

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All that a university or a final highest school can do for us is still but what the first school began doing – teach us to read - Thomas Carlyl

Education is an intrinsic component of a child's holistic development. The goal of education is to help a child develop her innate abilities and inherent potential so that she can become a versatile, thinking and feeling individual. Education is a lifetime journey that develops a variety of skills in us - how a child learns these skills is determined by both the child and the teacher's approach. As a result, a one-size-fits-all approach may fail to meet the needs of many young children. Learning is a broad term that encompasses the entire educational process that develops a young child, it includes school curriculum, singing, dancing, typing, writing, cycling and many other skills. We are all born as blank slates (*Tabula Rasa*), as Locke (1632-1704) put it, with no innate knowledge. We learn what we know after we are born by sensation and reflection (Neuman, 2010).

India has a long history of appreciating a child's early years of life, as well as a rich cultural heritage of activities for stimulating development and instilling "Sanskaras," or basic values and social skills, in young learners. Previously, this was mostly supplied inside joint families, through traditional child-care practices that were widely discussed and passed down from generation to generation. In the previous few decades, however, there have been changes in the family as well as the social setting (National Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Curriculum Framework, 2013).

In the early years, education and learning are naturally the duty of the parents. Following that, they spend their first years of life at a preschool, where they learn about the world outside of their home. As a result, the preschool is where young children's growth and development are aided during their formative years, thus what they learn and how they learn are quite important. Preschool is a place where children between the ages of two and six can participate in a range of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes (Position paper NCERT, 2006 on Early Childhood).

Because the pace of development in these years is extraordinarily rapid, the first 6 to 8 years of a child's life are widely recognized as the most essential years for lifelong development. In

the recent neuroscience research, it has been found that “Experience-based brain development in the early years sets neurological and biological pathways that affect health, learning and behavior throughout life” (Mustard, 2007). Also, children who master two languages in early childhood have a larger left-brain hemisphere. If the child's brain development is not supported by, or embedded in a stimulating and enriching physical and psychosocial environment during these early years, the chances of the child's brain developing to its full potential are greatly reduced, and often irreversibly reduced. This period in one's life is also critical for instilling social values and personal habits that are known to endure a lifetime. What follows logically is the critical need of investing in these early years to create an enabling environment for every child, and therefore a good foundation for life, which is not only a child's right, but also has a long-term impact on a country's human capital quality. This logic underpins the relevance of early childhood care and education (ECCE).

1.1 CURRICULAR FRAMEWORK PRINCIPLES

Thinkers have pondered about the nature of childhood and the process of socialization since the dawn of civilization. Plato's ideas about guiding young children in state-run schools were as unacceptably radical to his contemporaries as Gandhi's ideas about craft-based basic education were centuries later to his peers. Early childhood education was pioneered by Western intellectuals such as Rousseau, Froebel, Dewey, Montessori, and others. Their concepts have paved the path for sensory and practical activities to become part of the curriculum. Play, art, rhythm, rhyme, movement, and active involvement have all been incorporated into classroom dynamics as a result upon their insistence and understanding of their relevance. Indian philosophers have also been influenced by their observations of young children and their discoveries regarding the child's interest in various things and activities. The pioneers to design an impactful child-centered approach in Indian education were Gandhi, Tagore, GijubhaiBadheka, and TarabaiModak.

1.2 POLICIES FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD CARE AND EDUCATION (ECCE)

Children's well-being was a key component of India's development policies. For the first time in 1968, the Ganga Sharan Sinha Committee proposed that the government spend extensively on preschool education (Swaminathan, 1998). The National Policy for Children (1974), which served as the foundation for India's Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) system, paid special attention to early childhood education. ECCE was recognized as "a vital

element in the human resource strategy, a feeder and support programme for primary education, and a support service for working women" in the 1986 National Policy on Education (Working group on Development of children for the Eleventh Five Year Plan, 2007-2012). The importance of early childhood care and education has been recognized in the 11th Five Year Plan as the stage that creates the foundation for a child's lifelong growth and attainment of her full potential, and directs that "all children be provided at least one year of preschool education in the age group of 3- 6 years" (NECCEP, 2012).

1.2.1 Existing Indian Policies for ECCE

The existing policies for ECCE are summarised as below, with highlights from each of them.

- Committee on Early Childhood Education (1953) recommended for the first time including pre-primary classes in Indian primary schools, realising the limitations of leaving all responsibilities on parents to educate in early childhood.
- Committee on Child Care (1963-64) suggested a total makeover of preschool education and included midday meals in their programmes.
- Kothari Commission (1964) recommended establishing state-level pre-primary education centres.
- National Policy on Children (1974) stated that, it would be the State's policy to provide adequate assistance to children before, during, and after birth, as well as throughout their growth period... The state gradually will expand the scope of such services so that, within a reasonable time, all children in the country have access to the best possible conditions for a balanced development including free and compulsory education till the age of fourteen.
- The National Policy of Education (NPE), (1986) considered ECCE to be a critical component of human resource development plan, as a feeder and support programme for primary education, and as a service for working women. The Policy placed a special emphasis on investing in the development of young children, particularly those from populations where first-generation learners are the majority. Recognizing the holistic nature of child development, ECCE programmes were to be broadened and made more child-centered, with an emphasis on play and the child's individuality. The goal was to fully integrate childcare and pre-primary education in order to supplement and strengthen primary education.
- National Plan of Action (NPA) (1992)

It focused on safety, survival, development, and progress of children. Following the NPA, the State Plan of Action for Children (SPAC) was created. Time-bound goals and strategies were established for each of the areas covered by NPA and SPAC.

- National Nutrition Policy (1993)
The policy recognized that children under the age of six were nutritionally susceptible and one of the "high-risk" categories, thus they were given top priority in policy articulations and programmatic interventions for particularly vulnerable groups; the National Nutrition Mission (NNM) was formed to address the problems.
- Yashpal Committee (1993) advocated reducing load on children in school and improve quality of learning including capability for life-long self-learning and skill formulation. Also, the use of electronic media in the report titled 'learning without burden' was recommended.
- The National Population Policy (2000) focused on children's health as a means of achieving population stability.
- National Policy for the Empowerment of Women (2001) although was meant for women empowerment, did focus on childcare facilities, crèches at work places, educational institutions, and homes.
- National Health Policy (NHP) (2002) concentrated on reducing IMR to 30/1000 live births and MMR to 100/100,000 by the year 2010.
- The (1992) Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) reflected India's commitment to children, leading to the development of a policy to draft a National Charter for Children, ensuring that no child goes hungry, uneducated, or without medical care.
- National Plan for Action (2005) incorporated universalization of ECCE in its goals with specific importance for care, protection, and development opportunities for children below 3 years, along with adequate preschool learning opportunities for 3-6 year olds.
- National Curriculum Framework (2005) put a lot of emphasis on holistic development of children, for preparing them for schooling. It also advocated for play-based, developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- National early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Policy (2013) was formed with a vision to promote inclusive, equitable and contextualized opportunities for optimal

development and active learning for children below 6. The policy focuses on preschool learning for young children's holistic development.

