

Stephen Krashen's Language Acquisition Theory:

How is It Viewed by Ibri College Students?

Mohammad Al Ghafri

Nizwa University

English Department

P.O.Box 33, Nizwa, PC 616,

Sultanate of Oman

Drmohammedalghafri@gmail.com

Ms. Amal AL-Lamky

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

English Department /Ibri College

P.O.Box 14, Ibri, PC 516,

Sultanate of Oman

Amal.ibr@cas.edu.om

Younes Audeh

University of Technology and Applied Sciences

English Department /Ibri College

P.O.Box 14, Ibri, PC 516, Sultanate of Oman

younes.ibr@cas.edu.om

Abstract

Acquisition of a certain language, normally, does not need a concentrated and complex dose of pure conscious knowledge of grammatical norms and rules; what is required is a smooth and meaningful interaction and full immersion in the target language, which is defined as: “Natural Way of Communication”, where there is no much focus on the form of the utterances; but on the talk and messages conveyed as a comprehensible input in a relaxed atmosphere; no fear or anxiety. In order to provide the audience with a useful and rich grasp of the topic at hand, the researchers have distributed a questionnaire among a group of (32) male and female First and Foundation year students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences in the Sultanate of Oman, studying advanced English courses. What the researchers have reached is that in order to acquire and develop a second language, there should not be much concentration on structure and form of utterances; it should be on conveying the comprehensible input that focusses mainly on the meaning, not formation of grammatical constructions. Discussion, implications, recommendations and suggestions will be highlighted throughout this paper.

Key words: Acquisition, conscious, hypothesis, input, natural, pressure, subconscious, target language

Introduction

Krashen’s Hypothesis advocates the idea that language learning could be achieved in two ways: through acquisition and learning. The acquisition process happens subconsciously: through communicating with people and participating in daily-usually- informal activities. Sometimes the learner is not aware of this process—acquiring a new language. On the contrary, learning process mainly depends on formal and conscious instructions and teaching of grammatical rules of the target language. Krashen’s Acquisition Hypothesis follows the natural order of acquiring language which occurs with no teacher, opposite to learning. This article highlights Stephen Krashen’s Hypothesis about acquiring and learning a second language. More detailed focus will be on the Monitor, Input, Affective Filter, Natural Order, Acquisition-Learning and i+1 Hypotheses.

Literature Review

The Monitor Hypothesis states that consciously learning language (like studying grammar rules or doing vocabulary exercises) can help a person monitor language output, but doesn’t result in improvements to using language. In other words, learning grammar rules can help you measure your language ability, but not really improve it. (Lewis, 2020, Para.11).

The Monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning and defines the influence of the latter on the former. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar. According to Krashen, the acquisition system is the utterance initiator, while the learning system performs the role of the ‘monitor’ or the ‘editor’. (Schutz, 2019, Para.12).

In fact, teaching or learning grammar is not teaching language; students who were taught by the Grammar-Translation Method were smarter at memorizing, using, and applying the grammatical rules of the target language, but when it comes to speaking, they show less efficiency. These learners have much competence of rules, or even the literature of the target language, and spend time to monitor their output when they speak. They are not fluent-- slow speakers and care-takers, in general.

Krashen believes that the acquisition process is viewed as the initiator, or starter, while the learning order takes the role of editor. The whole competence acquired represents the input of the Monitor which requires some conditions such as sufficient time, comprehension of the rules needed for performance later on, and knowledge and focus on syntax and its correct forms. Moreover, the main job of the Monitor is to well check, then releases the output. (Anonymous, 2020). Though so important in the learning process, the Monitor, almost always, inhibits speech, as the speaker becomes more careful in selecting his/her words and expressions, and this, in return, slows down fluency. The researchers have experienced a number of incidents in the place where they teach regarding this matter: some students stop and stammer while giving talks, or doing presentations. It is a real monitor block that becomes a sort of barrier which makes many learners speak slowly, but accurately, in general (Anonymous, (n.d.). If the learner says, "*Mary is playing tennis now*", for example, this means that he/she has checked the full structure via the Monitor and used it correctly. Interestingly enough, the learnt knowledge stored could be checked before, while, or after speaking or writing; the Monitor releases quality usages, or corrects that after the utterances are over—self and automatic correction. What about Krashen's Input Hypothesis?

