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Multilingual Learners: Understanding Second Language Acquisition Competency

The educator applies appropriate instructional strategies for multilingual learners' second language acquisition (SLA)

Key Method

The educator identifies the stages of second language acquisition (SLA) of selected multilingual learners. The educator also monitors and analyzes student work to implement appropriate instructional strategies that match each student's second language acquisition stage.

Method Components

Second language acquisition (SLA) describes the systematic steps that learners take as they learn a language other than their home or native language. Educators who are knowledgeable about best practices teach effective SLA strategies to multilingual learners in a safe, educational environment. Second language acquisition requires time, effort, and patience.

Components of Second Language Acquisition

Definition of Second Language Acquisition

Understanding who your multilingual learners are is the foundation for your instruction. To gain a deep understanding of your multilingual learners you will become familiar with how the federal government defines these learners, demographics, and current data trends on learner opportunities and academic achievement gaps.



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Stages of Second Language Acquisition

Stage and Time Frame	Description
Stage 1: Pre-production 0-6 months	“Silent Period” Listening, beginning to understand, points, total physical response
Stage 2: Early production 6 months-1 year	1- or 2-word responses, participates using keywords/familiar phrases, uses present tense verbs
Stage 3: speech emergence 1-3 years	Good comprehension produces simple sentences, makes grammatical and pronunciation errors
Stage 4: Intermediate Fluency 3-5 years	Excellent comprehension, makes few grammatical errors
Stage 5: Advanced Fluency 5-7 years	Near-native level of speech

Types of Language

Social and academic language is acquired at different rates. Other factors can have significant impacts on language learning.

Social language:

- 3-5 years to develop
- Used in social or informal settings often peer-to-peer
- Vocabulary is basic in nature
- Grammar is less complex than academic language

Academic language:

- 4-7 years to reach proficiency
- Used in academic settings
- Content specific vocabulary which is advanced and esoteric
- Grammar is often complex

Factors that Influence Language Acquisition

Rates of acquisition in the above chart are a general guideline but can be influenced by many factors.

Cognitive Factors:

- Grammatical sensitivity, memory, and ability to discriminate and produce sounds



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- Ability to observe, notice, and internalize rules of language (inductive language learning)
- Educational experience
- Age of learner
- Learning disability

Affective Factors:

- Motivation to learn English
- Level of anxiety in classroom
- Willingness to participate

Social Factors:

- Socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and gender
- Cultural differences and expectations
- Security

Cross-linguistic Factors

- Home language and linguistic ability in home language
- Language transfer issues, grammatical structures, vocabulary connections
- Alphabet differences (Roman and others) and sounds of letters

Mental Health and Newcomers

- Factors of immigration
- School and family connection
- Newcomer situations

Stages of Second Language Acquisition and Instructional Strategies

There are a variety of instructional strategies and activities that are appropriate for multilingual learners at the various stages of second language acquisition. There are guidelines for which strategies are most appropriate for beginning, intermediate, and advanced students. But the educator who is knowledgeable about the multilingual learners in their classroom, can make an informed decision about strategies that will work best for them.

There are several strategies that may be effective depending on the learners and their needs. Consider the learners' experience with classroom procedures. In the resource section you will find additional information about each of these six strategies.

Modeling:

Modeling is appropriate for all levels. Educators can model language by describing what they are doing.

Structured Pair Work:

This is appropriate for all levels, but multilingual learners at the beginning levels can benefit from language practice in a low-risk setting.

Learning Style Surveys

Getting to know students' learning styles can help you find strategies that work best for them.



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Visual Scaffolds

By creating a system of visuals, color-coding, and graphic organizers, students can be successful in the classroom and make learning easier.

Hands on Experiences

Incorporating opportunities for hands-on learning supports all levels of multilingual learners as they grasp concepts in a non-verbal format.

Meaningful Classroom Talk

Classroom discussion supports multilingual learners as they interact with the language through listening and speaking.

Cognitive and Linguistic Processes

Cognitive processing in language learning refers to the mental activities and thought processes that individuals engage in when acquiring a new language. It encompasses attention, perception, memory, reasoning, and problem-solving, all of which contribute to understanding and using a second language effectively.

Language learning involves absorbing new vocabulary, grammatical structures, and cultural nuances. Cognitive processing allows learners to actively engage with these elements, comprehend their meanings, and integrate them into their linguistic repertoire. Effective cognitive processing leads to the internalization of language rules, enabling learners to generate accurate and meaningful communication. Learning a second language requires several types of memory. Each type of memory plays an important role in language.