The key areas are –

- a. Sensory and Perceptual Development: Visual, auditory, and kinaesthetic encounters stimulate all five senses.
- b. Physical, Health, and Motor Development: This included gross motor skills, fine motor skills, fine muscle coordination with dexterity, eye-hand coordination, sense of balance, physical coordination, and awareness of space and direction, as well as nutrition, health status and practices for children.
- c. Language Development: Language skills development encompassed the crucial LSRW- listening, speaking, reading and writing activities, which can help a child become literate. These skills can be developed, sometimes simultaneously, in a joyful way at a developmentally appropriate age.
- d. Cognitive Development: Developing concepts of number, its operations, spatial sense, skills for sequential thinking, critical thinking, observing, reasoning, problem solving, etc. were the focus of this area.
- e. Development of Creative and Aesthetic Appreciation: This area explored different forms of expressions in activities of arts-dance, music, drama, etc.
- f. Personal, Social and Emotional Development: In this, developing awareness about self, self-control, life-skills, habit formation, curiosity, social relationships, group interaction, expression of feelings, acceptance of others' feelings were included to make a child a wholesome individual.

NCERT (2019) in its pre-school curriculum focuses on three developmental goals that encompass all the five domains. Preschool aims to help children become engaged learners, think critically, be creative, collaborate, communicate, and connect with their immediate environment, all of which are closely related to early reading and numeracy skills. Preschool education aims to foster a child's overall personality development through play, manipulation of concrete material for experimentation, and exploration. It emphasises a print-rich environment in which young children can practise core reading skills in their daily lives, as well as age and developmentally appropriate pedagogical practises of essential concepts and

literacy abilities. In the preschool, this builds the groundwork for literacy learning. It also suggests how to arrange educational activities for young children in the age of three to six years, in a way that is consistent with the goals.

The National Education Policy 2020

Recognizing the rapid change in knowledge, as well as the employment landscape and ecosystem, the most recent National Education Policy 2020 focuses on how children ‘learn to learn’. The gap between current learning outcomes and what is expected in relevant times must be overcome by fundamental reforms that ensure the highest quality, equity, and integrity throughout the system, beginning with early childhood care.

The goal of the new national policy is to establish a world-class education system by 2040, with high-quality education for all students regardless of social or economic status. The implementation of prior education initiatives has mostly focused on concerns of access and equity. This Policy addresses the unfinished agenda of the National Policy on Education of 1986, as amended in 1992 (NPE 1986/92). The Right of Children has been a substantial advancement from the previous Policy of 1986/92. Recognizing the rapid change in knowledge, as well as the employment landscape and ecosystem, the most recent National Education Policy 2020 focuses on how children ‘learn to learn’. The gap between current learning outcomes and what is expected in relevant times must be overcome by fundamental reforms that ensure the highest quality, equity, and integrity throughout the system, beginning with early childhood care. 5+3+3+4 is the new pedagogical and curricular structure, whereas 10+2 was the old structure. Three years of Anganwadi/pre-school/Balvatika for children aged 3 to 6 are included in the first five years of foundational education. This is the first time that children in this age group have been included in this policy, which is critical because over 85% of a child’s cumulative brain development happens before the age of 6. In order to promote healthy brain development and growth, it is critical to capitalise on this early period with appropriate care and brain stimulation. Unfortunately, millions of young children, particularly those from low-income do not have access to high-quality ECCE.

The policy emphasises that a considerable percentage of pupils in primary school, estimated to be over 5 crores, lack core literacy and numeracy skills. The NEP, 2020, also emphasises the importance of confronting this situation head-on and quickly, so that basic learning can be done in schools and all children may benefit from a high-quality education. Foundational literacy and numeracy achievement for all children must become a national priority right

away. Students, as well as their schools, teachers, parents, and communities, must be instantly supported and encouraged in order to assist in the achievement of this vital objective and mission, which serves as the foundation for all future learning. Recognizing the importance of basic skills in national development, the 'AtmaNirbhar Bharat' campaign established a National Foundational Reading and Numeracy Mission, NIPUN Bharat with the goal of ensuring that every child in the country achieves foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) in Grade 3 by 2026-27. A robust curricular framework, engaging learning material – both online and offline, learning outcomes, teacher capacity training, and their measuring indices, assessment procedures, and so on will be designed to accomplish this.

Not so long ago, scholars in Developmental Psychology and Child Development such as Piaget, Bruner, and Vygotsky have emphasised play and activity as the child's natural modalities of learning, based on their research. We now know that these programmes should be built on an awareness of the learning patterns that characterise the core nature of childhood, thanks to the discoveries and philosophies of these practitioners and philosophers. The following basic principles must be understood by the ECCE teacher.

- Play as the basis for learning
- Art as the basis for education
- Recognition of the special features of children's thinking

1.3 PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION AND LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

Language development is critical in the preschool years because it lays the groundwork for subsequent learning. Listening and comprehension, oral skills/speaking and communicating, vocabulary development, pre-literacy/emergent literacy skills such as phonological awareness, print awareness and concepts; letter-sound correspondence; recognition of letters; building words and sentences and early writing and introduction to language of school transaction – all are included.

Language is a powerful instrument that plays a critical role in our understanding of the world. Our worlds are shaped by our words. All of our attempts to make sense of our experiences in the world—perceiving, remembering, attending, comprehending, and thinking—are inextricably related to language (Lindfors, 1991).

Language is crucial for communication, information exchange, the development of reading abilities, reading comprehension, and later in life, scholastic performance. Despite this, language acquisition and experiences in ECCE programmes receive minimal attention.

Children will continue to speak two languages if they believe it is beneficial. Language acquisition is dynamic; it must be meaningful and practical (Collier, 1995a; Grosjean, 1982; Krashen, 1996; McLaughlin, 1984).

