CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 PURPOSE OF LANGUAGE

1.2 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS IN CHILDHOOD

1.3 ROLE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

1.4 ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SOCIALIZATION PROCESS IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

1.5 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH PRIMARY EDUCATION

1.6 CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION
   1.6.1 RECEPTIVE SKILLS
   1.6.2 READING SKILLS
   1.6.3 LISTENING SKILLS

1.7 COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION

1.8 SUMMARY
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Man being a social animal needs to communicate with the fellow members of the society. Communication is both verbal and non-verbal. Language acts as a tool for verbal communication. Besides this communicative function, language also reflects the cultural value of the society. Society, in general, is concerned with language as a mode of communication. The members of the society are expected to use language effectively to develop interpersonal skills. Efficient use of language demands a thorough understanding of the different aspects of language, as language use varies from one context to another.

Language, with the elaborate symbolic values, has a number of functions to do. The most basic, and all pervasive of such functions, is communication. Another important function of language is aesthetic expression. Language and communication have come to be regarded as more or less synonymous because aspects of communication other than language in society are most insignificant as compared to what language does in society. Language must have for all reasons originated in human society as a means of communication as developed from most primitive modes of communication.

1.1 PURPOSE OF LANGUAGE

Language is not only used for communicative purposes but also for other purposes. Compared to the narrow definition of communication that we have assigned to language, we can see that man is not only able to express himself but also to hide his thoughts and feelings in the use of language, to use language to provide a double meaning in a given situation and so on. In other words, human language has been developed to such an extent that it contains hosts and forms, functions and meanings that are outside the scope of pure communicative purposes.
This communicative function of language has come to be called communicative competence. Communicative competence is the built-in language ability of the individual that makes him capable of communicating himself effectively to others using communicative strategies. Language consists not only the structural components such as sounds, grammar and lexis but also a set of strategies or devices that help the speaker carry out interpersonal communication with optimum efficiency in a given communicative context. Language does not take place in a vacuum. It is produced in all its concreteness as an event. All communicative events that take place in given communicative contexts are in fact social contexts of one kind or other.

One model of language, developed by Bloom and Lahey (1978), describes three components of language viz., form, content, and use – that make up an integrated system. The form of the language connects sound and meaning. The content is based on knowledge of the world and our feelings about it. Thus, the form of language allows us to express the content. The use of language refers to the ways in which language functions in different communicative situations. It includes both our purposes in communicating and the way in which we choose a specific form to express a particular message.

Language is a system used by a group of people for giving meaning to sounds, words, gestures, and other symbols to enable communication with each other. Bloom and Lahey (1978) have defined language as “the knowledge of a code for representing ideas about the world through a conventional system of arbitrary signals for communication.” When we hear, speak, read, or write with language, we transmit information. A child learns to identify a familiar object, for example, by hearing the spoken word tree, by seeing the printed word tree, by viewing the sign language gesture for tree, or by encountering a combination of these signals.

1.2 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION PROCESS IN CHILDHOOD

Language development begins in infancy. Obviously, communication between infants and their caregivers does not require language, since smiles, cries, gestures, and eye contact all form the basis for later communication. Although very young infants
cannot understand words, they do respond to the caregiver's language, and some linguistic abilities are present almost from birth (Molfese et al., 1982).

The infant's ability to respond to language and to other nonverbal cues leads to a kind of turn taking. A parent speaks, and the baby responds by smiling or cooing. The parent then says something else, and the pattern continues. These interactions are the beginning of a conversation mode and form the basis for later communication. The infant is also an expert at cooing, which involves production of single-syllable sounds such as 'oo'. Vowel sounds are often led by a consonant, resulting in a sound like 'moo'. The next step in language development is babbling, which involves both vowel and consonant sounds stuck together and repeated often. Babbling may begin as early as three months, and it gradually increases until about nine to twelve months of age. It then decreases as the child begins to use words (deVilliers and deVilliers, 1978).

Children usually utter their first word anytime between ten and fifteen months of age, but there is considerable individual variation. Children's first words are not usually those they hear most often. Katherine Nelson (1973) studied early word acquisition in a number of children and was able to divide the children into two categories. Expressive children use words that were involved primarily in social interaction such as "bye-bye" and "stop-it". The early language of referential children involved the naming of objects, such as dog and penny. These different styles followed the linguistic style used by the child's caregivers. The parents of referential children named objects very frequently, while those of expressive children used words that directed their children's activities and emphasized social interactions. It is evident that even at this tender age, the environment has a potent influence on the type of language developed in young children.

