. Great schooling provided by the education systems of EFL countries also meets the demands of *Classroom condition* believing that controlled acoustics influence hearing and comfortable physical surroundings for a better concentration can encourage learning positively. In good classrooms, *Simplified Language* condition and *Drill Input* condition will be also met. The first, if occurs, will assist the teacher to make sure that the used language is within the capability of the learner and the latter assumes giving *ample practice to develop automatic control* (Spolsky, 1989, pp. 171-3). Finally, according to formal language Learning-Teaching condition multiple opportunities to observe and practice the new language can be provided. The more these match other relevant conditions (the learner, the goals, and the situation), the more efficient the learning will be. If any amount of second language is learned, it can be estimated that it is learned for a communicative purpose which is good enough for improving the learning itself. Nonetheless, formal language learning opportunity does not solely foster the whole use made by learners from the situations. Another share is better to be given to the informal language learning situations. After learning a second language in a simplified and controlled formal situation which reduces the students' stress and increases the motivation and self-confidence, it is time to practice in a natural setting. The role of informal learning opportunity seems to have two dimensions: first a provider of input

(maybe comprehensive input) and second a place for practicing and mastering without fear of being laughed at or punished.

### 12.3 Tourism: Providing Informal Learning Opportunities

Improving the tourism will let the EFL countries host thousands of foreign visitors bringing with themselves a common language (English) for communication as well as cultures from around the world. Because of many barriers in EFL countries, tourists and visitors do not tend to willingly travel to these countries depriving the people in such contexts from being exposed to natural (informal) learning. If exposure to native speakers or language users from around the world occurs, many stipulated conditions of Spolsky will be met which can significantly boost the chance of learning. To clarify, EFL students' *attitudes* will be positively directed toward the English language for it is a means by which people can earn much money and run a better life. Such attitudes will lead to both instrumental motivations (to deal with foreigners and sell or buy goods) and integrative ones (to live with them or join them in their business or their scientific activities, etc.). Then people tend to make use of the opportunities either informally provided by the society (through TV, media, radio, internet, business, shopping, tourism, etc) or formally (through elementary, secondary and high school or universities and colleges). Both formal and informal learning opportunities are provided by social context which plays an important role in learning a second language (Spolsky, 1989). It is in such context that the number of speakers is high increasing the desire of the others to learn it besides the attitude and motivation conditions set by Spolsky. Two other important conditions will be met. These are standard language and vitality conditions. The language being picked up informally has this vitality and the one being taught formally has the required standard. Other condition that might apply is official use condition. Modernized language condition is also applicable since English is being modernized and standardized for teaching.

Fulfilling these conditions might determine goals and opportunities for learning and individual attitudes to the target language and its speakers. Comprehensible input condition is also applicable because it is the speaker who has to make an effort to see that language is comprehensible because the other party is expected to understand. Exposure condition is another condition which is available in Malaysian context. People spend time on learning at least one aspect of the language which will help succeeding. Communication condition mentioning that the language is being used for communication will be observed plus Fluent Speakers condition since many speakers in the environment are fluent or native. Other relevant conditions to learning opportunities will be provided by such EFL contexts which include Open Area condition, Uncontrolled Language. Again, the Outcome Condition of the learning is applied which states that someone knows a second language if one or more criteria are met. At the end, it should be asserted that the social context provides a chance of learning an international language and it might not be that much difficult to learn English. Then another condition set by Spolsky will be well met accordingly; the Communicative Goal Condition emphasizing (that) *Language learners may aim to achieve various degrees of control of a language for communicative purposes* (Spolsky, 1989, p. 56).

