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The Interaction of Cognitive and Social Factors in Second Language Acquisition: A Review of Psycholinguistic and Sociocultural Perspectives

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Abstract

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a multidisciplinary field of study that continues to evolve alongside the growing need for global communication and increasing social mobility. SLA research has largely been shaped by two primary perspectives: the psycholinguistic perspective, which emphasizes individual cognitive processes, and the sociocultural perspective, which highlights the role of the social environment in language learning. The differing foci of these perspectives often spark debate regarding which factors are most dominant in determining successful second language acquisition. This study aims to analyze the interaction between cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition through a theoretical review of psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives. A qualitative approach utilizing a literature review method was employed. Data were gathered from various books and reputable journal articles discussing second language acquisition theories published within the last five to ten years, as well as relevant classic works. Data analysis was conducted using content analysis and comparative synthesis techniques. The findings indicate that successful second language acquisition cannot be explained solely by cognitive or social factors in isolation. Working memory capacity, attention, motivation, and language processing interact dynamically with the social environment, communication practices, learner identity, and cultural support. Therefore, an integrative approach combining cognitive and social dimensions is necessary to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the second language acquisition process. Future research is encouraged to develop empirical models that examine the relationship between these factors within diverse language learning contexts.

Keywords: Second Language Acquisition, Psycholinguistics, Sociocultural, Cognitive Factors, Language Learning

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INTRODUCTION

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a crucial area of study in applied linguistics that continues to evolve in line with the growing global demand for multilingual skills. In the context of 21st-century education, second language acquisition serves not only as a means of communication but also as a means of accessing knowledge, expanding academic and professional mobility, and building global competencies. In Indonesia, the phenomenon of second language acquisition is evident in the learning of English, Arabic,

and Indonesian for Foreign Speakers (BIPA), which continues to increase year after year. This situation makes the study of factors influencing the success of second language acquisition increasingly relevant. The importance of this study is supported by the fact that the success of second language learning is not always determined solely by the quality of teaching. Various studies have shown that there are internal and external factors that mutually influence the language acquisition process. Research by Kholiq, Yulianto, and Suhartono (2024) shows that first and second language backgrounds have a significant influence on subsequent language acquisition, especially in multilingual contexts. These findings demonstrate that the language acquisition process cannot be understood solely from a linguistic perspective but must also consider the surrounding cognitive and social dimensions. In studies of second language acquisition, two broad perspectives are often used to explain the language learning process: the psycholinguistic perspective and the sociocultural perspective. The psycholinguistic perspective positions an individual's cognitive abilities as the primary factor determining successful language acquisition. This theory emphasizes the importance of attention, working memory, motivation, and information processing abilities in understanding and producing language. In the context of learning Arabic as a second language, Tania and Agung (2024) explain that psycholinguistic theories remain the primary foundation for explaining how individuals acquire new language systems through complex mental processes. Conversely, the sociocultural perspective holds that language is acquired through social interaction and individual involvement in a specific cultural environment. In this perspective, language learning is understood as a social activity mediated by teachers, peers, language communities, and various other communication practices. Successful language acquisition is determined not only by an individual's cognitive capacity but also by opportunities for interaction, the learner's identity, and social environmental support. Thus, language is viewed as the result of interactions between individuals and the social context in which it is used. These differing views have given rise to debate among experts. Psycholinguists argue that the entire process of language acquisition ultimately occurs within the individual's mental system, making cognitive factors the primary determinant of successful language learning. Conversely, socioculturalists believe that language skills will not develop optimally without participation in meaningful social practices. This debate demonstrates that there is still no single consensus regarding the most dominant factor in second language acquisition.

Second language acquisition is a multidimensional process influenced by the interaction between internal (cognitive) and external (social) factors. The psycholinguistic perspective emphasizes that successful language acquisition is influenced by mental mechanisms such as attention, working memory, motivation, information processing, and the transfer of the first language to the second language. In this perspective, language is processed through cognitive activities that enable learners to gradually understand, store, and produce utterances. Psycholinguistic studies also explain that an individual's ability to manage language input will determine the quality of second language acquisition. Zulfa, D. R. (2023). Meanwhile, the sociocultural perspective, which is heavily influenced by Vygotsky's theory, views language acquisition not only as occurring in the individual's mind but also through social interactions. The learning environment, communication with teachers and peers, culture, and the practice of using language in everyday life are the main sources of language competence. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and scaffolding explains that language skills develop optimally when learners receive guidance from more competent individuals and engage in meaningful communication activities. Warseto, A., Wijayanti, H. N., & Setyawan, C. E. (2020). The interaction of these two perspectives shows that cognitive and social factors do not work separately, but rather complement each other. Cognitive processes process the acquired language input, while the social environment provides opportunities to obtain input,

negotiate meaning, and use language authentically. Thus, the success of second language acquisition is determined by the synergy between the learner's cognitive readiness and the quality of social interactions that support the learning process. The implication for Arabic language learning is the need to design learning that not only trains linguistic aspects and cognitive strategies, but also creates a communicative environment that encourages collaboration, language practice, and language use in real contexts. Arifah, R., & Tumanggor, I. (2026).