The Input hypothesis is only concerned with '**acquisition**', not '**learning**'. According to this hypothesis, the learner improves and progresses along the 'natural order' when he/she receives second language 'input' that is one step beyond his/her current stage of linguistic competence. For example, if a learner is at a stage 'i', then acquisition takes place when he/she is exposed to '**Comprehensible Input**' that belongs to level 'i+1'.(Schutz, 2019, Para.15).

The 'input hypothesis' also emphasizes that the ability to use language is not taught, it is naturally formed through exposure to a large amount of understandable input over time. It can be seen that understandable input is the key to language acquisition and the core of the "input hypothesis". (Wanlu, 2021, Para.9).

Some fresh teachers, with little or no experience, would expect their students to have a good background on the material at hand, and start-teachers- explaining high level information. Students, however, get stuck and become unable to follow up the teacher's explanation, especially when the course depends on numbers. Experienced teachers, on the other hand, first check the level of their students if teaching them for the first time. This could be approached by asking them to do diverse and different exercises; writing short paragraphs, oral talks, or giving them some warming up missions—pictorials, new vocabulary, etc. so as to activate their background knowledge. Students get along well with their teacher's course when they receive a simple and easy comprehensible content. "This

hypothesis [The Input Hypothesis] suggests that language acquisition occurs when learners receive messages that they can understand, a concept also known as comprehensible input” (Anonymous, (n.d), para. 8). Learners find it difficult to understand all things in different majors if the gap is too wide between the knowledge they already have, and the knowledge about those majors—this is much far away from their level.

Krashen is careful to specify that you can't read or listen to *anything* and improve your language. You have to read or listen to things you can understand. Language acquisition happens best, he says, when the input is just slightly more advanced than your level. (Lewis, 2020, Para. 17).

The researchers do work together in full harmony, especially when dealing with academic papers. They apply things that students get benefit of. The first couple of weeks of the semester are set as a 'silent period'—students just listen and get new comprehensible knowledge that suits their level. This is done according to a certain schedule after which teachers ask them to start using the input by expressing themselves through short conversations about ordinary things, then about the material they have taken. “A result of this hypothesis [Input Hypothesis] is that language learners should be given an initial 'silent period' during which they can build up acquired competence in the language before beginning to produce it”. (Bahrani, 2011, Para. 10). Krashen's 'Input and Comprehensible Hypotheses' seem insufficient as the ultimate ways to help learners do well. The methods adopted for teaching a new language are the problem, not the learners. Moreover, some linguists advocate utilizing technology in language acquisition and learning processes through social media and mobile phones.

The methods that we use to learn new languages are the problem, not the learners. There are an estimated 1.5 billion English-language learners in the world, and that number is expected to exceed 2 billion by the end of the decade. It is impractical to talk about 'total immersion' or 'comprehensible input' as the best tools for this number of learners. The modern digital learners need a new pedagogy and a new technology implemented in a smartphone that everybody has today. (Zilberman, 2019, Para. 20).

“I will help my students move from what they already know, to what is knowable or just beyond their level of ability”(Anonymous, 2020.Para. 14). This is a good procedure to follow in teaching students a possible way of learning and understanding a new language. This- implicitly- highlights the 'i+1' hypothesis that moves students step by step in getting a gradual comprehension. Comprehensible input encourages learners, and makes them learn easily and efficiently. “Comprehensible input is language, that is either written or heard, that is understood by the learner”. (Anonymous, 2020, Para. 8). How does the Affective Filter work?

The Affective Filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's view that a number of 'affective variables' play a facilitative, but non-casual, role in second language acquisition. These variables include: motivation, self-confidence, anxiety and personality traits. Krashen claims that learners with high

motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, a low level of anxiety and extroversion are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. (Schutz, 2019, Para.16).