Language affects how children see, recall, comprehend, and make sense of their surroundings. According to Henry Sweet, an English Phonetician and a Linguist (Chand, 2017), 'Language is the expression of ideas through the combination of speech-sounds into words. The combining of words into sentences corresponds to the combination of concepts into thoughts.' Language necessitates the coordination and integration of a wide range of talents, functions, and skills. We have the natural ability to learn languages. Language development in children follows a predictable pattern, based on the age at which they achieve their milestones.

1.4 LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

The process by which we develop the ability to perceive and understand language, as well as produce and use words and sentences to communicate, is known as language acquisition. During the critical phase, children must be exposed to language input (Chand, 2017). Non-humans do not communicate via language; hence it is one of the classic human characteristics. Humans utilise language for social contact, hence in order for children to learn a language, they must interact socially. Children learn language through interactions with their parents, teachers, and classmates, and it unfolds in stages, starting with understanding and progressing to one-word utterances, two-word sentences, and so on.

Language acquisition requires exposure to language, and auditory and acoustic inputs are required to activate the language faculty in young children. There are two types of language acquisition: first language acquisition and second language acquisition. Learning a first language is something that every child may accomplish at home without needing official instruction.

Learning a second language, on the other hand, is normally done at school or afterwards. It's fascinating to learn how children acquire language so quickly and at such a young age. They accomplish this through a subconscious procedure in which they are unaware of any grammatical norms.

Behaviourist theory, Noam Chomsky's innateness theory, Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, and social interaction theory by Vygotsky, are considered major theories of language acquisition. According to the Behaviourist view, "Infants learn spoken language from other human role models through a process involving imitation, rewards, and practice. Stimuli and incentives are provided by human role models in an infant's environment" (Cooter & Reutzler, 2004). When a child tries to communicate, or imitates noises or speech patterns, they are frequently complimented and rewarded for their efforts. As a result, praise and affection are the benefits. Human and animal learning is a habit-forming process. According to this approach, a highly complicated learning activity can be learned by breaking it down into little routines. These responses, whether correct or erroneous, are rewarded or punished, respectively (Hubbard, Jones, Thornton & Wheeler, 1983). As a result, it is obvious that learning in childhood is influenced by inculcating habits.

Noam Chomsky has made a significant contribution to language learning, particularly in the area of second language acquisition. One of the fundamental features of human language, according to Chomsky (1956), is its creativeness. We can generate an infinite number of correct sentences that have never been produced before in the world. According to him, a child's language achievements are too high to be described in terms of any form of environmental input. Children hear a limited amount of speech, much of it incomprehensible, but they build an elaborate set of rules for constructing a limitless number of sentences quickly and consistently. Their ability is significantly more extensive than their experience. Chomsky claimed that humans have an abstract system of unconscious knowledge about sentence structure and word order. It also includes knowledge about meaning and sound. The properties of these knowledge systems are composed of principles and parameters-what is called 'Universal Grammar'- principles being universal to all human languages with cross-language skills. More time should be spent on practicing language skills than explaining and memorizing grammar rules. Grammar should only be a part of language education so that it does not become a barrier to children's language learning or the Achilles' heel. Chomsky's first book 'syntactic structures' (1957) states that children are born with an innate ability to learn any human language. Every child possesses LAD-language acquisition device, which encodes major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child's brain. Children can learn new words and apply the syntactic structures from LAD to form sentences. Chomsky points out that a child could not possibly learn a language through imitation alone because the language spoken around him is highly irregular-adult's speech, that is often broken and sometimes even ungrammatical. This is known as the Natural

Acquisition Theory, mainly deals with the acquisition of the native language, but can be applied to other languages. The innate theory states that there is a critical period for language acquisition, during which environmental exposure is needed to stimulate the innate trait (Chand, 2017). A new study in Toronto says that bilingual children perform better at cognitive tests than monolingual ones (Bialystok, 2012). Bilingual children develop separate language systems for each language and those don't interact (Keshavarz & Ingram, 2002).

Cognitive theory (Piaget, 2009) points out that linguistic development is only one facet of a child's entire intellectual growth. Cognitive thinking is concerned with the mental changes that occur as a result of cognitive processes in a person's mind. The development of cognition matches language acquisition. The thought and language develop parallels. The processes involved in learning are-observing, categorising, making generalisations, making decisions, and solving problems which help learners to make use of the information presented. The children arrive at school with prior knowledge, abilities, and experiences relevant to the learning settings, which allow them to participate actively in their learning process (Wilburg, 2010).

All components of an individual's learning, according to cognitive theorists, are the consequences of what the learners have discovered in their own mental process –it is not through observable behaviour (Warren, 2012). The main stages of Piaget's cognitive development theory are sensory - motor period (birth to two years), pre - operational period (two years to seven), concrete operational (seven to eleven years) and formal operational period (eleven to adulthood).

The pre – operational period is crucial and children learn very fast, especially their language, memory and imagination. This is where the child begins to represent the world with words and images. Vygotsky's social interaction theory states that children can be influenced by their environment as well as the language input they receive from their care-givers.

The language acquisition is influenced by the interaction of factors - physical, linguistic, cognitive and social. Vygotsky's sociocultural model suggests that a child observes an interaction between other people and the behaviour develops in the child. She learns the best when interacting with those around to solve a problem.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is basically learning occurring within. The distance between a child's ability to perform a task on her own and the ability to perform under the guidance of an adult/peer. Vygotsky believed humans use tools that develop from a culture, such as speech and writing, to mediate their social environments, and the internalization of these tools led to higher thinking skills (Crawford, 1996). Another

important concept Vygotsky gave was of scaffolding. It means a temporary support given to a child by MKO (More Knowledgeable One), usually parents or teachers, which enables a child to perform a task until such time that the child can perform the task independently.

Krashen (1985) also believed that crucial changes happen around age 5. It was also derived that productive/expressive language skills (speaking and writing) develop from the receptive skills (reading and listening), which can help for language acquisition immensely, according to his “input hypothesis”.

1.5 STAGES OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT IN PRESCHOOL EDUCATION

Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing are the four basic language abilities/skills (LSRW). Learning a language encompasses acquiring these four skills. This set of skills are very important in using the language successfully. Speaking and writing are productive/expressive skills, whereas listening and reading are receptive skills. A teacher may easily recognise a child who is not speaking or writing, but a child who is unable to listen or read properly may not be seen until later. Auditory skills include listening and speaking, whereas visual abilities include reading and writing. All four of these abilities are intertwined and necessary for learning a language. They happen practically simultaneously, not sequentially.