Children then begin to use single words to represent an entire thought. This is called a holophrase. For instance, a child says 'up' to mean 'pick me up'. The child's early speech, whether it is constructed of two or three-word sentences, leaves out small words like a, to, and from and concentrates on the more important words. This is called telegraphic speech, because it is similar to the language found in telegrams, where the
sender includes only the words absolutely necessary to communicate the message. For example, “mommy go store” may mean mommy is going to the store, or it may be thought of as a command: “Mommy, go to the store”. Whatever this utterance means, the child has used only the words that are absolutely necessary for conveying meaning.

During the age of three and four, children begin to use sentences of approximately four or five words, and by five years of age, their syntax is quite good. A three-year old child has a vocabulary of about 900 words and begins to use plural nouns and the past tense. At the age of four, children start using conjunctions and their sentences are much more complex. At the end of six years, there is improvement in their syntax and approaches, which are similar to that of an adult (Smith & Neisworth, 1983). However, tense errors and other grammatical irregularities occur in speech until the age of eight to ten. As their linguistic competence develops, children make certain predictable mistakes (Griffiths, 1986). If we listen even casually to the speech patterns of young children, we will find some striking differences between their use of language and that of adults.

During the age of four and five, children have an average vocabulary of over 1,500 words and use sentences with an average of five words in length (Leonard, 1982). They are generally able to make themselves understood, even to strangers. The four-year old child begins to show the ability to modify his / her speech for the listener; for example, the child uses longer and more complex sentences while talking to his/her mother than when addressing a baby or a doll.

Language continues to develop steadily, though less dramatically, after the age of five. The child acquires more vocabulary, and is able to use more sophisticated grammatical forms. A six-year-old child, in fact, normally uses most of the complex forms of adult language. Some of the consonant sounds and blends, however, are not mastered until the age of seven or eight. Thus, a child enters the school for first grade with his / her grammar and speech patterns usually influenced by those of his / her family, neighbourhood, and region.
Apart from these, psychologists put forth certain facilitating factors for language development viz., imitation, reinforcement and innateness. Social learning theorists like Bandura (1977), argues that imitation plays a primary role in language acquisition. Bandura believes that not only is a child's vocabulary learned through imitation, but also the complex grammatical rules. The reinforcement explanation of language acquisition holds that adults shape the child's language, giving and withholding reinforcement. B.F. Skinner (1957), has pointed out that the child who utters the correct sound, word or sentence is reinforced. Also, adults presumably require ever-closer approximations to correct, adult-like speech before giving reinforcement. Theoretically, then, the child is gradually pressured to learn adult-like speech in order to obtain reinforcement. On the other hand, Chomsky's (1957, 1965) innateness hypothesis suggests that children have a genetic potential for creating and understanding language that is, 'Language Acquisition Device' that contains the basic elements or structures of language. According to Chomsky, children are innately equipped to focus on transformation in order to learn the rules for changing deep structure into various surface structures. Based on the above discussion, the language development is closely related to learning process since imitation, reinforcement and innateness are the learning factors.

Froebel has pointed out that the teacher plays the role of a second parent. The teacher could lead them grow and develop according to their natural hidden abilities and potentialities. The duty of the teacher, in Froebel's method, is to regulate the educational process, because education is controlled development. Further, the teacher should aim at the training the senses of children by providing them many activities, opportunities for self-expression through play, projects and other arts.

A human being is a positive asset and a precious national resource, which needs to be cherished, nurtured and developed with tenderness and care coupled with dynamism. Education has historically played this important role and has thereby emerged as a natural characteristic of human society. Education has also contributed to the shaping of destinies of societies in all spheres of the development and never has it
ceased to develop. Further, education, being a subsystem of social system, should reflect the main ethos, aspirations and concerns of the society (NCERT, 2000).

1.4 ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND SOCIALIZATION PROCESS IN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

'School is more than a place where children learn facts and concepts. It is a place where much personal growth and social interaction occur. Children meet many new people in school and develop new friendship. It plays a major role in child's social and psychological development. Child's self-concept, self-esteem and social development are important parts of life and the responsibilities of the school are to help children build a healthy self-concept and improve their relationship with others (Hatch, 1987).