It is clear enough that tense situations do inhibit people, learners in particular, from speaking freely. These situations could be better if teachers were more understanding and more careful. From an educational point of view, teachers should let their students feel secure, and be treated in a flexible way. Respect among the whole class leads to success. When students express themselves in a class discussion, the filter works, either positively or negatively. Normally, high self-esteem and confidence lead to low filter control, but if learners feel they are on the spot and under pressure, the filter becomes high and learners get in trouble-- may sweat and shiver and cannot utter complete sentences. "The Affective Filter hypothesis states that affect- how you're feeling- changes language acquisition ability. Krashen argues that negative emotions, like embarrassment or fear, make a person less able to acquire a language". (Lewis, 2020, Para.13). This strange filter does lots to learners. Figueroa (2019, Para. 1) concludes: "The affective filter is a psychological filter that either helps or obstructs the process of learning a second language". In general, small group formation in classrooms may reduce the high filter and make students more secure, as they cooperate with their group members and consult them about things at hand. Seasoned and caring teachers should think of many ways in order to make their students' filters become as low as possible.

Students with a high affective filter are reluctant to participate in class discussions because they are afraid of making mistakes and being judged by the teacher or classmates. They would rather collaborate with classmates in a small group setting, as that allows them to lean heavily on peers for support or avoid work together. (Figueroa, 2019, Para. 3).

In order to lower the affective filter in classrooms, teachers can do many things. First, make students feel secure and tell them that the course they are joining is so easy and enjoyable-- a piece of cake. Moreover, teachers, before starting the lesson, should start warm-up exercises as an introduction. Second, they may create some activities depending on the language, or expressions they all have acquired in prerequisite courses. This builds confidence and raises students' self-esteem and helps moving forward in learning and taking risk and responsibility, as well. Third, overcorrection should be avoided. For example, if a student says, "I see three falcons yesterday". The teacher is not to reprimand him, but should encourage him by repeating his sentence in a way that corrects it indirectly-- that's right, you saw three falcons yesterday. So, students should be helped during this risk-taking period. "Instead of pointing out every mistake in the statement, simply rephrase the statement and model it back grammatically correctly. The student will notice the subtle correction and keep it in mind for the future" (Figueroa, 2019, Para.7). Fourth, teachers are to create a healthy atmosphere in classrooms by dedicating some time telling their students that it is natural that people make mistakes, and throughout mistakes people get some experience and positive learning out of committing mistakes in the future. Moreover, it is so important to spread a good culture among students that prohibits laughing if peers err, and teachers should, if necessary, arrange individual meetings for some students who cannot cope with class corrections. Fifth, though strange, keen

teachers may mix fun with learning—playing games, learning with music, cross-words, watching videos, etc.(Figueroa, 2019; Vasquez, (n.d)). More formal focusing on language learning and challenging exercises and activities causes boredom and demotivation. So, creating a healthy atmosphere that enables students lower the affective filter is necessary. “Creating classroom environments that act intentionally to lower the affective filter will increase language development.” (Gonzalez, 2020, Para. 3). In language acquisition, does the natural order have a vital role in making language acquisition easier?

Studies have been done to try and determine if there is a natural order in persons begin “acquiring” various language structures, i.e., morphemes, syntax, etc. The exciting discovery is that the acquisition of grammatical structures does indeed tend to follow a predictable order. In addition, what comes naturally for those learning their first language is very similar to (but *not* the same as) what comes naturally when learning a second language. (Krashen, 2016, Para. 17).

Krashen, in his Natural Order Hypothesis, mentions that children learning their first language get their grammatical structure naturally—via mimicking others and learning some ready-made syntactic usages and utterances, and some of them can be acquired before others. The simple present can be acquired and used before complex ones such as the passive voice, or past participle.

The natural order hypothesis is the idea that children learning their first language acquire grammatical structures in a pre-determined, 'natural' order, and that some are acquired earlier than others. This idea has been extended to account for second language acquisition in Krashen's theory of language acquisition. (Echeandia, 2020, Para. 1).