The importance of the early years of a child's life has been confirmed by neuroscience research, especially because 90 percent of brain development has already occurred by the time the child is six years old. As a result, whatever experiences the young child has attained in this time, has a significant influence on her future learning. The foundations of language are laid here. The pace of development, particularly cerebral development, is the highest in the early years of life, and environmental enrichment or deprivation has the greatest influence during this era of the organism's most active growth.

For maximal learning, Piaget's cognitive development theory emphasises grasping the preoperational period in a child between the ages of 2 and 7. During this golden time, children attempted to express the world through words, images, and drawings. The children are learning quicker than predicted because of evolutionary acceleration of many skills such as motor, cognitive, emotional, and so on, in 4+ learners. With over thirty years of experience in working with children, the researcher believes that children who are the first-generation English learners and whose mother tongue is not English arrive at school with little print exposure in English at home. Because of their low reading levels, they are unable to complete

their coursework successfully. There is a significant distinction to be made between education and learning. Adults have no idea that young children who even pretend to read at home are more likely to improve their reading skills later in life. The books can be in their mother tongue or in English, but the habits and attitudes they adopt when they are young are crucial. Reading ability has less to do with age and more to do with a child's linguistic abilities, such as how much she was read to, how much she played with words and books, and how much she pretended to be a reader while playing with language. A child gains contact with the outside world through reading, which is a fantastic achievement for someone so young (NIPUN Bharat, 2021).

1.6 ENGLISH AS A GLOBAL LANGUAGE

English is a global language and one of the top five most spoken languages worldwide. It is considered the language of 'global literacy', necessary for international communication, higher education, science, business, media, entertainment and publications (McKay, 2002). This language is spoken by around 427 million people who are native speakers (Crystal, 1997). English is spoken by around two billion people as a first, second, or foreign language (Crystal, 2008). As a result, English spoken by about 30% of the world's population, and the figure is growing. It is used for communication, trade, education, and exchanging ideas and culture all over the world as a vehicular language. Surprisingly, almost 80% of English speakers are non-native speakers (Crystal,2003).

In the twenty-first century, the ability of proficient reading in English language is being considered as the coinage of the knowledge economy. According to UNESCO Institute of Statistics (UIS),2017 report, two-thirds (68%) of children (262 million) out of 387 million are enrolled in school and will complete the last grade of primary school but will not achieve minimum reading proficiency levels. This research demonstrates how education systems throughout the world are failing to offer excellent education and safe learning environments for children. The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (2018) findings for reading proficiency, reflect that in the digital age, the rising bar of success in education puts even more pressure on educational systems to lay solid foundations. Technology has the potential to super-empower individuals with superior knowledge and skills while leaving further behind others with inadequate foundations.

According to a recent World Bank research, 53 percent of children in low- and middle-income nations suffer from 'learning poverty', which is defined as the inability to read and comprehend a basic sentence by the age of ten. In India, it affects 55 percent of children in

the late elementary school years. The situation is that all of a child's fundamental to advanced information will be predominantly available in English throughout his or her lifetime, making it critical that any child, everywhere, be able to read in English and not miss out on education due to a lack of this understanding.

1.6.1 Importance of English Language Education in India

With about 250 million school-aged children and 9.2 million teachers, India has made tremendous progress toward achieving universal access to education up to the basic level. However, studies have shown that simply guaranteeing that pupils attend school does not automatically result in improved learning. Today, there is a considerable national concern over children's inadequate learning levels at various stages in the schooling. Research has shown that once children fall behind in foundational reading and numeracy, they tend to maintain flat learning curves for years, unable to catch up. This is because children are supposed to 'learn to read' and develop foundational abilities until they reach third grade. Children are supposed to be able to 'read to learn' after third grade. The learning gap will widen if this does not happen, it will increase even more in subsequent years as language textbook materials and mathematics concepts become more complicated and abstract. Children who are forced to learn in a language they do not understand suffer far greater harm. India has been heavily affected by English in our globalised society. In addition, the colonial history has left an indelible effect on the way our country speaks. Many parents want to teach their children to be bilingual in order to prepare them for the changing world. The desire for a better life and a better career for their children motivates parents to choose an English medium education for their children. With the start of the globalisation movement in the business world, English came to be viewed as a critical tool for success and found its way into our schools.

Multilingual people have greater levels of cognitive brain function and are better at solving issues, planning, and other intellectually demanding tasks, according to research (Chatel, 2014). According to Jayasundara (2015) and Ramirez and Kuhl (2016), the optimum strategy for parenting bilingual/multilingual children is to begin using a second or third language as soon as the new born child begins to acquire her first language. Furthermore, Ramirez and Kuhl's (2016) research found that children learn best when they begin learning two languages at a young age through high-quality interactions with actual human beings and are supported in both languages throughout their toddler, preschool, and school years. Our education system is challenging due to school options and multilingualism; thus, it is critical that non-

native English speakers are taught with a complete awareness of their cultural differences and English language weaknesses. It's not only about learning new words or grammar in English; it's about being able to communicate effectively. The minutes of Macaulay (February 2, 1835) formally set the path for English in India. On March 7, 1835, Governor-General Bentick issued the required order to make English the medium of instruction in all educational institutions. The University Grants Commission (UGC), chaired by Dr S Radhakrishnan issued a statement in 1948 that stated, *"Our students who are undergoing training at schools that will admit them either to university or to a vocation must acquire sufficient mastery of English to give them success in the treasures of knowledge."*

The Kothari Commission (1964) noted that 'English has to be taught primarily as a "Language of Comprehension" rather than a "Literary Language" in the future,' according to the Official Language Commission (1955), to establish in pupils studying it a faculty for comprehending compositions in English language.' As English will continue to be needed as a "library language" in the sphere of higher education for a long time to come, a firm foundation in the language will have to be created at the school stage.'

