

Assignment 1

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A Discussion on Factors Affecting Second Language Learning

Introduction

Language is a tool for interpersonal communication, especially in the world which an increasing number of multinational cooperation activities on various aspects of society are occurring on a daily basis. As a communicative means, language become an integral part of human beings. Thus, for individual needs on self-development and communication with others, a growing number of people is increasingly aware that they need ability to acquire languages more than just their mother language. A second language normally belongs to different language families in terms of one's native language, this would be account for some difficulties and problems that a second language learner would encounter through their process of second language learning. Although they all may confront particular difficulties and problems, still they are not equal in their second language learning process, an instructor may discover that in a same classroom instruction, some learners have abilities to achieve their goals perfectly at the very beginning stage of their language learning, while some other learners may pay numerous efforts without fulfilling their objectives. Then an significant question has drawn many language researchers attention on how to make second language learning easier for learners which the same as an infant acquires his mother language. Patsy M. Lightbrown  Nina Spada (2000) summarized six main categories: personality of individuals, intelligence, aptitude, motivation attitudes, learner preferences(style and beliefs) and age of learning, those are factors which would affect language learning of second language learners. In this essay we would discuss each of these factors to find out what, why and how these factors would have influence on second language learning and how they contribute to differences between learners, in addition, from our discussion to draw implications on second language learner that could help them for their learning.

Language Learning and Language Acquisition

Before we begin to discuss factors affecting second language learning, we will first have a quick review on definition of L2 and differences between language learning and language acquisition. From the broad perspective, we could refer L2 to a language that obtained or acquired after ones mother language, whereas in the narrow perspective, L2 is a term which is excluded by the term "Foreign Language" (FL). L2 serves an interactive and institutionalized function in a society where people tend to speak their mother language to communicate which different from L2. For example, in certain Asian countries and the Middle East English be treated as second language in countries such as India, Singapore and Dubai. As to foreign language, it acts no critical part in a society or community, where people only learn it for individual goals, for instance, to pass examinations, to do business, to develop interests and to travel around, etc. China is a country where people speak English as a foreign language.

Language learning and acquisition are also different notions, learning is an intentional process where learners learn with purp  Background reading on is an unconscious learning process where learner could learn without notice. After descriptions above we may find some explanations of how learners acquire L2 by identifying both external and internal factors which would affect them.

Intelligence

The term intelligence applies to one's ability to procure and employ knowledge, there are various IQ tests provide measurements for second language learners, the result of IQ test could be regarded as an indicator which shows learners' degree of success. Those learners with high IQ scores are usually seemed to have strong ability and performance on language learning. However, recent studies investigate that IQ tests may indicate certain aspects of language ability instead of overall coverage. In the cases of verbal IQ tests where language examination and principle understanding are required, learners who obtain higher scores might have fewer capabilities on communication and interaction activities.

Intelligence is a concept with multiple angles, for which learners would have more than one ability which cannot all be tested by IQ tests. People claimed the advantage a young learner possessed the "critical period hypothesis", young learners would outperform adult learners in second language learning since their brain is more flexible than adult learners (Lenneberg, 1967). But this "critical period hypothesis" has been questioned by many researchers 2 these years (Genesee, 1987), they suggested the dependency level of cerebrum is altered which the rate of second language acquisition can be expressed by young learners' psychological and social factors instead of their physiological determinants.

Aptitude

3 Aptitude is ability and innate talent one born with, its ability which already exists before while 4 others will cultivate for. Somebody in specific domain has his or her inborn adeptness could acquire skill and knowledge or accomplish task better than others under circumstances when with same number of experiences or even without any experiences.

Many studies instantly demonstrated that learners who reach higher scores on L2 tasks have outstandingly greater both L1 and L2 aptitudes than those who obtain lower scores (Ganschow, Sparks, & Javorsky, 1998). One of the measuring points of a satisfying L2 learner is their capability all round language aspects, especially in terms of their phonological ability. Failing to prove to be a successful learner one might have a series of language learning shortcomings.

However, some teachers 5 gradually discover that learner aptitude may uncorrelated in classroom teaching, for instance, a learner would have inherent skills on spoken language whereas the class is grammar-oriented. In this circumstance, it's noteworthy for teachers that single instructional strategy and method may not take into account all learners, certain peculiar instructions need to be prepared for delivering to consider learners with aptitude.

