THE EFFECTS OF AGE AND MOTIVATION FACTORS ON SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

İkinci Dil Kazanımında Yaş ve Motivasyon Faktörlerinin Etkileri

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Özet


Anahtar Kelimeler: İkinci Dil Kazanımı, İkinci Dil Öğrenimi, Motivasyon, Yaş Faktörü

Abstract

Learner is affected by many factors in the second language acquisition process. The level of cognitive development, socio-economic and cultural background, and the ability to acquire a language, age and motivation of the learner’s can be expressed as the factors affecting second language acquisition. The competency of a learner’s in his or her first language has a direct relationship with his or her age. Schooling and cognitive development are the other factors affecting the second language acquisition. In researches and studies made on second language acquisition, the learners who completed their first language acquisition have been found more successful in second language acquisition. Motivation is another factor affecting second language acquisition. Achieving motivation lets the learner a desire to learn a language. Studies on motivation show that motivated learners are more successful in second language acquisition.

Key Words: Second Language Acquisition, Second Language Learning, Motivation, Age

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Factor

Language learning has always become an important work-field both in schools and other private sectors dealing with language teaching and learning process. Second language learning is a process which is affected by many factors. It is accompanied by different kinds of factors including the learner’s environment both in and out of school. In this article the age and motivation factors in the second language learning process will be analyzed, discussed and some perspectives will be put forward.

According to Collier (1988), the factors that affect second language acquisition and advancement in language learning depend on the learner’s cognitive style, socio-economic background, formal schooling in first language and so on. Yiğiter (1988), expresses that, in general, there are three factors affecting second language learning. They are the teacher, learner and method respectively. These three factors have great impact on language learning.

What is Second Language Acquisition

Second language acquisition is concerned with the study of the way in which an individual becomes able to use one or more language different from his first language. This process can take place in a natural setting or through formal classroom instruction, and, although the degree of proficiency that can be attained is a controversial topic, it can start at childhood or during the adult age (Krashen, 1982).

The Effect of Age on Second Language Acquisition

A learner’s age is one of the important factors affecting the process of second language acquisition. Collier (1988), expresses that successful language acquisition depends on the learner’s age. In one of the earliest studies on second language acquisition Lenneberg (1967), claims that there is a certain period in acquisition of a second language. In this period, which is identified critical period hypothesis in language acquisition, Lenneberg theorizes that the acquisition of language is an innate process determined by biological factors which limit the critical period for acquisition of a language from roughly two years of age to puberty. Lenneberg believes that after lateralization, which is a process by which the two sides of the brain develop specialized functions, the brain loses plasticity and lateralization of the language function is normally completed by puberty, making post-adolescent language acquisition difficult.

After Lenneberg, in some other studies examining subjects’ pronunciation after over five years of exposure to the second language, it was found that the large majority of
adults retain their accent when the second language is acquired after puberty, whereas children initiating second language acquisition before puberty have little or no foreign accent. In two different studies on assessing students’ acquisition of pronunciation after three years of exposure to the second language, Fathman (1975) and Williams (1979), found that younger students had retained more accent-free pronunciation when compared to adolescents just past puberty.

While critical period studies usually focused on child-adult differences and suggested that younger learners should be superior learners, studies of oral language skill acquisition by children of different ages have led to the conclusion that older children acquire faster than younger children (Collier, 1988). In a study made by Ervin-Tripp (1974), it was found that after nine months of instruction in French, 7- to-9-year-olds performed better than 4- to 6-year-olds did in comprehension, imitation, and conversation.

Fathman (1975), found that in the first year of study, 11- to 15-year-olds were significantly better at acquiring English as a second language than 6- to 10-year-olds in pronunciation, morphology, and syntax.

As to academic purposes, students need to acquire as complete to a range of skills in the second language as possible. In school language becomes abstract and focus of every content area task, with all meaning and all demonstration of knowledge expressed through oral and written forms of language as students move from one grade level to the next. Some researchers made comparisons on the performance of students of different ages on language tasks associated with school skills, including reading and writing. Some researches have been conducted by comparing the performance of students of different ages on language tasks associated with language skills, including reading and writing, In some of these studies, both short-term and long term, it was found that students between the ages of 8 and 12 are faster in early acquisition of second language skills, and over several years’ time they maintain this advantage over younger students at the age of 4 to 7 years (Collier, 1988).

From these studies, it can be asserted that older students between the ages of 8 to 12 are faster, more efficient acquirers of school language than younger students between the ages of 4 to 7. In many of the studies, young children beginning the study of a second language between the ages of 4 and 7 take much longer to master skills needed for academic purposes than older children do. The reason why students acquire the language skills better is that children who enter school at the age of 5 or 6 have not completed acquisition of their first language, which continues through at least age 12. From ages 6
to 12, children still are in the process of developing in first language the complex skills of reading and writing, besides, continuing acquisition of more complex rules of morphology and syntax, elaboration of speech acts, expansion of vocabulary, semantic development, and even some subtleties in phonological development (McLaughlin, 1984).

The Effect of Motivation on Second Language Acquisition

Motivation is one of the important aspects of second language acquisition. Motivation is a kind of desire for learning. It is very difficult to teach a second language in a learning environment if the learner does not have a desire to learn a language. Taken into consideration from that aspect, to be able to make the learner active and desirable in learning process gains importance.

