As the learning and teaching of English as L2 takes place not in isolation but in a practical and actual situation, it is essential to study the context in which our learner is placed. Important variables of the usual Indian context are: the learner, the teacher, the purpose of learning English and the social set-up. Each one of them deserves to be discussed separately and elaborately.

1. The Learner

The learner is the most important variable of a teaching/learning situation. "Probably the largest variable in the learning situation is the pupil himself."\(^1\) Some of the general characteristics of the learner such as his age, motivation, aptitude, resources and time available to him, etc., go to determine the strategy for carrying out teaching effectively.

a) His Age and Linguistic Competence: Here we are going to take up the teaching or learning of English vis-a-vis the ordinary students who have attended a Government Primary School upto 5th class and who have learnt reading and writing their L1 by the time they are inducted into the learning of an L2, i.e., English, beginning with its alphabet at an average Government or private school.

At this age, i.e., at the age of 10-12 years the child is able not only to read and write his L1 but also to think and

\(^1\) Wilkins, Second Language Learning and Teaching, p. 51.
express ideas in his language freely and fluently. Language is no barrier for him as far as understanding others and making himself understood to others in his L1 is concerned. He is now going to be initiated into the alphabet of a new language and later into its vocabulary, sentence structure, etc., in a graded manner.

Although basically here we are studying the children at school learning English formally, alongwith the case of these early teenagers can be taken up the case of those adults also who missed learning English at school and want to learn it now. Such adults are usually the products of Gurukulas or Madarasas, where English is taught, if at all, at a late stage, the language being a university requirement at the degree level in case of examinations in Sanskrit, Urdu, Persian, Panjabi, Arabic, etc. This category of learners should include those adults also who missed learning English for one or the other reason when they were children but now wish to learn it for one purpose or the other. The number of such adult learners, though not very large, is not insignificant.

b) His MT: The learner whose case is mainly being taken up here is one whose MT is Hindi. Hindi is the MT of most of the people belonging to Himachal Pradesh, Haryana, U.P., M.P., Rajasthan, Bihar and also the Union territory of Delhi. Besides,

2. Hindi has several dialects, and it is only in limited areas that standard Hindi is spoken. But since all dialects have the essential Hindi core in them the term 'Hindi' should naturally include all these dialects also.
a large number of people belonging to the Panjab, Gujarat, Maharashtra and some other places also use Hindi as their L1 in their homes. Some of them just do not allow their children to learn the regional language. Instead, for the purpose of wider communication, they prefer them to learn Hindi at the first instance. In some families, however, Hindi is learnt as the first language alongwith the MT. Such bilingual children are mostly at home in both the languages equally. Besides such bilinguals, the case of those whose MT is a language other than Hindi but who have learnt Hindi as an L2 subsequently, but before learning English, is also being taken up.

There is not much difference between Hindi and Urdu as far as our purpose is concerned. Syntactically both the languages are similar. Excepting the lexical items of the hard type (words derived from Sanskrit or Persian/Arabic sources) the vocabulary is more or less identical. Even in the case of nouns, as both the languages basically belong to the Indo-European family of languages, there is considerable similarity. Therefore, when we talk of Hindi as the MT it is intended to mean and to include Urdu as well.

In fact the present study could be applicable, if not fully, at least in part, to all those languages which are akin to Hindi structurally and lexically. As far as phonological similarity is concerned it depends on whether a particular language (as the MT) in its written form is as coherent and consistent as written Hindi is in respect of spelling-pronunciation relationship. For
example, Panjabi and Urdu are largely such languages.

c) **The Time Available:** As pointed out above, though an adult learner of English is also being considered, the main learner being considered here is the child fresh from an ordinary primary school. The time that this child has to devote to learning English is another variable. For English he gets on an average four to six hours a week, i.e., one period of 40 minutes to one hour a day. And after the period is over he is back to his daily routine, in his MT environment. He is back to a situation where he cannot even remotely be in touch with the English language. Even while at school, he reads and understands the other subjects of study in his MT. He has interaction with his classmates in Hindi. He gets neither time nor opportunity to reinforce what he has learnt because outside the class he neither repeats nor hears repeated what he has learnt in his English class.