In Indonesia, research on second language acquisition generally focuses on a single perspective. Salsabila, Krisnawati, and Ratnasari (2023) examined the acquisition of Indonesian by non-native speakers, focusing on phonology and morphology. This research successfully explained the development of language skills from a linguistic perspective, but failed to link it to social factors that influence the learning process. Furthermore, systematic reviews of second language acquisition in young learners in Indonesia also show that most studies still focus on pedagogical aspects and learning outcomes without comprehensively integrating cognitive and social factors. Other studies discussing second language acquisition also primarily examine the influence of the first language on second language learning or highlight specific learning strategies. Although these studies make significant contributions, most still view cognitive and social factors as separate variables. Consequently, few studies specifically explain how these two factors interact to shape successful second language acquisition. This limitation indicates a research gap that needs to be addressed. In practice, the process of second language acquisition never occurs solely in the cognitive or social domains. A learner may possess good memory skills but experience communication difficulties due to a lack of opportunities for interaction. Conversely, a language-rich social environment may not necessarily result in high language proficiency if the learner lacks adequate motivation and cognitive strategies. This phenomenon demonstrates a reciprocal relationship between cognitive and social factors that has not been widely studied in an integrative manner. Based on these conditions, this research is important to provide a more comprehensive understanding of second language acquisition. This study aims to analyze the interaction of cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition through a review of psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives. This research is expected to enrich the development of second language acquisition theory and provide a conceptual foundation for the development of more effective language learning strategies. Furthermore, the research results are expected to bridge the debate between psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives by demonstrating that successful second language acquisition is the result of a dynamic interaction between an individual's cognitive capacity and the social environment in which the language is learned.

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is a field of study that examines the process by which a person acquires a language other than their first language. The psycholinguistic perspective views language acquisition as a mental process involving cognitive mechanisms for receiving, storing, processing, and producing language. From this perspective, successful language learning is influenced by the learner's internal capacities, such as attention, working memory, motivation, information processing ability, and learning strategies used. One influential theory in psycholinguistic studies is the Input Hypothesis developed by Krashen (1985). This theory states that language is acquired when learners receive linguistic input (comprehensible input) that is slightly above their existing level of proficiency. According to Krashen, the process of language acquisition occurs naturally when learners are exposed to comprehensible language in meaningful communication contexts.

Subsequent research has shown that linguistic input alone is insufficient to explain the process of second language acquisition. Schmidt (1990), through the Noticing Hypothesis, asserted that learners must be aware of certain language elements in order to

process them into linguistic knowledge. In other words, attention is a crucial component that determines whether language input can be internalized. In addition to attention, working memory is also a crucial factor from a psycholinguistic perspective. Wen (2019) explains that working memory functions as a temporary system that allows individuals to store and manipulate linguistic information during the learning process. Learners with high working memory capacity tend to be better able to understand complex language structures and master new vocabulary more quickly than learners with lower working memory capacity.

Research by DeKeyser (2017) shows that the automation of language skills also plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. Through repeated practice, declarative knowledge of language rules can transform into procedural knowledge, enabling more fluent and spontaneous language use. Therefore, cognitive factors encompass not only the ability to understand language but also the ability to develop automatic language skills through continuous practice. Despite making significant contributions to understanding the internal mechanisms of language learning, the psycholinguistic perspective is often criticized for focusing too much on the individual and not paying enough attention to the influence of the social environment. This criticism has led to the development of other approaches that place social context as a primary factor in second language acquisition. The sociocultural perspective is rooted in the theory of cognitive development proposed by Vygotsky (1978). Unlike the psycholinguistic approach, which emphasizes the individual's internal processes, the sociocultural perspective views language learning as occurring through social interactions mediated by culture and the environment.

