



The Influence of Psychology Factors on English Language Teaching

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Abstract: A large number of examinations in the history of teaching of English language have encouraged a tendency to a good relationship between psychology and English language teaching. Both English language teaching and psychology are important for teaching English in order to increase the knowledge of language teachers and learners. It is fact that psychology may be used as devices to reinforce learning English and to motivate the English students. To understand what is meant by psychology factors we need to briefly consider psychological theories of language learning. This paper will consider educational psychology and approaches to psychology in the acquisition of second language. To illustrate the issue of this paper I will look at interlanguage theory in second language.

Keywords: Interlanguage Theory, Psychological Factors, English Language Teaching, English Language, Theories of Psychology

1. Introduction

We notice that the learning of second language requires tremendous attention to psychological factors. In other words, in order to help second language learners to acquire second language which are unlike the language of their own language, we need to follow ways such as psychological factors. We should know that learning second language should not be dealt with without psychological factors. The second language learners should learn it whenever they feel confidence to do. One of the ways to increase the knowledge of the learners in acquiring second language is mention all the factors that are discussed later so as to be easier for the reader to follow the argument. Ziahosseiny (2009) argued that motivation as one of the language leaning effective variables moves a person to a particular action. The learner of foreign language, who feels that the learning will satisfy his or her social needs or psychological, will be positively motivated to learn. Khansir (2013, p. 1142) said that "linguistics and psychology has affected on Language teaching that is why, language learning involves the individual learner, motivations for learning, memory etc. Wilkins (1972) mentioned that most developments in teaching of foreign language came back to the time of the Second World War are done based on the assumption that language is a form of behaviour. Ellis (2003) added that there are factors which can be affective like learners' personalities on the degree of anxiety they experience and preparedness to take risks in learning and using a second language.

What is interesting for us is that teaching of English language can be used as a discipline that is primarily a practical area of work, or an application of theories which is rooted in large theoretical orientations. Therefore, it is important to understand those theoretical orientations or the deep structures of English language teaching. Thus, what is also necessary to keep in mind, that the psychological, linguistic, and English language teaching are essential as the orientations to this study. Breen and Candlin (2001) argued that we should consider aims in language teaching such as communication as a general aim, the underlying demands on the learner that such a aim may imply, the initial contributions which learners may bring to the curriculum, the process of teaching and learning, the roles of teacher and learners, the role of content within the teaching and learning, and the place of evaluation of learner progress and evaluation of the curriculum itself from communicative point of view (Khansir & Pakdel 2014). Dörnyei (2008, p. 5) argued that motivation as one of the most basic aspects of the mind of human being is used in order to



show success or failure in any learning situation (Resivia Gayatri 2020). According to Nouthaphone and Purbani (2020), motivation is something that supports or stimulates us to do something.

A number of studies in the field have aimed at investigating the effect of psychological factors on acquiring second language in general and English in particular. The studies have been done in the works of Gardner and Lambert, (1959) Gardner and Lambert, (1972), Gardner (1980), Busch (1982), Keller (1983), Gardner (1985), Kaplan (1990), Dörnyei (1994), Williams and Burden (1997), Dörnyei and Otto, (1998), Dörnyei (2009), Daftarifard et al (2014), Zendeboodi et al (2015). Khansir and Ghani Dehkordi (2017).

In the field of theories of psychology there have been two schools of English language teaching in respect of learner's learning English, firstly, Behaviourism which considers to eliminate all reference to subjective concepts or experience. Khansir (2013, p. 1142) added that "the basic theories of the behaviourist school are on empirical evidence obtained from experiments with living organisms and laboratory animals". One of the major most important the philosophy of the second school is called Cognitivism that it is used in order to give the ability to the learners to speak and understand a language such as English. The second school of psychology that has influenced English language teaching can be described as the cognitivist views of learning and teaching based on cognitive psychology.