d) **His Environment:** The next variable of the situation envisaged here is the environment at home or, to use a more neutral term, the atmosphere during the off-school hours, be it in the hostel or at home in the village, town or city. Here too the environment is non-English and intensely native. The learner is left to do his homework with no one to help and advise him, no one to give him practice in what he has learnt in his classroom. Besides, English constitutes only one-fifth or one-sixth of what he is required to revise and consolidate. Most of the students, if not all, are those whose parents are
illiterate or who are only marginally educated, and who do not have even the least of teaching aids such as a tape-recorder, radio, T.V. set, etc., offered by the modern scientific age in advanced countries.

e) **His Medium of Instruction:** Another variable of the situation is the medium of instruction. In schools where the medium of instruction is English (as in the case of students in Public or Convent Schools) the learner is exceptionally lucky to have the necessary interaction in English, and thus get an exposure to English almost continuously. But the learner in question here is the one who, far from having English as the medium of instruction, is only reasonably well-versed, at best, in his MT. He cannot yet think of adopting English as a medium of instruction for other subjects. In fact this learner has to pass through three distinct stages:

i. The initial stage as a student of 6th class continued through 7th and 8th classes.

ii. As a high school student after having been exposed to English for about 3-4 years, in whatever small measure.

iii. As a post-high school pupil after 5-7 years of exposure to English.

At none of these stages and even beyond is he required to adopt English as a medium of instruction as against the Public School pupil who is required to pursue the study of all other subjects also through English.
This observation on the non-English medium of instruction does not imply that we propose to suggest or recommend English as the medium of instruction at the school or the college stage. What is intended is to state the fact in order to emphasise the very limited exposure to English which an average (not the exceptional) student has or can have, since it is limited to the classroom.

f) His other Pre-occupations: Not only is English not the medium of instruction for our learner, he has also to learn an additional regional language or Sanskrit at school. Thus our learner is called upon to study his own language which in this case is Hindi, another Indian language, and English under the Three Language Formula which has been accepted by the Indian Government as a part of its language educational programme. He, therefore, cannot think of using English as a medium of day-to-day use. His situation has nothing in common with that of the convent school learner who invariably not only uses English as the medium of instruction but may also have the facility of using it as a language of day-to-day communication.

g) His Period of Learning: It is also important to keep in mind the duration of the pupil's L2 learning process for which the relevance of the MT is to be discussed in this thesis. It would be only reasonable to remember that during the entire period of study the language learning process continues. In this respect it may be pointed out that in the matter of language learning it is difficult to point out the stage by which learning is over even in respect of the MT. Some people
continue to acquire their own MT even till as late as extreme old age. This may be stretching the matter too far, but the L1 development continues normally till the learner acquires the first degree in his academic pursuit. Naturally then the L2 learning will also continue at least till a learner clears the first degree stage.

So the period sought to be covered in relation to L2 learning is from the 6th standard till the student passes his first degree examination because in most of the universities even at present, English is being taught as a compulsory subject upto B.A. level. And it would be fallacious to assume that it is only literature and not the language which is taught at the degree stage. This is clear from the examination requirements. It is true that these days it is the DM which has taken the place of GTM and so the formal language teaching/learning component in university syllabi is rather small. But if we take up the syllabi (of degree course) of any university as in practice until recently and even as they are at present at some universities we will see that usage and composition still take a lion's share of the total marks in an examination.

