1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The chapter discusses the background of the study with reference to the challenges faced by English language teachers and the learners in Government schools (Upper Primary Level) of Jammu and Kashmir State. It describes the statement of the problem and objectives of the study. It highlights the research questions and the hypothesis of the study. The chapter also explains the significance of this research and presents the summary of all the chapter of the thesis.

1.2 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In Jammu and Kashmir English has been taught as a second language and as a compulsory language from primary level in government schools. The primary aim of teaching English in the government schools of Jammu and Kashmir was to develop the proficiency of children from their early age. In order that they become proficient in the language, they must have a rich exposure to the language through a range of activities which will help them to practice the use of language. The textbooks prescribed should have content which must be familiar, easy and interesting to them. Further the methodology adopted by the teachers should encourage participatory learning. The teachers must be specially trained, highly skilled with a good knowledge of the subject and also be aware of child psychology.

Unfortunately a big mismatch has been found between the genuine second language acquisition theories and the activities related to the teaching of English language in schools, especially in the Government upper primary schools of Jammu and Kashmir State. English has not been taught in a way which could give the desired result of developing the language proficiency of the learners of the Government schools. The materials used are too complex, as they consist of literary content. The teachers
are not subject-specific teachers and are not trained and equipped well to teach the children.

The teaching methodology has been traditional that it does not serve the purpose. It neither encourages interaction learning nor does it develop the interest of the learners. On the contrary it increases anxiety among the learners who are already struggling to learn the language as the content is beyond the level of the learners. The traditional teaching strategies of reading passages from the textbook, instructing children to read aloud and simultaneously translating the meaning of the texts in Dogri/Kashmiri/Balti (respective mother tongues of Jammu Kashmir and Ladakh regions) and in Urdu confuses the children, because of the variation in the grammatical constituents of the target language and the translated language. All these factors hamper the process of learning the language. As a result their performance is very poor in the exams. This is evident from the very poor results of 157 Government schools in 10th Standard Board exams. The average pass percentage of Government schools in secondary school examinations in the state (between 2003 and 2012) was 37.02 in contrast to 73.12 for the same examinations in private schools as per the survey reported by (Sharma 4+; Lateef, 5; Bhat). Verma added in a newspaper report that the results of 10th standard Board exams of 280 Government schools were 0% to 5%. All these results indicate clearly the fact that the teaching and the learning conditions of Government schools are not conducive to the acquisition of English language.

There has been a considerable dropout in the schools also. According to Reshi the parents of the children who study in the State Government schools perceive that the provision of quality teachers is quite meagre and it has failed to foster the learning interest among children. Further, poor financial conditions confine majority parents to enrol their children only in Government schools thereby denying them a quality based education. Many parents move their children from Government schools to private schools besides their miserable financial conditions and it directly affects the rate of enrolment of Government schools as well. The evidence of hundreds of schools closed by Government after the drop in enrolment rate proves that the parents are dissatisfied
with the education provided in the Government schools. As an illustration in Srinagar district alone 236 schools were closed from 1999 to 2000 and this practice still continues (Ishfaq 1). A relevant survey of School Education Department of the State found that 124 schools were closed in different districts across Jammu and Kashmir because of lack of students on the rolls. The bad to worst situation of Government schools indicate that a number of schools are functioning in a single room to two roomed Government owned as well as rented buildings with full-fledged teaching staff (Ali 1).

While examining the curriculum of the State Government schools, it is observed that it is unsuitable and contrary to the needs of the learners. Though it is a known fact that it is one of the most vital components of a school education system, yet it is left faulty in many aspects. The curriculum does not serve the needs of the learners in terms of its relevance and skill development. Rehman has reported that the worst condition can be analysed after looking at the State board exam results published over the years (9+). It clearly showed the endless poor performance of students from government schools. Such poor performance of Government schools not only exists in the State of Jammu and Kashmir but it is being found in all Indian Government schools. Ultimately it has its frightening consequences in the education system of the country. According to Gupta a report formed on India Vision 2020 under the chairmanship of former President of India A. P. J. Abdul Kalam including 500 experts, there will be 500 million children in India by the year 2016 with less than five years of education and another 300 million children will not have finished secondary school (81). Usually it has been observed that the learners face different problems such as demotivation due to improper seating arrangements in school, unsupportive parents, poor quality teaching and learners earning burden in childhood. Such reasons are the common causes for giving up education during childhood. However, the factors that are responsible for dropout of a large population of children during schooling due to the unavailability of trained teachers and unsuitable textbooks have not been studied widely. This is also an important issue in which it may be examined how unsuitable textbooks affect motivation
and how untrained general English teachers become responsible for the poor performance of children.