According to National Curriculum Framework (NCF) (2005), it is crucial to understand the intrinsic linguistic potential of children while teaching a language, as well as to recall that languages are socio-culturally produced and evolve in our day-to-day interactions. The liberalisation of our economy ushered in the arrival of international corporations, resulting in a slew of new work prospects that needed a strong command of the English language. Students began learning English in order to address practical demands related to job hunting. Spoken English institutions and English medium schools began to spring up all across the country. Academicians and politicians were forced to reconsider their syllabuses and pedagogies as a result of this predicament. Exam-oriented instruction, rote memorization, and a lack of individual attention were some of the reasons why pupils struggled to learn English. According to the National Knowledge Commission's (2007) study, the situation is ironic. For more than a century, English has been a component of our education. However, English is out of reach for the majority of our youth, resulting in extremely uneven access. Even now, just around 1% of our population speaks it as a second or third language, let alone as a first.... However, NKC feels that the time has come to teach English as a language in schools to our young people, regular people. Early effort in this area would aid in the development of a more inclusive society and the transformation of India into a knowledge society. According to NCERT (2007), the All-India School Education Survey revealed an intriguing fact about how English medium schools are increasing. The key points are outlined below.

Between 1993 and 2002, the percentage of schools teaching English as a "first language" increased from 5% to 10% in elementary schools and from 7% to 13% in upper primary schools. More states offer English as a second language than any other language. English is said to be offered as a medium of instruction in 33 to 35 states, which is more than any other language. As a result of the aforementioned facts, we can notice a significant transition in India from regional to English as a medium of education. Non-native English speakers now outnumber native English speakers all across the world. English is utilised as a medium of instruction at 15.49 percent of elementary schools, 21.08 percent of upper primary schools, 28.73 percent of secondary schools, and 33.06 percent of higher secondary schools. In the seventh survey, the similar figures were 12.98 percent, 18.25 percent, 25.84 percent, and 33.59 percent, respectively (7th survey NCERT).

Many areas of India have extremely low literacy rates. Between 2012 and 2013, children's reading levels did not improve considerably (ASER, 2013). In many situations, children's reading abilities have deteriorated over time to the point that they are unable to read at levels well below their grade level. For example, since 2009, the percentage of pupils in Standard 5 who could read a Standard 2-level book has steadily fallen, reaching only 47% in 2013.

In government schools, the percentage drops even further, to 41.1 percent. In Andhra Pradesh, for example, over 31% of students in Standard 3 are unable to read a single word, and 48% are unable to read a Standard 1-level text. In Karnataka, roughly 37% of children in Standard 3 are unable to read a single word, while 62% are unable to read a Standard 1-level text.

There are roughly 447 languages spoken in India, 75 of which are institutional languages and 22 of which are formally utilised by various states (Paul, Simons, & Fennig, 2013). The Three Language Formula is the nation's language-of-education policy, which reflects this multilingualism. By the completion of secondary school, all students must have learned three languages: one as a medium of instruction (L1), one as a second language (L2), and one as a third language (L3) (Department of Elementary Education and Literacy & Department of Secondary and Higher Education, 2013).

The school determines the order in which the languages are taught. English is more likely to be used as a medium of instruction in private schools than in other types of schools, followed by Hindi and a regional language. Government schools are more likely to employ the state's official language as the medium of instruction (such as Kannada in Karnataka or Telugu in Andhra Pradesh), followed by English and Hindi. Furthermore, the potential of socioeconomic mobility associated with English language and literacy abilities has sparked a

boom in parental and community demand for English-medium schools (Azam, Chin, & Prakash, 2010; Coleman, 2011). However, there is no indication that students who attend these low-resource schools learn English any better or quicker than those who attend schools where the medium of instruction is a regional language (Mohanty&Misra, 2000). Furthermore, no scientific guidelines exist to explain when and how English should be introduced to improve outcomes in regional as well as English. Given the current scenario of multilingualism, non-alphabetic writing systems, and limited resources, reading research is crucial to uncovering the process of learning acquisition specific to these environments. Such formative, pre-intervention research is critical for improving the quality of rigorous impact evaluations, especially the theory of change on which these evaluations are based (White, 2014). Furthermore, by providing a theory of change that is relevant for educational contexts in the developing world, and by supporting the development of effective reading programmes and policy decision making, a science-based learning framework is highly likely to improve the quality of learning outcomes in children.

1.7 READING SKILL AND ITS IMPORTANCE

Reading is a very recent invention, dating from roughly 6000 years ago, whereas speech dates from six million years ago. It's also worth recalling that just a few people could read until approximately a century ago. Reading has just become so common in the last century, and it is now a must for many daily activities. Reading is a difficult ability that needs both reading and comprehending content at the same time (NIFL, 2001).

“Reading is perhaps the hardest thing we teach individuals in the education system. There are certain children who will have a difficult time.” stated Brian Wandell, Stanford University Psychologist. Humans appear to be the only species capable of recording their communication—a tremendous talent. Furthermore, we appear to be the only species capable of translating its transmission into another media. As a result, we have identified reading as a unique skill. Our brains are wired to understand spoken language, but learning to read is a different story. No one is born with the ability to read. Reading is mostly a visual activity. It is also learning to correlate the printed word with its meaning and to recognise the sounds of letters in words. It entails deciphering the meaning of a paragraph, which may necessitate varying degrees of thought.

According to the report shared by the National Research Council (1998), our brains have to process a lot of things at once when we read; it has to relate letters to sounds and arrange

those sounds in the correct order. Reading is a fully learned ability that is critical to a child's growth.

Cunningham and Rose (2002), advocated that if a child avails rich language experiences early in life, the brain becomes more receptive to acquisition of reading skills, such as phonemic awareness, decoding and word recognition. If a child is read to in the early years, when she learns to read, her brain continues to develop more pathways for language and cognition. The pathways become well-travelled, and the acquisition of good reading skills can lead to many greater abilities. Strong consistent reading instruction can alter the functioning of the brain. Two important variables can help strengthen neural pathways to enable children to become strong and successful readers:

- Deliberate practice: Children need to hear and read many different types of texts often.
- Intense instruction: To prepare the brain for gradually complex texts in school, children require intense instruction of fundamental reading skills such as phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, and comprehension.

