VARYING CHARACTERISTICS IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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Abstract

This article aims to discuss the variation of characteristics in second language acquisition. The method used to gather data is a literature review. A literature review is employed to examine textbooks, internet resources, and relevant journals pertaining to the study's *topic. The process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) involves a spectrum of diverse characteristics among learners. This article examines the multitude of individual attributes, encompassing cognitive abilities, motivation, age, and learning styles, that contribute to the complexities within Second Language Acquisition (SLA). By acknowledging and exploring these varying traits, this examination aims to elucidate how these individual differences impact the acquisition and mastery of a second language. Understanding and accommodating these diverse characteristics are pivotal in tailoring effective pedagogical strategies and interventions within the domain of language acquisition. This comprehensive analysis underscores the importance of personalized approaches in SLA, emphasizing that recognizing and adapting to the unique needs of each learner can significantly enhance their language learning journey. By integrating these insights into educational practices, educators can foster more effective and inclusive language learning environments.*
Keywords: Second Language Acquisition (SLA), Learners, Varying characteristics

INTRODUCTION

Language is a communication tool used by humans to interact with each other. With language, people can share knowledge, exchange ideas, swap information, and understand others. In other words, individuals are capable of mastering or acquiring language as long as they live, grow, and develop. Efforts towards language mastery can be pursued through two methods: language instruction and language acquisition. Language instruction is the process of an individual's language mastery that occurs in a formal setting, limited to the level of meaning or language rules. Language

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instruction refers to consciously acquiring language skills. On the other hand, language acquisition is the process of an individual's language mastery that occurs in a non-formal situation, attempting to understand language at the level of meaning by associating it with context. Language acquisition is a language acquisition strategy that aims to master language in a comprehensive manner. Acquisition refers to unconsciously mastering language, unaffected by teachings on rules and language structure, as well as formal environments.

An individual's mastery of a language begins with the acquisition of their first language, often referred to as the mother tongue (L1). The acquisition of the first language is typically associated with a child's language acquisition that initially occurs within the family environment by imitating language; during this process, the child is unaware that they are learning their language. After mastering the first language (L1), an individual in subsequent stages can acquire another language, commonly known as the second language (L2), with the aim of expanding knowledge, enhancing communication skills, adapting to the external world, and developing their life. An individual also strives to acquire the second language for daily use in various purposes, such as tourism, education, employment, economy, social, cultural, and political aspects.

The acquisition of the second language (L2) certainly involves a process. An individual's fluency in using the second language heavily depends on opportunities to use it and other influencing factors affecting the acquisition of the second language, such as the influence of the first and second languages, environment, age, culture, and media. To gain a deeper understanding of the acquisition of the second language and the influencing factors, this article will outline several aspects related to language acquisition and the factors influencing the acquisition of the second language.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) stands as a multifaceted process influenced by an array of individual traits and qualities. The journey of acquiring a second language traverses through diverse terrains shaped by an individual's cognitive capacities, motivational factors, age dynamics, and distinct learning styles. Understanding the intricate interplay of these varying characteristics within the realm of SLA is paramount in unraveling the complexities that underlie language acquisition.

This article aims to delve into the mosaic of individual differences encountered in the pursuit of mastering a second language. By examining the nuances of these diverse traits, this exploration seeks to shed light on their profound impact on the acquisition, progression, and ultimate proficiency achieved in a second language. Recognizing the significance of these variations not only enriches our comprehension of language acquisition but also forms a pivotal cornerstone in tailoring effective pedagogical approaches that accommodate and optimize individual learning journeys.

METHOD

This research falls under the category of qualitative descriptive research. Qualitative research is essential for understanding a social phenomenon and the perspectives of the individuals under study (A. Kusumastuti and A Mustamil Khoiron, 2019; S Siyoto and M Ali Sodik, 2015; Sholahuddin, 2021; Sugiyono, 2013; Suliswiyadi, 2019; Widodo, 2021). Its primary objective is to describe, study, and explain the phenomenon.

The data collection methods employed in this research include literature review. A literature review is conducted to examine textbooks, internet resources, and relevant journals related to the research topic. Interview and observation methods are utilized to gather evidence regarding the factors influencing second language acquisition.

The data analysis technique utilized in this research follows the data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994), which involves data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing, and data verification.

RESULT/FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Diverse individual characteristics play a pivotal role in the process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). The analysis of various studies and literature reveals a spectrum of traits contributing significantly to the complexities within Second Language Acquisition (Ellis, 1985; Fadillah, 2009; Felix, 1978; Sutrisna, 2021). There are several varying characteristics in Second Language Acquisition, namely cognitive abilities, motivation, age, and learning styles.

Cognitive Abilities

Studies consistently highlight the correlation between cognitive abilities and language learning. Individuals with higher cognitive flexibility and working memory tend to exhibit more efficient language acquisition.