Learning language needs hard work, patience, practice and dedication. Teachers should start from simple things when it is related to practice speaking that leads to fluency. In the elementary phase, a possible way to encourage learners to use language is to let them speak about things they are familiar with, such as daily activities and personal experience. After a couple of weeks, the teacher may record their speeches and see how fluent they have become, and check how many words they utter per minute.

Major finding indicates that a conducive environment created by the teacher helps students to enhance their speaking skills. For elementary students to be fluent in speaking the target language, the teacher needs to give them opportunities to talk about their own experiences. (Ben, 2021, Para. 6).

Students are to learn how to create full and complete sentences. It is true that this is difficult in the beginning, but by the course of time, they will succeed. Memorizing fragments and using functional expressions does not lead to perfection. “If you only learn phrases in chunks, how will you know the individual meaning of each word, much less how to create new sentences and phrases with them?” (Cortes, 2010, Para. 4).

Sometimes illiterate people become fluent in a certain language that they are fully immersed into. That depends on how attentive they are, and how much they indulge with native speakers of that language. The same occurs with second language learners who mix with native speakers of that language and hear repetitions of words, expressions, and sentences from them. It is a pure and authentic environment when the unconscious state is present.

A natural order might, on the other hand, emerge in the process in which the child, or the second language learner, hears hundreds upon thousands of repetitions from those within the learner's environment who speak the language with correct form and structure. This situation is where the unconscious assimilation of correctness comes. Language is then acquired! (Bower, (n.d.), Para. 6).

Too much focus and concentration on grammar-especially in the Grammar-Translation Method- could harm students' acquisition of language; raises the affective filter, and slows down students' comprehension and fluency.

The insistence on learning rules of grammar and other skills in the grammar-translation method will raise the affective filter, which, of course, will prevent students from experiencing input. In fact, this method is consistent with the skill-building approach, which claims that conscious rules are first learned and they are used in real situations through laborious drills. (Ponniah, (n.d.) pp.16-17)

Methodology

In order to get the useful data about the research, the researchers have initiated a questionnaire of ten questions: (5) multiple, and five (WH) questions. This questionnaire was sent to the participants online, since teaching nowadays is done via the Internet because of COVID-19.

Population

The participants of the research are (32) male and female First and Foundation year students at Ibri College of Applied Sciences and Technology - the Sultanate of Oman, second semester of the academic year 2021-studying an advanced mandatory English course, aged between 19-21 years old.

Questionnaire Analysis

In order to gather more information about the topic, a survey was conducted among (32) Foundation and Year 1 students, enrolled at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences-Ibri College of Applied Sciences. The study is conducted by means of a questionnaire that

consists of (10) items. The first part contains (5) (Agree/Disagree) questions, while the second one consists of (5) (Yes/ No) questions.

The analysis of the results for the first part of the questionnaire, (Yes/No) questions, shows that (56.3%) of the participants admit that to acquire a second language, the focus should be mainly on conveying the meaning of the content with no much concentration on grammar. Based on this, the researchers came to the conclusion that in order to learn and develop a second language, less emphasis should be placed on the structure and form of utterances, and more emphasis should be placed on conveying comprehensible input that focuses primarily on meaning, rather than the formation of grammatical constructions. In addition, the majority of the students, (78.1%) believe that learning the grammar of a second language is done consciously and in formal premises (classrooms, etc.) and (84.4%) of them prefer to start learning a second language gradually-step by step-, especially tenses and syntax. Having said that, it is clear that when students are given information that is straightforward and easy to understand, they do well in the classroom. Furthermore, a significant percentage of the respondents (90.6%) find it difficult to speak fluently in the classroom (doing presentations, for example) when they are worried and anxious, so they have to stop and think in order to choose the proper words. This finding gets in line with what has been stated earlier in the literature review section as it has been found that despite its importance in the learning process, the Monitor's feedback nearly always restricts speech and contributes to slowing down the speakers' fluency since the speaker becomes more selective in his or her words and expressions.

