

Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

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Abstract

This paper analyzes Lightbown and Spada's article on the factors that influence second language acquisition. The article emphasizes the significance of age, intelligence, motivation, aptitude, and personality in second language acquisition. This paper investigates the impact of each of these variables on language learning outcomes and discusses how teachers can assist language learners. Some factors, such as age and intelligence, have a direct impact on language learning outcomes, while others, such as motivation and attitudes, can indirectly influence language proficiency. Understanding these factors can aid students in optimizing their language-learning practices and increasing their likelihood of success, according to the paper's conclusion.

Key words: Second language learning, age, intelligence, motivation, attitudes, aptitude, personality, language proficiency, language learning outcomes, language learners.

Introduction

Second language learning is acquiring proficiency in a language that is not the individual's first language, as stated by Hoque (2017). The reasons for learning a second language are varied, ranging from personal interest to career opportunities. Second language learning can be done in various ways, such as through self-study, formal classroom instruction, or immersion in a country where the language is spoken. The acquisition of a second language can be a challenging and rewarding experience. It requires effort, dedication, and exposure to the language through listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The ability to converse in a second language opens up a world of opportunities, such as communicating with people from different cultural backgrounds, traveling, and working in a global environment. The development of second language is influenced by a variety of aspects, including age, motivation and attitudes, intelligence, aptitude, and personality (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Understanding these factors can aid students to optimize their language learning practice and improve their chances of success. This paper will critically review Lightbown and Spada's article on factors affecting second language learning.

Intelligence is an essential factor that determines the success of learning a second language. According to Lightbown & Spada (2001), intelligence plays a crucial part in reading and accepting the grammar of the second language. Nonetheless, research shows that intelligence plays little impact during classroom interactions and

communication (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). Therefore, Intelligence can have an impact on second language learning, but its influence is not absolute. There are different theories of intelligence, and while some suggest that it is a fixed trait, others believe it can be developed through learning and experience. Li (2009) claims that intelligence is influential in learning efficiency during second language learning. This factor is directly related to imitation, memory, and problem-solving ability; hence, teachers should intentionally develop learners' intelligence to expand their perspectives.

Some research has suggested a correlation between intelligence and language learning, meaning that individuals with higher intelligence may have an advantage in acquiring a second language (Kakhramonov, 2020). This advantage may manifest itself in various ways, such as understanding complex grammar rules, memorizing vocabulary, and using analytical thinking to infer meaning from context. However, it is vital to understand that intelligence is not the only feature that influences language learning. Motivation, prior knowledge of a related language, learning style, instructional method, and language environment can affect learning outcomes. Additionally, while intelligence may provide an initial advantage, language learning is ultimately a process of practice, exposure, and effort. Individuals with lower intelligence can still achieve a high level of expertise in a second language through hard work and dedication.

Aptitude denotes a person's potential or natural capability to acquire a novel language. It is often measured through tests that assess various language-related skills, such as phonetic coding capacity. Lightbown & Spada (2001) states that aptitude abilities include understanding the importance of words, remembering new sounds, understanding grammatical rules, and memorization. However, individuals who successfully learn a second language may not be proficient in all the aptitude abilities, as Lightbown & Spada (2001) asserted. In this regard, an individual might be good at memorization while inefficient at remembering new sounds. Also, an individual who understands the importance of words in a sentence might not understand grammatical rules well.

According to research, individuals with high language learning aptitude are more likely to be successful in second language learning. These learners may have an advantage in acquiring a new language due to their ability to quickly recognize patterns in the language, comprehend grammar rules, and retain new vocabulary. According to Beccia (2020), language aptitude is associated with the cognitive capacity to acquire a new language. This provides a good explanation of why individuals with high aptitude are excellent at learning a second language. However, Li (2015) claims there is a controversy concerning the importance of aptitude in conscious learning.

Nonetheless, research shows that a significant level of second language learning is dependent on input such that what is related to second language learning is associated with conscious learning (Li, 2015). Similar to intelligence, language learning is ultimately a process of practice, exposure, and effort. Thus, individuals with lower language learning aptitude can still achieve a high level of know-how in a second language through hard work and dedication.

According to Lightbown & Spada (2001), existing research does not demonstrate a direct relationship between personality and second language learning. Still, there are various personality characteristics proposed to affect second language learning. For instance, extroverted individuals tend to be more successful in language learning as they are most likely going to engage in conversation and practice speaking with others (Zhang, 2008). They may also be more comfortable making mistakes and receiving feedback from others, which can help them improve their language skills. However, the existing research does not always come to this conclusion (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). For example, an individual might be an introvert but motivated to learn a second language. Also, inhibition is a bad personality vice that discourages second language learning. This is because it prevents risk-taking and the ability of an individual to practice a second language.

Moreover, openness to experience, another personality trait, is also associated with success in language learning. People who are more open to different involvements are most likely going to be interested in different cultures and languages and may be more motivated to learn a new language. Furthermore, individuals who are high in conscientiousness may be more successful in language learning, as they are often organized and diligent in their approach to learning. This can help them stay on track with their language learning goals and maintain a consistent practice. However, Lightbown & Spada (2001) claims that personality aspects might only be applicable to conversational skills rather than literacy skills.