2. The Teacher

After having discussed all aspects of our learner we come to the next important variable of L2 learning situation, i.e., the teacher. The teacher from one angle is the most important variable. However, frankly speaking, the teacher of English in an average Indian school, to say the least, is not fully competent. According to the report of a study group he is "not adequately qualified or trained for the specialist task of
teaching a foreign language at the earlier stages... teaching is not done by teachers who have an adequate knowledge of the language and of language teaching methods."³

Thus the teacher of English is neither well-equipped nor well trained. He has himself not been adequately taught those things which he is called upon to teach. For example, the average teacher knows nothing much of accent and pronunciation, and precious little of the basics of formal grammar. As will be made out in Chapter No. VI on the basis of a survey conducted in the schools around, it can be safely said that hardly any school teacher knows anything of IPA notations or any other system of notation followed by some of the standard dictionaries. Indeed many of them even do not know of the standard dictionaries and how to consult one to the teacher's or the learner's full advantage. The way an average teacher of English speaks is hardly intelligible to a native speaker and a native speaker's English is beyond his comprehension too. Though the goal is not the native speech, at least the teacher must be capable of understanding a native's pronunciation. Some of the teachers cannot understand a speech made in English even by an Indian. Only a few can carry on conversation in English.

The reason is not far to seek. They have never been specially trained for the teaching of English. "In India the main problem is

to have competent teachers of English. A large number of the present teachers are relatively ill-taught and are noted for their lack of professional skill in their understanding of language and language learning and in their command of methods and techniques of language teaching."⁴ We may contrast this position with the professional qualifications which a teacher must possess according to Robert Lado:

To perform professional duties one must be professionally qualified. The language teacher must be educated, at least to the level of his peers. He must have the general professional preparation of a teacher. And he must ... know the target language well enough to be imitated by his students.⁵

Naturally a teacher with insufficient qualifications can hardly be supposed to do too well with his pupils. D.A. Wilkins also expresses a similar sentiment when he says:

It would be unrealistic to expect a teacher to set objectives which he himself is not capable of reaching. A teacher who himself has difficulty in speaking the language he teaches is not going to succeed in giving his pupils a command of spoken language.⁶

The availability of competent teachers is a pre-requisite for an efficient teaching of L2. The dearth of competent teachers led the Modern Language Association (MLA) of America to prescribe some qualifications for an L2 teacher. Though the

⁵. Language Teaching, p.8.
⁶. second Language Learning and teaching, p.54.
Association has given three levels of excellence, viz., superior, good and minimal only the last, i.e., the minimal, is being reproduced under each qualification so as to invite a comparative study with what we actually have in the field:-

i) Aural understanding:
Minimal : Ability to get the sense of what an educated native says when he is enunciating carefully and speaking simply on a general subject.

ii) Speaking:
Minimal : Ability to talk on prepared topics (e.g., for classroom situations) without obvious faltering, and to use the common expressions needed for getting around in a foreign country, speaking with a pronunciation readily understandable to a native.

iii) Reading:
Minimal : Ability to grasp directly (i.e., without translating) the meaning of simple, non-technical prose, except for an occasional word.

iv) Writing:
Minimal : Ability to write correctly the sentences or paragraphs such as would be developed orally for classroom situations, and to write a short simple letter.

v) Language Analysis:
Minimal : A working command of the sound patterns and grammar patterns of (English) and a knowledge of its main differences from (one's mother tongue).
vi) Culture:

**Minimal**: An awareness of language as an essential element among the learnt and shared experiences that combine to form a particular culture, and a rudimentary knowledge of the geography, history, literature, art, social customs, and the contemporary civilization of (English) people.

vii) Professional preparation:

**Minimal**: Some knowledge of effective methods and techniques of language teaching.\(^7\)

Now if we compare these minimal requirements with the actual position, we shall find that the ratio is 10:1, i.e., only 10% of what is required is available. This observation has been supported by the enclosed survey of teachers of English at post primary secondary schools...

As far as the training in teaching skills given to the teacher of English before his appointment as such is concerned it does not make him proficient in the subject further than whatever he gained as a student of English at the University or college for earning his B.A. or M.A. degree. To assess his proficiency in the language it is important to remember that those who opt for training as teachers, (graduates, \(\ldots\))

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post-graduates or under-graduates) are those whose academic results are unpromising and who undertake the training for the profession with reluctance as the last available resort.  

