

KEY FACTORS AFFECTING LANGUAGE ACQUISITION DEVELOPMENT OF EFL LEARNERS



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***Abstract.** The article discusses the importance of recognizing and considering the impact of learner characteristics such as age, learning style and learning strategies on successful language acquisition. It develops the viewpoint that learners' specific learning needs such as style preferences, age factors and learning strategy specifications should be taken into account while teaching English to students in the EFL classrooms.*

***Keywords:** foreign language acquisition, age factors, learning styles, learning strategies, motivation, aptitude, accomplish, reflective, impulsive.*

There are some key factors influencing successful language acquisition in the procedure of language learning and teaching. These factors are mostly composed of some basic learner characteristics including personality, aptitude, motivation, learning styles and strategies and the factor of age. From the perspective of age, it should be specifically noted that the relationship between age and success in second language acquisition is a complex and controversial subject matter dealt with in the research of language acquisition study [Rebecca, 1990].

In our opinion, it is important to clarify the concept of language acquisition at this point. The terms “language acquisition” and “language learning” are widely used in methodology, however, they carry different meanings and mostly understood in different senses. For example, Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics defines these terms in the following way: **language acquisition** (*n*)-the learning and development of a person's language. The learning of a native first language is called first language acquisition, and of a second or foreign language, second language acquisition. Some theorists use “learning” and “acquisition” synonymously. Others maintain a contrast between the two terms, using “learning” to mean a conscious process involving the study of explicit rules of language and monitoring one's performance, as is often typical of classroom learning in a foreign language context, and using “acquisition” to refer to a non-conscious process of rule internalization resulting from exposure to comprehensible input when the learner's

attention is on meaning rather than form, as is more common in a second language context.

Still others use “acquisition” only with reference to the learning of one’s first language. Moreover, Stephen Krashen also claims that there is a clear distinction between acquisition and learning. To be more concise, the former is subconscious and anxiety free, whereas learning is a conscious process where separate items from the language are studied and practiced in sequence. Krashen also suggests that teachers should concentrate on acquisition rather than learning and that the role of the language teacher should be to provide the right kind of language exposure, namely **comprehensible input** (that is, language that the students understand more or less, even if it is a bit above their own level of production). From these arguments it is clear that the relationship between age and language acquisition is so interrelated that it is important for teachers to be aware of this so that they can choose the right choice of language teaching methods, approaches and techniques.

In addition to the age factor influencing the language acquisition process, there are other key issues of teaching individuals a foreign language that should be taken into consideration during the teaching procedure. In this connection, it should be highlighted that learning styles and strategies are considered to be the most essential points to which English language teachers should pay much attention when they teach students a language. It is an irrefutable fact that the way students learn is different, therefore English language teachers should have the necessary skills for dealing with different learning styles and strategies in the classroom so as to enable their students to learn most efficiently according to their learning style and strategy preferences. The terms learning styles and learning strategies can be confusing.

According to the standard definition, learning styles refer to “an individual’s natural, habitual, and preferred ways of absorbing, processing and retaining new information and skills”. From this definition it is clear that every learner has their own way of learning something new and they apply them in the process of learning [Reid,1995].

These learning styles seem to be the root of the effectiveness and success of their learning. Therefore, the English language teachers’ interest in learning styles has dramatically increased in recent years. Furthermore, in the last decade the number of the works specifically devoted to learning styles and English language teaching such as Reid, Kinsella, Oxford, and Oxford and Anderson has increased significantly. The perceptual learning styles such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, and tactile are the most prevalent types of learning styles. However, they are only one piece of a much larger learning-style picture. Therefore, it is important to see the different learning

styles as connected because learners will have more than one learning style. In addition, different tasks may be approached in different ways, more than one learning style can be significant to accomplish a given task. The following three broad categories of learning styles have been regarded as the best taxonomy working well for English language teachers [Zoltan ,2005].

Table 1:

Learning Style Classification for the Second Language Classroom

Cognitive styles	Sensory styles	Personality styles
Field Dependent —learns best when information is presented in context. They are often more fluent language learners	1-Perceptual: Visual -learns best when there is visual reinforcement such as charts, pictures, graphs, etc.	Tolerance of Ambiguity: refers to how comfortable a learner is with uncertainty; some students do well in situations where there are several possible answers; others prefer one correct answer
Field Independent -learns most effectively step-by-step and with sequential instruction. They are often more accurate language learners	Auditory -learns more effectively by listening to information	Hemisphere Dominance: Left-brain dominant learners tend to be more visual, analytical, reflective and self-reliant
Analytic -works more effectively alone and at his/her own pace	Tactile -learns more effectively when there is an opportunity to use manipulative resources	Right-brain dominant learners tend to be more auditory, global, impulsive and interactive
Global -works more effectively in groups	Kinesthetic -learns more effectively when there is movement associated with learning	
Reflective -learns more effectively when they have time to consider new information before responding	2- Environmental: Physical -sensitive to learning environment, such as light, temperature, furniture	
Impulsive -learns more effectively when they can respond to new information	Sociological -sensitive to relationships within the learning environment	

immediately; as language learners , they are risk takers		
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It is clear from the content of the table that style preferences of learners should be recognized and taken into account by teachers while they select appropriate teaching methods and approaches to teach them effectively. Therefore, it should be particularly highlighted that in order to recognize different styles in their learners and create lesson plans and classroom activities that address these varied styles, teachers should have certain knowledge of the general categories of learning styles. The main reason for this is that every student in the classroom will have cognitive, sensory, and personality type learning styles.

However, learning strategies are different from learning styles. Learning strategies refer to “characteristics we want to stimulate in students to enable them to become more proficient language learners.” Firstly, it should be stressed that strategies are important to a given task. To be more precise, strategies are chosen in conformity with the task set by the teacher. For example, teachers usually ask learners to make a presentation on a specific topic that they have recently discussed in a language classroom. According to the given task, students should present and reveal the main assumptions of the topic.

To deal with this particular task learners apply a cognitive strategy, auditory representation in particular. Strategies are specific means that learners use to learn or improve their language. There are many different kinds of learning strategies, depending on the context and tasks. Therefore, it is expedient to focus on the general learning strategies. In the cognitive academic language learning approach, Chamot and O’Malley (1994) identified some general learning strategies (see the 2nd -table) that contribute to second language students’ success in academic and classroom environments. The general learning strategies are important for all language learners in formal classroom environments. General learning strategies are classified into three broad areas: metacognitive (i.e., strategies to help students think about their own learning), cognitive, and socio-affective [Jack C. Richard, 2007].

In conclusion, the following implications and final reflections can be drawn:

Learner characteristics such as age, learning styles and learning strategies play a significant role in language acquisition development;

Teaching methods, techniques and strategies should be adapted and based on the learner needs such as age, learning style and strategies;

Learner peculiarities in terms of their learning styles, strategies and age factors should be taken into consideration in order to promote success in EFL classrooms

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