Personality

Personality is a possible factor affects L2 learning, it's not straightforwardly simple to make explicit conclusions on studies of personality, and even research on same personality would eventually lead to different result. As we commonly know that learner with extrovert personality is more likely to have better behavior in L2 learning than those introvert learners. Learners achieve higher rate on factor extrovert usually demonstrate 6 satisfactory performance on L2 learning, some others also have good language ability with lower extrovert rate.

Extrovert learners tend to have strong sense of spirit of adventure and with more self-confidence, inhibition is not supposed to be encouraged in language learning process, where confidence and risk-taking are special need in L2 learning. This is the reason why younger learners are more

activate than adult learners since adults have more concern on their own behaviors.

A further pronunciation study has proved disadvantage of inhibition, there are two groups of learners, one of the groups is supplied with a small amount of alcohol through their test, this group shows better than the other group with stimulative effect of alcohol (Guiora, 1972). Having alcohol even one might make mistake such as inarticulate pronunciation, it's more benefit that learner has courage to participate and practice, the willingness to make mistake in attempt is vital in acquiring oral skills, learner's personal **Background reading** impact on fluency of oral English (Krashen, 1981).

Personality may not have solid impact on L2 learning comprehensively when its main influence on spoken language while written language which has less affected on, still we should hold belief on relation between personality and L2 learning success.

Motivation

Motivation is a critical factor in L2, it has been examined that motivation has direct relation to successful language learning (Gardner, 1985), but there is still argument of differentiating specific relevance between leaning motivation and leaning success, one with high motivation would have greater outcome of learning or one obtain great success would have higher motivation. One point we must notice about is learning purpose based on language interests or individual needs such as occupational demand. Robert Gardner and Wallace Lambert (1972) come up with the concept of integrative and instrumental motivation, integrative motivation is founded on personal and cultural development while instrumental motivation is specific goal-oriented practice, both of them would benefit learning, but internal driving force would abate if learning is facilitated by external impetus such as goal pursuing.

In classroom teaching, motivation of students can be observed by teachers regarding to student's classroom interests and positive attitudes toward class, but it's unlikely for teachers to identify particular reasons behind motivation. It's feasible for teachers turn class attractive by applying a variety of teaching methods and practices through teaching activities, with which it would be favorable in boosting their learning motivation.

Learner Preferences

Each learner has learning preferences and styles when facing learning materials which will be received and managed by learners in a natural way, however not all learners will have clear notice of their learning style, in fact, when absorbing instructions from class learners would more or less have balance on how the teaching should be delivered, they would form their own ideas in mind of what teaching methods and practices would be applied for us. Depending on Carlos Yorio (1986), most learners are not content with their class learning in a highly communicative setting, they prefer their L2 learning would pay more attention on language form such as morphology and syntax. Under this circumstance, learners believe their learning progress barely meet their expectations since instructions are not the best style they prefer to, even though there are no study on the differences of learners learning progress between original style of instruction and learners' expected instruction.

No matter what and how the learners' beliefs and styles are, we should not consider them as wrong thing, in contrast we should encourage them bravely try to use various approaches throughout their learning, since their belief and style would guide their learning strategy, teachers

should extend learners' strategy repertoire and exert diversified teaching methods into classroom teaching.

Age

Age has been a controversial topic for long time, within an immigrant family where children learn L2 all the way to the native level but their parents may not reach the same level as their children. This do not mean all adults L2 people are less capacity in language ability, there are also certain adults have outstanding performance on their L2, only that differences can be discerned from native speaker through their pronunciation, word selection and sentence formation.

The critical period hypothesis provides account for this situation, as we grow up our brain has a critical period for language acquisition, which is the  suitable period for language learning, as our brain grows mature, the critical period irreversibly vanish which would affect SLA process. The critical period disappears earlier or around one's puberty, after this period, L2 learners learn second language based on their general learning ability which they would also use in learning other things.

Some of us would argue that language learning after their critical period, learning effect is not as good as younger learner who learns before the end of critical period. Beside biological critical period, younger learners usually have more time for learning, they would have less pressure toward language fluency and accuracy, which actually results in higher chances of exposure on communicating. As for adults, they would take more notice of self-behaviors, which then generates constraint on their language practice, especially when they need to express complicate thoughts and employ advanced level of language, self-constraint is helpless in expressing thoughts clearly, and failing to explicit their minds will lead to the feeling of frustration.

Debates exist in critical period from several  perspectives. First, adults have effective learning than youngsters at the very early period of L2 learning. Second, learners start learning from their teenage are perform better than those begin learning from pupil. Third, teenager and adult show that they approach high level proficiency on L2 learning, are these different opinions present negation on critical period in SLA?

