

Do input (s) matter in Second Language Acquisition (SLA)?

Evidence from the Learners' Outcomes

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Abstract



The paper has investigated the role of L2 input (exposure) on learners' outcomes in a second language learning setting among Pakistani students at the secondary level. The data were collected from one hundred and sixty-seven participants through a questionnaire (checklist) and a test from randomly selected English Language learners' samples and analyzed through SPSS. The results have confirmed that the students of the private schools receive higher-level of inputs (English) than the state school students: $t(167)=7.89, p<.05$. The analysis also indicated that there have been statistically significant effects on the learners' parents' family income and education level. However, the results presented no significant difference in terms of gender. The findings may help teachers to improve their classroom interactions by providing better input(s) opportunities. It also proves that the students, who avail ample inputs, are more proficient and accurate in their production and commit fewer errors and mistakes in their outcomes. Moreover, it may help the authorities and policymakers to devise policies, and curricula and design materials accordingly.

Keywords: Input, Outcomes, SLA, Language Exposure, Urdu

Introduction

The English language has earned the status of a second language as well as a tool for communication-cum-instructions in education along with the administrative institutions of Pakistan. Although the educational system in Pakistan is multi-strata in nature having private English Medium Institutions and State Institutes, there is a common goal of education; where English language proficiency in writing as well as in speaking is considered very essential by the language policymaker. However, a huge gap of L 2 exposure (input) prevails in both educational systems that affect the performance of the learners significantly.

Input:

In the literature on SLA, input as one of the important factors in both acquisition and learning has been treated variably. Some theories consider input very important like Krashen's (1982) input hypothesis and while others relegated it to a secondary position as in UG (Cook, 1985). According to VanPatten and Benati (2015:38) input is the language that is available to the learner that he 'hears or reads and deciphers for understanding'. Likewise, They state that "even in instructed SLA, input is the primary database on which learners build linguistic systems" (VanPatten & Benati, 2015:39). According to Gass (2013) input is "the speech that the learners hear in a meaningful context". Moyer (2009:163) has advised that any sort of language data, a student receives from society (natively) or a teacher in the classrooms, in both first and second-language learning situations. Mangubhai (2001) has stated that input is "the form-based or meaning-based data that a learner receives either formal classroom or in naturalistic setting".

Krashen (1982, 1981) has considered input as "one of the most crucial aspects in the acquisition of a language". Long (1981) posited it as "a basic requirement" for second language acquisition. Huang, Chang, Niu, and Zhi (2018:2) and Moyer (2009:159) have measured input as a contextual predictor and an essential aspect of "long-term attainment". Mangubhai (2001:147) has suggested that all the researchers are united on the point that without language input language learning and acquisition are impossible. In the same way, Storch (2009:104) recommends that the input works

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as a catalyst for L2 development, and is crucially needed for successful learning and acquiring a second language. Takimoto (2009) has suggested that input-based tasks are the backbone for more successful language learning and pragmatic competence in the EFL milieu. Researchers have worked on input from various perspectives such as pragmatics, (Rozendaal & Baker, 2010) phonology & phonetics (Moyer, 2009; Steinlen, 2008), orthography, language comprehension (Jackson, 2008), frequency (Lieven, 2010; Rohde, 2008), form (Ellis & Collins, 2009) and language acquisition process (Long, 1981) that have been described in the following section.

The paper is divided into the following sections. Section (2) describes the literature review, the purpose of the study, and the research questions. Section (3) deals with the research methodology, section (4) entails results and finding, section (5) explores discussion, and section (6) deals with the conclusion. The final section (7) refers to the references.

Literature review

Flege (2009) has researched native speakers' input to examine adult Chinese immigrants an average of 27 years old, to the United States on arrival. These immigrants were parted into groups (university students and professional adults jobs going, groups). The students' group received a sufficient amount of input while the other group did not. Fledge's study has confirmed that the students' group performances were much better due to ample input as compared to the adult group.

Al-Ansari (2001) has established that formal classroom exposure (shelter curricular) was more operative for proficiency in an L2 as compared to informal (extracurricular exposure) on 94 university undergraduate students. Mangubhai (2001) has investigated the same element and reached a similar conclusion that the best circumstances for L2 acquisition and learning are the availability of appropriate or required input, either in written or verbal form. His study was on 12 schools and consisted of three (silent reading, book flood, and controlled) groups.

Love, Maas, and Swinney (2003) have argued that the process of comprehension is similar for both Bilingual native and non-native English speakers, but the input to which they are exposed can create a difference in production. They also believe that language input directly affects both syntactical, and lexical language processes & language proficiency.