A key concept in sociocultural theory is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is the distance between a learner's actual abilities and the potential abilities that can be achieved with the assistance of more competent others. In the context of language learning, this assistance can take the form of guidance from teachers, peers, or members of the language community. Lantolf and Thorne (2015) explain that language is not merely an object to be learned but also a tool used to construct knowledge. Therefore, the language learning process occurs through social activities that enable individuals to participate in authentic communication practices. Through these interactions, learners have the opportunity to develop both linguistic and social competence. Another important concept is scaffolding. This concept refers to temporary support provided to learners during the learning process. This support can take the form of guidance, feedback, examples of language use, or other assistance that helps learners complete tasks they cannot yet perform independently.

Norton's (2018) research shows that learner identity also plays a significant role in the success of second language acquisition. Individuals who perceive opportunities to participate in a language community tend to be more motivated to use and develop their language skills. Conversely, social barriers such as discrimination, stereotypes, or limited access to a language community can hinder the language acquisition process. In recent developments, a sociocultural perspective is also widely used to explain language learning in digital environments. Social media, online learning platforms, and virtual communities are considered new social spaces that allow learners to interact with a wider range of target language speakers. Thus, social factors in language acquisition are no longer limited to face-to-face interactions but also encompass technology-mediated interactions. Although psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives are often positioned as two distinct approaches, recent research shows that they complement each other in explaining the process of second language acquisition. No single factor can fully explain the success or failure of language learning.

Ellis (2020) emphasizes that second language acquisition is the result of an interaction between cognitive processes and social experiences. Linguistic input received through social interactions must be processed by an individual's cognitive system to

become permanent language knowledge. Conversely, good cognitive abilities will not develop optimally without opportunities to use language in real social contexts. Research by Philp, Adams, and Iwashita (2014) shows that social interactions provide opportunities for learners to observe specific language forms, receive feedback, and test their linguistic hypotheses. In these situations, social processes function as triggers for cognitive activity that supports language acquisition. Furthermore, motivation, as a cognitive factor, is also strongly influenced by the social environment. The L2 Motivational Self-System theory developed by Dörnyei (2019) explains that language learning motivation is formed through the interaction between personal goals and the social environment. Support from family, teachers, peers, and the language community can increase learners' motivation to continue developing their language competence.

In the context of modern language learning, the integration of cognitive and social factors is becoming increasingly important because the learning process takes place not only in the classroom but also through various digital platforms. Learners can obtain linguistic input through online media, interact with international communities, and simultaneously develop independent learning strategies. This situation suggests that the boundaries between cognitive and social factors are increasingly difficult to separate. Various studies have examined the factors influencing second language acquisition from different perspectives. Li (2023) found that working memory capacity is positively related to second language comprehension ability in adult learners. This research confirms the importance of cognitive factors in the language learning process. On the other hand, research by Zhang and Hyland (2022) showed that active participation in a language learning community significantly improves learners' communication competence. These findings strengthen the argument that the social environment plays a crucial role in the development of language skills. Research by Pfenninger and Polz (2021) attempted to integrate cognitive and social aspects in language learning. The results showed that internal and external factors influence each other in determining learning success. However, this research focused more on formal educational contexts and therefore did not provide a comprehensive conceptual picture of the relationship between these two factors in various language learning situations. Furthermore, most previous research tends to treat cognitive and social factors as separate variables. Studies specifically analyzing the dynamic interaction between these two factors are still relatively limited, particularly in the form of theoretical syntheses that connect psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives.

Based on this situation, this article seeks to fill this research gap by presenting a more integrative analysis of the relationship between cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition. The primary focus of this study is not only to identify the contribution of each factor but also to explain how they interact to shape an effective and sustainable language acquisition process.

METHOD

This research is a qualitative study with a library research method. Library research was chosen because the main objective of the research is to examine, analyze, and synthesize various theories and research findings related to the interaction of cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition. The approach used is a descriptive-analytical approach that aims to explain phenomena based on theoretical studies and previously published research results. The research data sources consist of primary data sources and secondary data sources. Primary data sources include books discussing second language acquisition theory, psycholinguistics, and sociocultural theory, such as the works of Krashen, Ellis, Ortega, Lightbown and Spada, and Lantolf and Thorne. Meanwhile, secondary data sources come from national and international journal articles published between 2019 and 2025. Some of the national journals used include the

research of Tania and Agung (2024) on the model of Arabic as a second language acquisition, the research of Kholiq et al. (2024) on the role of first and second languages in third language acquisition, as well as various recent studies discussing second language acquisition in the Indonesian context.