The current scenario demands that children are taught English language for communication particularly spoken and written communication. It is required to equip them with the skills that they can explore any text or lesson of any subject written in English language with minimum difficulties. The English language teaching with literary text alone is not sufficient for language acquisition in day-to-day life particularly in the non-native scenario of English medium education. It has become a prerequisite to provide skill-based courses to learners for English language proficiency development.

Instructional material and teaching quality are the two important pillars of education that determine the effective teaching-learning connectivity between a teacher and a learner. Similarly, the sub-pillars of material are content and tasks (characteristics). If the language teaching materials are embellished with these characteristics and focussed with skill-based learning, then assurance of perfect instructional material is confirmed as the quality material is required for teaching language particularly in the 21st century. In the present scenario, the teachers are being considered as facilitators and guides. With respect to teachers, their high qualification and their competence may not be a foremost requirement while appointing the English teachers but the advanced instructional material forms the important component of teaching.

Lack of advanced materials and lack of competent English teachers affect Government school education department teaching on one side. On the other side, improper in-service teacher training keeps majority English teachers' untrained. Academicians' believe that the 'National Council of Educational Research and Training (NCERT)' is also responsible for toppling the quality of the education in Government schools. According to Dr R. L. Bhat, the NCERT is not only increasing problems for the majority of students but also debilitating the efficiency teachers in teaching the English language. He has categorized a number of one million Indian primary, upper primary,
high and higher secondary schools in different categories such as Elite schools, Private schools and Government schools. He has described that the students of Elite schools (Superior Category Schools) have an absolute milieu for ‘catching’ the English language and the NCERT teaching English model fits them best. He believes that the students who greatly benefit from the advanced system comprise a very small number, in fact less than half a percent fraction. He has highlighted that the private schools (second group) display the label of English Medium Schools and it is acceptable that a few schools are true to the claim. It is asserted by him that in terms of practice majority of the schools fail to meet the criteria to call themselves as English medium schools. They are practically either Urdu or Hindi medium schools. He is confident that Government schools identically flaunt the English medium tag and in reality they are regional or Urdu or Hindi medium in practice.

It has been observed that the professional preparations of teacher Educators are not relevant and satisfactory. According to Bhat and Mehraj “the English language teacher preparations at school level are just obsolete, bookish, ill concerned, impractical, ill-planned and uninspiring (33-39).

According to Ahad, the poor and uneducated parental background is an additional reason why learners are struggling in English language learning classrooms in Government schools. It believed to be acute abutment for second language acquisition but due to this bereft, the children suffer heavily and this has been playing a vital role in their demarcation at their beginning level. All such factors affect the learning interest of majority learners (rural area learners) and they suffer gradually from scholionophobia. In the history of the State Government School Education, a meagre learning change has been witnessed at the upper primary level and it is an analytical affair for the millions of learners (1-45).

The Education Department has failed to recognize or justify the need for English language teaching. Ultimately the poor results of Government schools in the state every year indicate the improper English language teaching scenario. Through the
observations of Geelani, it is known that recently the former State Education Minister accepted in his speech that “the crises in school education sector are to the extent that 8th pass students are not in a position to read the 2nd class textbook (7).” Pandith has emphasized the fact that the important aim of education is to develop in learners of all levels a great degree of knowledge and self-confidence which still remains unachieved.

An extensive study carried out by Iqbal, it is claimed that unless the “school education system does not see massive reform there will be no change ahead, as we know the education system cannot be reformed from a top-down approach but a bottom-up approach is needed (7).” The bottom-up approach depends on the strength of school education system widely functioning through the English language in the whole country. Further the stability of English medium education system depends on the practical knowledge of English language teachers who can help learners successfully in the acquisition of language. Therefore the aim of teaching English can be served by trained teachers, suitable materials and appropriate methodologies, these three factors have a great impact on the language learning efficiency of learners.