### 12.4 Media

Having much exposure to English outside the classroom plays a crucial role in better learning and reinforcing a second language in EFL contexts. Most similarly in EFL contexts, very few English programs are broadcasted on TV or radio publicly. Of course, through advancements in technology and the more frequent use of the Internet, satellite, and rapid growth of private language institutes, the opportunities for English language learning have greatly improved particularly in Iran (Talebinezhad & Aliakbari, 2002; Noora, 2008) and other EFL contexts. Nonetheless, this seems to be really inadequate and more ought to be done. If more TV programs are daily broadcasted in English including cartoons, movies, sitcoms, game shows, music, news, talk shows and advertisement, the chance of reinforcing and strengthening the language learned either formally at schools or informally in the social milieu will be definitely boosted. To compound the exposure to English language, radio, journal and newspapers and many subscribed satellite channels which offer abundant opportunities of easy access to the target language can be also enlisted. Nonetheless, in Iran and many Arabian countries, people are not legally allowed to have access to satellite TV since the policy makers consider their programs inappropriate and against morality. So, this is another issue which makes EFL contexts unique in respect to access to English language data.

The *Media* plays a role in supporting the formal learning opportunities provided at schools. The TV, as a typical example, is the most frequently used medium that provides and makes programs such as movies, game shows, sitcoms, reports, documentaries, advertisements and even educational programs all in English and cautiously in line with the purposes of the educational system. It is the TV which can broadcast many programs in English for familiarizing the people and motivating them to learn. It is really through a very good input that a language can be even acquired. These programs can also provide Native language subtitles in order to keep the motivation constant. Radio can do the same of course through talk shows, reports and game shows. Music in English language can be

also broadcasted purposely. Newspapers, advertising and internet can all help this process through providing English sections in native language. Websites can also be established in line with educational system to assist learning. Besides that, there are many websites all over the world which teach and provide language aspects widely. In these cases, the Exposure condition will be also met plus Attitude and Motivation conditions accompanying Instrumental and Integrative conditions; Comprehensible Input may also occur. Informal Language condition is perhaps the most important one happening.

### 12.5 Businesses and Incorporations

In many offices and business centers, an interminable number of personnel are found who can comprehend English and communicate in English. Practically, these offices, business centers, governmental offices and shops meet a huge volume of encounters with foreigners who have to use English as a means to meet their needs. Such a case might be true about the capital city of many EFL countries. In order to utilize such occasion, a role can be assigned to some organizations which provide services to tourists. These places include the international airports, hotels, some restaurants, shopping centers and finally travel agencies. They have employers who can mostly speak English and are good resources of the informal learning opportunities. Schools can arrange workshops and expedition tours in English in these centers. By taking the students to such places, they can experience a chance of listening, talking and practicing what they have learned. It can additionally increase their motivation so that if they can learn English or a second language, they can have a better chance of being hired in such places which mostly pay well, too. Therefore, we can ascertain that the following conditions will be fulfilled if the authorities and politicians can manage to bring the chance of utilizing this context; the conditions are *Number of Speakers, Standard Language, Vitality, Official Use, Attitude, Motivation, Integrative and Instrumental Language Learning or Teaching, Exposure condition, Language Values, Communication condition, Natural learning, Speakers condition, Open Area condition, Uncontrolled Language, and finally Comprehensible Input.*

### 13. Conclusion

Based on this exceptional condition set by Spolsky namely the *Linguistic Outcome Condition* of the learning, *someone knows a second language if one or more criteria are met.* It is crystal-clear that in EFL contexts, we need to provide and prepare more opportunities and chances so help learners learn the L2 more efficiently and practically. On top of all the sectors, this is politicians that can allow and prepare the appropriate stream for learning English as a second/foreign language. Moreover, this is politicians who can lead and assist education policy makers to fulfill educational conditions besides controlling and enhancing the tourism, media, businesses, etc for accomplishing all the aforementioned conditions proposed by Spolsky (1989). To sum up, it is obvious that all the suggested solutions will definitely need governmental financial support. We should note again that the social contexts are essential triggers in EFL contexts and can bring about opportunities that if used by learners, can cause linguistic and non linguistic outcomes.

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