Working Memory:

Working memory is a limited-capacity system that temporarily holds and manipulates information. In language learning, working memory is responsible for holding words, phrases, and grammatical rules as learners construct sentences and engage in conversations.

Long-Term Memory:

Long-term memory is the repository of knowledge that endures over time. It's where learners store vocabulary, grammar rules, cultural information, and language skills learned over the course of their language learning journey.

Procedural Memory:

This type of memory is responsible for storing skills and procedures, such as grammatical patterns and pronunciation rules, which become automated with practice. It contributes to the ability to produce language without conscious effort.

Declarative Memory:

Declarative memory involves the storage of facts and explicit information. Learners use declarative memory to recall vocabulary definitions, verb conjugations, and other explicit linguistic knowledge.

Attention and Noticing:



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Effective language acquisition relies on learners' ability to pay attention to linguistic features in the input they receive. Noticing patterns and structures helps learners internalize the language.

Chunking:

Learners naturally group words and phrases into meaningful chunks for more efficient processing. Chunking aids in recalling and using language patterns without having to consciously analyze each individual word.

Transfer in Second Language Acquisition

As a learner takes on a new language, certain elements get “moved over” from their native language to the new language. Teachers should be familiar with the effect that native language (L1) can have on the second (L2) or other language. To support this transfer or explain differences, teachers should be familiar with the foundation of English. . Cross-linguistic Influence is the impact of one language on another.

Positive Transfer: Prior knowledge of the first language can facilitate second language learning. The more aware of grammar or parts of speech a learner is, the smoother the transfer.

Negative Transfer (Interference): Differences between L1 and L2 can lead to interference, where incorrect patterns from L1 are applied to L2. For example, if L1 lacks certain verb tenses, the learner may struggle with those tenses.

Input, Interaction and Output

Providing learners with meaningful input, opportunities for interactive communication, and encouragement to produce output creates a balanced language learning environment. Recognizing the interplay between input, interaction, and output underscores the complex nature of language acquisition and the role of communication in shaping learners' linguistic competence. There are three hypotheses which are important in understanding second language acquisition.

Input Hypothesis

Proposed by linguist Stephen Krashen, the Input Hypothesis posits that multilingual learners acquire language best when they are exposed to input slightly above their current level of competence, yet still understandable. Sometimes referred to as “comprehensible input,” this encourages learners to be challenged, but not overwhelmed.

Interaction Hypothesis

Formulated by Michael Long, the Interaction Hypothesis emphasizes the importance of interactive communication. Multilingual learners should be engaged in authentic conversations and negotiate meaning with others. Interaction provides opportunities for learners to receive corrective feedback and to practice.

Output Hypothesis

Michael Long argues that producing language through speaking or writing plays a crucial role in language development. Producing language serves to test learners' language hypotheses



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and receive feedback on language usage. Output leads to refinement of internal grammar and towards accuracy.

Supporting Rationale and Research

AL-Takhayinh, Ayman & Al-Dala'ien, Aref & Mudhsh, Badri Abdulhakim. (2015). Second Language Acquisition: An Overview and Theoretical Background.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/367530648_Second_Language_Acquisition_An_Overview_and_Theoretical_Background

Li, P., Jeong, H. The social brain of language: grounding second language learning in social interaction. *npj Sci. Learn.* 5, 8 (2020). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-020-0068-7>

Robertson, Kristina, and Karen Ford. "Language Acquisition: An Overview." ColorínColorado, WETA Public Broadcasting, <https://www.colorincolorado.org/article/language-acquisition-overview>

Ruiqin Miao, Second Language Acquisition: An Introduction, Editor(s): James D. Wright, International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences (Second Edition), Elsevier, 2015, Pages 360-367, ISBN 9780080970875, <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.92096-8>.

