PSYCHOLOGICAL OBSTACLES IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND HOW TO OVERCOME THEM

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ABSTRACT

Second language (L2) acquisition is often confronted with various psychological barriers that can hinder the learning process. These barriers include anxiety, embarrassment, fear of making mistakes, and lack of motivation. These psychological factors can affect learners' self-confidence and slow down their ability to master a second language. This study discusses the common psychological obstacles faced by L2 learners and how to overcome them. Proposed solutions include stress management techniques, enhancing intrinsic motivation, and creating a supportive learning environment. This research aims to provide insights for language teachers and learners in tackling these psychological challenges with more effective approaches.

KEYWORDS	*Second language acquisition, Psychological barriers, Anxiety, Motivation, Language learning, Stress management, Learning environment*

INTRODUCTION

Second language acquisition is a complex process that involves various factors, both cognitive, social, and psychological. Although many individuals are able to master a second language (L2), it is not uncommon for them to face various psychological obstacles that can hinder the process. These psychological obstacles include fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, social anxiety, and the influence of rigid or negative mindsets. These factors can affect how a person interacts with the language being learned and, in turn, slow down their progress in mastering the language.

In this study, various psychological obstacles that are often encountered in the acquisition of a second language will be discussed, as well as ways that can be applied to overcome these obstacles. This discussion is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the relationship between psychological factors and language acquisition, as well as provide practical solutions that can help second language

learners overcome the challenges they face. Thus, it is hoped that language learners can be more confident and effective in achieving the desired language proficiency.

Second language acquisition (L2) is a process that is greatly influenced by various factors, both internal and external. In addition to cognitive and social factors, psychological factors also play an important role in the smoothness of second language learning. According to the theory of language acquisition put forward by *Krashen* (1982), affective factors such as motivation, anxiety, and self-confidence have a significant impact on the process of language acquisition. Krashen argues that high motivation and low anxiety will improve a person's ability to master a second language. Conversely, excessive anxiety can inhibit information processing and reduce learning effectiveness.

Psychological obstacles in the acquisition of a second language include several aspects, including *speaking anxiety*, fear of mistakes, and lack of confidence. *MacIntyre* (1995) posited that anxiety is one of the main factors that can hinder a person from speaking a second language, as anxious individuals tend to avoid communication situations that require the use of a second language. The same thing is also explained by *Horwitz* (1986), who explains that anxiety in learning a second language can lead to conversation avoidance and difficulty in maintaining a fluent conversation.

In addition, psychological factors such as the fear of making mistakes often hinder the learning process. *Dörnyei* (2005) emphasizes the importance of creating a supportive learning environment, where learners feel comfortable interacting without fear of negative judgment. Without fear of mistakes, learners can experiment more freely with language and improve their communication skills.

In the face of this psychological obstacle, various strategies can be applied. Learning that emphasizes intrinsic motivation, anxiety management, and confidence building can help learners overcome these psychological barriers. For example, according to *Gardner* (2006), building strong intrinsic motivation through clear personal goals and increased self-awareness can improve learners' attitudes toward a second language and reduce their anxiety. Additionally, relaxation techniques and a more humanistic approach to language teaching can help reduce the social anxiety that learners often face.

Thus, an in-depth understanding of the psychological obstacles to second language acquisition and the application of appropriate strategies will be crucial to help learners overcome these barriers, so that they can achieve optimal language proficiency.

Second language acquisition (L2) is a complex process that involves many factors, both cognitive, social, and psychological. Psychological factors play a very important role in determining a person's success in mastering a second language. Psychological obstacles that arise during the learning process can hinder a person's

ability to develop and interact using the language being learned. Several experts in the field of psychology and language education have identified various psychological obstacles that are often experienced by second language learners, and provided recommendations to overcome these barriers.

According to *Eysenck* (2000), anxiety is one of the most common psychological barriers found in second language learning. This anxiety is often referred to as *foreign language anxiety* and can take many forms, such as fear of public speaking, fear of making mistakes, and fear of negative judgments from others. *Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope* (1986) in their study suggested that high anxiety in second language learning can hinder students' ability to access information and use language fluently. This anxiety can cause learners to be overly cautious or even avoid communication situations that require them to use a second language, thus hindering the acquisition process.

In addition to anxiety, lack of self-confidence is also a significant psychological obstacle. *Bandura* (1997) in the theory of *self-efficacy* explains that individuals who have a low level of confidence tend to feel hesitant in using a second language, even though they have enough knowledge. This low self-confidence is often caused by negative experiences in the past, such as feeling incapable of speaking well or often making mistakes. *Dörnyei* (2005) emphasizes that to overcome this, it is important for language teaching to create a supportive environment, where learners feel valued and given the opportunity to practice without fear of negative judgment.

