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LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND L2 LANGUAGE: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Language acquisition, particularly second language (L2) learning, has been a central focus of linguistic and educational research. This literature review synthesizes recent studies (2020–2024) to explore key theories, factors, and methodologies in L2 acquisition. The review highlights the role of cognitive, social, and technological factors in shaping L2 learning outcomes. Findings suggest that while individual differences such as age, motivation, and aptitude remain critical, emerging technologies and innovative pedagogical approaches are increasingly influential. This article concludes with implications for future research and practice in L2 teaching and learning.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, L2 Language, A Literature Review

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INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a multifaceted process that encompasses cognitive, social, and environmental dimensions. It is a fundamental aspect of human development, enabling individuals to communicate, express ideas, and engage with their surroundings (Isbahi, 2024). While first language (L1) acquisition typically occurs effortlessly during early childhood, second language (L2) learning is often a more deliberate and challenging endeavor, requiring sustained effort, motivation, and often formal instruction. The study of how individuals acquire additional languages has been a central focus of linguistics, psychology, and education, with researchers seeking to understand the mechanisms that facilitate or hinder L2 learning.

Over the past few decades, the field of L2 acquisition has evolved significantly, moving beyond traditional cognitive theories to incorporate sociocultural, ecological, and technological perspectives. Early theories, such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Chomsky's Universal Grammar, emphasized the role of innate linguistic structures and comprehensible input in language learning. However, contemporary research has broadened this scope, exploring how social interaction, cultural context, and individual differences shape the L2 learning process. For instance, Sociocultural Theory (SCT), rooted in Vygotsky's work, highlights the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning, while Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) views language acquisition as a nonlinear, adaptive process influenced by multiple interacting factors.

The rapid advancement of technology has also transformed the landscape of L2 learning. Digital tools, such as Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) platforms, mobile apps, and AI-driven chatbots, have introduced new opportunities for personalized and immersive learning experiences. These

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innovations have not only expanded access to language education but also raised questions about their effectiveness and equity in diverse learning contexts. Additionally, the growing recognition of multilingualism and translanguaging practices has challenged traditional monolingual approaches, emphasizing the value of leveraging learners' entire linguistic repertoires to facilitate L2 acquisition.

Despite these advancements, gaps remain in our understanding of how various factors interact to influence L2 learning outcomes. For example, while the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggests that younger learners have an advantage in acquiring native-like proficiency, recent studies have shown that older learners can achieve high levels of competence through motivation and effective learning strategies. Similarly, the role of individual differences—such as aptitude, personality, and working memory—continues to be a topic of debate, with researchers calling for more nuanced and context-specific investigations.

This literature review aims to provide a comprehensive overview of recent developments in the field of L2 acquisition, focusing on studies published between 2020 and 2024. By synthesizing current research, this article seeks to identify emerging trends, highlight key findings, and address unresolved questions. Specifically, it examines the interplay of cognitive, social, and technological factors in L2 learning, explores the implications of innovative pedagogical approaches, and discusses the role of individual differences in shaping learning outcomes. Ultimately, this review aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of L2 acquisition and inform future research and practice in language education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theories of L2 Acquisition

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Recent studies have continued to explore the applicability of established theories in L2 acquisition, while also introducing new frameworks to better understand the complexities of language learning. Universal Grammar (UG), proposed by Chomsky, remains an influential theory, particularly in explaining the innate linguistic structures that facilitate language acquisition. Smith et al. (2021) found that UG principles are more evident in early L2 learners, supporting the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which posits that younger learners have a biological advantage in acquiring native-like proficiency. However, their study also noted that older learners can achieve high levels of competence through explicit instruction and motivation, suggesting that UG principles may interact with other factors such as age and learning context.

In contrast to UG, Skill Acquisition Theory emphasizes the role of practice and proceduralization in L2 learning. This theory, rooted in cognitive psychology, views language learning as a process of developing automaticity through repeated practice and feedback. Recent research has applied this framework to explain how learners develop fluency in specific language skills, such as speaking and writing (DeKeyser, 2020). For example, studies have shown that task-based language teaching (TBLT) aligns well with Skill Acquisition Theory, as it provides learners with opportunities for meaningful practice and skill development.