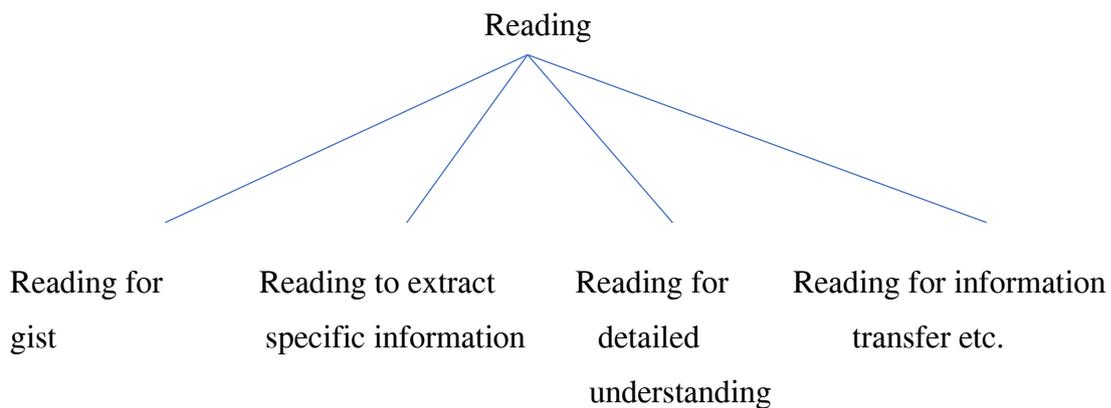
Reading allows us to connect with the mind and universe of another person, which is a rare ability. It is a pleasurable and gratifying activity that allows us to engage in lifetime exploration and discovery. Learning ideas, feelings, emotions, experiences, and concepts is what reading is all about. Reading is the most significant study aid for a child's education, almost like a magic wand with which a child can obtain knowledge and explore the wonderland of books, becoming self-sufficient and confident as a result. It is without a doubt the most effective approach for a young child to absorb new experiences. The capacity to read is very crucial to a child's progress and the health of our society, according to policymakers and educational professionals. Reading is the most common way to gain knowledge. If children do not learn to read, they will drag a country backwards on the road to growth, bringing poverty as a result.

National Policy for Elementary Education (1986). states that, *“A warm welcoming and encouraging approach in which all concerned share a solicitude for the needs of the child, is the best motivation for the child to attend school and learn. A child-centred and activity-based process of learning should be adopted at the primary stage. First generation learners should be allowed to set their own pace and be given supplementary remedial instruction. The availability of books at low prices is indispensable for people’s education. Measures will be taken to improve the quality of books, promote the reading habit and encourage creative writing.”*

Some children learn to read on their own, many others are taught by a family member or a preschool teacher before they begin formal schooling. Teaching children to read is a tough challenge; books, resources, and motivating reports and policies will not succeed; only teachers who engage with children and encourage them to take up reading as a lifelong pastime will succeed. It also necessitates that young students listen to precise pronunciations and utilise the words they have learnt in meaningful ways in their interactions. Many long-term studies on reading achievement have found that children who do not get off to a solid start with literacy (reading and writing) do not catch up. Despite the fact that reading is one of the most researched areas of education, the way it is currently taught does not represent the scientific view of what works best.

According to Sinha (2003), establishing mass literacy is a critical goal in India. The disparity between what is desirable and what is realised in terms of mass literacy, on the other hand, is a major source of concern. Despite an increase in the percentage of literate people in the population, the absolute number of illiterates continues to rise. Many people who consider themselves to be literate are unable to comprehend what they read. Given this context, it is critical to explore what happens in elementary school because this is where most Indian children first encounter literacy and, as a result, rely on schools to become literate. This clearly demonstrates why literacy is important (reading and writing). For the vast majority of our future literate citizens, schools are their only option. As a result, we must pay close attention and ensure that this occurs in a well-guided manner at the entry level. Children who fail to improve in reading by the end of first grade are at a higher chance of failing in other subjects throughout school, according to research (McIntosh, Horner, Boland, and Good, 2006). They keep performing poorly until they lose interest in school and give up trying. The ability to decode meaning from a text is defined as reading skill. It is the ability to grasp, interpret, and decode written language in a broad sense. To become a proficient reader, you must have these skills. Reading skills can be classified into skills -macro skills and sub-skills/micro skills (Harmer, 1991).

The figure below shows the macro skills.



We read different types of materials, like a story, a newspaper, a letter or study material. Each material is looked into/read differently. These ways of different reading are called reading sub-skills or micro skills. The main micro-sub skills are-skimming and scanning. The main reading methods for teaching reading are the phonic method, the word whole or look-and-say method, and the sentence method (Schonell, 1961).

1.7.1 The components of Reading skills

According to the National Reading Panel, USA (2000), there are five cornerstones of reading,



Figure 1.1 Pillars of Reading

1. **Phonemic / Phonological Awareness:** This is the ability to recognise, consider, and work with specific sounds in words. It is the best predictor of reading success because it teaches children how to understand the link between letters (graphemes) and sounds (phonemes) in order to become effective readers.
2. **Phonics:** This approach of learning to read and write English focuses on the sounds that the letters make. The alphabet serves as the foundation here. It stresses the decoding of graphemes (letters) into phonemes as reading (sounds).
3. **Vocabulary:** This is a term that refers to the words that we need to know in order to communicate successfully. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are the four types of vocabulary. Vocabulary is extremely important in the reading process and contributes to a reader's comprehension considerably.
4. **Fluency:** It is the capacity to read quickly, accurately, and expressively. To understand what they read, learners are expected to read fluently, whether quietly or loudly.
5. **Comprehension:** This is the process of understanding and interpreting what has been read. Students must be able to (1) decode what they read; (2) establish connections between what they read and what they already know; and (3) think carefully about what they have read in order to effectively understand written information. It is perhaps the most complex skill, and the ultimate goal in reading.

1.7.2Pre -reading skills

According to Osei, et. al (2016), the pre-reading can be defined as a child's knowledge of reading prior to entering kindergarten.

The six most important abilities are:

- **Narrative abilities:** the ability to describe objects and events as well as tell stories.
- **Phonological Awareness:** The ability to hear and play with smaller sounds in words.
- **Letter Knowledge:** Understanding how letters differ from one another, understanding their names and sounds, and being able to recognise them in a variety of situations.
- **Print Motivation:** Having a passion for books and reading them.
- **Vocabulary:** Knowing what things are called.

- **Print Awareness:** Noticing print, knowing how to handle a book, and following words on a page are examples of print awareness.

1.7.3 Challenges faced by English Medium schools in India

During early speech and language development, children learn to read and write. Hence, this emergent literacy stage begins at birth and continues to their preschool years. If children are to read and write in English, they need to learn words, which, in the early years come from their home environment. Children learn differently due to their behaviour, motivation, achievement, personality, self-esteem and last but not the least, the teaching method.

