Second language acquisition Psychological factors, Affective/emotional factors.

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Language involves interaction with others. Psychological factors play an important role in a learner’s success in acquiring and using a second language. A learner is simultaneously an individual and a member of a group.

In this article, I will talk about learners as individuals. As an individual, a person carries character traits that enable him/her to function in different ways and deal with situations in a unique and personal style.

These individual factors influence second language acquisition as much as does the nature of the target language itself.

Psychological factors can be divided into two categories: affective or emotional, and cognitive, although there is not a clear cut between affective and cognitive factors. The mastery of a language creates on the students an affective or emotional response: enjoyment, pride, etc, but also the work of mastering a language (a second language) can be considered cognitive. The teachers need to be aware of all these factors and work with students in order to help them promote their learning.

AFFECTIVE/EMOTIONAL FACTORS

The affective domain is the means through which individuals become aware of their environment, respond to it with feelings, and act according to them. Some of these feelings are:

Self-esteem. A large part of a person’s feelings revolve around the way that person feels about himself/herself. According to Schumann, there are three aspects of self-esteem:

- Global (overall assessment of one’s worth)
- Specific (self-evaluation in various life situations, e.g., at work, and in individual characteristics, such as personality and intelligence)
- Task (self-evaluation in particular tasks)

It is unclear that high self-esteem causes language success, but teachers should encourage students to feel proud of their successes and abilities, because they may facilitate language learning.

Motivation. It’s the impulse, emotion or desire that causes one to act in a certain way. Various individual, sociocultural and instructional factors impact motivation. There are two types of motivation according to Gardner and Lambert:

- Instrumental motivation (the need to acquire a language for a specific purpose, e.g., getting a job)
- Integrative motivation (the desire to become a member of the culture of the second language group)

Although it is hard to identify and study it, motivation is key to learning.

Anxiety. Anxiety when learning a second language can be seen as similar to general feelings
of tension that students experience in the classroom. Almost everyone feels some anxiety when learning, and having to perform in a new language compounds anxious feelings.

*Attitudes.* Attitudes play a critical role in learning a second language, for example English. Attitudes toward self, toward language, toward English-speaking people, and toward the teacher and the classroom environment affect students.

*Empathy.* It’s the capacity to be aware of another’s feelings and to share them. It involves the connection of oneself with others. When learning a second language, listeners must understand the intentions and emotions of a speaker and attempt to comprehend the message.