Meanwhile, Complex Dynamic Systems Theory (CDST) has gained significant traction as a framework for understanding the nonlinear and adaptive nature of L2 learning. Verspoor et al. (2020) argue that language acquisition is not a linear process but rather a dynamic interplay of multiple factors, including cognitive, social, and environmental influences. CDST highlights the variability and unpredictability of L2 development, emphasizing that learners progress at different rates and through different pathways. This perspective has been particularly useful

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in explaining individual differences and the role of context in shaping learning outcomes.

Individual Differences in L2 Learning

Individual differences have long been recognized as critical factors in L2 acquisition, and recent research has continued to explore their impact. Motivation, in particular, has been a central focus. Zhang and Zhang (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on motivation and L2 proficiency, revealing that intrinsic motivation—driven by personal interest and enjoyment—significantly predicts success in self-directed learning environments. Their findings underscore the importance of fostering learner autonomy and creating engaging learning experiences.

Language aptitude, another key individual difference, has also been extensively studied. Li and Taguchi (2023) investigated the role of working memory capacity in L2 grammar acquisition, finding that learners with higher working memory scores were better able to process and retain complex grammatical structures. This aligns with earlier research but highlights the need for more nuanced studies to understand how aptitude interacts with other factors, such as instructional methods and learning context.

Personality traits, such as extroversion and openness to experience, have also been linked to L2 learning outcomes. For instance, extroverted learners tend to engage more actively in communicative activities, which can enhance their speaking skills (Dewaele & Dewaele, 2020). However, the relationship between personality and L2 proficiency is complex and may vary depending on the learning environment and cultural context.

Technology and L2 Learning

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The integration of technology into L2 learning has been one of the most significant developments in recent years. Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) and mobile-assisted language learning (MALL) have been shown to enhance vocabulary acquisition, speaking skills, and overall learner engagement. Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2020) reviewed studies on MALL and found that mobile apps provide learners with flexible, on-the-go access to language resources, which can increase exposure and practice opportunities. However, they also noted challenges, such as the need for reliable internet access and the potential for over-reliance on technology.

AI-driven tools, such as chatbots and adaptive learning platforms, have also gained attention for their ability to provide personalized feedback and support. Chen et al. (2023) examined the use of AI chatbots in L2 classrooms, finding that these tools can simulate real-life conversations and offer immediate, tailored feedback, which enhances learner autonomy and engagement. However, their study also highlighted limitations, such as the inability of chatbots to fully replicate human interaction and the risk of reinforcing errors if not properly designed.

Sociocultural Factors

The sociocultural context of L2 learning has been increasingly emphasized in recent research. Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that encourages learners to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, has been shown to facilitate comprehension and communication in multilingual classrooms. García and Wei (2021) argue that translanguaging not only supports L2 development but also validates learners' linguistic identities, fostering a more inclusive learning environment. This approach challenges traditional monolingual teaching methods and highlights the value of leveraging learners' existing knowledge and skills.

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Study-abroad programs have also been a focus of sociocultural research, as they provide learners with opportunities for cultural immersion and authentic language use. Kinginger (2020) examined the experiences of L2 learners in study-abroad contexts, finding that social interaction and cultural engagement were critical factors in developing L2 proficiency. However, their study also noted that the benefits of study-abroad programs can vary depending on individual factors, such as motivation and willingness to engage with the host culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This literature review adopts a systematic approach to identify and analyze relevant studies published between 2020 and 2024. Databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, and Scopus were searched using keywords such as "second language acquisition," "L2 learning," and "language acquisition theories." Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed journal articles, empirical studies, and meta-analyses. A total of 35 studies were selected for in-depth analysis, with a focus on their theoretical frameworks, methodologies, and findings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cognitive Factors in L2 Learning

Recent research has reaffirmed the critical role of cognitive processes in L2 acquisition, particularly working memory and attention control. Li and Taguchi (2023) conducted a longitudinal study examining the relationship between working memory capacity and L2 grammar acquisition. Their findings revealed that learners with higher working memory scores demonstrated greater accuracy and speed in processing complex grammatical structures, such as relative clauses and subjunctive mood. This aligns with earlier studies by Baddeley (2003) and Wen

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(2016), which identified working memory as a key predictor of L2 learning success. However, Li and Taguchi's study also highlighted the need for more longitudinal research to understand how cognitive abilities evolve over time and interact with other factors, such as instructional methods and learner motivation.

Another important cognitive factor is attention control, which refers to the ability to focus on relevant linguistic input while ignoring distractions. Recent studies have shown that learners with stronger attention control are better able to notice and internalize new vocabulary and grammatical patterns during communicative activities (Suzuki & DeKeyser, 2021). These findings suggest that L2 instruction should incorporate strategies to enhance learners' cognitive abilities, such as mindfulness training or targeted exercises to improve working memory and attention.

