

# The different factors of individual language learners in second language acquisit...

[Psychology](#)



The Different Factors of Individual Language Learners in Second Language Acquisition Recently, Second Language Acquisition (SLA) play important role to language learning and teaching as second language that SLA refers both to the study of individuals and groups who are learning a language subsequent to learning their first one as young children, and to the process of learning that language that the additional language is called a second language (L2), even though it may actually be the third, fourth, or tenth to be acquired. It is also commonly called a target language (TL), which refers to any language that is the aim or goal of learning (Saville-Troike, 2006). According to Gass and Selinker (2008) states that SLA refer to the learning of another language after the first language has been learned that the use of this term does not differentiate among learning situations For the SLA learners, they have various differences of characteristics or variables in term of language learning that they learn with different speed and different results and there are many explanations for that issue for supporting the question that the focus on learner differences in SLA has been most concerned with the question of why some learners are more successful than others (Ellis, 1994; Saville-Troike, 2006; Harmer, 2007; Cook, 2008; Hall, 2011). Finally, second language (L2) learners are different in various factors that there are many explanations for that issue.

The general factors that influence second language learning are: age, aptitude and intelligence, cognitive style, attitudes, motivation and personality (Ellis 1985). The aim of this essay is to present these factors and their contribution to success or failure in language learning that a variety of well-known scholars characterized into main three types: cognitive variables;

affective variables; and personality variables (Johnson, 2008). Firstly, the cognitive variables relate to the mental make-up of the person. Intelligence is one such factor; another is language aptitude (Johnson, 2008) or when a person tries to learn something, his/her success is partly governed by intelligence, memory, and the ability to analyse and evaluate (Richards et. al, 1992; Brown, 2000). Mostly, cognitive variable divided into two forms that are intelligence and aptitude. Traditionally, intelligence refers to the mental abilities that are measured by an IQ (intelligence quotient) test. It usually measures only two types of intelligence: verbal/linguistic and mathematical/logical intelligence (Ellis, 1995; Brown, 2000; Harmer, 2007; Johnson, 2008).

Further, there are other types of intelligence such as spatial intelligence, bodily-kinesthetic intelligence, musical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, and intrapersonal intelligence (Gardner, 1993, Brown, 2000). Linguistic intelligence also known as verbal-linguistic – is one of the many types of intelligence described in multiple intelligence theory. People with significant linguistic intelligence are often good at languages and enjoy reading and writing. For example, a student with strong linguistic intelligence may remember new words very easily and use them quickly. According to Gardner (1993) and Brown (2000) also categorized intelligences into various types as follow: Linguistic intelligence: speaking, using words, writing, giving presentations, solving word problems; Logical-mathematical intelligence: using numbers, logic, calculations; learning and understanding grammar rules; Spatial intelligence: drawing, painting, using color, art, graphics,

pictures, maps, and charts; Bodily-kinesthetic intelligence: muscular coordination, athletic skill, body language, drama and theater;

Musical intelligence: using music, tones, hearing; producing the intonation and rhythm of a language; Interpersonal intelligence: talking with other people, understanding them, using language to communicate; Intrapersonal intelligence: self-knowledge, self-confidence, using language to analyze yourself. To conclude, intelligence, especially measured by verbal IQ tests, may be a strong factor when it comes to learning that involves language analysis and rule learning (Brown, 2000; Johnson, 2008). Intelligence also has some connection with school performance that there are links between intelligence and aptitude in classroom, as might be expected (Cook, 2008 cited Genesee, 1976) On the other hand, intelligence may play a less important role in language learning that focuses more on communication and interaction (Cummins, 1980). Hence, it is important to keep in mind that “intelligence” is complex and that a person has many kinds of abilities and strengths (Brown, 2000; Johnson, 2008).

For the second cognitive variables is aptitude that refers to the ability to learn quickly (Carroll, 1991) and is thought to predict success in learning or the natural ability to learn a language that is thought to be a combination of various abilities, such as the ability to identify sound patterns in a new language, the ability to recognise the different grammatical functions of words in sentences, Rote-Learning ability, and the ability to infer language rules (Richards et. al., 1995; Cook, 2008). In term of Language aptitude refers to the potential that a person has for learning languages. This

potential is often evaluated using formal aptitude tests (Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT), which predict the degree of success the candidate will have with a new language. Aptitude tests vary but many include evaluation of ability to manage sounds, grammatical structures, infer rules, and memory. Furthermore, language aptitude is defined in terms of speed in language learning (Cook, 2008 cited in Ranta, 2008: 142), and is a concept that “ accepts that everyone can acquire; it is just that some people do it faster than others” (Johnson, 2008: 118). In the classroom, language aptitude may be fixed but there are many things teachers can do in the area of learner training to improve the learner’s ability.