Thus, education system plays an important role in providing equality of access to quality education and opportunity (NCERT, 2000). The education system, built on a strong foundation, strives to meet the requirements of learners irrespective of their social, cultural, and economical context. However, educational inequity prevails at all levels of education and it remains a crucial problem. Provision of instruction that would suit the individual differences is a challenging task, and it becomes much more complex in the process of language learning.

As a process, education may be looked at from two points of view: from that of society and from that of the individual. Society seeks to perpetuate itself by handling on its cultural acquisitions to each succeeding generation. As an individual process, education seeks to bring about the growth and development within the individual. We should bear in mind that these two aspects of education, namely the social aspect and individual aspect, are complementary, and not conflicting. Individual development is not possible except in so far as the individual comes into possession of the social inheritance, and social transmission is impossible without bringing about changes within the individual.
The society and the individual are interdependent. We cannot think of a society without an individual, nor an individual without a society. An individual is judged by the society to which he belongs, for it is the society, in addition to his inherent gifts and qualities, which contributes to his upbringing and shaping and moulding of his character (Venkateswaran, 1993).

Socialization and learning are frequently defined as being almost synonymous. But, when viewed from the context of education, socialization confines itself to the non-formal aspects of the educational process – a process that takes place inside as well as outside the school. All of the various components of the social environment contribute to the socialization of the young and involve learning of one kind or another. The formal learning that takes place in school is greatly influenced by the processes of socialization and informal learning that go on constantly during a person’s waking hours, both in the early years and throughout the entire life course.

Education, thus, aims to develop the socialization skills of the children. Socialization is defined as an interaction process between the individual and his total environment, through which the individual becomes a person. In short, socialization is the process of building up group values in the individuals (from the point of view of individual) and it is the way that culture is transmitted and the individual is fitted into an organized way of life (from the point of view of society). Prior to the formal learning at school, the children learn a lot by interacting with their family members. At school, the children face a new environment i.e., school environment. They meet their peer groups and start interacting with them. The experiences attained from home environment and school environment enable the children to mingle with the society / community, where the child can learn a lot through different experiences, which may be of positive and negative experiences. Thus, these three environments such as home, school and society help the children develop their socialization skills; they should be nurtured in all these stages, constantly. Thus, the socialization process paves the way for effective future role-performance of the children.
Education becomes a process leading to the enlightenment of mankind and it is the most formidable tool for survival. It means, intellectual growth alone is not only the criterion for education, but also emotional maturity and ethical awareness. Thus, education is incomplete without the formation of critical habits. The purpose of education is not only to contribute to the continuity of culture, but also to change peacefully and rationally material foundations of civilization.

More so, education should be so designed that it would meet the complex needs of the individuals situated as they are in a developing societal context. This would mean designing the content and process of education in a way as to develop requisite knowledge, understanding, learning skills and attitudes which are in tune with the social, economic and political ethos of the country and are also responsive to changes and developments taking place in the global context. Further, education has to respond to the learning needs of the individuals, which are usually identified in terms of her/his personality development. Necessary inputs are provided to bring about changes in their personal and social behaviour besides providing them development. The development should be taking place in aspects viz., scholastic and non-scholastic.

The active process in the classroom is not teaching but learning. Learning is a dynamic and continuous process, which brings a permanent change in behaviour or behavioural tendency in all its aspects namely knowing, feeling and acting. The basic condition for the learning is readiness and maturation of the children. The readiness refers to the adequacy of his / her mental capacity such as motivation, aptitude, intelligence, personality factors, thinking capacity, mental health, memory etc. Also, learning is a reflective process, whereby the learner either develops new insights and understandings or changes and restructures his or her mental process (Arokiadoss, 1999).

Effective learning results in the development of one of the three skills such as fundamental skills, social competence, and the mastery of abstract ideas or all the three. If an individual shows aptitude and competence in a skill or in skill subjects, he is considered to be mechanical minded; if he develops ability to deal with other people
successfully, he is considered to be social minded; and if he can learn to deal easily and accurately with abstractions, he is said to be academic minded. Hence, an individual may seem to possess learning proficiency in all three areas such as, mechanical, social and abstract (Crow & Crow, 1991).