Moreover, with regard to the second set of the questions, (Agree/Disagree) questions, the results are as follows: A considerable percentage of the respondents (87.5 %) agree that the 'Input Hypothesis' emphasizes that the ability to use language is not taught, it is naturally formed through exposure to a large amount of understandable input over time. It is also noted that most of the students, (93.8%), declare that when they work in a small group in the classroom, they feel extremely relaxed and can express themselves well because they lean to their colleagues if they face a problem understanding any mission. It is obvious that tense conditions prevent people, particularly learners, from speaking freely. Generally speaking, students may find it difficult to express themselves in English and participate in class discussions if a lot of attention is paid to them in the classroom. As such being the case, it is highly recommended that teachers encourage their students to work in groups as this may lower the high filter and help students feel more comfortable, as they collaborate with their group members and consult them on current issues.

Appendix

Figure 1

1. To acquire a second language, the focus should be mainly on conveying the meaning of the content with no much concentration on grammar.

32 responses

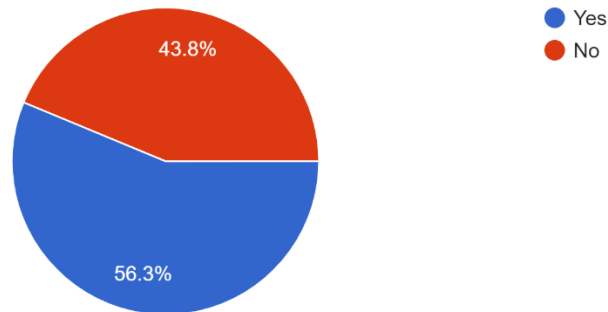


Figure 2

2. Using the second language in daily life conversations –by mixing with native speakers- happens subconsciously.

32 responses

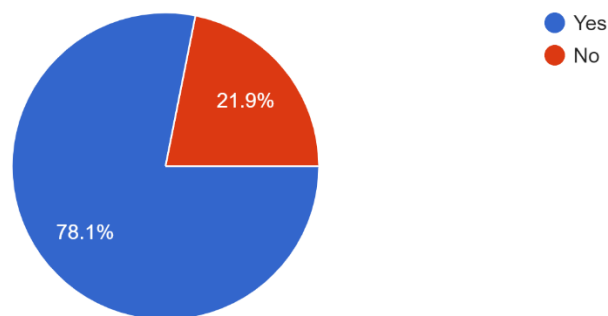


Figure 3

3. Learning the grammar of the second language is done consciously and in formal premises (classrooms, etc.).

32 responses

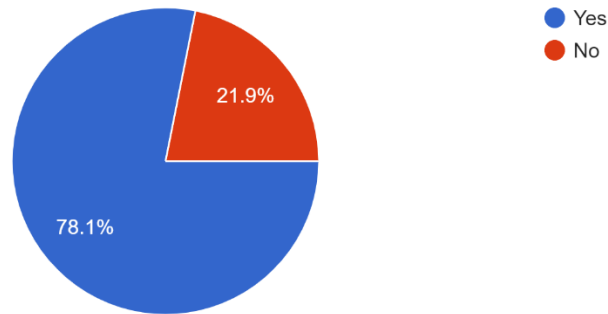


Figure 4

4. I prefer to start learning a second language gradually-step by step-, especially tenses and syntax.

32 responses

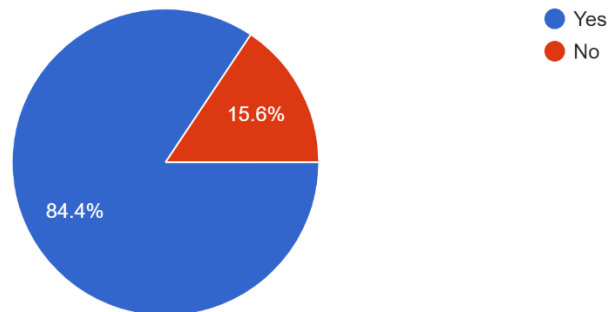


Figure 5

5. When I am worried and anxious, I find it difficult to speak fluently in the classroom (doing presentations, for example), so I have to stop and ...to choose the proper words (High Affective Filter).

