

Factors in Second Language Acquisition

After much reading about L2 learning variables (both internal and external), I have come to the conclusion that teaching and learning a foreign language is very complex. It is clear, however, that some factors are more influential than others, and that I, as a teacher, can have an impact on many of them. In this paper, I will discuss seven of these.

In my mind, the most important variable in learning another language is motivation. Learning language is demanding. Motivation is needed in the learning process to help learners become a successful language learner. By having clear purpose in studying the language helps learners to find their motivation. Motivation is connected to passion, which is an intrinsic drive force for someone to do something. Intrinsic motivation influences learner to perform at their best to accomplish their purposes. Bush (2015) gave an example about Turkish students in his study to shows motivation influences language learning. The result of students that receive explicit instruction could perform better on the test comparing to the students that were taught using activities. However, the survey said that activities and games were valuable and motivating for them. Games and activities should not replace explicit instruction, but should be regularly utilized in class to help increase students' motivation in learning. Motivation could not be increased by only utilizing activities or games. Neither students would be motivated if there were only explicit instruction. In my opinion, there are many factors that are needed to help students develop their motivation in learning the language. A person could learn language by getting good instruction, opportunity to practice and getting sufficient feedback. A teacher could play a significant role in all these components by delivering quality instruction, providing activities for them to interact, and giving them healthy feedback on their performance(Newport, 1990, as cited

in Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Feedback helps learner to understand their strengths and weaknesses as language learners better. Meaningful output helps learners to reflect on themselves and see their own progress, which helps motivate learners as well. Overall, teacher's motivation in giving instruction will always make a difference for the learners.

Another factor that influences language learning is beliefs. Everyone has their own beliefs on different aspects about language learning. Some have strong beliefs on how instruction should be given (Newport, 1990, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Some have negative belief about their own ability to learn language. Any type of beliefs about language learning could affect learners performance either positively or negatively. Beliefs are often created from past experiences (Heidar & Bahareh, 2015). There was a student who had a belief for many years that she could not learn English because it was too difficult. Her beliefs has changed after finding her motivation to study English. Her motivation forms a new belief for her, which later result in more positive action. In my opinion, even though beliefs are created from past experience, we could always create new beliefs for the learners. New experiences could shape or form new beliefs. Beliefs are created from experiences, and students mostly get experiences in a language classroom. It is important to make sure that the classroom become a positive influence in forming students' beliefs. As a teacher, we play a big part in giving that experiences and forming their beliefs. Some ways that teachers could do that are using activities to discuss about their beliefs, encourage them to examine their own beliefs, help them set goals and deliver instructions that help them toward the goals. Discussing about their beliefs help themr to become aware of their own beliefs, which they could monitor if their beliefs are affecting on their performance positively or negatively. Setting goals will help them work with their positive beliefs, or work

against their negative beliefs. Last, the teachers responded to students' beliefs through effective instruction. Beliefs are strong and powerful. If the teachers are aware of their learners' beliefs, they will be able to deliver more effective and appropriate instructions for their learners.

A third factor that influences language learning is aptitude. Aptitude is an ability to learn language quickly. There are many different types of aptitude such as phonemic coding ability, rote learning ability, or grammatical sensitivity (Newport, 1990, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013). People have different aptitude profiles. Some have higher aptitude than others. Some do not have aptitude for language. They are specific capacity for language, not intelligence. Therefore, aptitude obviously does have a huge impact on language learning. Learners could make good use of their aptitude to make effective progress in their language learning. They could also share or help their friends who might not have or have lower aptitude to learn. Teachers could choose variety of approaches to teach learners with different aptitude profiles (Cenoz, 2000). Understanding and being aware of differences of aptitude could help teachers to teach the students rather than just delivering instructions. In my opinion, aptitude is something teachers could not control, but could make it become useful. Teachers have power to direct students how to use their aptitude. Teachers also have power to empower students who might not have high aptitude or do not have to develop their intelligence on those types of aptitude through their instructions. Teachers' beliefs and motivation are shown through the way instruction is delivered.

A fourth factor that influences language learning is personality. Personalities affect our behaviors and ways that we choose to respond to anything in life. Some personalities come with us when we were born, and some others are formed throughout life. Personalities affect our

performance in learning language (Cenoz, 2000). Coker (2016) explained that different personalities affect learners to perform in language learning differently. They had the students take the test that has 9 types of personalities included. Those personalities types are The Perfectionist, The Helper, The Achiever, The Loyalist, The Leader, The Peacemaker. The result of the test shows that each learner performs differently in learning language depending on their personality. The helpers love to work in groups, while the perfectionist likes to work on their own. The purpose of this study is to emphasize the importance of knowing personalities of the learners is good information for teachers to plan their lessons appropriately for each individual. The best thing teachers can do is to observe and pay attention to personalities of their learners, and take into account as giving instructions, assignments or feedback.

Strategy use is another factor that plays a significant role in influencing language learning of the students. Strategies are ways to process information or approach the task. Successful learners know and aware of strategies that are available for them in accomplishing the task, and effectively select them to use appropriately for the tasks (Anderson, 2005). Anderson (2005) explained that strategies are conscious actions, and are not isolated actions. He explained that strategies work as an orchestra, where there are more than one instrument being played all together at the same time. Strategies is one of the factor that could be developed by anyone. It is a skill that is not given from birth or anything, but from practice using them. Strategies affect language learning in many ways. It helps learner to improve their performance. It helps learner to reduce time in studying ineffectively. Anderson (2005) emphasized the importance of metacognitive strategies, which a strategy that help learners regulate their own learning. This strategy gives many benefits to both students and teachers. For students, this strategy make them

think about learning process. They will reflect on their performance, plan their steps and work toward their goals, review their strengths or weaknesses and monitor their own progress. For teachers, this strategy will help students become an agent of their own learning, which means teachers only become as facilitator. It is also beneficial to acquire this strategy because it will help teachers reflect on themselves as a teacher. Being aware of strategies lead to effective progress and development that is necessary for language learning and teaching.

The sixth factor that I believe influences language learning is identity. Identity is a product of social cultures, social interaction, and social structures. Identity affect how learners choose to act and perform in their language learning (Barber, n.d.). Language is a tool to communicate. Many students might learn language because they wish to belong to the community that they live in. There are many students that learn language because it was required. For the first category, their own identity might affect them in learning language some way, but not as much as a second group. When language class is only learned because it was required, learners perceptions or identity might take place in their learning process. Language is a skill that requires understanding and accepting the culture and identity of the language. These help learners to improve their performance on the language. Teachers should be aware of perceptions and identity of their learners and how it affect them in learning process. If identity becomes a stumbling blocks to acquire the language, then teachers should meet with learners to discuss and try to understand them(Newport, 1990, as cited in Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Last factor that is very important in language learning is family. Family is the first institution for a child. It is where a child learn and be exposed to their first society or first language. Family plays essential roles in developing many aspect of a child's life such as

attitudes, perspective, personality or identity (Khan, n.d.). Family shapes and forms a new life based on themselves, their education or the system of the society. A child learn their first language from a family and people around them. Many people learn other languages from a school or outside sources. However, family could still influence the way you learn language. For example, if the parents are closed minded to the cultures of other countries, they might not support students to learn and progress in acquiring the language as much as the family that understands the benefits of speaking many languages. Because family is a central of our life, it is obvious that it could have strong influence on language learning. As a teacher, it is important for us to be aware of your learners' family situation. Those information are helpful for us to understand our learners better. Moreover, teachers can become a positive influence to the family helping them to know how to appropriately support their children in learning the language.

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