Learning is the acquisition of habits, knowledge and attitudes. It involves new ways of doing things, and it operates in an individual’s attempts to overcome obstacles or to adjust to new situation. Further, when learning takes place, it can be expected that a more or less permanent change will be evidenced in the children’s behaviour. Such change may range from the acquisition of relatively simple skill, item of information or specific attitude to the mastery of complicated mechanical performance, understanding and application of difficult and abstract reading materials. Most of the conscious learning experienced by the learner leads to learning outcomes for what they are worth. As an individual goes about his daily activities, he unconsciously may acquire many changed modes of thought and behaviour that grow out of his experiences.

In fact, effective learning depends upon the progressive mastery of language skills, which form the basis for mastering learning content in general. The satisfaction of one’s interests, the gaining of experience and the development of the power to participate in higher forms of thinking and reasoning rest upon the utilization of language. We think in words, and we express our thoughts in words either through oral or written communication. The degree of success, which we acquire in the utilization of language expression, is closely related to individual’s potentiality to acquire the tools needed for effective thinking and expression and teaching efficacy that will make the acquisition of these tools possible.

A language learner acquires the knowledge of all the four skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing at different levels of learning and retains the knowledge in his / her memory. The instructional materials and the teacher’s guidance help the learner achieve these skills. However, the learner is not to merely attain the knowledge but to use it in practical situations to further his linguistic knowledge. The basic skills in
language learning are of two types: receptive and expressive. His /her receptive ability can be measured by the speed and correctness with which she/he understands whatever s/he hears and reads in the language. Similarly, his / her expressive ability can be measured by the speed and correctness with which s/he is able to speak and write. Various language teaching methods and instructional materials to be used by the teachers and efforts put in by the learner are equally responsible for acquiring all the skills in language learning (Singh and Sudharsan, 1966).

Language allows us to express our thoughts, our ideas, and our desires to one another. It allows us to show what we know and to influence others. Language skills are obviously crucial to success in school. The curriculum should focus on the part of language development of children at primary school level. Language education poses multiple problems in education because of the curriculum content and learning environment, and it is also the medium through which the other knowledge is acquired.

The individual has an in-built capacity to learn a language called Language Acquisition Device (LAD). Language learning is not a mechanical process of stimulus–response, reinforcement and habit formation. When a child encounters new language item, he / she screens it through the old learnt items’ repertoire. He /she makes a hypothetical plan, tests the plan. If it is right, accepts the plan, if not, rejects it and tries another hypothesis. The child learns the rules of grammar through trial and error. Mistakes are the inevitable part of learning. They indicate that the child is putting an effort to learn the language.

1.5 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION THROUGH PRIMARY EDUCATION

Language education should encourage independent thinking. Children should be encouraged to express their opinions freely and interpret events around them and also the events in the past. It should motivate children to discuss in their own way. Their natural creativity and imagination must be encouraged and fostered that will make them realize the basic difference between the verbal language and the language of mathematics.
Usually, education in the institutions, imparts knowledge about something without considering the context in which that knowledge is to be used. Language poses a particular challenge to curriculum designers because it is not certain that teaching knowledge about language helps us in any way. The unclear role of knowledge entails two further curriculum problems such as, inciting motivation and providing opportunities for practice (Stub, 1975).

In India, the school education system is divided into three major segments viz., Primary Education, Secondary education and Senior/Higher Secondary education. The Primary education is further divided into three stages such as Pre-primary, Primary and Upper/Post-primary stages.

At the Pre-primary stage, the education system provides the children preparatory activities such as group activities, play-way techniques, language games, number games and activities directed to promote socialization and environmental awareness. Perception, pleasure and participation are to be undertaken at this stage, to enable the children attend the later stages.

The National Curriculum Framework aims at providing a uniform structure for this stage for the whole country, but it is found that the pre-primary stage of education is not available in many States in India. In many other States, it is not available in the rural sectors. In some states, “Aanganwadis’ exist, but these do not function as pre-primary education centre.

Further, though formal teaching of subjects and reading and writing skills are clearly prohibited at this stage and only, listening and spoken forms are encouraged, almost everywhere the subjects are focussed in these preparatory classes. This puts
unhealthy and harmful load on children whose neuro-muscular capabilities are not yet developed.