It is interesting for us is that over the several decades Chomsky (1957) as one of the great linguists mentioned that all languages of human being share certain features (i.e. they all have nouns and verbs), that are known 'linguistic universals'. He suggested the language acquisition device (LAD) as an innate mechanism which all human being have it. He (1957, 1959, and 1965) also supported 'Nativist theories that mention that the ability to acquire language is innate and the children are programmed to learn language. Thus the Chomsky's theory has influenced on language acquisition and has influenced on educational psychology.

Interlanguage is one of the most important language and psychology theories that have influenced on English language teaching in the field of error analysis in 1972. In 1972, Selinker was the first research scholar coined the concept of interlanguage in language teaching. Khansir (2012) argued that interlanguage is a theory that while learning a second language or target language such as English as foreign or second language, for example, two types of language transfer may occur. Language transfer is the effect of one language on the learning of another. For example Negative transfer, also known as interference transfer is the use of L1 patterns or rule which leads to an error in the target language. English student builds up a system for himself or herself which is different in some ways from their first and second language systems. The system which the English student builds up for learning English or target language has been called interlanguage.

2. Educational Psychology

In order to understand our discussion about this article, we need to look briefly at the definition of psychology and then educational psychology will be briefly discussed. Psychology considers human behavior and experiences. Birjandi et al (2006) argued that various divisions of psychology are concerned with particular aspects of behavior (for example, developmental psychology, clinical psychology, and educational psychology). They added that psychology as a science involves the application of scientific procedures and approaches for understanding human behavior. Thus, psychology is known as one of the most important subjects in the study of human behavior and experiences. Williams and Burden (1997) argued that "psychology as a discipline of study grew directly out of philosophy" (p.8).

Educational psychology is still an important subject of controversy among English teachers, syllabus designers, linguists and psychologists in teaching and learning language in general and English in particular. English education continued in EFL and ESL setting through teaching and learning it with use educational psychology over the world. Approaches to ELT over the world have been done through educational psychology and teachers of English continue to follow it in teaching English to their students.

Kaplan (1990) defined Educational psychology as the application of psychology to education by focusing on the evaluation and development, and application of theories of learning and instructions and also application of principles of learning and instructions that can help the current of lifelong learning. According to Richards et al (1992), educational psychology is known as one of branches of psychology which studies theories and problems in education, including the application of theory of learning to teaching and learning of classroom, testing and evaluation,



curriculum development, , and teacher education. According to [Birjandi et al \(2006, p. 3\)](#), "educational psychology is the application of relevant psychological knowledge to educational theory and practice".

3. English language Teaching and Approaches to Psychology

While considering English language teaching, it is important and necessary for all of teachers of English language to follow the schools of psychology have influenced on English language teaching in the history of ELT. One of the psychology schools is Behaviorism. It has influenced on Structural linguistics, which in turn has influenced on the structural approach to the teaching English. The founders of this approach were [Fries in 1964](#) and [Lado in 1957](#). In this time, word lists, the IPA system and the behaviorist methodology of teaching marked a systematic approach to the study of languages. Thus this approach arose out of the ideas of early form of conditioning. This school study language in terms of stimulus and response. Skinner was one of the supporters of this school and he is known as the founder of modern behaviorism (1957).

The other psychology school has influenced on English language teaching in particular and language teaching in general was the Cognitive psychology. This psychology school was developed as a theory in psychology by [Neisser in 1967](#) and second theory of this school developed in linguistics by [Chomsky in 1965](#). The basic characteristics of cognitive approach was written by [Celce- Murcia \(2001, p. 7\)](#), led to discuss of leaning language. These are: language learning is viewed as rule acquisition, and language learning is not viewed as habit formation; instruction is often individualized; learners are responsible for their own learning; grammar must be taught but it can be taught deductively (rules first, practice later) and / or inductively (rules can either be stated after practice or left as implicit information for the learners to process on their own); pronunciation is de-emphasized; perfection is viewed as unrealistic and unattainable; reading and writing are once again as important as listening and speaking; vocabulary instruction is once again important, especially at intermediate and advanced levels; errors are viewed as inevitable, to be used constructively in the learning process and the teacher is expected to have good general proficiency in the target language as well as an ability to analyze the target language ([Khansir 2014](#)).