In the 1990s, researchers in the field of applied linguistics called for an expansion of the motivational construct in second language learning (Skehan 1991; Oxford & Shearing, 1994; Dörnyei, 1994). Preliminary evidence has emerged in recent research, which not only demonstrates the relevance of the new motivational constructs (such as goal-setting, causal attributions and so on) in language learning, but also shows that incorporation of such new elements into the existing theoretical models is likely to result in more elaborate models of language learning motivation (Tremblay & Gardner 1995).

Reece & Walker (1997), express that motivation is a key factor in the second language learning process. They stress that a less able student who is highly motivated can achieve greater success than the more intelligent student who is not well motivated. Sometimes students may come highly motivated and the task of the teacher is to maintain motivation of the students. The task of the teacher is to maximize the motivation. Shulman (1986), expresses that students’ learning is facilitated most effectively when students are motivated, and that motivation can be enhanced through the creation of a positive affective climate. Crookes & Schmidt (1991), defines the motivation in terms of choice, engagement and persistence, as determined by interest, relevance, expectancy and outcome.

Motivation depends on the social interaction between the teacher and the learner. To be able to create an effective learning environment having highly motivated students necessitates strong interpersonal and social interaction. According to Cooper & McIntyre (1998), if it is accepted that learning is claimed to be dependent on certain types of interpersonal and social interaction, it follows that circumstances that make these forms of interaction desirable or at least congenial become a necessary prerequisite of effective
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learning. It can also be said that the appropriate forms of interaction help the learner solve his or her problems in the learning process.

The importance of the teacher factor in having a high level of motivation in second language acquisition cannot be neglected. The success of a teacher in second language acquisition in school affects directly the success of learners. Cooper & McIntyre (1998) underline the importance of the teacher factor in students’ achievement. They add that the more successful the teacher is in focusing and facilitating effective pupil calibration, the more effective the teacher will be in facilitating effective pupil learning.

The choice of teaching strategy on motivation is emphasized by Reece & Walker (1997). The choice of teaching strategy has an effect upon the motivation and interest of the student. The manner in which the teacher approaches the teaching strategy will have an effect upon motivation: an enthusiastic approach is more likely to motivate than a dull approach.

Kristmanson (2000), offers that an effective learning environment can be achieved by:

- Encouraging and supporting students at all times but especially when they are struggling or lacking confidence in certain areas.
- Being energetic and enthusiastic about what you are teaching and on those days when you do not have that energy, provide activities that require the learners to put forth the majority of the energy.
- Creating an atmosphere in which students are not afraid to make mistakes and are encouraged to take risks.
- Avoiding tension-causing strategies such as surprise quizzes, overly competitive activities, putting students in front of their peers with no warning or chance for preparation, and correcting errors in a negative, accusatory fashion.
- Allowing students opportunities to talk about themselves, their interests, and their culture.
- Providing opportunities for interaction in the target language in and outside the language learning environment through preplanned and spontaneous activities,
- Encouraging goal setting and a sense of dedication and continuous commitment to the language learning task through meaningful, relevant and authentic language learning activities.
- Encouraging learners to seek out opportunities in their lives that will help in the learning of the target language.
- Creating, through the presentation of attainable goals and reasonable challenges, a learning environment with a definite potential for success.
- Recognizing the "little successes", improvements and progress of all students both individually and with the entire group.

Attitudes can also play a significant role in the language-learning classroom. They have a close relationship with motivation. Krashen (1985), proposes that attitudes can act as barriers or bridges to learning a new language and are the essential environmental
ingredient for language learning. Krashen (1985), states that learning can only happen if certain affective conditions, such as positive attitudes, self-confidence, low anxiety, exist and that when these conditions are present input can pass through the affective filter and be used by the learner. Davies (1996), states how students can learn a language effectively as follows:

“In learning how to use a language effectively, students must be actively engaged in using language. The teacher of English must create opportunities within the classroom situation, which enable students to think through language and to express their learning through the language modes of speaking, listening, reading and writing. A variety of strategies have been developed which encourage students as active meaning-makers, using language to go beyond the literal in investigating how language works and is used as a form of thinking and communication.”

There have been several researches on learners’ motivation in second language learning. In a laboratory study performed by Gardner, Lalonde and Moorcroft (1985) a French/English paired associates learning paradigm was used, and it was demonstrated that learning was faster for subjects classified as having relatively high levels of integrative motivation than for those with low levels. Subsequent studies have employed the same paradigm but have administered all material by computer. In one such study, Gardner and MacIntyre (1991), investigated the effects of integrative and instrumental motivation on the learning of French/English vocabulary, and found that both interactively- and instrumentally-motivated subjects learned the vocabulary faster than subjects not so motivated.

Conclusion

The success in second language acquisition depends on many factors. Age and motivation factors are among the most important ones. In studies, it has been found that if a learner has a competency in his or her own language, he or she is more advantageous than those who have not completed his first language. As to motivation, it has been found that motivated students are more successful in second language acquisition second language acquisition than those who are not motivated.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