Data collection was conducted through a documentary study by identifying, inventorying, and classifying literature relevant to the research focus. The collected literature was then selected based on thematic relevance, source credibility, and year of publication. Priority was given to articles from nationally and internationally accredited journals published within the last five years. The data analysis technique used content analysis. The analysis stages included data reduction, theme categorization, concept interpretation, and synthesis of research results. In the first stage, the researcher identified key concepts related to cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition. The second stage grouped the findings based on psycholinguistic and sociocultural perspectives. The third stage compared the various research findings to identify patterns of relationships between the two perspectives. Next, a conceptual synthesis was conducted to generate a more comprehensive understanding of the interaction of cognitive and social factors in second language acquisition.

To enhance the validity of the study, the research employed source triangulation by comparing various references from books, journal articles, and previous research. With this approach, the research results are expected to provide a more in-depth and systematic picture of the relationship between cognitive and social factors in the process of second language acquisition.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Cognitive Factors as the Foundation of Second Language Acquisition

The psycholinguistic perspective views second language acquisition as a mental process involving a series of cognitive mechanisms within the individual. In this view, learners are not merely passive recipients of information, but rather individuals who actively process linguistic input into linguistic knowledge that can be used in communication. A synthesis of the literature indicates that attention, working memory, motivation, and information processing are key components supporting the second language acquisition process.

One of the most widely researched cognitive factors is attention. Schmidt explains that learners must be aware of the existence of certain linguistic forms so that this information can be further processed into language competence. Without adequate attention, the language input received becomes mere exposure that does not contribute significantly to the development of language skills.

In addition to attention, working memory plays a crucial role in second language acquisition. Working memory allows individuals to temporarily store linguistic information while analyzing it. Various studies have shown that working memory capacity is positively related to the ability to comprehend text, master vocabulary, and produce a second language more effectively. Motivation is also a cognitive factor that significantly influences successful language learning because it encourages learners to persist and use various learning strategies.

Based on the results of a content analysis of various literature sources, the cognitive factors that contribute to second language acquisition can be presented in the following table:

Table 1. Synthesis of Cognitive Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Cognitive Factor	Scholar/Study	Key Findings	Implications
Attention	Schmidt (2010)	Awareness of linguistic forms determines the language acquisition process.	Language input should be designed to direct learners' attention to linguistic features.
Working Memory	Wen (2019); Li (2023)	Working memory capacity influences language comprehension and production.	Learning activities should take learners' cognitive load into account.
Motivation	Zoltán Dörnyei (2019)	Motivation enhances learners' persistence and engagement in the learning process.	Teachers should foster meaningful learning goals to sustain learner motivation.
Information Processing	DeKeyser (2017)	Repeated practice leads to the automatization of language skills.	Language practice should be conducted consistently and continuously.

Table 1 shows that cognitive factors serve as an internal foundation that enables individuals to receive, retain, and use a second language effectively. However, high cognitive abilities do not always guarantee successful learning if they are not supported by an adequate social context..

Social Factors in Sociocultural Perspective

In contrast to the individual-centered psycholinguistic approach, the sociocultural perspective places social interaction as a central element in second language acquisition. This perspective is based on the assumption that the development of language skills cannot be separated from the social and cultural context in which individuals interact.

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, learning occurs through a process of social mediation. Individuals acquire new knowledge through interactions with others who are more competent. In the context of second language learning, teachers, peers, and native speakers function as mediators who help learners develop their language skills. This concept is known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), a developmental space that allows learners to achieve higher proficiency through social support.

Social interaction provides learners with opportunities to obtain authentic language input and use it in real-life situations. Social factors also include learner identity, a sense of acceptance within the language community, and opportunities to participate in communication practices. In the digital age, social media and virtual communities further expand the social space for language acquisition. The results of the literature synthesis on social factors in second language acquisition are presented in the following table:

Table 2. Synthesis of Social Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Social Factor	Scholar/Study	Key Findings	Implications
Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) and Social Mediation	Lev Vygotsky (1978)	Assistance from more knowledgeable others accelerates the learning process.	Teachers should serve as facilitators of learning.
Scaffolding	Lantolf & Thorne (2015)	Temporary instructional support enhances learners' competence.	Collaborative learning should be promoted.
Learner Identity	Bonny Norton	Identity investment	An inclusive learning

	(2018)	influences learners' participation in language learning.	environment enhances learners' confidence.
Community of Practice	Philp et al. (2014)	Authentic interaction supports language development.	Learning should be based on meaningful, real-world communication.
Digital Environment	Zheng & Wang (2023)	Technology expands opportunities for interaction.	Digital platforms can be utilized as effective learning environments.

Based on Table 2, it is clear that the social environment is not merely a supplement, but rather an essential factor that provides opportunities for authentic language use. However, the sociocultural perspective is often criticized for not providing a detailed explanation of the mental mechanisms underlying language processing. Therefore, an integrative approach that connects social factors with cognitive factors is needed.