This theory was supported by Chomsky's LAD hypothesis and one of the most important hypothesizes comes back to Language Acquisition Device hypothesis was coined by Chomsky. This hypothesis focused on cognitive psychology and methodologies that eventually questioned the notion that input had to outcome in learner output, or even that output was solely dependent on classroom input. [Chomsky \(1959\)](#) argues that the behaviorist theory failed to account for the logical problem of language acquisition. [Khansir \(2010\)](#) discussed this issue as follows:

Cognitive learning theory holds that the human mind is viewed as an active agent in the thinking process and meaningful learning. In this theory, every normal person learns a human language, whereas even the most intelligent of animals, such as, the ape cannot learn language though some animals can learn to solve problems, use tools and so on.

One of the psychology schools is Transformational Generative School; I could not leave it in this discussion. The Transformational Generative Grammar was developed as a reaction to Behavioristic Psychology. This theory held that all languages have a common core of features called universals. A surface comparison between source and target language is not only inadequate but is based on a notion contrary to the facts of language. All languages, are alike in their 'deep structure,' it is only at the superficial or surface level that they diverge. These universals are a part of language in general, and this notion is an outcome of "the Rationalist-psychologist's" contention that language is innately specified almost in its entirety in man. In first language acquisition, children learn to talk because the capacity for language, as well as most of the structures of language is built into them. Chomsky rejected Skinner's theory of verbal behavior. [Chomsky \(1966\)](#) believed that linguistic behavior is a matter of habit, that it is solely acquired by reinforcement and association. [Chomsky \(1966\)](#) added that every child has an 'innate capacity' that help him/her to get knowledge of his/her language and enables him/her to produce his/her language creatively, called language Acquisition Device. Thus, Language Acquisition Device (LAD) can be made up of a set of principles which allow the child to work out the deep structures of particular languages ([Keshavarz, 1994](#)).

Before we leave our discussion about this issue English language and psychology, we discuss briefly English language and its place in human language. Today, English is an official language among many countries over the world. It is used as foreign and second language among people of the world. It has influenced on educational



subjects and played an important role in the acquisition of knowledge over the world. Khansir (2013) argued that English language is applied as international language of medicine, science, and business. Jesa (2008) said that the purpose of teaching English language teaching is to make the student an effective user of the language. Thus, according to Jesa (2008), there are the general objectives of English language teaching as follows:

- 1 In listening, the general objectives of teaching English are to enable the student to comprehend English when spoken at normal conversational speed;
- 2 In speaking, the general objectives of teaching English are to enable the student to speak English with fluency, accuracy and appropriateness;
- 3 In reading, the general objectives of teaching English are to enable the student to read English with comprehension at a reasonable speed;
- 4 In writing, the general objective of teaching English are to enable the student to write English neatly and correctly.

4. Interlanguage and Psychology

One of the important aspects of psychology that has influenced on English language teaching is Interlanguage. There is enough research evidence to show that error analysis and interlanguage have influenced on English language teaching. With growth and maturity some students develop a prejudice against target language (foreign language), this acts as a barrier to learning that language. In addition, natural problems have also been found affecting student's language learning. It has also been reported that child learners of a second or foreign language usually reach higher levels of acquisition than adult beginners, whereas adult beginners are faster in attaining second or foreign language proficiency. It is important for us to know why second language students make errors. Khansir (2008) argued that the main reason for student's errors is refer to competence of the learner. The competence errors are made by the application of the rules of the target language wrongly. Interference of mother tongue is known as one of the reasons for students' errors that is called as the negative transfer, which happens when the forms of the target language and those of the learners' mother tongue are different from each other, when there are similarities, there is positive transfer between the target language and mother tongue. What it is important for us to know is that " the study of language learners' errors has been particularly fruitful for understanding the different view of the results involved in second and foreign language acquisition".