These include helping learners identify their preferences for learning; thinking about learning styles, and then looking at how these can be developed; and developing learner autonomy by teaching learners how to study effectively. Carroll, (1990) defines aptitude in terms of: ‘ phonemic coding ability’, the ability to identify sounds and remember and link them to phonetic symbols; sensitivity to grammatical structures in a sentence; the ability to learn inductively, i. e., to infer rules about language from examples; the ability to rote learn vocabulary items. In sum, early research revealed a substantial relationship between performance on language aptitude tests and performance in foreign language learning that was based on grammar translation or audio-lingual methods (Carroll, 1973). For that reason, a person with high language aptitude can learn more quickly and easily than a person with low language aptitude, all other factors being equal (Richards et. al., 1995). However, performance on language aptitude tests seems

irrelevant to L2 learning with the adoption of a more communicative approach to teaching (Dornyei, 2005).

Further, Successful language learners may not be strong in all of the components of aptitude. Learners' strengths and weaknesses in the different components may account for their ability to succeed in different types of instructional programs (Cook, 2008; Johnson, 2008). Implication for teaching of aptitude, Cook (2008: 146) suggests four possible ways in which teachers might use information about learners' aptitude: select learners who are likely to succeed at language learning and bar those who seem likely to fail; stream learners with differing levels of aptitude into different classes; teach learners with different types of aptitude, for example, those with and without phonemic coding ability, in different ways and with different final examinations. This might lead to different activities in the same classroom, parallel classes, or self-directed learning; and excuse learners with low aptitude from compulsory language classes. Secondly, the affective variables are attitude and motivation that is called affective variables (Richards et. al., 1992). First, the attitude a learner has towards a foreign language may affect his/her success in learning it. Accordingly, Johnson (2008) says the affective variables mean "to do with the feeling" and 'feelings' respectively which the most commonly studied affective variables are motivation and attitudes. For language attitude refer to the attitudes which speakers of different languages or language varieties have towards each other's languages or to their own language (Ellis, 1994; Gass and Selinker, 2009).

Moreover, it is the expressions of positive or negative feelings towards a language that may reflect impressions of linguistic difficulty or simplicity, ease or difficulty of learning, degree of importance, elegance, social status, etc. (Richards et al. 1992) or attitudes towards a language may also show what people feel about the speakers of that language (Harmer, 2007; Johnson, 2008). For motivation in individual language learners, Dörnyei (2001) defines that motivation is one of the most important factors in second language acquisition which it is obvious that learners who want to learn are likely to achieve more than those who do not. Basically, the category of motivation is divided into basic four types as follow: integrative; instrumental; intrinsic (internal); and extrinsic (external) (Gardner and Lambert, 1972; Dörnyei, 2001). An integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn an L2 in order to know more about the foreign cultural community to the extent of being accepted as a member of that other group (Gardner and Lambert, 1972). An instrumental motivation refers to the practical value and the advantages of learning a new language, such as getting a job, a better CV, or better career opportunities.

Perhaps the biggest difference between the integrative and instrumental orientations is that the latter does not imply any interest in getting closer socially to the language community (Masgoret and Gardner, 2003). Intrinsic motivation is a motivation to learn that comes from an internal force such as interest in language learning or the desire for further personal development in general. It compares with extrinsic motivation, which is motivation from external pressures such as the need to speak English for work or because a parent has sent a learner to class (Williams and Burden, 1997; Cook, 2008;

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Hall, 2011). For example, often high level learners show a high degree of intrinsic motivation as they continue to study a language beyond any practical need. Extrinsic motivation is a motivation to learn caused by external pressures such as work, because a parent has sent a learner to class, or the need to gain a qualification in the language. It contrasts with intrinsic motivation, which is an internal force such as interest in learning a language to communicate with other people or for further personal development in general (Williams and Burden, 1997; Cook, 2008; Hall, 2011). For example, exams preparation classes often have a high degree of extrinsic motivation as learners are attending class to pass an exam, often for work purposes.