The primary stage of education consists five years of schooling (five grades from first standard to fifth standard). At this stage, one language that is home language / regional language is used for the first two years (grade I and II). English language is introduced from the III standard onwards. In the changed socio-economic scenario and individual and national requirement generated by the process of globalisation and information technology, introduction of English at this stage seems to have been necessitated. It still should not be introduced earlier for two reasons, such as before it can be introduced, the learners’ first language should be strong enough to be used as a resource for learning the second language, and the first two years, in very large number of cases, are to be devoted to a smooth transition from the home language of the learners to their school language or regional language (NCERT, 2000).

The post-primary stage consists of three years (from standard sixth to eighth). During this stage, the three-language formula has been introduced with the best of intentions and academic considerations. Under this formula, the first language had invariably to be the home language / mother tongue or the regional language. Thus, the language education plays a significant role in primary education system.

Language plays an important role in the early childhood education in any educational system. A language is not only taught as a subject but is also used as the medium of instruction for teaching different school subjects right from the beginning. Thus, language teaching is charged with additional responsibility for teaching different skills of the language and enabling the child to use this language as the medium of learning other school subjects.

Effective learning depends upon the maturation of the children. The children’s stage of maturity is important in the learning process. Until and unless there is sufficient physiological and psychological maturity there will be little learning or what learning
there is will be distorted. The child learns to walk only after he/she has reached a particular stage in his/her maturation process; he learns to read more easily only after he has reached his individual state of readiness for reading. The intellectual maturity during the primary school years largely depends on a child’s ability to read. This ability in turn depends on the proper functioning of the eye, a function of physical maturity. Many intellectual tasks demand the ability to concentrate, which in turn is controlled by emotional maturity. Emotional development affects mental growth and emotional factors facilitate or block mental activities such as language learning and reasoning.

1.6.0 CONCEPT AND PROCESS OF LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION

A proficient user of the language has a number of different abilities. S/he may read a book, write a letter, converse with people and listen to a lecture effectively. Language has different aspects. The receptive aspects of language are listening and reading. It refers to the recognition and comprehension of the message conveyed through sounds and symbols arranged in a definite order. The productive aspects of language cover the skills of speaking and writing. They are used for the transmission of the expression or for the translation. A learner has to learn these skills to comprehend and transfer the information.

1.6.1 RECEPTIVE SKILLS

Language abilities are of different kinds—reading, listening, writing and arithmetic. The first three are concerned with language and the last one is related to reasoning and mathematical ability. The language ability of children who are proficient in the language skills such as reading, listening, writing and speaking leads to learning ability i.e., communicative skills. The language skills can be categorized into two viz., Receptive skill and Productive skill. The Receptive skill includes reading and listening and the Productive skill includes writing and speaking. Effective acquisition of receptive skills would help achieve efficient productive skills.
1.6.2 READING SKILLS

Reading is a key to success in school, to the development of out-of-school interests, to the enjoyment of leisure time, and to personal and social adjustment. It helps a child to adjust to his age mates, to become independent of parents and teachers, to select and prepare for an occupation, and to achieve social responsibilities. As our culture becomes more complex, reading plays an increasingly greater role in satisfying personal needs and in promoting social awareness and growth. Through reading we acquire many of our standards of behaviour and morality; we may broaden our interests, our tastes and our understanding of others. Reading is so interrelated with the total educational process that educational success requires successful reading. Experience has taught us that those who fail in school usually have failed first in reading.

Reading development demands numerous basic skills and the development of the more advanced reading skills depends upon the successful acquisition of these basic skills. Thus skill development, proceed both vertically and horizontally. New and more complex skills are built upon the foundation of earlier and simpler skills, and at the same time the basic foundation skills are refined. Growth in skill is gradual but it must be continuous. As new learning is added, old learning should be practised and strengthened.

The objective of all reading is the comprehension of meaning. The initial step in this process is the association of an experience with a given symbol. This is absolutely necessary, but it is the most elemental form of comprehension. Complete meaning is not conveyed by a single word. A good reader learns to interpret words in their contextual setting. S/he comprehends words as parts of sentences, sentences as parts of paragraphs, and paragraphs as parts of stories.