However, the American linguist Larry Selinker introduced interlanguage, in recognition of the fact that second language learners construct a linguistic system that draws, in part, on the learners' first language but is also different from it and also from the target language (Ellis, 2003). Selinker (1972) as one of the great research scholars in linguistics and English language teaching considered five fossilization processes in language as follows:

- A. There is sometimes rules and subsystems of the interlanguage may result from transfer from the first language, called language Transfer.
- B. There is some elements of the interlanguage may result from specific features of the training process used to teach the second language, called Transfer of Training.
- C. There is some elements of the interlanguage may result from a specific approach to the material to be learned, called Strategies of Second Language Learning.
- D. There is some elements of the interlanguage may result from specific ways people learn to communicate with native speakers of the target language, called Strategies of Second Language Communication.
- E. There is some elements of the interlanguage may be the product of overgeneralization of the rules and semantic features of the target language, called Overgeneralization of the Target Language Linguistic Materials (1972).

Eckman (1991) added that interlanguages are languages and, further, that proposed linguistic universals are fully universal, in the sense that they apply to non- primary as well as primary languages. Thus, Ellis (2003)



mentioned that the concept of interlanguage offers a general account of how second language acquisition takes place. It incorporates from mentalist theories of linguistics and elements from cognitive psychology. He added that the concept of interlanguage can be viewed as a metaphor of how second language acquisition takes place.

5. Psychological Factors

Psychology is related to the mental process in teaching and learning language of human being. It focuses on human behavior and experiences. [Birjandi et al \(2006\)](#) mentioned that psychology is a science which involves the application of scientific procedures and approaches for understanding human behavior. One of the important psychological factors is motivation. [Johnson and Johnson \(1999, p.219\)](#) argued that motivation is usually defined as a psychological trait which leads people to achieve some goal. Motivation has been as a significant factor in teaching and learning target language and especially in EFL or SEL classrooms. What is important for us to know is that motivation is an integral part of English learning and teaching in foreign or second language in the everyday lives of English young learners over the world. Motivation is used as strategies of the language learning to help the language students to acquire knowledge of the particular rule or system in the English. [Brown \(2007\)](#) said that motivation is the anticipation of reward, whether internally or externally administered, choices made about goals to pursue and the effort exerted in their completion. I close my discussion about motivation by saying two kinds of motivation which are very important in learning English; one of them is instrumental motivation and the second is integrative motivation. [Khansir and Ghani Dehkordi \(2017\)](#) made a distinction between instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. Instrumental motivation is used for wanting to learn a language because it will be useful for certain "instrumental" goals, such as, reading a foreign newspaper, getting a job, and passing an examination. Integrative motivation is used for wanting to learn a language in order to communicate with people of another culture who speak it.

The second factor of psychology that is very important in language teaching is attitude. Attitude is closely related to motivation and they are often used together as one construct. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007\)](#) added that attitude is usually formed in childhood. It is very important factor along with motivation in target language (English). There are two kinds of attitude in learning language; first positive attitude help students to reach their purpose in leaning target language (English) but negative attitude hinders leaning target language (English). [Brown \(2007\)](#) mentioned that attitude is a set of personal feelings, opinions, or biases about races, cultures, ethnic groups, classes of people, and languages. What is important for us to know is that negative attitude can be changed through orientation and instruction. One of the best reasons causes negative attitude is misunderstanding or misconceptions about a phenomenon. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007\)](#) gave advice to language teacher about negative attitude and they argued that teachers should be conscious of the potential negative attitude in the students and try to understand the source of misunderstanding. My last words come back to language attitude based on [Richards et al \(1992\)](#), language attitude is thought to be a combination of various abilities , such as the ability to identify sound patterns in a new language, the ability to recognize the different grammatical functions of words in sentences, rote learning ability , and the ability to infer language rules. [Ziahosseiny \(2009\)](#) mentioned that attitude refers to the behavior, thoughts and feelings that the language learner shows to the foreign language, the people who speak it and their culture. Two language learners have different attitude in learning target language. We can conclude that an English student with high language attitude can learn English more quickly and easily than an English student with low language attitude in a class.