To conclude from various researchers found that both integrative and instrumental types of motivation are related to success in L2 learning. Moreover, most L2 learning situations involve a mixture of each type of motivation that research strongly favors intrinsic motivation, especially for long-term retention that intrinsically motivated learners are striving for excellence, autonomy, and self-actualization. Lastly, classroom motivating, the content needs to be relevant to their age and level of ability, and the learning goals need to be challenging yet manageable and clear, such as varying the activities, tasks, and materials to increase students' interest levels and using cooperative rather than competitive goals to increase students' self-confidence as well as cultural and age differences will determine the most appropriate way for teachers to motivate students according to Stern (1983) also claims that the level and type of motivation is strongly influenced by the social context in which language learning takes

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place and the relationship between L1 and L2. In the last one of factor, there are a number of personality characteristics that may affect L2 learning, such as extroversion, introversion, inhibition and risk-taking, anxiety, identity and ethnic affiliation, gender, learner beliefs, age, and learning styles.

First of all, introversion is someone who is much happier with a book than with other people (Richard et. al., 1992; Ellis, 1994; Murcia, 2001; Cook, 2008; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Hall, 2011) as well as An extroversion is someone who is much happier with people than with a book (Richard et. al., 1992; Ellis, 1994; Murcia, 2001; Cook, 2008; Gass and Selinker, 2008; Johnson, 2008; Hall, 2011). Many scholars ask some question concerning introversion and extroversion that you more extroverted or introverted are as it is often argued that an extroverted person is well suited to language learning. However, research does not always support this conclusion as some studies have found that learners' success in language learning is associated with extroversion such as assertiveness and adventurousness, while others have found that many successful language learners do not get high scores on measures of extroversion. The concept of inhibition is closely related to the notion of self-esteem. All people protect their ego by building sets of defenses. The higher self-esteem the lower walls of inhibition and greater success in learning a foreign language.

It has been suggested that inhibition influences language learning in a negative way because it discourages the risk-taking, which is an essential element in this process. It is necessary to make mistakes if a person wants to learn a foreign language. People make hypotheses about the language

and then test them out by trial and many errors. If learners do not want to speak until they are absolutely certain that they are correct they will never acquire communicative skills (Brown, 1994). This is mainly a problem of adults who are more self-conscious than children are. A child adopts a new language and accent more rapidly than an older person who is less open to the influences and changes. The next thing that language learners have to face is the loss of status. They must accept the fact of being depended on others and sometimes be prepared to reveal their weaknesses or look foolish. " An individual who is detached, self-critical, and has a sense of humour can cope with this demand of language learning better than a rigid or status-conscious individual who lacks self-awareness or humour" (Stern, 1983: 382). It has been also suggested that tolerance of ambiguity is an advantageous feature as learning a second language is closely connected with baffling and confusing situations.

" The learner who is capable of accepting with tolerance and patience the frustrations of ambiguity that second language learning inevitably involves is emotionally in a better position to cope with them in a problem-solving frame of mind than a student who feels frustrated or angry in ambiguous situations." Anxiety is another important aspect of personality that affects learning a foreign language. Brown (1994: 141) describes anxiety as a state of mind connected with " feelings of uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt and worry." MacIntyre and Gardner (1991) distinguish anxiety into: trait anxiety, when some people have some general predisposition to be anxious and state anxiety, which can be experienced in a particular situation. They also identify three components of foreign language anxiety: communication

apprehension, fear of negative social evaluation and test anxiety. Their studies show that “ foreign language anxiety can be distinguished from other types of anxiety and that it can have a negative effect on the language learning process” (Brown 1994). It is important to differentiate between debilitating and facilitative anxiety.