The Interaction of Cognitive and Social Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Recent research developments indicate that cognitive and social factors cannot be strictly separated in explaining second language acquisition. The two form a mutually influential and complementary relationship.

Social interactions provide the linguistic input needed by the cognitive system to be processed into language knowledge. In other words, the social environment serves as a source of learning experiences, while the cognitive system functions as a mechanism that processes those experiences. Without adequate social exposure, cognitive processes lack material to process. Conversely, without adequate cognitive capacity, social input cannot be optimally internalized.

This relationship can be explained through the concept of internalization in sociocultural theory. Language structures learned through social interactions gradually become part of an individual's linguistic competence. Motivation also demonstrates an interaction between cognitive and social factors. Support from teachers, family, and the language community can increase learning motivation, while a less supportive environment can weaken learner motivation. The results of a conceptual synthesis regarding the relationship between cognitive and social factors are shown in the following table:

Table 3. Interaction of Cognitive and Social Factors in Second Language Acquisition

Social Factor	Influenced Cognitive Process	Impact on Second Language Acquisition
Teacher Interaction	Attention and comprehension	Facilitates the acquisition of linguistic structures.
Peer Collaboration	Information processing	Increases learners' confidence to communicate.
Social Feedback	Linguistic awareness	Helps learners identify and correct language errors.
Community of Practice	Learning motivation	Increases the frequency of language use.
Digital Environment	Self-regulated learning strategies	Expands opportunities for accessing language input.
Cultural and Family Support	Identity investment	Strengthens learners' commitment to language learning.

Table 3 shows that social factors do not operate separately from cognitive factors, but rather influence various mental processes that occur during language learning. This finding differs from some earlier research, which tended to separate the two factors as independent variables.

This difference can be seen in Table 4, which presents a synthesis of the research gap in previous research.

Table 4. Research Gap Synthesis

Researcher	Research Focus	Key Findings	Limitations
Tania & Agung (2024)	Arabic language acquisition	Emphasizes learners' mental processes in language acquisition.	Does not examine the role of social factors.
Kholiq et al. (2024)	Third language acquisition	Explores the influence of L1 and L2 on L3 acquisition.	Does not explain the interaction between cognitive and social factors.
Salsabila et al. (2023)	Indonesian as a Foreign Language (BIPA) acquisition	Describes learners' linguistic development.	Focuses primarily on linguistic aspects.
Systematic Review (2024)	Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in Indonesia	Highlights language learning strategies.	Integration of cognitive and social perspectives remains limited.
This Study	Interaction between cognitive and social factors	Proposes an integrative synthesis of cognitive and social perspectives in SLA.	Provides a foundation for future empirical research.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings of this study have important implications. Language learning cannot simply emphasize cognitive exercises such as memorizing vocabulary and grammar; it also requires creating a social environment that allows learners to use the language in real-life situations. Integrating collaborative activities, group discussions, project-based learning, and utilizing digital communities can be effective strategies for connecting cognitive processes and social experiences in second language learning.

Thus, second language acquisition can be understood as a multidimensional process involving a reciprocal relationship between an individual's mental mechanisms and the social environment in which the language is used. This integrative approach provides a more comprehensive explanation than approaches that emphasize only one factor and is a major contribution of this research to enriching the study of second language acquisition.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that second language acquisition is a complex and multidimensional process that cannot be explained solely through cognitive or social factors. The psycholinguistic perspective emphasizes the importance of attention, working memory, motivation, and information processing as internal mechanisms that enable individuals to understand and use a second language. Meanwhile, the sociocultural perspective emphasizes that language development occurs through social interaction, cultural mediation, participation in language communities, and a supportive learning environment.

The analysis shows that these two perspectives are not contradictory but rather complementary. Social factors provide the experiences, linguistic input, and communication opportunities necessary for language learning, while cognitive factors function to process these experiences into permanent language knowledge and skills.

Thus, successful second language acquisition is the result of a dynamic interaction between the learner's internal capacities and the surrounding social conditions.

A key implication of these findings is the need for a more integrative approach to language learning. Teachers and curriculum developers need to combine strategies that support cognitive development with social activities that encourage authentic language use. Collaborative learning, projects, communities of practice, and the use of digital technology can provide a means to connect these two dimensions.

Further research is recommended to develop empirical models that examine the relationship between cognitive and social factors in various language learning contexts, including online learning, artificial intelligence-based learning, and multilingual environments. Such studies are expected to enrich second language acquisition theory and make a tangible contribution to the development of more effective language learning practices relevant to the needs of the 21st century.

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