The third factor is personality factors which are used in learning target language (English). They are classified such as self-esteem, inhibition, anxiety, risk-taking and extroversion. They are closely related to motivation and the choice of student strategies. The first item of this category will be considered in this paragraph is self-esteem. Self-esteem breaks into words. First, I consider the word esteem. Esteem is called a fancy word is used for valuing someone or something, or thinking that someone or something is important. Thus, self is called means well yourself. So when a person uses the two words together in order to make the term self-esteem, it is easier to see what self-esteem is. [Ziahosseiny \(2009\)](#) argued that self-esteem refers to a person's concept of self, acceptance of self, and reflection of self in the interaction between self and others. It indicates the extent to which an individual believes himself to be capable, significant, successful and worthy. [Rosenberg \(1965\)](#) mentioned that self-esteem as a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward the self. [Brown \(2007\)](#) argued that self-esteem informally refers to an ego which is a factor related to the thinking and feeling of human organism. According to [Mortahan and Rizwan Khan](#)



(2003), self-esteem refers to the evaluation which one makes with regard to the self; it expresses the personal attitude or approval or disapproval, that is, a personal judgment of worthiness which is expressed in the attitudes that the individual holds towards him/herself. [Mortahan and Rizwan Khan \(2003\)](#) said that self-esteem in terms of the discrepancy between a person's conception of idea and real selves. However, there are three levels of self-esteem, namely Global or general self-esteem, specific self-esteem, and task self-esteem. [Brown \(2007\)](#) argued that global self-esteem refers to the degree to which persons in general feel positive about themselves; the second level of self-esteem is specific self-esteem refers to one's appraisal of his/himself in certain life situation such as education, work, communication, or special interaction. The third level of self-esteem is called task self-esteem, relates to particular tasks, activities or skills within specific situation.

Inhibition is one of the categories of personality factors in language learning. It closely related to and in some cases subsumed under the notion of self-esteem is the concept of inhibition. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007, p. 221\)](#) mentioned that "people build up a number of defenses in order to protect themselves when necessary". Human being child grows with a mother tongue language and he/she growing degree of awareness his/her language system in the process of life from childhood. The people who possess a higher degree of self-esteem are capable of coping with threats to his/her existence, and therefore his/her defenses are marginal. But the people (he/she) with weaker self-esteem build up huge walls of inhibition to protect his/her self-perceived weakness or lack of self-confidence. According to [Brown \(2007\)](#), inhibition refers to apprehension over one's self-identity or fear of showing self-doubt, leading to building mechanisms of protective self-defense. Anxiety is one of the most important categories of personality factors in language learning. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007, p. 233\)](#) stated that "anxiety is defined as a state of apprehension and vague type of fear." [Brown \(2007\)](#) mentioned that anxiety refers to the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, and nervousness connected to an arousal of the autonomic nervous system, and associated with feelings with uneasiness, frustration, self-doubt, apprehension, or worry. In general, there are two kinds of anxiety registered in literature. According to [Ziahosseiny \(2009\)](#), state anxiety which is specific to a situation and trait anxiety which is a permanent characteristic of one's personality. [Birjandi et al \(2006\)](#) pointed out that some types of anxiety are facilitating while others are debilitating. The role of language teacher as one of the angles of teaching and learning target language (English) is very vital. And according to [Horowitz \(1986\)](#), teachers either help students learn to cope with their anxieties or that they take steps to make the learning situations less stressful.