Effective reading includes not only a literal comprehension of word or sentences but also an interpretation of mood, tone, feeling and attitude of the subject matter. The reader must also comprehend the implied meanings and prejudices of the writer. S/he must recognize summary statements, make inferences and applications, and see the broader implications of a passage. S/he must familiarize with the time and place in which
the words were written. S/he must use the periods, commas, quotation marks and questions as aids to interpretation. Schell (1972) speaks of three levels of comprehension:

- **Literal Comprehension**: getting the primary, direct, literal meaning of a word, idea, or sentence in context.
- **Interpretation**: getting deeper meanings – anticipating meanings, drawing inferences, making generalizations, reasoning from cause to effect, detecting significance, making comparisons, and identifying purpose.
- **Critical reading**: evaluating the quality, accuracy, or truthfulness of what is read.

Beyond literal level of reading comprehension, the various comprehension skills require the reader to understand the author’s message when it is implied and not directly stated. The reader’s ability to categorize and classify events is basic to nearly all comprehension skills. The reading comprehension skills distinguishing facts and fantasy, real and unreal, fact and opinion, and relevant and irrelevant are categorizing skills that require the reader to categorize reading material into one or two mutually exclusive categories. That is, the information gained from reading is fact or fantasy, real or unreal, fact or opinion, and relevant or irrelevant. In each instance, the information must fit one category or the other, it cannot fit both. Hence, categorization is an important comprehension skill since it underlies critical reading.

Reading governs three general perspectives. First, reading is seen as an important facet of achievement in all school subjects. That is, a child with reading problems is immediately handicapped in math, science, and social studies. Generally, failure in such content areas is associated in large part with deficits in reading ability. Second, reading is seen as a very important means by which people obtain information about their environment, which help them interact successfully with their environment, especially the environment outside the realm of school. Third, reading is seen as an indispensable skill in terms of entertainment. Through reading, a person can experience ideas, adventures,
feelings, and situations not available in the everyday real world. Like movies, television, staged events etc., reading is also an outlet, a form of diversion.

Reading is an integral part of education and everyday life. It appears to be a skill that given the right opportunities, people acquire almost with effortless ease. Reading is a two-way process involving both recognition of a word and understanding its meaning. It is a meaningful interpretation of visual-verbal symbols presented in printed or written form. According to Carillo (1976), reading is developmental in the sense that each stage is followed by another. A child learns to read sequentially, building on each step. Carillo describes the five stages of reading development, they are pre-reading skills, Initial reading, Rapid development of reading skills, Wide reading and Refinement. Johnson and Myklebust (1967) described reading as 'visual receptive language' involving a complex integration of many processes such as attention, discrimination, perception, memory, conceptualisation and evaluation. Other language specialists have divided reading into two separate processes viz., learning to associate symbols with sounds, (decoding) and, learning the meaning of words. Complete reading involves four steps: recognition, understanding, reaction and integration.

The reading process begins with the child attending to the sound of spoken language and being able to discriminate between words. As the child begins to recognize letters of the alphabets, s/he simultaneously learns to attach meaning to the printed word. The child also grasps the fact that words are sequenced in a left to right direction. The child learns to recognize words using the surrounding context, the shape of the letters, the total appearance of the word, and the sound those letters make. As s/he begins to associate meaning with the words, s/he starts to reason and think about what s/he is reading.

Generally, reading programmes focus entirely on word identification strategies but later, must be taught together with comprehension skills. Reading for meaning is also a by-product of the reader’s previous experiences, which help in understanding the meaning of what is being read and in using contextual cues.
Reading is a visual skill, but success in reading depends on the underlying perceptual and assimilative processes than on visual efficiency and the peculiar oculomotor habits of the individual reader. Faulty eye movements are not so much a cause of poor reading as a symptom of poor reading. Eye defects, even though they are of a fairly gross nature seldom are an absolute bar to a child’s becoming a good reader.

According to the information-processing model, reading is a process dependent upon the selection of the right cues. The efficient reader uses selective attention (LaBerge & Samuels, 1976). Reading must become automatic to be efficient. The reader must look beyond the size, shape and general appearance of the letters to recognize the spelling patterns, associating the letter with the sound and then deriving the meaning of the word. These associations are automatic for the efficient reader. But in the case of the dyslexic individual a lot of time and effort is focussed on decoding the isolated words. S/he lacks the internal representation available to the efficient reader, and this delay in processing results in poor comprehension.