Certainly, the answer is no, Mark Patkowski (1980) suggested that L2 learners age before 15 could reach language level of native speaker. Patkowski investigated age factor and combined it with other factors, for instance, the length one has resided in a country or community which surrounded by native English environment. An immigrant has stayed in the US for 15 years while the other has lived for 10 years, the 15-year immigrants must enter the US at an early age if he would expect to outperform that of 10-year' on L2 behavior. The same applies to that one lives in US for 20 years from age 18 may not likely to do better than whom lives only 10 years also from age 18. Meanwhile, with no regarding on age factor, receiving certain amount of classroom instructions cannot make adult learners obtain the same successful level as younger learners.

Age is a significant factor in L2 leaning in terms of native-like development for L2 learners, not only for aspect of pronunciation but also for other linguistic features (Johnson and Newport, 1989).

Johnson and Newport have conducted study aiming grammatical issues in L2 learning, they found that when compare learners start L2 learning before age 15 to those begin learning before age 10, there is no distinction difference in L2 ability between these two age groups. On the contrary, older learners learn after age 15 are unlikely to achieve native like level, and their language ability

are varied from each other. This study has provided firm evidence to support the existence of critical period in language learning, especially its contribution in attaining native-like language level.

For most of instructors, parents and others, even who barely have knowledge about the theory of critical period, still they have an instinct that the earlier of the age the better in L2 learning. However, if we ignore native-like language level, adult learners may obtain higher L2 proficiency more easily, thus it's important for us decide our goal of L2 learning when determine which age should we start our learning.

Studies of Patkowski, Newport and Johnson verify advantages for learning at an early age, particularly if you are intent to reach a native-like level, indeed these younger learners make success on their L2 learning, which almost make no difference with L1, yet this ultimate achievement is not only for young learners but for all of the L2 learners as well.

When learners have ambitious goal such as pursuing native-like standard, then learners need to start L2 learning at least before age 15 and follow the principle the earlier the better. In addition, learner must bear in mind the likely risk of losing their L1 ability if they totally immersed in L2 environment from their very early age. In school setting, L2 learning is always severed as communicative instrument, where L1 still occupies the main position. Learning for a certain amount of time per week later on, learners, for instance, age 10, would eventually catch up or outpace their counterparts who merely begin L2 study a few years earlier.

Exposure is also critical, many L2 learners start early, but after their very beginning learning, they do not have many chances to immerse themselves in L2 or apply L2 for daily use, this would finally result in L2 ability decreasing. ¹⁰ of exposure need to be guaranteed for L2 maintenance, with little or no exposure on L2 would not help any further development.

Conclusion

We have discussed many factors affect L2 learning, including intelligence, personality, motivation, aptitude, learner preferences and age. All these factors are closely integrated with each other and interact mutually in sophisticated manner. By having access to studies and researches, even some results of them about these factors contradict with one another, is not to suggest our alteration in learning or teaching immediately but on the basis of existing understanding of these variables, we should summarize experience and draw better comprehension on methods and approaches of second language learning from our experience, which would promote mastery of L2 regarding both teaching and learning.

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Assignment 1

GRADEMARK REPORT

FINAL GRADE

60/100

GENERAL COMMENTS

Instructor

This is a very good answer which is well presented and clearly defined.

You have displayed a good coverage of the material.

You provide a well-structured argument and the mark recognises work at a high level.

You also demonstrate an effective grasp of the literature and your emerging voice.

You might want to consider:

1. Elaborating on key EFL theory by further referencing key texts.
2. Referring to the age factor in more detail.
3. Can you refer to more recent reading in addition to the seminal works by key authors



Comment 1

Good overview, but you may want to introduce the chapter reference earlier.



Background reading



Comment 2

avoid.



Comment 3

one is born with - incomplete syntax



Comment 4

re-phrase - meaning unclear.



Comment 5

Clear evidence of understanding.



Comment 6

Can you account for this claim. Why are extroverts more successful?



Background reading

Evidence of wide reading



Comment 7

Further clarification here.



Comment 8

Check Harvard referencing and more recent references.



Comment 9

What research evidence is there to support this idea?



Criticality

Good ability to be critical and appraise the study's findings to further knowledge and thinking.



Key issues

Clear identification of key issues



Comment 10

You need refer to fossilization rather than decline here.



Comment 11

Good coverage of the main theory and issues.



Comment 12

Can you refer to more recent reading in addition to the seminal works by key authors?