Risk-taking is one of the important factors of psychology in language learning. Risk-taking variation seems to be a factor in a number of issues in target language (English as foreign or second language) and pedagogy. It is interesting to know that successful English language learning happens when the English students have the willingness to take risks when the students face a problem. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007, p. 221\)](#) mentioned that "risk-taking in language learning refers to certain activities that, in the long run, would help the learners develop language ability". [Brown \(2007\)](#) added that risk-taking refers to willingness to gamble, to try out hunches about a language with the possibility of being wrong. [Richards et al \(1992\)](#) said that risk-taking concerns the degree to which a person is willing to undertake actions that involved a significant degree of risk. One of the issues discussed in risk-taking is willingness to guess. [Rubin \(1975\)](#) argued that one of the prominent characteristic of good language learners is willingness to guess. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007\)](#) added our discussion about the issue of willingness to guess and they argued that willingness to guess and being impulsive in initiating communication are features of risk-taking.

There are kinds of personality factors in target language are namely, extroversion and introversion. [Farhady and Delshad \(2007\)](#) said that extroversion refers a person strong desire who feels the need to receive self-esteem, and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving that affirmation from within oneself. [Brown \(2007\)](#) mentioned that an extroverted person as a gregarious, life of the party person. [He \(2007, p. 166\)](#) added that "extroversion is the extent to which a person has a deep-seated need to receive ego enhancement, self-esteem, and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving that affirmation within oneself". In language teaching, [Johnson and Johnson \(1999\)](#) mentioned that extroversion perhaps explains the degree of active participation in class and therefore may relate to language learning success. [Busch \(1982\)](#) said that extroverted learners would be more proficient than introverted learners in learning pronunciation. One of the types of personality factors is introversion. Introversion is one of the important factors in the acquisition of a second language. [Richards et al \(1992\)](#) mentioned that introversion is contrasted with extroversion and added that a person who has the characteristic of introvert, the person who tends to avoid social contact with others and is often preoccupied with his/her inner feelings, thoughts and experiences.



I close my discussion about Psychological factors and I conclude that the effect of Psychological factors on acquisition of English language have been extensively documented , the issue of Psychological factors in acquiring English language more efficiently and effectively than other languages. However, psychological factors are affective factors influencing language learning.

6. Conclusion

English language teaching like other profession is a developing one and it cannot live on its own; contributions from other disciplines are necessary for its development. One of the most important disciplines among other disciplines is psychology. Psychology has been playing a prominent role in developing English language teaching for a long time. In fact, it is the psychologists who were interested in the early years of language teaching in general and English language teaching in particular and thus the most valuable theories and approaches and methods of language teaching and English language teaching is their contributions.

In the 1940s, the Audio-Lingual Method of English language teaching had behaviorism ' as one of its foundations; when this method lost its popularity and meaning –based methods gained ground , 'cognitivism' because one of their foundations. Thus, the experiments in the field of psychology have been the main contributors to language teaching and also English language teaching. In recent years, because of interdisciplinary studies and research, new disciplines such as psycholinguistics, educational psychology, and sociolinguistics have developed and they contribute to English language teaching.

There is no doubt that the study of language as a human activity forms a part of psychology and the study of language as a social phenomenon forms a part of sociology. Psychological factors have played a major role in language teaching and learning in general and English language teaching in particular over the world. It is interesting for us to know that psychological factors are successful measures in the acquisition of language learning. As stated above, psychological factors are purposeful factors and these are a part of language learning and teaching and along with teachers and students works play a significant role in English language teaching. Psychological factors have been discussed as one of the major issues to researchers, teachers and syllabus designers in developing English language teaching. Finally, all methods and approaches of ELT have been involved in teaching English students in the history of English language teaching. However, the methods and approaches have been involved in both psychology and pedagogy in language learning and language use.

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