1.6.3 LISTENING SKILLS

Listening is a fundamental language skill that typically develops faster than speaking and that often influences the development of reading and writing ability. The skill of listening should be a major area of concern to teachers and students. Listening is ‘the process of receiving, attending to and assigning meaning to aural stimuli’ (Wolvin & Coakley, 1985). All aspects of listening involve a transformation of ‘input’ into ‘intake’. This distinction between input and intake is very important. Not everything to which a child is exposed becomes ‘intake’, but only the part that is significant to which the child is paying attention.

Listening is important to our personal lives as well as to civilization. It provides enrichment, knowledge, co-operation, and understanding. Its importance may be underscored by the fact that over 45 percent of our time is spent in listening. As members of society, we function primarily as listeners. Listening is, in fact, a basis for a child’s learning process through auditory stimuli s/he collects data, imitates words and
syntax, and subsequently learns to communicate. Listening is also the means by which we can foster effective human relations. The family, business, labour union, politician, and reporter who avoid the obligations of listening contribute to misunderstanding. Our right for free speech carries with it an equal obligation of responsible listening.

Listening is a complex, problem solving skill. Listening is more than just perception of sounds, though perception is the foundation. Listening also includes comprehension of meaning-bearing word, phrases, clauses, sentences and connected discourse. Generally listening is not an isolated skill. In normal, everyday communication, listening usually occurs together with speaking. Only in certain circumstances, for instance, in a lecture, at the theatre, or when listening to the radio, does listening appear to be an isolated skill, not interacting with other language skills.

The process of listening includes two stages: encoding and transmitting the message by the sender and decoding and providing required feedback by the receiver. The effectiveness of communication in an instructional process is determined by the extent to which these two stages are executed.

Basically, listening skill can be categorized into three viz., discriminatory, evaluative and appreciative listening. The discriminatory listening requires the receiver to understand, remember, and comprehend the integral parts of an idea or object. It may involve learning statistics, the parts of a machine, or the steps in driving a car. Its basic function is the learning process, or the cognitive activity to restructure what has been said into areas or categories. The evaluative listening involves the process not only of conceptualising and understanding a subject but of making a judgement concerning the value of an idea. Its function is critical and evaluative, as in the case of weighing relative ideas in politics, philosophy, and other humanistic areas. In an appreciative listening, the listener may choose not to challenge or remember the contents of a speech but simply to enjoy or appreciate what is being said. Because the speech may deal with something with which s/he is already familiar, s/he may choose to enjoy its style and delivery and pay
little attention to content. If s/he views the message to be one of entertainment, it is said to be appreciative.

Ross (1966) found that good listeners rated higher than poor listeners on intelligence, reading, socio-economic status, and achievement. Obviously, listening is more than hearing. Hearing is auditory reception, but listening involves the dimension of understanding and remaining attentive to what is being said. Two listeners, even with the same hearing acuity, often receive widely different messages from the same sound.

Listening is closely related to auditory factors. Listening requires a cultivation of auditory abilities. It involves the same basic perceptual and mental processes as reading and, indeed, in certain cases may be a more suitable method of learning than is reading. Training in listening develops auditory discrimination, which in turn serves as a basis for phonetic analysis in reading. Listening and speaking provide the vocabulary and the sentence patterns for reading. The instruction in grammar, usage, and composition, occurring either directly or indirectly in learning to listen and to speak, is also beneficial in learning to read. Finally, words and sentences most easily read are those that have been heard and spoken.

Listening ability is also basic to the learning of reading. Hollingsworth (1964) reviewed the literature on this point and concluded that listening does indeed have a positive effect on reading achievement. Listening and reading have basic similarities. Both involve the reception of ideas from others. Reading demands sight and comprehension; listening calls for hearing and comprehension. Listening provides the vocabulary and the sentence structure that serve as a foundation for reading.

There are other reasons for improving the listening skills of children. Skill in listening is closely related to proficiency in many academic areas. Some children are better listeners than readers. For children in the lower grades, for children who are poor readers, listening is the most important means for achievement (Many, 1965).
There are, of course, other means of acquiring information that do not involve reading. Listening is one of the most effective skills to process information. Accordingly, listening skills have been increasingly emphasized in recent years. Listening is not a solution to all academic problems, but it is effective in such areas as literature and other social and behavioural sciences.