Teacher training only impresses upon a pupil-teacher, and that too vaguely, certain theoretical ideas about the teaching of English. In the absence of adequate proficiency in the language and motivation, this kind of training is irrelevant to the practical needs of teaching and more or less infructuous. 

The teacher along with the taught lives in a social set-up where it is Hindi or a local dialect of it that predominates. It may then be said that the teacher too along with the learner is back to the Hindi atmosphere soon after his class is over, and we cannot expect him to gather much from the social set-up regarding the development of proficiency in English to be imparted to the learner later on. 

Mostly the teachers of English posted in rural India are from the rural stock, and even if they were from the towns it would not make much difference because even in most of the towns the social set up more or less is the same as far as the congeniality of atmosphere for the use of English is concerned. 

Perhaps Robert Lado has also in mind a situation like the Indian situation when he says the following about this 

8. I have it on personal knowledge from a former Dean of the Faculty of Education, M.D. University, Rohtak, that when he visited a prestigious College of Education, affiliated to this University, and addressed the students, he asked the entrants how many of them had joined the B.Ed Course of their own choice, only one out of 150 admitted that he had joined of his own free choice. The others had been forced by circumstances.
important variable, i.e., the teacher in an L2 learning situation:

There are great variations among language teachers with regard to their qualifications... The teacher may speak the language natively or he may have studied it as a second language himself. His speech may be some standard or substandard variety. He may be a trained and experienced teacher or he may not have any teaching experience or training at all. 9

3. The Purposive Context

a) General: There can be one, more or all the four broad objectives of learning an L2. They are:

i. to understand it when spoken.

ii. to understand it when it is in the written form.

iii. to be able to speak it.

iv. to be able to write it.

To put it in David Abercrombie's words:

Knowing a language means being able to read it, write it, speak it and understand it when spoken. These are four distinct and separable activities... though they are so closely intertwined for the normal individual that he finds it difficult to think or talk about anyone of them without invoking the rest. 10

To talk of these four as 'distinct and separable activities' which may be learnt independently is likely to cause

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some misunderstanding about the purpose of L2 study. We cannot ignore Abercrombie's own observation that they are 'so closely interwoven'. Hence it is better and safer to talk of the four as aspects of an integrated and comprehensive purpose. P.J.T. Glendening pleads for pursuing all these activities simultaneously:

We should aim at keeping them linked, at not divorcing them and keeping them apart. They should help one another. It is rather unbalanced to aim at proficiency in just one aspect, to the exclusion of interest in other aspects. In practice, one aspect or another will frequently be stressed, but some sort of equilibrium at least should be the objective.11

Glendening seems to be right because "Given that we have to study all the facets of the language learning processes why not apply this fourfold knowledge to each activity, exercising both our knowledge and the manifestation of this knowledge in reading, writing and so on?"12

Doubtlessly the ideal situation would be to learn the language in such a manner that one is able to acquire all these four skills simultaneously. That is a high ideal to achieve and for that achievement ideal teaching and learning conditions are required to be created. That, however, can be and ought to be the aim of a student who subsequently wants to use English as a

12. Ibid., p. 19.
medium of instruction for other subjects of study and still later on as a medium of working in life. But it will be unrealistic to believe that for an average Indian student the purpose of learning English is to acquire all the four skills mentioned above. This observation may sound to be general, arbitrary and impressionistic only until we refer to certain courses of study (examination requisites) or employment situations. For example, the courses in English prescribed for Matriculation or Senior Secondary or even Degree Examination in Haryana and around have hardly any component in respect of listening (and then understanding) and speaking. There is nothing much requiring a learner to acquire either of the two skills. Even at the M.A.(English) stage there is no provision for oral examination. It is only recently that the students have started being examined in transcribing the pronunciation of certain words of English in the Linguistics paper. Earlier that too was not a part of the course. And the transcription too is more theoretical and mechanical than practical in requirement.