Role of Technology

The rapid advancement of technology has revolutionized L2 learning environments, offering new opportunities for personalized and immersive learning experiences. Chen et al. (2023) investigated the use of AI-driven tools, such as chatbots, in L2 classrooms. Their study found that chatbots provide immediate and personalized feedback, which enhances learner autonomy and engagement. For example, learners who interacted with AI chatbots reported increased confidence in speaking and writing, as the tools allowed them to practice in a low-pressure environment. However, the study also identified challenges, such as the limitations of automated feedback in detecting nuanced errors and the risk of reinforcing incorrect language use if the chatbot's algorithms are not sufficiently advanced.

Another significant development is the use of mobile-assisted language learning (MALL). Kukulska-Hulme and Viberg (2020) reviewed studies on MALL and found that mobile apps, such as Duolingo and Memrise, enhance vocabulary

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acquisition and speaking skills by providing learners with flexible, on-the-go access to language resources. However, they also noted that the effectiveness of MALL depends on factors such as learner motivation and the quality of the app's design. For instance, apps that incorporate gamification and spaced repetition have been shown to improve retention and engagement.

Despite these advancements, challenges remain in ensuring equitable access to technology. Learners in low-resource settings may lack the necessary devices or internet connectivity to benefit from these tools, exacerbating existing inequalities in language education. Addressing these challenges will require collaboration between educators, policymakers, and technology developers to create inclusive and accessible learning solutions.

Sociocultural Influences

The sociocultural context of L2 learning has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in shaping learning outcomes. Translanguaging, a pedagogical approach that encourages learners to draw on their entire linguistic repertoire, has gained prominence in multilingual classrooms. García and Wei (2021) argue that translanguaging not only facilitates comprehension and communication but also validates learners' linguistic identities, fostering a more inclusive and supportive learning environment. For example, in a study of bilingual classrooms, learners who were encouraged to use both their L1 and L2 demonstrated greater confidence and participation, leading to improved L2 proficiency.

Study-abroad programs have also been a focus of sociocultural research, as they provide learners with opportunities for cultural immersion and authentic language use. Kinginger (2020) examined the experiences of L2 learners in study-abroad contexts, finding that social interaction and cultural engagement were critical factors in developing L2 fluency. For instance, learners who actively

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participated in host-family activities or local community events reported significant improvements in their speaking and listening skills. However, the study also noted that the benefits of study-abroad programs can vary depending on individual factors, such as motivation and willingness to engage with the host culture.

These findings highlight the importance of creating socioculturally rich learning environments, both in and outside the classroom, to support L2 development. Educators should consider incorporating translanguaging practices and providing opportunities for authentic language use, such as study-abroad programs or virtual exchange initiatives.

Pedagogical Implications

Recent studies have underscored the effectiveness of innovative pedagogical approaches, such as task-based language teaching (TBLT) and content-based instruction (CBI), in promoting L2 proficiency. Ellis (2022) conducted a meta-analysis of studies on TBLT, finding that task-based activities encourage meaningful interaction and language use, leading to improved communicative competence. For example, tasks that require learners to collaborate on problem-solving activities or role-playing scenarios have been shown to enhance both fluency and accuracy. These findings align with the principles of Skill Acquisition Theory, which emphasizes the importance of practice and proceduralization in developing language skills.

Similarly, CBI is effective in integrating language learning with subject-matter content, such as science or history. This approach not only enhances learners' language skills but also deepens their understanding of the content. For instance, a study by Lyster and Ballinger (2021) found that learners in CBI classrooms demonstrated greater gains in both vocabulary and critical thinking skills compared to those in traditional language classrooms.

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These pedagogical approaches highlight the importance of creating authentic and meaningful learning experiences that engage learners and promote active language use. Educators should consider adopting TBLT and CBI in their teaching practices, while also incorporating technology and sociocultural strategies to enhance learning outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This literature review highlights the multifaceted nature of L2 acquisition, emphasizing the interplay of cognitive, social, and technological factors. While individual differences such as motivation and aptitude remain critical, emerging technologies and innovative pedagogical approaches offer new opportunities for enhancing L2 learning outcomes. Future research should focus on longitudinal studies to better understand the developmental trajectories of L2 learners and explore the potential of AI-driven tools in diverse educational contexts.

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