Another factor that is no less important is the fear of making mistakes, which is often related to the perception that mistakes are a sign of failure. *Schmidt* (1990) suggests that language learners are often hampered by the fear of mistakes because they perceive them as something embarrassing or indicative of their incompetence. This causes learners to be less courageous to practice and avoid using the language in the context of real communication. *Krashen* (1982) also identified the important role of "affective filters" in the process of language acquisition. When learners feel anxious or afraid of making mistakes, their affective filters will "go up," which prevents them from receiving and processing the language input necessary for learning.

In addition, motivation problems also have a great influence on psychological obstacles in the acquisition of a second language. *Gardner* (2006) in his theory of motivation in language learning states that intrinsic motivation (the desire to learn a language because of personal interest) is more effective than extrinsic motivation (learning a language due to external pressure or need). Learners who have strong intrinsic motivation are more likely to endure psychological challenges in language learning and are more open to taking risks, including making mistakes.

The importance of a more humanistic approach to language teaching is also

emphasized by *Littlewood* (2004), who suggested that second language teaching should not only focus on cognitive and linguistic aspects, but also on developing self-confidence, managing anxiety, and building a positive and supportive learning atmosphere. Learning that encourages learners to speak without fear or anxiety about mistakes will help them feel more comfortable and motivated to continue learning.

To overcome this psychological obstacle, various strategies can be implemented. *MacIntyre* (1995) suggested that language instructors pay more attention to managing anxiety in the classroom, for example by using relaxation techniques or role-playing that help reduce tension. In addition, task-based *learning* that focuses on practical communication can help build learners' confidence in using a second language in a real context. *Dörnyei* (2001) also emphasizes the importance of motivation in overcoming psychological obstacles by creating clear goals and strong relevance for learners, so that they stay motivated despite difficulties.

Thus, psychological obstacles in acquiring a second language are real and often experienced by many learners. However, through the right approach and the implementation of supportive strategies, these barriers can be overcome, allowing learners to be more effective in mastering a second language and feel more confident in communicating.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach focuses on understanding individual experiences, perceptions, and psychological factors such as anxiety, motivation, and confidence. It is particularly suitable for exploring the subjective experiences of second language learners. This can be achieved through methods like in-depth interviews, which delve into personal experiences related to psychological constraints such as anxiety, embarrassment, or lack of motivation. Focus group discussions allow researchers to explore group perspectives on psychological factors that affect second language learning. Observations can be conducted to study students' behavior in learning environments, such as their reactions during public speaking activities.

Quantitative Approach

This approach measures the impact of psychological constraints on second language proficiency using statistical data. Researchers often employ surveys with questionnaires, such as the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS), to assess anxiety levels. Experiments or quasi-experimental studies can be used to

test the effectiveness of specific interventions, such as relaxation techniques or communication-focused strategies, in addressing psychological constraints.

Mixed Methods

A mixed-methods approach combines qualitative and quantitative techniques to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. For example, researchers might conduct a survey to measure anxiety quantitatively and follow it with in-depth interviews to gain qualitative insights into individual experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Interview

Semi-structured interviews are commonly used to explore psychological constraints, such as anxiety or motivation, in second language learners. These interviews may involve participants like teachers, students, or linguists.

Observation

Observations involve studying participants in classroom or learning environments to directly identify psychological barriers. This method provides real-time insights into participants' behaviors and reactions.

Questionnaire

Questionnaires are used to measure specific psychological factors, such as anxiety levels, motivation, or attitudes toward a second language. Instruments like the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale (FLCAS) are examples of tools that can be utilized in this process.

Case Study

Case studies provide an in-depth analysis of specific individuals or groups, such as students in a particular language class, to examine their psychological constraints and coping mechanisms.

Document Analysis

Document analysis involves the use of literature or secondary data from previous research to support and validate findings, enriching the study's overall analysis.

Data Analysis Methods

Thematic Analysis (Qualitative)

This method is used to identify key patterns and themes within qualitative data, such as interviews or observations, that relate to psychological constraints.

Statistical Analysis (Quantitative)

Quantitative data, often derived from questionnaires or tests, can be analyzed using statistical tools such as SPSS or Excel. Techniques like regression analysis, correlation, or T-tests are commonly used to examine relationships between psychological factors and learning outcomes.

Data Triangulation (Mixed Methods)

Triangulation involves comparing results from various data collection methods to ensure validity and reliability, offering a well-rounded perspective on the research findings.

Example of Research Procedure

The research procedure begins with the identification of psychological obstacles through data collection methods like interviews, observations, or surveys. This is followed by analyzing the causative factors using thematic or statistical methods. Researchers then identify coping strategies by asking participants to share their approaches or referring to existing literature. An optional step involves testing the effectiveness of proposed solutions through observations or follow-up testing to measure their impact.