32 responses

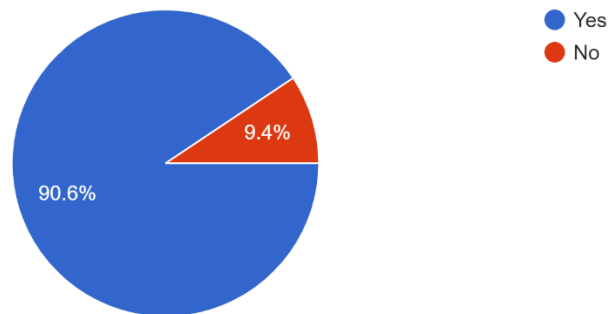


Figure 6

6. The 'Input Hypothesis' emphasizes that the ability to use language is not taught, it is naturally formed through exposure to a large amount of understandable input over time.

32 responses

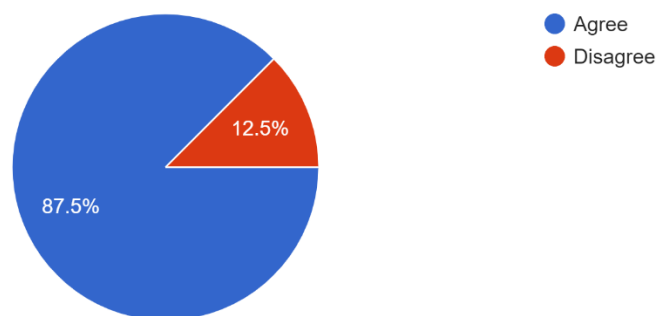


Figure 7

7. I understand quickly when the material explained is easy and comprehensible.

32 responses

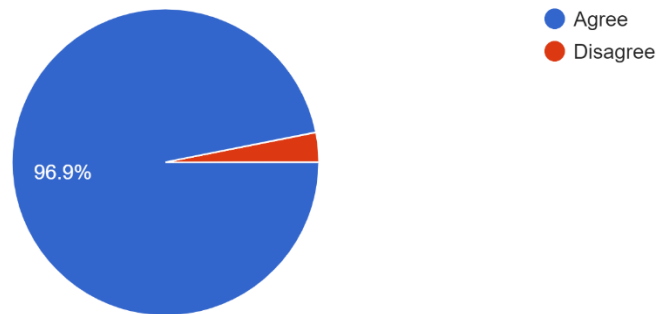


Figure 8

8. I feel angry when my class-mates laugh at my mistakes.

32 responses

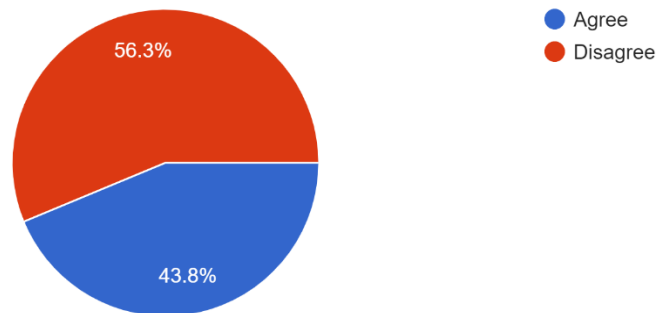


Figure 9

9. When I work in a small group in the classroom, I feel extremely relaxed and can express myself well because I lean to my colleagues if I face a problem understanding any mission.