Schutz, Ricardo. (2019). Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition, [Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition \(sk.com.br\)](https://www.sk.com.br/Stephen-Krashen's-Theory-of-Second-Language-Acquisition)

Yang, Hong. "On Teaching Strategies in Second Language Acquisition." US-China Education Review, 5(1), 61-67. January 2008. <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED502535.pdf>

Resources

Articles

[What Is ELL In Education And Why It's Important](#)

[The Differences Between Right & Left Brain Thinking](#)

[Children's Activities: Left Brain, Right Brain - Dandelion Training & Development](#)

[Beyond Words: Children Use Cognitive Skills in Language Learning - Neuroscience News](#)

[Acquiring a Second Language for School](#)



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Pre-K Learners

[8 Strategies for Preschool ELLs' Language and Literacy Development](#)

[Multilingual Preschoolers](#)

[Age-Appropriate Speech and Language Milestones](#)

[Speech Sounds Development Chart](#)

Kindergarten-12th Grade

[6 Essential Strategies for Teaching English Language Learners](#)

[Five Strategies to Support Language Learners in the Classroom - Participate Learning](#)

[Acquiring a Second Language for School](#)

[SLIFE: Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education](#)

Factors that Influencing Second Language Acquisition

[BICS & CALP](#)

[Academic Language and English language learners](#)

[The Home Language: An English Language Learner's Most Valuable Resource](#)

[Lowering the Affective Filter for English Language Learners Facilitates Successful Language](#)

[Acquisition - Collaborative Classroom](#)

[Factors that Influence Second Language Acquisition](#)

[What is translanguaging? – EAL Journal](#)

[Newcomer Tool Kit \(PDF\)](#)

[You Are Welcome Here: Supporting the Social and Emotional Health of Newcomer Immigrant Students](#)



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Strategies

[5 Effective Modeling Strategies for K-12 English Learners](#)

[6 Strategies to Help ELLs Succeed in Peer Learning and Collaboration](#)

[Learning Style Survey](#)

[Visual Scaffolding Tips for ELLs | Teaching Channel](#)

[What Is A Kinesthetic Learner?](#)

[Meaningful Classroom Talk: Supporting English Learners' Oral Language Development](#)

[6 Ways to Scaffold Writing for ELLs | Thoughtful Learning K-12](#)

[Case Study on Mahesh](#)

[Transfer in Second Language Acquisition](#)

Input, Interaction and Output

[Long's Beliefs about Language Learning](#)

[Stephen Krashen's Theory of Second Language Acquisition](#)

[Stephen D. Krashen - Language Acquisition](#)

[Merrill Swain's Output Hypothesis](#)

[Input, Interaction and Output Hypotheses](#)

Classroom Examples

Videos

[Ep. 18: Who are English Language Learners? – For a Better Life](#)

Submission Guidelines and Evaluation Criteria

To earn this micro-credential, you must receive a passing score in Parts 1 and 3 and receive a proficient score for all components in Part 2.



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Part 1. Overview Questions (Provides Context)

400-500 words

Please address the following prompts to provide an overview of your work with multilingual learners:

- Describe the demographic breakdown of your current classroom or school, and your level of comfort as it pertains to understanding students' language acquisition, cultures, and customs.
- Detail your strengths and weaknesses in working with multilingual learners. Be specific and ground your response in examples.
- Describe your school setting and why learning how students acquire a second language is vital to your work.

Passing: The educator completely answers all three prompts with specific evidence of their experiences. Writing is comprehensive and coherent.

Part 2. Work Examples/Artifacts/Evidence

Artifact 1: Second Language Acquisition Levels and Reflection

Describe the SLA levels of the students in your class or a group of students with whom you work. Include the language level (number or percentage) of your group.

Read the [Case Study on Mahesh](#) in the resource section. Write a reflection on either Mahesh or a student in your class or group. Identify which of the strategies from below you would use to support the student's second language acquisition based on their language level.

- Modeling
- Structured pair work:
- Learning style Preferences
- Visual scaffolds
- Hands on experiences
- Meaningful classroom talk

Artifact 2: Input, Interaction and Output Hypotheses

Read the examples in the [Hypothesis Examples](#) found in the resources. Explain how you can leverage these theories in your class. Be sure to include:

- An example of how you could support each of the three
- A reflection on how your lesson would be challenging yet not overwhelming to students

Artifact 3: Lesson Plan

Choose one SLA stage and create or modify a lesson. Consider your students' needs, interests, and cultural backgrounds while designing activities that challenge and support their language development. Remember to integrate authentic materials and create a supportive and inclusive



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learning environment that encourages their active participation and language exploration. The lesson should include:

- Language stage for which you are planning
- Content or topic
- Language objective
- Content objective
- Description of activities and strategies used