Although anxiety is regarded as a negative factor which must be avoided, the concept of facilitative anxiety, “ a little nervous tension in the process”, is a positive factor. It must be remembered that “ both too much and too little anxiety may hinder the process of successful second language learning” (Brown, 1994: 143). There has been some research that investigated the reasons of the state anxiety in the classroom. Bailey (1983) found that competitiveness among students, their relationship with a teacher and tests could increase anxiety. Skehan (1989) states the possibility of anxieties can be a result of low achievement that poor and average students are prompt to encounter failure because of debilitating anxiety more often than high-ability students are. It was also suggested that different kind of anxiety appears depending on the level of students. The more proficient learners are the more facilitating anxiety they experience (Scovel, 1978). Learning style refers to an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred way of absorbing, processing, and retaining new information and skills or a learning style is ‘ the characteristic manner in which an individual chooses to approach a learning task’ (Reid 1995; Hall, 2011 cited in Skehan, 1998: 237).

Types of learning styles related to L2 learning is categorized into various types, such as perceptual learning styles: visual, aural/auditory, and haptic

(kinesthetic & tactile), cognitive learning styles (field-independent vs. field-dependent), and right-brain dominance vs. left-brain dominance. According to Dörnyei (2005) says commonly identified learning styles include: field dependent and field independent, i. e., thinking which relates detail to the overall context or thinking which separates detail from the general background; wholist and analyst, i. e., a focus on the ' bigger picture' or a focus on detail; rule forming and data gathering, i. e., learning and applying rules (i. e., deductive learning) or learning via exposure to examples (i. e., inductive learning); reflective and impulsive learning, i. e., a deliberate or a quick response; verbal and visual learning, i. e., success by working with verbal information or by working with visual or spatial information; levelling and sharpening, i. e., assimilating new information quickly and losing some detail or emphasizing detail and changes in new information. A field-dependent learning style is defined by a relative inability to distinguish detail from other information around it. It can be compared to a field-independent learning style, which is defined by a tendency to separate details from the surrounding context. For example, field-dependent learners often work well in teams as they tend to be better at interpersonal relationships (Abraham, 1985).

In the classroom, activities that connect different parts of a lesson are useful for field-dependent learners. For example, learners can discuss what they know about a topic, predict content, or look at and listen to related material. Abraham (1985) also defines A field-independent learning style is defined by a tendency to separate details from the surrounding context. It can be compared to a field-dependent learning style, which is defined by a relative

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inability to distinguish detail from other information around it. Theorists define these two cognitive styles in terms of how they are psychologically different which makes this a useful model for teachers trying to understand their learners. For example, field-independent learners tend to rely less on the teacher or other learners for support. In the classroom, activities such as extensive reading and writing, which learners can carry out alone, are useful for field-independent learners.

To summarize, field-independent: see things more analytically field-dependent: see things more holistically that a variety of scholar found that FI is related to classroom language learning that involves analysis, attention to details, and mastering of exercise, drills, and other focused activities and FD is related to the communicative aspects of language learning that require social outreach, empathy, perception of other people, and communicative skills. Hence, FI/FD may also prove to be a valuable tool for differentiating child and adult language acquisition due to the fact that FI increases as a child matures to adulthood. For right-brain vs. left-brain dominance, the right brain perceives and remembers visual, tactile, and auditory images. It is more efficient in processing holistic, integrative, and emotional information. The left brain is associated with logical, analytical thought, with mathematical and linear processing of information. Though we all tend to have one hemisphere that is more dominant, it is important to remember that the left and right hemispheres need to operate together as a “ team”. Further, every person, student or teacher, has a learning style; therefore, there is no particular teaching or learning method that can suit the needs of

all learners. Learning styles exist on wide continuums, although they are often described as opposites.

Learning styles are value-neutral; that is, no one style is better than others. However, very little research has examined the interaction between different learning styles and success in L2 learning; however, students should be encouraged to “stretch” their learning styles so that they will be more empowered in a variety of leaning situations. In conclusion of personality variable, in general, the research does not show a single clearly-defined relationship between personality traits and SLA. The major difficulty is that of identification and measurement of personality characteristics. Personality variables may be a major factor only in the acquisition of conversational skills, not in the acquisition of literacy or academic skills. Most research on personality traits has been carried out within a quantitative research paradigm (i. e., an approach that relies on measuring learners’ scores on personality surveys and relating these to language test performance). More qualitative research is needed to adequately capture the depth and complexity of the relationship. However, the research on individual differences is complex and the results of the research are not easy to interpret. This is because of the lack of clear definitions and methods for measuring individual characteristics including the fact that the characteristics are not independent of one another: learner variables interact in complex ways. It remains difficult to predict how a particular individual’s characteristics will influence his or her success as a language learner.