Bohn and Bundgaard-Nielsen (2009) have investigated diverse inputs of L1, 26 years old, Danish speakers having 8 years of English instructions from a non-native teacher but with little input (exposure) of native English. Their speaking fluency and vowel intelligibility was tested with four lists of word of mono-syllabic forms like but [bvt] along with the list "bat, bart beat, bit, bet, burt, bort". The study aimed to see the fluency and vowel intelligibility of Danish learners in a non-native setting. The results have shown that comparatively, Danish speakers' vowel intelligibility and fluency in English were significantly lower than the native speakers. It also confirmed that heterogeneous and ununiformed inputs greatly affect the outcomes of non-native speakers

Masangya and Lozada (2009) studied the relationship between English language input and the proficiency of sophomore students in Taiwan. A total of one hundred and sixty secondary school students were the participants of this study. They concluded that if exposure to the intended language is increased for the learners, there would be fewer errors in their outcomes.

Jackson (2008) explored the impact of input on comprehension at the sentence level on 43 participants who were parted into two levels: 17-year-old intermediate-level L2 students and 26-year-old advanced L2 students. They were provided target language (German) filler sentences on animated and unanimated subjects and objects. The study resulted that both groups encountered fewer problems in comprehension assessments which was supported by sentence-level input of German as L2.

Rohde (2008) investigated the effects of input frequency on the acquisition of the +ing (progressive) form of the verb by nine years old learners of German as an L2. Retrieving data from the students' diaries, the study has resulted that despite an enriched input of progressive verb forms through the exposure to a native-like atmosphere, the focused grammatical structure were not learned well because the focused structures were rarely used by the natives. So, saliency and frequency of input are vital for the effective learning of L2.

Lieven (2010) examined the frequency of the input, in terms of morphological, lexical, and syntactic forms, in children's comprehension. She concluded that the frequency of input has expedited learning and led to significant attainment in language acquisition. She also considered age one of the crucial factors for learning. According to her results, Young children have shown significant success in both first and second language acquisition due to input frequency.

In another recent investigation, Huang et al. (2018) discovered that socio-economic status and input had a very close relationship. They affirmed that the language input proved to be more significant than the socio-economic status of the learners.

Purpose of the study:

The study focuses on determining the English language input effects on learners and their outcomes at the secondary level. Furthermore, it also explores different factors that not only affect these inputs but also the performance of learners

Research questions

- What factors are involved that affect the language input (exposure) in second language learning and acquisition?
- What are the effects of language input (exposure) on the outcomes of second language learners?

Research Methodology

The present study is quantitative. It is mostly based on descriptive and co-relative analysis. Although some researchers consider context one of the important factors for successful acquisition, others regard the role of input and frequency. The study aims to see whether L2 exposure in the form of inputs facilitates second language acquisition or not.

To attain the above-mentioned goal, we selected the students randomly, and the test and the checklist were provided to assess the L2 influence in learning an L2. SPSS software is used for the collection and analysis of data in this study. In the present study, it was hypothesized that private schools students in Pakistan are more proficient and accurate in their production as compared to the state schools because these students receive ample English language input in all the situations like home, school, peer, media, etc.,

Participants

A total number of 180 checklists along with essay tests were distributed among the participants but only 167 were received from them. These were studying in two types of schools. i.e. state schools and private institutions. Both males and females were included in this study.

Instrument:

A survey checklist and essay-type test were used for the present study, the checklist has been taken and modified accordingly from de Carvalho Filho, Lajom, Regodon, and Bunagan (2009) study which was conducted in the Philippines and Taiwan.

Checklist:

The English language input (exposure) survey questionnaire (checklist) is based on the profiles of the learners with their gender and age respectively. The input profiles are divided into *Home* (English language input at home), *Peer* (English language input by peer), *Schools* (English language input at school), and *media* (English language input from media). The checklist has 24 situations that affect the respondent's target language directly or indirectly. The codes are distributed according to the Likert scale in the following manner.

Always = 5, Often = 4, Sometime =3, Rarely = 2, and Never =1.

Test:

The second part of the study is based on a written essay to check the different types of errors that are committed by the learners and compare them with the results of the checklist.

Data Analysis:

The data were entered, stored, and analyzed on SPSS. The mean and standard deviation were calculated from the collected data analyses. Firstly, overall group Mean (*M*) and Standard deviation (*SD*) are given and then situational wise is provided. The descriptive relationships were found to show whether there was any association between the L2 input and the performance in terms of written skills.

Results

The *t-test* for the two independent variables was conducted to see the difference in input between both types of students and its impacts on their performance. The difference between the private schools (Means: 80.86, SD:19.98) and the state schools (M:57.71, SD:14.12) was significantly different, $t(167)=7.89, p>05$. It indicates that students of private institutes are more exposed to these inputs than that of state schools in Pakistan.