A report titled “Where India Reads 2017-18” on urban private schools reveals the level of reading in children. The NGO Stones2Milestones researched on the reading ability of around 20,000 students across 20 states in India, in 106 private unaided English medium schools. Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) India, pointed out that children attained fluency and comprehension in reading English only in class 6, which ideally should be attained at the end of class 3. Only 12.5% in class 4 and only 2.7 % in classes 5 and 6, were reading at an age-appropriate level. So, to turn India into a ‘nation of readers’, we need to pay urgent attention to this learning deficit. Obviously, children whose parents cannot read, write, or talk in English will be at a disadvantage compared to those who grow up in literate households. The parents rely on teachers to provide the necessary reading input. With extra importance being given to writing in our schools, reading does tend to get sidestepped. The teaching of English as a second language becomes more complex and intricate in a multilingual society like ours.

One of the causes for children's lack of reading ability is that primary and pre-primary school teachers are not always properly qualified and competent. Because of how s/he learned earlier, the teacher teaches English as a topic. The pressure of completing the syllabus causes the instructor to neglect the fundamental instruction of reading in the classroom. Rarely does a teacher concentrate on students who learn to read English just within the confines of the classroom. Many teachers have no idea how to get their students to read in class. Teachers do not engage with the students in English, depriving them of what may be their sole opportunity to listen to and talk in English. A child eventually learns to copy from the blackboard and gets some English knowledge by memorising answers. The element about comprehension is badly lacking in this case.

The formal translation approach, grammar-based method, and exam-oriented teaching methods take away the fun of learning English from young students. There is no spontaneity, enthusiasm, or interest in the classroom; only mechanical instruction. By failing to initiate reading intriguing and age-appropriate material in the classroom, the teacher fails to instil a love for reading. Struggling children do not have the opportunity to catch up, and as a result, they accumulate learning. Instead of keeping up with the pace of a child's learning, the pace is fixed to cover the curriculum. Because there are no proper teaching methods for reading at the entrance level in our English language schools, it is a sorry state of affairs. To begin reading with comprehension for our senior kindergarten pupils, the researcher believes that a lot of effort and tactics on the part of the instructor are required.

1.8 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Foundational learning is the backbone of a child's lifelong learning. The fundamental skills of being able to read with comprehension, write, and perform basic arithmetic operations are essential for a child to succeed after grade 3. National Education policy, 2020 states that, "Our highest priority must be to achieve universal foundational literacy and numeracy in primary school and beyond by 2025. The rest of this Policy will be largely irrelevant for such a large portion of our students if this most basic learning (i.e., reading, writing, and arithmetic at the foundational level) is not first achieved."

The World Children Report (1999) stated that nearly a billion people enter the 21st century unable to read a book or write their names. All over the world the reading habit of children is waning. A nation's achievement of basic quality education depends on good reading habits of children and adults. The reading habit is best formed at a young impressionable age in school, but once formed it can last one's life. (Choudhary B. K. et al, 1990).

The National Initiative for Proficiency in Reading with Understanding and Numeracy (NIPUN Bharat, 2021) guidelines for implementation of foundational literacy and numeracy cover key technical aspects of foundational literacy and numeracy as well as administrative aspects for effectively setting up an implementation mechanism at the national, state, district, block, and school levels. It was created after a series of in-depth discussions with implementation partners and specialists in the field. It has also been given careful consideration in order to make it adaptable and collaborative. As a result, the National FLN Mission will be implemented using and strengthening current mainstream structures, and will take a comprehensive approach with active participation from all stakeholders. The National Mission on Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (2021) aims to achieve universal

foundational literacy and numeracy in primary schools by 2025, and to ensure that all children obtain grade-level reading, writing, and math competencies. One of the mission's goals is to help children become motivated, independent, and engaged readers and writers with strong comprehension and long-term reading and writing skills.

The first six years of life are critical since the rate of development in these years is more rapid than any other stage of development. Research in neuro-science confirms the importance of early years in a child's life, particularly since 90% of brain development has already taken place by the time a child is six years of age (National Early Childhood Care and Education Curriculum framework, 2005).

Reading is integral to many of our day-to-day activities and is perhaps the most crucial skill learnt in school. It is almost impossible to imagine how a child can have access to the content of a subject without reading. Children who do not learn to read during the early grades usually struggle with reading throughout their schooling (Juel,1988; Snow, Burns & Griffin, 1998; Stanovich,1986). The better and wider the background of the pupils' understood language, the greater their chance of success in learning to read, irrespective of other conditions. Hence, learning to read must be preceded and accompanied by a background of language experiences obtained through home and school. Stories must be told and read, pictures must be shown and books provided so that a variety of talk about everyday situations will produce a wide vocabulary of common words (Schonell,1961). Reading is one of the most important skills that students must master to be successful educationally, occupationally, and socially. It enables students not only for learning, careers, and pleasure, but also for language acquisition (Heba, 2019). Reading is more than just understanding sounds, words, phrases, and the abstract components of language that linguists may study. Reading, like hearing, entails decoding and generating meaning from words. The reader brings a wealth of knowledge to this active and complex process (Goodman and Goodman, 1994).

Stuart and Stainthorp (2016) discussed that every act of reading (R) involves recognizing and understanding written words (D, decoding) combined with understanding the sentences and texts the written words comprise (C, linguistic comprehension). It was also stated that reading is the result of the output from two sets of very complex, separable but linked processes (decoding, linguistic comprehension).

Sadly, upper grade children cannot attain proficient levels of reading, because once poor reading trajectories are set, it is almost impossible to reverse the damage (Francis et. al.,1996; Good et. al., 2009).

According to Snow, C. & Burns, M. (1998), reading skill is acquired in a relatively predictable way by children who have normal or above-average language skills; have had experiences in early childhood that fostered motivation and provided exposure to literacy in use; get information about the nature of print through opportunities to learn letters and to recognize the internal structure of spoken words, as well as explanations about the contrasting nature of spoken and written language; and attend schools that provide effective reading instruction and opportunities to practice reading. There are three potential stumbling blocks that are known to throw children off course on the journey to skilled reading. The first obstacle, which arises at the outset of reading acquisition, is difficulty understanding and using the alphabetic principle – the idea that written spellings systematically represent spoken words. It is hard to comprehend connected text if word recognition is inaccurate or laborious. The second obstacle is a failure to transfer the comprehension skills of spoken language to reading and to acquire new strategies that may be specifically needed for reading. The third obstacle to reading will magnify the first two: the absence or loss of an initial motivation to read or failure to develop a mature appreciation of the rewards of reading.