The Cognitive Language Acquisition Theory was largely influenced by several figures in the fields of cognitive psychology and linguistics. One of the most influential figures in shaping this concept was Jean Piaget, a Swiss psychologist known for his theory of child cognitive development (Piaget, J. 2000; Siegler, R. S., & Ellis, S., 1996).

Piaget made significant contributions to our understanding of how children comprehend the world and language. His theory on stages of cognitive development, including processes of adaptation, assimilation, and accommodation, provided a framework for understanding how children process and understand language.

Piaget's concepts regarding how children construct their understanding of the world through interactions with their environment, as well as how they continuously modify and expand their understanding (accommodation), have significant implications in the theory of cognitive language acquisition.

While Piaget wasn't a linguist, his contributions to understanding cognitive processes in general, including language development, have influenced views and theories within the context of cognitive language acquisition.

Motivation

Motivation is the driving force or energy that compels someone to take action, pursue goals, or engage in specific behaviors (Anjomshoa & Sadighi, 2015; Marszalek & Balagna, n.d.; Zareian & Jodaei, 2015). Motivational factors emerge as influential determinants in SLA. Intrinsically motivated learners display sustained interest and engagement, positively impacting language proficiency. In the context of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), several motivational theories address the factors influencing an individual's desire to learn and use a second language. There are self-confidence, goal orientation, willingness to communicate, and social identification.

The first is self-efficacy theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of an individual's belief in their ability to learn a second language. High self-confidence in language learning abilities tends to increase motivation to continue learning and using the language.

The second is task and achievement orientation theory. This theory focuses on how individuals are oriented towards specific learning tasks in second language acquisition. Those who focus on achieving particular goals tend to have higher motivation in learning a second language.

The third is Willingness to Communicate Theory. This theory highlights an individual's willingness to communicate in the second language. Those highly motivated to interact and use the second language in social situations tend to be more motivated to learn it.

The last one is Integrative and Social Identity Theory. This theory emphasizes that motivation to learn a second language can be influenced by the desire to connect with the culture or community speaking that language. Identifying with the culture or group speaking the second language can enhance motivation to learn it.

Factors; self-confidence, goal orientation, willingness to communicate, and social identification; can influence individual's motivation to learn a second language. This demonstrates that motivation in SLA results from the complex interaction of internal and external factors.

Age

Age remains a crucial factor affecting SLA (Birdsong, 2009). While younger learners often display greater aptitude for native-like pronunciation, older learners may compensate with stronger analytical skills.

One well-known theory that examines the role of age in second language acquisition is the Critical Period Hypothesis. This theory suggests that there is a specific period in an individual's development during which the ability to acquire a second language naturally and with relative ease is notably high. It generally highlights that this ability significantly declines after the critical period ends.

Early research by linguists like Eric Lenneberg and others supported the notion that children tend to learn a second language more quickly and easily than adults. However, pinpointing the exact critical period and the rate of decline in language acquisition after that period remains a topic of debate in these studies.

Moreover, some other theories emphasize that while children may be more flexible in learning a second language, it doesn't imply that adults are unable to effectively learn a second language. These theories highlight the role of factors such as motivation, learning environment, types of social interaction, and learning strategies in determining an individual's success in acquiring a second language, not solely dependent on age.

In essence, while the Critical Period Hypothesis considers the influence of age on second language acquisition, ongoing debate and research continue to explore the complexity and diversity of factors impacting an individual's success in learning a second language regardless of their age.

Learning Styles

Language learning strategies are the often-conscious steps or behaviors used by language learners to enhance the acquisition, storage, retention, recall, and use of new information (Oxford, 1989). The theory of learning strategies in second language acquisition emphasizes how individuals employ specific strategies to comprehend, retain, and effectively use a second language. There are several significant theories regarding learning strategies in the context of second language acquisition, namely taxonomy of language learning strategies, contextual learning strategies, strategies adopted by learners, and planning strategies.

The first is taxonomy of language learning strategies. This theory is developed by Rebecca Oxford. This theory categorizes language learning strategies into several types, such as cognitive strategies (information processing), metacognitive strategies (monitoring and regulating learning processes), and social strategies (interaction with native speakers or peers).

The second is contextual learning strategies. This theory emphasizes the use of learning strategies adapted to specific contexts, such as using language in particular situations or adapting to different communicative environments.

The third is strategies adopted by learners. This involves studying how second language learners adopt or adapt learning strategies from their first language into the process of acquiring a second language.

The last one is planning strategies. This theory highlights the use of planning strategies in the second language learning process, such as scheduling study time, setting goals, and creating effective learning plans.

Based on the discussion above, the individual traits in second language acquisition provide a crucial foundation for the development of suitable and effective pedagogical strategies. By understanding this diversity of characteristics, educators can create a more inclusive and successful language learning environment for learners.

CONCLUSION

The realm of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is intricately woven with a multitude of diverse individual characteristics. This examination of individual attributes, spanning cognitive abilities, motivation, age, and learning styles, has revealed their substantial contributions to the complexities inherent in Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

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