

An essay examining  
the factors which  
affect second  
language learning



Language is essential for sharing feelings, knowledge and experiences. Learning a second language is a difficult task which depends upon the characteristics of the learner but the benefits of language learning help on raising multiple opportunities in one's life. Lightbown P. M. and Spada N. (2000) suggested that ' in second language learning, it has been observed countless times, in the same classroom setting that some students progress rapidly through the initial stages of learning a new language while others struggle along making very slow progress' (p 28). When learning a second language the learners use everything that they have. This includes their culture, their first language, their educational background, their personal experiences and the new environment. While learning a new language a learner must learn about new phonetics, a new grammar, and lots of new words to mend communication breakdowns. Learners also need to learn how to say things appropriately in different social contexts and many different function of the language i. e. disagreeing, complaining, arguing, etc. Similarly, learners acquire a second language when they receive understandable message so the learners need understandable input. For the better learning, as Bloom said ' receiving, responding, valuing, organization and self characterization through one's value system' have also a greater impact on learning process and hence personal behaviours have greater affect on learning second language. According to Maitland, K. (1997), factors primarily in the student (S), factors primarily in the family (F) and factors primarily in the environment of the second culture (E) are the factors that affect second language learning.

According to Lightbown and Spada (2000) ' to find out whether an individual factor such as motivation affects second language learning', the researchers used to select a group of learners for their study based on some defined assumptions. For this they used questionnaires and conducted relevant tests to find correlation of the concerned factors affecting second language learning. They found that there are various factors as described below which affect on the effective language learning (p 30). On the basis of different studies and findings, the following are some major factors that affect second language learning process.

**Intelligence:** Usually it is related with the performance of the learner in a certain test. The IQ of the learner plays a positive role on language learning. Since, intelligence is multifaceted and individuals have different kinds of abilities and strengths that cannot be measured by traditional IQ tests.

**Aptitude:** Aptitude refers to the special ability involved in second language learning. The relationship between aptitude and second language learning success is a very important one and various studies, such as Gardner (1985) and Skehan (1989) have reported that aptitude is a major factor determining the level of success of second language learning. Good aptitude for learning such as understanding of the function of the words in sentences, understanding and use grammatical rules and use supports the language learning process effectively.

**Personality:** According to Lightbown and Spada (2000) ' a number of personality characteristics have been proposed as likely to affect second language learning, but it has not been easy to demonstrate their effects in

empirical studies' (p32). There is a common argument that an extroverted person is well suited to language learning however the studies have not shown this conclusion. Studies have shown that self-esteem, risk taking behaviour, empathy, talkativeness and responsiveness are all qualities of the learner affecting the second language learning process. Coleman and Klapper, (2005) said that introverts generally perform better academically where as an extroverts appears more likely to take advantage of social opportunities for second language input.

Motivation and attitudes: According to Gardner (1985), ' the positive attitudes and motivation are very much related to success in second language learning'. There is still limited evidence on the topic of whether it is motivation that produces better learning or effective learning that enhances motivation or if both are affected by the others. But it is found that both Integrative motivation and instrumental motivation are related to success in second language learning. Different studies have tried to come to a conclusion that the social dynamic or power relationship between the languages helps to the learner on being more motivated. Gardner (1985) suggested that if the language learners don't like the other language community, they can never really learn their language.

Learner preferences: Reid (1995) has used the term ' learning style'. It is used for describing individual's natural, habitual, and favoured way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills. Visual learners, aural learners and kinaesthetic learners can make their own progress while learning a second language because of their different learning style. Learners who try to learn the language in a holistic way make the best  
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progress in learning. Similarly, individual nature plays a vital role on giving focus to the learning process.

**Learner's beliefs:** The strong beliefs and opinions of the learners on how their instruction should be delivered play an active role while learning language. The learners' beliefs are taken as strong mediating factors while learning a second language and teachers can develop their teaching learning strategies and thus manage greater flexibility while approaching language learning classes.

**Age of acquisition:** The researchers found that language learning is more active and efficient in the critical age of language development. According to Butler, Y. G and Hakuta, K. (2006) to get mastery in second language, it is best if the process of learning starts in early childhood (pg 126). Adults are often self-conscious by their lack of competency in their second language if they start to learn at a late stage of their life.

**Learning strategies:** learning strategies are factors of second language learning. The steps or actions by learners to improve the development of their language skills are known as learning strategies. Different strategies work best for different people while learning the second language.

Researchers are trying to know more about every aspect of the learning strategies.

In conclusion, the context of the learner also plays a vital role on learning process. Readiness of the learner for learning is essential to make significant progress on learning a second language. More studies will be carried out in

this field to find out more generalized affect of the respective factors while learning a second language.