1.7 COGNITIVE ASPECTS OF LANGUAGE SKILLS ACQUISITION

' Language, being a skills subject, needs much more attention in the teaching learning process. Most often, the verbal responses, language patterns and behaviors of the poor learners are considered inadequate and inappropriate and are referred to as learning disabilities. Such disorders and differences in language acquisition are observed in learners at all levels. Differential language skills affect academic progress. Hence, effective language instruction should incorporate aspects of diversity, pedagogy, skill and knowledge of strategies, assessment and diagnosis. '

'Cognitive development of the children can be traced from simple discrimination and generalization in the sensory motor stage to highly abstract and internalized thought in the formal operations stage. In the concrete operations stage, an individual first relies heavily on external objects to assist his reasoning (for example, using fingers to assist in counting). The ability to deal with abstractions is very primitive. Later, after more experience, the individual approaches the formal operations stage of internalized abstract reasoning. Thus, the development of cognitive ability occurs sequentially in the sensory motor, concrete operations, and formal operations periods (Vernon, 1950 and Piaget, 1952)'

'Cognitive style refers to the preference for a certain kind of information and particular ways of processing it. In the language learning process, which is greatly influenced by affective factors, cognitive style contributes a number of variables. A reflective cognitive style emerges out of a reflective personality. The learners reflect and consider various possibilities before taking a decision. An impulsive cognitive style arises out of an impulsive emotional state. The impulsive learners are relatively quick in taking
decisions. Generally, learners who are reflective are slower and more accurate, and tend to make fewer errors in reading than impulsive learners (Chandrakanthi, 2003).

Psychological tests assess cognitive abilities, adaptive skills and behaviour (Temperament). Cognitive abilities, often-called, intelligence includes skill involving verbal expression and comprehension, judgment, memory and visual-motor skills. Adaptive skills are the abilities human beings need to function daily in their world. These include communication and psychomotor skills, self help skills and socialization skills. Aspects of behaviour include activity level i.e. Emotion and feelings, attitudes, interest, motivation etc., the later two skills are non-cognitive in nature.

The child’s cognitive abilities must be taken into account if we are to understand language acquisition. Learning a language involves such cognitive processes as attention, information processing, and retention. For instance, paying attention to stimuli that are loud or attached to some vital activity (such as feeding), remembering them, and making discriminations and judgments about them (such as whether they are the same or different) are cognitive processes related to learning language (Peter, 1986). Children must also develop some intuitive understanding of the rules of language, which, in itself, is a cognitive process.

1.8 SUMMARY

India is a multicultural and multilingual country. In most of the Indian states, people at least use two Indian languages for communication purposes. The people mostly use English as a link language. Mostly in schools, the children are being taught regional language as the first language and English as the second language. English as a second language is being formally taught in schools only. Through the social institutions like, home, community and schools, the children initially learn regional or home language by imitation or through formal educational process. The early socialization and learning take place in the family. A vast amount of learning takes place during the preschool years. Much of the learning that occurs in this early period of socialization is neither self-consciously nor systematically carried out. Parents, brothers and sisters, grandparents
and other adults contribute to the process. The basic requirements involved in walking, talking, playing with other children, eating, toilet training, sleeping, and generally dealing with adults are learned in an informal way. Actually, more learning takes place informally during the course of a person’s life than could conceivably take place in the formal educational situations. The socialization and education in its real sense prepare children to face multifarious challenges that they are bound to face in society. In order to do so, language acquisition needs to be linked with the different life skills which are the abilities for adaptive and the positive behaviour that enable the children to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of every day life.

The language ability generally refers to proficiency in language skills such as listening, writing, speaking and reading that are helpful in communication of feelings, emotions, thoughts, etc. These language skills can be classified as receptive and productive skills. The productive skills include writing and speaking and the receptive skills are listening and reading. Acquisition of these language skills is closely related to child’s cognitive development, and the level of intelligence of the child is also a decisive factor. The relationship between cognitive development and language is intimate but very complex. The child cannot use language until he or she acquired the ability to use, for thinking either to refer or to symbolise. Thus cognition and language are closely linked and the child who does not understand abstract ideas cannot communicate effectively. Hence, the child’s cognitive ability must be studied to understand the acquisition of language skills. Considering the above factors, the present study has been undertaken to study the child’s cognitive abilities and their effect on receptive (language) skills.