A study comparing the rate of development of word reading skills in children learning to read in nine European languages showed that learning to read words in English is more difficult than most other alphabetic languages (Seymour, Aro & Erskine, 2003). Children learning to read in English, these skills developed more than twice as slowly as those of beginners learning to read in Finnish, Spanish or Greek. The early stages of learning to read are more taxing in English, and it takes longer for children to become fluent readers. The difficulty lies in its orthography, the conventional spelling system of a language and the way it maps onto spoken language. If a child cannot read, the chances of grade retention, dropouts, difficulties with employment and basic life activities can increase significantly (Lyon, 2001). So, the long-term effects of early reading difficulties can prove to be disastrous, hence it should be a top priority to impart effective early reading instruction to young children.

The most important factor in reading instruction is the initial attitude the children exhibit. If the children can successfully read at the beginning, then they will persist in further efforts (Schonell, 1961). Family involvement can be a potentially potent element in improving/enhancing early learning and development. It is a well-known fact that a child's brain develops rapidly between the age 0-5. Any delay in developing in this period may set a child back permanently in terms of cognitive learning abilities.

Most educators believe that phonological/phonemic awareness education is one of the most effective approaches to teach children to read. The ability of a reader to focus on and manipulate phonemes in spoken words is referred to as phonological awareness. Phoneme isolation, phoneme identity, phoneme blending, phoneme segmentation, and phoneme deletion are some of the exercises used to assess/improve children's phonological awareness. Phonological awareness instruction is not the same as phonics instruction, which teaches children how to decipher or spell words using grapheme-phoneme correspondences. The ability to recognise and manipulate the spoken elements of sentences and words is known as phonological awareness. It focuses only on the sound of words and sentences. Phonological awareness instruction produced positive effects on both word reading and pseudo word reading, indicating that it helps children decode novel words as well as remember how to read familiar words.

Many researchers posit that letter - sound knowledge is one of the most important factors of reading development (Bradley & Bryant, 1983; Dehaene, 2011; Ehri, Nunes, Stahl, & Willows, 2001; Nation, 2019; Solheim, Frijters, Lundetræ, & Uppstad, 2018; Sunde, Furnes, & Lundetræ, 2019; Tønnesen & Uppstad, 2015). Dehaene (2011) argued that letter-sound correspondences must be systematically taught, one by one and that the amount of such teaching is the best predictor of reading performance. Children benefit when parents and teachers work together as partners in education. Especially in early literacy practices, dialogic and shared reading help a lot. Parent-child interactions at home were associated with students' increased *code-related skills*, including print knowledge and preschool phonological awareness (Cottone, 2012; Fielding-Barnsley and Purdie, 2003; Weigel et al., 2006).

Beginners should be taught letters as well as phonemic awareness. When children are taught to control phonemes using letters, phonemic awareness training is more successful. This is due to the fact that letter knowledge is required for reading and spelling. Learning all of the letters of the alphabet is difficult, especially for students who arrive at school knowing only a handful of them. Shapes, names, and sounds must be learned well so that children can read and spell words automatically using them. If children lack letter recognition, this must be taught alongside phonological awareness. Young children need to enter kindergarten to learn to read, according to Duncan, 2015. To achieve reading skills, they must have explicit instruction in phonemic awareness (PA), the process to correlate the sounds in words to letters of the alphabet (Hatcher, Hulme, & Snowling, 2004), and also have code-based knowledge that promotes phonemic awareness (Lonigan & Whitehurst, 1998).

In the National Reading Panel (2019) report, a meta-analysis of 96 studies indicated that the children who spent 5 to 18 hours learning PA had extremely large effects on the acquisition of phonemic awareness. For beginners, learning to read is a difficult task. To read effectively and fluently, they must coordinate a number of cognitive processes, including word recognition, sentence and text construction, and memory retention of the material read. For novices, understanding the alphabetic system, which includes letter-sound correspondences and spelling patterns, as well as how to apply this knowledge in their reading, is an important element of the process. Systematic phonics instruction is a method of teaching reading that emphasises the learning of letter-sound correspondences and their application in reading and spelling words (Harris & Hodges, 1995). Beginners in the primary grades and youngsters who are having problems learning to read will benefit from phonics teaching. Instruction in phonics if done early, seemed much more effective than teaching it after Grade 1.

Based on the association between letter-sound knowledge and reading skill, it seems reasonable to advocate learning letters and their sounds early on in the first year of school, to ensure that children have equal opportunity to learn how to read (Nation, 2019). In a practical setting this could mean that all children should be measured on letter knowledge when they start school. Children who have broken the reading code should be given the right challenges for their skill/action capacity to further promote their literacy (Csikszentmihalyi, 2008). For those who have yet to break the reading code, effort should be put into acquiring enough letter-sound knowledge to start practicing decoding words (Hatcher, Hulme, & Ellis, 1994). As reading is the key to other keys in the educational systems, these should be prioritized tasks in the first 1–2 years of school (Solheim et al., 2018). According to Troia (2004), phonological awareness at the phoneme level is most critical to decoding and encoding skill at senior kindergarten level, so that quality exposure can be given to pre-schoolers.

From the research studies and reports on the importance of reading skills development for pre-schoolers, it is evident that teaching basic five reading skills early can help to resolve later reading difficulties among children. The investigator believes that enhancing reading skills in English language can be achieved early in school through a systematic programme in the classroom. The intervention programme is developed with the vision and understanding which includes simple age appropriate activities to enhance reading skills in English language for senior kindergarten students to enable them to read in a joyful way.

1.9 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Development and Implementation of a Programme for Enhancing Reading Skills in English Language of Senior Kindergarten Students.

1.10 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To develop a programme for enhancing Reading Skills in English Language of Senior Kindergarten students
- To implement the programme for Senior Kindergarten students for enhancing their Reading Skills
- To study the effectiveness of the programme using DIBELS Next tool

1.11 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. How will the reading skills enhancement programme for English language improve the reading skills of English medium Senior KG students?
2. How will the enhancement of reading skills in English language help Senior KG students in English language comprehension?
3. What could be the conducive environment for learning reading skills in Senior KG students?
4. To what extent can reading be developed /enhanced in Senior KG students?

1.12 HYPOTHESIS

The following null hypothesis was formulated to achieve the above stated objectives of the proposed study.

- There will be no significant difference between the mean achievement score of reading skills of the Senior Kindergarten students in pre- test and post-test.

1.13 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The study is delimited to the Senior Kindergarten students of Nagar PrathmikShikshanSamiti Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation-run schools, Ahmedabad.