Further, the age of acquisition can have a noteworthy power on acquiring a second language. Generally, acquiring a second language at a younger age, especially during early childhood, is easier than acquiring a second language later in life. According to Lightbown & Spada (2001), immigrant children speak fluently a foreign language than their parents because of their tender age. According to the authors, acquiring a second language at a younger age is easier because of the critical period, which suggests a specific period in human development when acquiring a second language is easier (Lightbown & Spada, 2001). In this regard, concluding that younger age is associated with the critical period of learning a new language is imperative.

Another reason is that children's brains are still developing, making them more receptive to language learning (Ipek, 2009). As children learn their first language, they also develop cognitive and linguistic skills that can facilitate second language learning. Additionally, youngsters are often more motivated to learn a second language if they are exposed to it early in life, especially if their parents or caregivers also speak the language. In contrast, adults may find it more challenging to learn a second language because their brains have already developed and are less plastic. Adults may also have more difficulty with pronunciation and grammar, as they are less likely to pick up on the nuances of the language in the same way that a child would. Additionally, research has shown that some aspects of language learning, such as vocabulary acquisition, may not be affected by age to the same extent as other aspects, such as grammar.

Motivation and Attitudes

Motivation is one of the most critical aspects with great impacts in acquiring a novel language (Wu, 2022; Ai, Pan & Zhong, 2021). It refers to the drive and desire to learn a new language, and it plays a crucial role in determining language learning outcomes. According to Lightbown & Spada (2001), high motivation leads to success in learning a second language. However, the question of concern is whether learners are motivated because of their success or whether success leads to motivation. Motivation can come from various sources, such as personal interest, social pressure, or professional goals (Nurhidayah, 2020). Individuals highly motivated to learn a new language are more likely to invest time and effort in their language learning, which can lead to better language proficiency. Research has shown that motivated learners are more likely to engage in language learning activities, such as interpretation, talking, and listening, and are more persistent in their efforts to learn the language (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015). They may also be more willing to take risks, make mistakes, and receive feedback from others, which can help them improve their language skills.

Furthermore, motivation can also affect language learning strategies. Highly motivated learners are more likely to use effective learning strategies, such as regularly practicing, seeking feedback, and setting specific language learning goals. On the other hand, students who lack motivation may struggle to maintain their focus and may not be as persistent in their language-learning efforts. They may also be less likely to engage in language learning activities and may not use effective learning strategies. Therefore, motivation is a critical issue that significantly impacts second language acquisition. Extremely motivated apprentices are more likely to participate in language learning activities, use effective learning strategies, and continue with efforts to learn the novel

language (Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Therefore, it is important for language learners to find ways to stay motivated throughout the language-learning process. Lightbown & Spada (2001) suggest that motivation in classrooms is essential and teachers have a role in ensuring student motivation.

In addition, Lightbown & Spada (2001) claim that learners' positive attitudes are directly related to the success of second language learning. Attitudes refer to the beliefs, feelings, and opinions that individuals hold about a particular language, its speakers, and the culture associated with it. Positive attitudes towards the language and its speakers can enhance language learning by increasing motivation and promoting a more receptive attitude towards the language. Other countries are more intentional than others in teaching a second language to students. For instance, it is not a requirement to study a second language in the US, while in Europe, it is a requirement (PERIĆ & RADIĆ, 2021). This can help learners engage more fully in the language-learning process and be more open to new language-learning experiences. On the other hand, negative attitudes towards the language and its speakers can hinder language learning by decreasing motivation and creating resistance to learning the language. Negative attitudes can also lead to stereotypes and prejudice towards the language and its speakers, which can create barriers to effective communication and language learning.

Additionally, attitudes towards the learning process itself can also impact language learning outcomes. Learners who have a positive attitude towards learning and are willing to take risks and make mistakes are more likely to engage in language learning activities and use effective learning strategies. Conversely, learners with a negative attitude towards the learning process may avoid language learning activities and use ineffective learning strategies, which can impede their progress. Roos (2013) attests that positive attitudes lead to motivation of learners and play a great impact in learning a second language. Therefore, attitudes towards the language and its speakers, as well as attitudes towards the learning process itself, is significant in the results of learning a novel language. It is important for language learners to cultivate affirmative attitudes while learning a language, as well as towards the learning process, in order to enhance their language learning experience.

Conclusion

In conclusion, second language learning is important because it provides an opportunity to work globally, besides from satisfying the intellectual curiosity of knowing a foreign language. The factors that affect second language learning include age, intelligence, motivation and attitudes, aptitude, and personality. Lightbown & Spada's (2001) article provides a comprehensive overview of the research on second language. In the article, the authors

highlight several factors that can influence second language learning with appropriate examples that aid in readers' understanding. This is together with an effective opinion on the factors that are crucial in learning a second language depending on the available research. Therefore, the article appropriately highlights the intricate nature of learning a second language and the importance of considering multiple factors when attempting to understand and support learners in this process.

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