Let us also look at some of the employment situations. A learner, who studies English up to the first degree level and goes in for higher studies in some Arts subject (say History) or a language other than English (say Hindi) for his Master's degree, can get a job in the capacity of:

i A teacher of History or Hindi at a school or college.
ii A business Assistant in the public or private sector in the Hindi region.
iii. An official in a government department in a state where the use of English within the state is regarded as a violation of government instructions (such as Haryana).

iv. A correspondent of some non-English newspaper.

v. A policeman of a subordinate status.

vi. A teacher of English in a school.

vii. A foreign service personnel.

viii. A correspondent of an English daily or periodical.

ix. A translator of books/articles from English, or into English.

x. An interpreter between two persons of whom one uses English.

Whereas the first five employment situations do not require any knowledge of English the last five do require a high level of proficiency in the language. But if we take into consideration the ground realities, the aim of teaching English largely is to acquaint the student with the language in a way so as to equip him with readiness to develop one or the other skill as need be at a later stage. And mostly in actual life, as we have seen above, no skill is required to be used and hence the knowledge of English acquired in whatever small measure, continues to remain dormant throughout unless one were employed in a situation which requires the use of English one way or the other, i.e., spoken or written or both.

Broadly speaking, then, the aim of teaching English in the usual Indian context up to the degree level is to acquaint
the student with just the outlines of the English language. The outlines include some broad grammatical rules, principles and concepts, and a workable vocabulary including some idioms and phrases just to equip the learner with the linguistic paraphernalia which may remain passive as long as no practical use of it is made but which may become quite active when required particularly in an employment situation.

Some may still insist that the aim of teaching English remains, technically and theoretically speaking, the attainment of proficiency in all the four skills. Some might as well say that it is good to keep the aims high. It would, nevertheless, be unrealistic to ignore the gross realities of the situation. In the kind of environment obtaining and the teaching equipments available or not available in our schools and colleges, it is just unthinkable to achieve for the average learner all the four skills except, of course, in rare cases. However, another pertinent aspect of the whole issue also cannot be ignored. The aims are fixed by the authorities that matter. More often than not, the authorities comprise members, officials and experts/teachers of higher standing, who have no direct contact with the classroom situation. The teacher, whatever his limitations, has the direct knowledge and experience of the situation. But he is more or less a passive executor of the teaching programme set out in the courses of study for him.

b) Professional context: The professional is a very
important component of the purposive context. As has been said above there are some professions in which an intensive knowledge and understanding of English is required, whereas there are some in which no definite and necessary knowledge of the language is required as far as the discharge of the professional duties is concerned. There are still some professions in which the knowledge of English language is required only as a 'library language'.

There are situations where English is required only for strictly administrative purposes, i.e., to deal with the official files. These two are the more likely situations for our learner. Once it is decided what profession one is going to adopt in life, English teaching ought to take the course accordingly. Then, teaching will have to be given a direction in order to cultivate that particular skill which goes with the profession opted for.

c) English to be learnt as L2 and Foreign Language: Here another point also needs to be clarified. Ideally, English has to be learnt not only as an L2 but also as a foreign language. English still continues to be used as a link language in India. For that English will have to be studied as an L2. India has diplomatic and commercial links with Britain and other countries. Besides, English as pointed out at the beginning is also an international language. So English should be studied as a foreign language too.
Basically there is not much essential difference between Indian English and British English. There may be some variations but one is largely intelligible to the users of the other. "These differences are mainly a matter of degree, not of kind." Besides, such "variations are normal to language." In fact, in spite of these variations and differences, there exists "an international standard English, such that an Englishman like Graham Greene, an American like Hemingway, an Indian like R.K.Narayan and a Nigerian like Onwuora Morkwu are all equally intelligible wherever they may be read." So we should not make much fuss over these slight variations. While valuing down the attitude of making too much of these differences Robert Lado says:

Everyone, for example, talks about differences between American and British English ... These are over simplifications that exaggerate the differences between groups and overlook the differences within each group. There are great variations within the regions where English is spoken—England, the United States, Canada, Australia, Scotland, etc. These differences within a region are at times greater than those that might be ascribed to the English of the United States as opposed to the English of England.