1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The problems identified with regard to teaching of English in government schools are:

- The textbooks prescribed for upper primary level are too complex as they have literary content.
- The methodologies adopted by teachers have been ineffective as they practise traditional translation method.
- They advocate rote-learning/verbatim strategies in English language teaching classrooms which do not meet the need of achieving the English language proficiency of children.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES
Keeping in mind the research context and independent and dependent variables, the study has been done with the following objectives:

- To examine the extent to which the English language materials, methodologies, tasks, English language teaching practices have been helpful in teaching English in the Government Schools of Jammu and Kashmir State.
- To devise and experiment the innovative modules for the development of communication skills of the upper primary level learners (8th Standard) of the State.
- To study the effect of teaching English language through learners’ culture-specific contents.
- To adopt a task-based approach to improve the communication skills of the learners.

1.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This research study has raised following research questions.

- To what extent the course materials meet the expectations (enable learners to develop English language competence).
- To what extent does the familiarity of content (culture-specific) in instructional materials play a role in English language teaching.
- To what extent is there an improvement in English language proficiency of learners after the experimental intervention.
- To what extent culture-specific modules with task-based language teaching stimulate the interest and motivation among English language learners of Government schools.

1.6 RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS
The following hypothesis has been formulated in alignment with the research objectives.

- The non-native upper primary level children learn English language more easily through the task-based approach and through their own culture-specific contents (familiar content).

1.7 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The teaching of English language as a subject and as a medium of education adopted by the stakeholders of Jammu Kashmir Government education has been the essential need of the hour for learners. Unless it is taught the way it should be, it will not be effective. Teaching English to the non-native learners is an excellent choice and an academic key in preparing students for global competition as the richest portion of the knowledge is available in this globalized language.

So this study is a support for various sections of the society. Firstly, it is linked with the successful academic career of the children. Secondly, it is associated with the expectations at State and National level which indicate every individual must be educated enough in order to make it an educationally advanced society. Thirdly the importance of this research meets the needs of the learners.

1.8 PREVIEW OF CHAPTERS

The research study is being organized into five chapters as summarized below:

The first chapter presents the background of the study with reference to the challenges faced by English language learners and teachers in Government schools (Upper Primary Level) of Jammu and Kashmir. It describes the statement of the problem and the objectives of the study. It defines the hypothesis to be tested and
sheds light on the significance and rationale behind this research. On the whole, the chapter highlights the reasons for undertaking this research study.

The second chapter reviews the research works on different aspects related to the chosen topic of the research. It discusses the second language acquisition theories and describes their theoretical relevance with the research topic. It analyses as to how the principles of these selected theories form a base to adopt an outcome-based language teaching approach (task-based language teaching approach). Furthermore, it discusses a wide range of literature reviewed on task-based language teaching research with reference to LSRW, the four basic language skills. It summarizes the works on the content and methodologies adopted in teaching English to the children (primary to upper primary level). It presents the works on the effects of content relevance and culture in teaching English. It reflects the studies on task-designing and age factor in second language acquisition.

The third chapter describes the evaluation of English textbooks during pre-survey and survey conducted to identify the barriers in English language teaching and learning as it tries to analyse the obstacles confronted by English language teachers and learners of Government schools of Jammu and Kashmir State. It describes the details and demographic profile of research population, data collection methods and data collection tools. It provides in-depth details about English language teaching and learning environment in Jammu Kashmir State Government schools. It also explains the statistical analysis done to validate the compiled data. Finally the chapter presents the features of the innovative modules developed on the need-based analysis based on the survey.

The fourth chapter describes the experimental design adopted for the study. It discusses the experimental study conducted with the children of Government schools of Jammu and Kashmir State. It describes the locations, subjects, experimental procedures and the criteria adopted for this experimental study. The chapter enlightens the practice of teaching research modules before teaching (pre-test), while teaching and
after teaching (post-test). It discusses the performance of the learners in the pre-test and in the post-test. It also provides the analysis of the feedback questionnaires administered among teachers and learners.

The final chapter presents the conclusions drawn from the experimental study. It provides recommendations and pedagogical implications of the study. It also highlights the further scope of the study.

1.9 CONCLUSION

The background of the study has described the English language teaching status in Government schools of Jammu and Kashmir with regard to the factors affecting their English language learning. The information related to the teaching of English in the State government schools denotes the obstacles averting children (upper primary level) from learning the English language. The extent to which the problem is extremely noteworthy has been explicated. It has helped in pointing out the root cause (research problem) of the poor performance of the children of the upper primary level. Further, the research questions raised by the study provide a rational and logical appeal of research.

The next chapter “Literature Review” gives the details of reviewed literature on the relevant aspects of the research topic. It discusses the research gap identified after reviewing an ample amount of literature relevant to this research study.