Table: 1 Means and SD of the groups

Groups	No	M	SD
Private Schools	80	80.86	19.98
State Schools	87	57.71	14.12

Secondly, Participants' Means and SD, scores of different situations of inputs: *home, friends, peers, media, and school* environment are illustrated in the table (2) and figure (1) below

Table: 2: shows the Mean (M) and S (Standard deviation) of Input (school environment, friends, media, and home) and Performance.

Option	Private Schools		State Schools	
	Mean	S.td	Mean	S.td
School environment	23.564	5.734	14.688	3.076
Friends	9.862	2.251	7.451	2.205
Media	36.322	8.730	27.175	6.687
Home	11.127	3.378	8.450	2.157
Performance	4.20	.649	2.22	.914
Cohesion & compactness in test	3.62	.719	1.90	.821
Errors	3.313	.597	1.75	.738

As given in table (2) above and figure (1) below, the option schools' environment of private institutions (M=23.56) is more than the State's school (M=14.68). Regarding the role of friends as the source of input, the private institution had the highest (M=9.86) as compared to State schools (M=7.45). The input from the media by private schools is (X=36.32) and state schools had lower that is (M=27.17). The homes' input is higher (M=11.12) and the school of the state had lower (M=8.45). The overall performance of the private institutions' students had a higher score (M=4.20) as compared to state schools (M=2.22). The cohesion and compactness were higher in the production of private schools (M=3.62) than in State schools (M=1.90); similar is the case in the errors and awarding marks, there was less number of errors in the outcomes of the students of the private schools so they achieved higher marks (M=3.31) than the State's schools (M=1.75).