13. Dodson, p. 47.
Thus even if English as a second language is the target it will serve the purpose of being used as foreign language also. In fact the two expressions, viz., 'English as a second language' and 'English as a foreign language' have been used as synonyms in this thesis as made out earlier.¹⁷

4. Social Set up

Our learner is placed in a society which is not very favourably disposed towards the use of English as a language of daily discourse. Though the user of English is viewed with envy, people at large are very critical of its use and would miss no opportunity to dub the users of English as suffering from a slavish or snobbish mentality. English is also regarded by a large section of the society as anti-India, anti-religion and also anti-people. This discouraging attitude of the people certainly has a dampening effect on the learner. "It can be difficult for the pupil to make the considerable effort required for learning a language if the society to which he belongs continually expresses critical attitudes about the people who speak that language."¹⁸ However, there is a section of Indians, fortunately placed in life, who study or feel obliged to study English with more than usual enthusiasm. In any case, the love-hate attitude towards English makes it necessary that we study English in a native (Indian) and acceptable manner.

¹⁷. See above footnote No. 2 (Ch.I), p. 2.
¹⁸. Wilkins, Second Language Learning and Teaching, pp.48-49.
Thus we have seen that the average teaching situation in India is:

i. The learner here is mainly the child who has learnt reading and writing his MT at an ordinary primary school. His MT is Hindi or some language akin to Hindi structurally. The time available to him for learning English is 40 to 60 minutes a day. He is back to his MT situation after his English classes -- a largely non-English environment. His medium of instruction is also largely Hindi. He has also to study Hindi formally and one more regional language besides English.

ii. The teacher of our learner is unenviable as far as his competence in English and training in educational methodology are concerned. He knows the MT of his learner.

iii. Though, ideally, high goals can be kept, the realities on the ground force us to be practical. So it would be only reasonable to acquaint the learner with the outlines of English language in such a manner that whenever a particular skill is required to be used this skill may be revived and improved afresh.

English has to be learnt both as L2 and as foreign language. In fact the two terms for our purpose are synonymous.

iv. The set up in which our learner is placed is not very well disposed towards the English language though the knowledge of English otherwise is still regarded as a status symbol.

The most important part of the situation is that the MT (which has already been learnt well and is being used liberally by the learner) is there to interfere.
Now that the teaching context has been determined let us address ourselves to the following questions:

i. Can a learner of an average Indian school possibly be placed in a first language atmosphere in respect of English?

ii. If he cannot be so placed, can he still be taught through the DM?

iii. Further, if he cannot be thus taught what will be the best alternative?

iv. Can in that case, recourse be taken to the MT?

v. Should recourse to the MT be regarded as a matter of necessity or can it be valued as a matter of choice?

It is clear from the teaching context that the learner of English at an average Indian School cannot possibly be placed in an LI atmosphere. At the initial stage, particularly, he cannot be taught English through the DM in view of the several variables discussed above. An alternative for him will be that first he should be taught through the GTM and after some linguistic development in him has taken place the use of the MT can be gradually but largely dropped. However, recourse to MT can intermittently be taken whenever need be. This recourse to MT particularly at the initial stage is a matter of necessity and not a matter of dispensable choice on account of the several constraints listed above.

However, the question which is an important part of the situation here is the interference of Hindi in the learning of
English. A way out suggested by language scientists to tackle this problem is to teach the learner through DM. The DM, inter alia, implies that the process of learning L1 and that of learning L2 are the same. So let us consider if they are the same or different.