32 responses

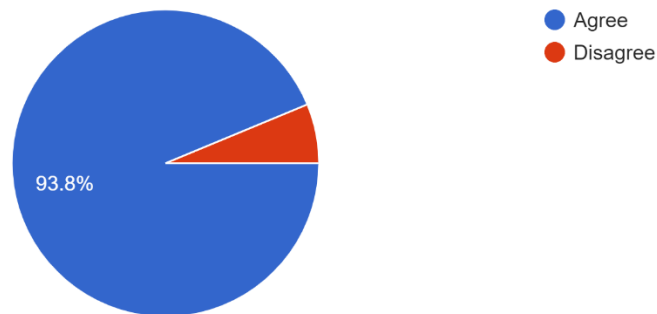
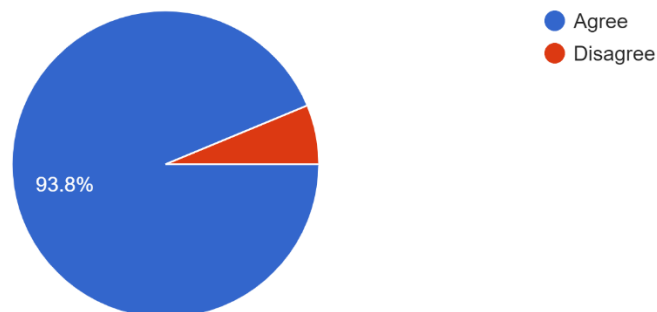


Figure 10

10. The Natural Order Hypothesis means that children learning their first language acquire grammar naturally, and some items are acquired earlier than others.

32 responses



Recommendations

In light of the modern technology, the new generation needs an up-to date pedagogy that copes with the technological development- it could be implemented on the educational platforms and smart phones, as well.

-Krashen's theories and hypotheses are useful to all--teachers and students alike, but they should be updated to go hand in hand with the current development in the field of teaching, acquisition, learning, etc.

-educators should bear in mind that most of the problems regarding learning a new, or second language, refer to the ways and methods followed in teaching, rather than the learners.

-to get better levels of fluency in the target language, subconscious training works best. Learners don't have to worry about making mistakes, or working under pressure and anxiety.

-though full and total immersion is useful for learners to be fluent in a foreign language, it is not enough for a complete progress in communicating with native speakers, unless there is a special guidance and learning efforts to support that immersion.

-due to some circumstances, if learners of foreign languages cannot have an authentic immersion, they can enjoy inexpensive virtual on-line courses. This immersion helps adults more than beginners, as they-beginners- do not have the basics or foundation to make do with.

Conclusion

Nobody denies the importance of Krashen's theories and hypotheses; from the very start-1980s- an enormous number of teachers from all corners of the globe have adopted his theories. Moreover, many research papers, articles, seminars, conferences, and lectures were conducted in light of Krashen's works. Of course nothing is totally perfect; some linguists and scholars have different opinions and say that though Krashen has put forward a great job in the field of language acquisition, still there are some downfalls to his work: it is still controversial.

Acknowledgement

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About the researchers

Mohammed Al Ghafri is a full-time lecturer of English at Nizwa University - Oman. He holds a PhD in teaching English (TESOL) from the University of Leeds where he also had got his MA in Education. He has had different positions: Acting Dean, - Ibri College, Head of the English Department, English supervisor and head of “follow- up and training courses” in Oman. His research interests are: classroom interaction and participation, identity, classroom context and teachers’ supervision.

Amal Al-Lamki is an English Language instructor at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Department of English- Ibri College of Applied Sciences, Ministry of Higher Education- the Sultanate of Oman. Holds a Master’s Degree in Curriculum and Methods of Teaching English Language. She has been teaching English for EFL undergraduate university students for more than a decade. Her research interests include academic writing, and challenges in EFL education.

Younes Audeh is the head of the Translation Committee and a lecturer at the Department of English at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences- Ibri College of Applied Sciences - the Sultanate of Oman. He is an M.A. holder in Applied Linguistics from Indiana University of Pennsylvania- USA. He has been teaching English as an ESL/EFL for decades. He has taught at a number of colleges and universities in different countries: Jordan, Kingdom of Bahrain, the United Arab Emirates, and the Sultanate of Oman. His research interest is academic writing.