Part 2. Rubric

	Proficient	Basic	Developing
Artifact 1: Second Language Acquisition Levels and Reflection	<p>The language levels of the students are shared.</p> <p>The educator uses either percentages or numbers to describe the focus group.</p> <p>A single student, either one in your class, a group you work with, or Mahesh is identified for the reflection. The reflection includes: -Language level -A strategy from the list -A reflection on why your chosen strategy would be effective for this student</p> <p>Writing is clear and demonstrates an understanding of how a strategy will support this student's language acquisition.</p>	<p>The language levels of the students are shared.</p> <p>The educator uses either percentages or numbers to describe the focus group.</p> <p>A single student, either one in your class, a group you work with, or Mahesh is identified for the reflection. The reflection includes: -Language level -A strategy from the list does not reflect why the strategy chosen strategy would be effective</p> <p>Writing does not fully demonstrate an understanding of how a strategy will support this student's language acquisition.</p>	<p>The language levels of the students are not shared.</p> <p>The educator does not use either percentages or numbers to describe the focus group.</p> <p>Reflection is: -Not specific to a student or a language level -A strategy from the list, but it does not discuss why it would be effective OR -Is not a specific strategy from the list</p> <p>Writing does not demonstrate an understanding of how a strategy will support this student's language acquisition.</p>
Artifact 2: Input, Interaction and Output Hypotheses	<p>Each of the three hypotheses is addressed thoroughly.</p> <p>The educator</p>	<p>Two of the three hypotheses are addressed thoroughly.</p> <p>The educator explains</p>	<p>One of the three hypotheses is addressed.</p> <p>The educator explains</p>



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	<p>thoroughly explains how each would be used within a lesson.</p> <p>Input Hypothesis: Explains how they plan to ensure that input materials are challenging, but accessible to students. Details are included to describe the content.</p> <p>Output Hypothesis: The educator explains how they plan for student production of language. The plan includes details about the process learners will use to produce language.</p> <p>Interaction Hypothesis: The educator explains how they will create opportunities for students to interact with language. The plan includes details of the lesson and the process of mutual understanding for students.</p>	<p>how each would be used within a lesson, but the response is general, not specific to the content.</p> <p>Input Hypothesis: Explains how they plan to ensure that input materials are challenging, but accessible to students. Details are included to describe the content.</p> <p>Output Hypothesis: The educator explains how they plan for student production of language. The plan includes details about the process students will use to produce language.</p> <p>Interaction Hypothesis: The educator explains how they will create opportunities for students to interact with language. The plan includes details of the lesson and the process of mutual understanding for students.</p>	<p>how it would be used within a lesson, but the response is general rather, not specific to the content.</p> <p>Input Hypothesis: The educator explains how they plan to ensure that input materials are challenging, but accessible to students. Details are included to describe the content.</p> <p>Output Hypothesis: The educator explains how they plan for student production of language. The plan includes details about the process students will use to produce language.</p> <p>Interaction Hypothesis: The educator explains how they will create opportunities for students to interact with language. The plan includes details of the lesson and the process of mutual understanding for students.</p>
<p>Artifact 3 Lesson Plan</p>	<p>The educator's lesson plan supports language acquisition. It thoroughly describes all five of the requirements: -The planned language stage</p>	<p>The educator's lesson plan's support for language acquisition is not apparent. It describes 3-4 of the requirements: -The planned language stage</p>	<p>The educator's lesson plan support for language acquisition is not apparent. It describes fewer than three of the requirements:</p>



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	<p>-Content or topic -Language objective -Content objective -Description of activities and strategies used for the SLA stage</p> <p>Activities are connected to the content objective.</p> <p>Materials and experiences are authentic and support students' cultures. The lesson provides opportunities for language usage and active participation.</p>	<p>-Content or topic -Language objective -Content objective -Description of activities and strategies used for SLA level</p> <p>Activities are connected to the content objective.</p> <p>Materials or experiences may not be authentic or supportive of students' cultures. The lesson provides some opportunities for language usage or active participation.</p>	<p>-The planned language stage -Content or topic -Language objective -Content objective -Description of activities and strategies used for SLA stage</p> <p>Activities are not connected to the content objective.</p> <p>Materials or experiences are not authentic and do not support the students' cultures. The lesson provides few opportunities for language usage or active participation.</p>
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Part 3. Reflection

200-300 words

Use the word count as a guide to write a personal reflection about your work on this micro-credential. For tips on writing a good reflection, review this resource:

[How Do I Write a Good Personal Reflection?](#)

Reflect on the following:

- How implementing instructional strategies has changed or will change your practices when working with multilingual learners in various stages of language acquisition
- How strategies will support second language acquisition

Passing: The educator's response thoughtfully addresses the impact the micro-credential has had on their practice in supporting multilingual learners and with second language acquisition.



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