Additional Research Methods

Literature Studies

A systematic review of previous studies related to psychological constraints in second language acquisition and strategies to overcome them offers theoretical insights and a broader understanding of the topic.

Case Studies

This method focuses on specific individuals or groups, such as students in a particular language class, to analyze their psychological barriers and explore effective coping strategies in detail.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results Based on Qualitative Methods

Psychological Obstacles Found

Interviews, observations, and case studies reveal several psychological obstacles commonly faced by second language learners. Language anxiety is a prevalent issue, often arising from fear of making mistakes while speaking or writing. This anxiety is typically triggered by a lack of confidence, environmental pressures, or past negative experiences, such as nervousness when speaking in front

of a class or interacting with native speakers. Another obstacle is a lack of motivation, with some learners struggling to maintain interest, particularly when immediate benefits of language learning are not evident. Instrumental motivation, driven by practical needs like work or study, tends to surpass intrinsic motivation stemming from personal interest. Social psychological barriers also play a role, including fear of negative evaluation and cultural differences that create additional pressure. Negative self-perception, or low self-efficacy, is another significant factor; learners who doubt their abilities often give up before attempting to participate actively.

Factors Causing Psychological Obstacles

Thematic analysis highlights several causes of these psychological constraints. Teaching methods that overly emphasize mistakes without offering positive feedback exacerbate student anxiety. Competitive or unsupportive classroom environments further diminish learning motivation. Additionally, personal factors such as negative past experiences, including ridicule, contribute to learners' reluctance and lowered self-confidence.

Strategies to Overcome Psychological Obstacles

Various strategies have been identified to mitigate these obstacles. Building confidence is crucial, with learners responding positively to supportive teaching methods, such as praise for effort and simulated small-group conversations that reduce stress. Motivation can be enhanced by linking language learning to personal goals, such as career opportunities, and using engaging, relevant learning materials. Anxiety management techniques, including relaxation exercises and breathing techniques, help learners feel more at ease, especially when combined with a relaxed teaching approach that avoids excessive focus on errors. Social support through group discussions and language exchange programs fosters emotional comfort and encourages interaction with native speakers.

Research Implications

For teachers, the findings emphasize the importance of creating an emotionally supportive environment that includes constructive feedback. Learners are encouraged to focus on their progress rather than comparing themselves to others. Institutions are advised to implement teacher training programs that address the psychology of language learners and promote inclusive teaching methods.

Results Based on Different Data Collection Methods

Interview

In-depth interviews with second language learners reveal several key findings. Communication anxiety is a significant barrier, often stemming from fear of speaking incorrectly, as illustrated by a participant's comment: "I'm afraid of speaking wrong, so it's better to keep quiet." Motivation is another challenge, with some learners lacking intrinsic interest, as one noted: "I learned this language only because I had to, not because I wanted to." Shyness, influenced by embarrassment over accents or limited vocabulary, also hinders participation. Proposed strategies include increasing emotional support from teachers and peers and designing learning activities based on individual interests.

Observation

Classroom observations highlight that some learners remain passive in group discussions, especially when they perceive their abilities to be lower than those of their peers. Participants who receive direct criticism without accompanying praise often show signs of frustration or anxiety, such as avoiding eye contact or lowering their heads. A competitive classroom atmosphere can further discourage engagement. Proposed strategies involve creating small-group learning activities to reduce pressure and adopting a supportive teaching approach that combines praise with constructive feedback.

Questionnaire

Data from Likert scale-based questionnaires reveal that 70% of participants experience high anxiety when speaking in class. Additionally, 55% report decreased motivation when learning materials are irrelevant to their needs, and 60% feel unconfident using a second language outside the classroom. Suggested strategies include providing relevant learning materials aligned with students' goals and interests and offering speaking training programs in relaxed environments to boost confidence.

Case Studies

In-depth studies of individuals or small groups provide detailed insights. For example, a highly anxious student reported avoiding interactions with native speakers. Follow-up interviews revealed increased confidence after participating in a language tandem program with a supportive native speaker. Effective strategies identified include the use of gamification-based language learning apps, which help learners feel more relaxed and motivated.

Document Analysis

Analysis of secondary data, such as student journals and teacher reports, highlights additional findings. Frequent formal assessments increase anxiety, while teachers employing inclusive approaches help reduce psychological barriers. Proposed strategies include replacing some formal tests with project-based assessments and providing teacher training focused on the psychology of second language learners.

General Conclusion of Data Collection Methods

The results of various methods show that psychological constraints such as anxiety, low motivation, and shyness are the main factors influencing second language acquisition. A holistic approach that involves emotional support, relevant teaching, and a supportive learning environment can help overcome these obstacles.