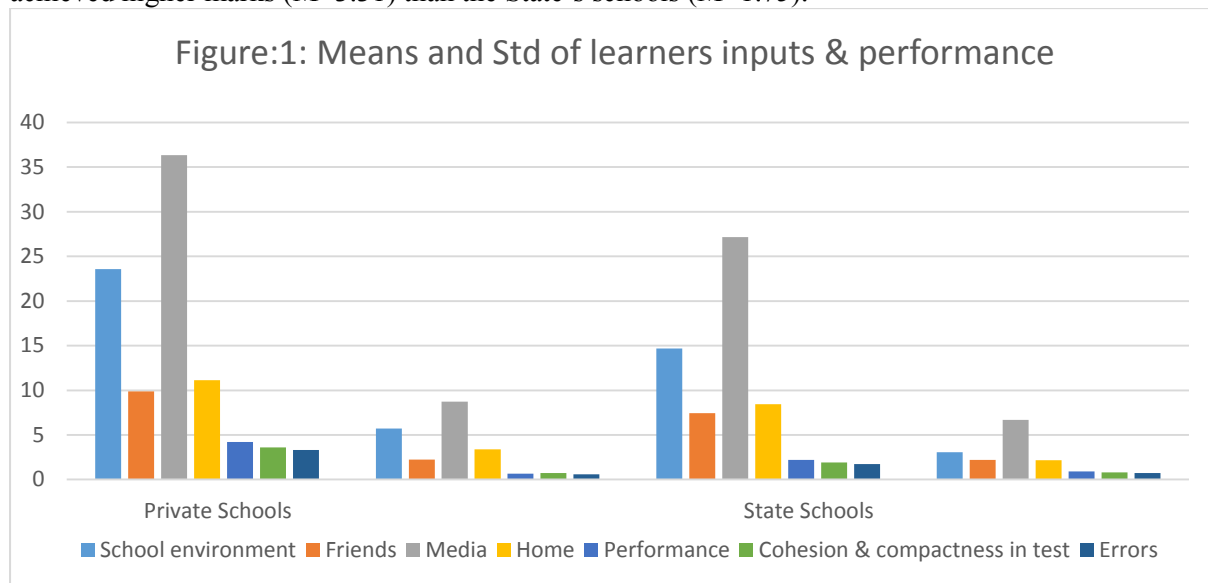


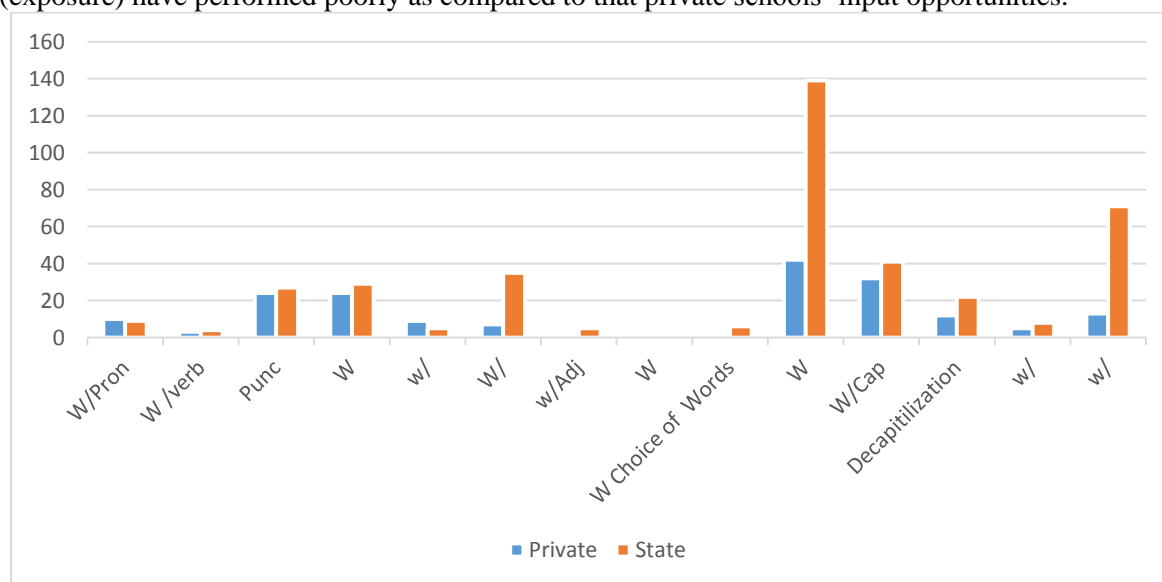
Table 3: Number of Errors Committed by Learners

Institutes	W/Pron	W/verb	Punct	/Tense	W/ Prep	w/ Sent	W/ w/Adj	Adv	W/ of Words	W/ Choice of Words	Spelling	W/ W/Cap	Decapitilization	form	Verb w/	Noun w/
Private	10	3	24	24	9	7	2	1	2	42	32	12	5	13		
State	9	4	29	29	5	35	5	2	6	139	41	22	8	71		

Table (3) displays the errors that were available in the written work of the students of both institutes. The outcomes of the study show that private school students are significantly more accurate and proficient in their performance as compared to state schools’ students which is why fewer errors were committed by them (see also figure: 2 for more clearance).

Table (3) explains that state school learners have committed 10 errors in terms of wrong use of pronoun (w/pron) as compared to the private schools' students that were 9. Likewise, the wrong use of verb were state schools 4 and private schools 3 respectively. There were 22 *de-capitalization* (de-cap) errors in-state school students as compared to private schools that were 12, similarly, wrong punctuations usages are reported that is 24 by private schools and 29 by state school learners. Moreover, in terms of wrong use of tense (w/tense), private school learners confirm 27 and state schools 29 respectively. Furthermore, wrong use prepositions were private school students were 9 and state schools were 5, wrong sentences (w/sent) were 7 and 35, use of wrong adjective(w/adj) was 2 and 5, use of wrong adverb(w/adv) was 1 and 2 respectively. In terms of the wrong choice of words were 2 and 6, wrong spelling, 42 and 139, and wrong capitalizations (w/capit) were 32 and 22. The wrong use of verb forms was 5 and 8 and the wrong use of nouns was reported in their written text as 13 and 71 respectively.

The results have confirmed that most of the state’s students, due to a lack of conducive and rich input (exposure) have performed poorly as compared to that private schools’ input opportunities.



Discussion

Results show that private school students have more opportunities in terms of input (exposure) as compared to state school students in Pakistan. The study confirmed that higher exposure to the English language significantly affects the performance of the learners. As a result of higher exposure (input) opportunities, students commit fewer mistakes and errors in their production (written task). The higher input (exposure) provides maximum chances for the learners to imbibe and internalize the English language well and provides more opportunities to communicate with each other in English. The results are aligned with the research (Bautista, 2000; de Carvalho Filho et al., 2009) that private school parents (51%) use English at home. The students at private schools students mostly used to communicate in English (Khan, 2013) with their peers in school. Private school students have a lot of opportunities to use media as compared to state schools in Pakistan. One reason for the lack of these inputs is the social status of the learners as well. In simple words, it can be concluded that English language exposure (input) is very important and essential for good communication and accurate outcomes.

Conclusions

The study has confirmed that input is a very essential factor for accurate outcomes. According to the result, the private schools' students received ample English language inputs, so their performance was comparatively better than state schools’ students. It is also found that students in private institutions have committed fewer mistakes in their outcomes as compared to state school students. The results

also prove that there is a great significance of English language input in the overall performance of the students.

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Abbreviations used in the study are:-

Ad	Adverb
Art	Article
De-cap	De-capitalization
Cap	capitalization
C W	wrong choice of word
V f	Verb form
W N	wrong use of the noun
W Pro	Wrong pronoun
W Pre	wrong preposition
W Sp	Wrong spelling
W T	Wrong tense
W C	wrong construction
W Se	Wrong sentence
Punct	punctuation