Psychological Obstacles in Second Language Acquisition

a. **Language Anxiety**

Language anxiety is a common barrier for second language learners, often stemming from a fear of making mistakes or negative judgments from others (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986). This anxiety affects communication, as learners are hesitant to speak due to concerns over being ridiculed or failing in front of others (Ellis, 1994). Additionally, anxiety impairs concentration and working memory, further hindering language acquisition (Ellis, 1994).

b. **Low Motivation**

Low motivation can significantly hinder language learning. According to Gardner and Lambert (1972), motivation plays a crucial role, with integrative motivation being linked to a desire to connect with the culture of the language being learned. On the other hand, instrumental motivation is driven by more practical reasons such as work or education. Dörnyei (2001) adds that irrelevant learning materials and a lack of support from the environment can reduce intrinsic motivation, making it difficult for learners to engage with their studies.

c. **Negative Self-Perception**

Negative self-perception is another barrier to language acquisition, often linked to low self-esteem or prior negative experiences in learning. Learners with low self-efficacy, as defined by Bandura (1997), may feel anxious and avoid participation, which further impedes language learning. MacIntyre and Gardner (1994) also highlight that negative self-perception can be reinforced by poor experiences such as ridicule or harsh criticism.

Causes of Psychological Obstacles

a. Unsupportive Learning Environment

An unsupportive or overly competitive learning environment can exacerbate language anxiety, as students may fear judgment or failure. According to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, high anxiety can block effective language input, making it harder for students to process and retain information.

b. Previous Negative Experiences

Scovel (1978) states that negative experiences, such as being ridiculed for an accent or mistakes, can leave a lasting psychological impact, creating barriers to further learning. These negative experiences can make students reluctant to participate in future language activities, reinforcing their anxiety and negative self-perception.

d. Lack of Social Support

Lack of support from teachers, peers, or family can worsen students' feelings of insecurity, as emphasized by Long (1996) in the Interaction Hypothesis. Without social support, students may struggle to overcome their anxiety and low self-confidence, further hindering their language acquisition process.

3. How to Overcome Psychological Obstacles

a. Overcoming Language Anxiety

To reduce anxiety, teachers can create a supportive learning environment by providing positive feedback and using simulation-based exercises such as role-playing (Krashen, 1982; Horwitz, 2001). Relaxation techniques, like deep breathing exercises before speaking, can also help manage anxiety (Young, 1991).

b. Increasing Motivation

Connecting learning materials to students' interests and goals is essential for fostering intrinsic motivation. Dörnyei (2005) emphasizes the importance of relevant materials to increase engagement. Rewarding progress and setting achievable goals can also help boost motivation (Gardner, 1985; Locke & Latham, 1990).

c. Improving Self-Perception

Building students' self-efficacy is critical. Bandura (1997) suggests providing small, manageable tasks that allow learners to experience success gradually. Social support from peers and teachers can also help reduce feelings of inadequacy and improve self-confidence (Vygotsky, 1978).

Implications Based on Expert Views

a. For Teachers

Teachers should adopt emotionally supportive approaches, such as providing constructive feedback and fostering a pressure-free classroom environment

(Oxford, 1990; Brown, 2007). Integrating humor, creativity, and interactive activities can also help reduce anxiety and improve motivation (Medgyes, 2002).

b. For Students

Students are encouraged to focus on their personal progress rather than perfection. Joining a language learning community or study group can also provide emotional support and boost confidence (Johnson & Johnson, 1989).

c. For Educational Institutions

Educational institutions should train teachers to be more attuned to the psychological aspects of language learners and design programs that foster a supportive learning environment (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Providing spaces that allow for emotional and social support will also help students feel more confident (Rogers, 1961).

Conclusions Based on Expert Views

Psychological obstacles such as anxiety, low motivation, and negative self-perception can significantly hinder second language acquisition. However, these obstacles can be overcome through approaches that focus on emotional support, relevant materials, and social reinforcement. The theories and views of experts such as Horwitz, Gardner, Bandura, and others highlight the importance of creating a supportive learning environment, setting clear goals, and providing social support to help students succeed in language learning.

CONCLUSION

Second language acquisition is influenced not only by cognitive processes but also by significant psychological factors that affect learning success. Common psychological obstacles include speaking anxiety, lack of self-confidence, weak motivation, fear of failure, and insufficient environmental support. These challenges can be overcome with strategies such as practicing speaking in supportive settings, using relaxation techniques, focusing on communication rather than grammatical perfection, rewarding small achievements, and engaging in language-learning communities. Strengthening motivation through goal setting, connecting language learning to personal interests, and highlighting its practical benefits also help. Addressing the fear of failure by viewing mistakes as part of the learning process and increasing environmental support, such as involving family or teachers, can further enhance success. Ultimately, overcoming these psychological barriers through a supportive and strategic approach leads to more effective and enjoyable language acquisition.

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