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**LESSON FIVE: CHARACTERISTICS OF A GOOD LEARNER**

A number of recent studies on language learning styles and strategies have attempted to define the “Good” language learner". During the 1970s, teachers and researchers reached conclusion that no single method of language teaching and research findings would end to the universal success in teaching a second language (Brown, 2007). It seems that learners would be successful in language learning regardless of methods or teaching techniques. In this regard, Brown (2007) said: “Certain people appeared to be endowed with abilities to succeed; other slacked those abilities” (p.132). So, despite of the numerous studies done on ‘The Good Language Learner’, it is difficult to prove many of the things that we ‘know’ to be true because they are based on  
our experiences which are hard to quantify (Lightbown and Spada, 1997).

One study, conducted by David Nunan, examined the practices of 44 non-native English  
speaking EFL teachers from a variety of Asian countries. He found that being motivated and  
willing to take risks, having opportunities to practice the language they had learned both  
inside and outside of the classroom and having some activities that were form-focused and  
learner-centered were the strongest factors which influenced the learning of this group of  
participants. Not being provided with opportunities to speak or automatize the language was  
listed as the main reason the participants felt they struggled when learning a language (Nunan, 2000). Generally, it seems to be that it is *the attitudes, skills, and strategies* learners possess that dictate whether or not they will be able to grasp the intricacies of language (Oxford, 1990)( Cited in Nunan,2000,p.7).

**1. Characteristics of Good Learners According to Some TEFL Experts** According to Rubin and Thompson (1983)(Cited in Nunan,2000,p.171) , a good language learner possesses some of these characteristics**:**

* Good learners find their own way**.**
* Good learners organize information about language**.**
* Good learners are creative and experiment with language**.**
* Good learners make their own opportunities, and find strategies for getting practice in using the language inside and outside the classroom**.**
* Good learners learn to live with uncertainty and develop strategies for making sense of the target language without wanting to understand every word**.**
* Good learners use mnemonics (rhymes, word associations, etc. to recall what has been learned)**.**
* Good learners make errors work**.**
* Good learners use linguistic knowledge including knowledge of their first language in mastering a second language**.**
* Good learners let the context (extra-linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world) help them in comprehension**.**
* Good learners learn to make intelligent guesses**.**
* Good learners learn chunks of language as wholes and formalized routines to help them perform ‘beyond their competence’
* Good learners learn production techniques (e.g. techniques for keeping a conversation going)**.**
* Good learners learn *different styles* of speech and writing and learn to vary their language according to the formality of the situation**.**

Rubin and Thompson were not the only ones who felt that it was important for students to  
take risks (3, 4, 5), use their previous schema (8), be motivated (4, 5), have solid strategies in  
place (4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13) and be able to live with uncertainty (5). Oxford and Brown also  
agreed. (Oxford, 1990) (Brown, 2000)**.**

According to McDonough and Shaw (2003,p.56 ),  
 “Success is thought to be based on such factors as checking one’s performance in a  
 language, being willing to guess and to ‘take risks’ with both comprehension and  
 production, seeking out opportunities to practice, developing efficient memorizing  
 strategies, and many others” **.**

Lightbown and Spada’s list ( Adapted from: Lightbown, Patsy M. and Spada, Nina (1997), How Languages are Learned (7th Impression), Oxford, Oxford University Press, page 34) resembles Rubin and Thompson’s, but they thought learners should also have a high intelligence, good academic skills and enjoy the process of learning. They implied that if a learner had good skills and was able to learn other subjects, they could then apply those same skills (eg. looking for patterns etc.) to learning a language.

* Good learners are accurate guessers**.**
* Good learners are willing to make mistakes**.**
* Good learners try to communicate even without language**.**
* Good learners look for patterns**.**
* Good learners practice whenever possible.
* Good learners analyze their own speech**.**
* Good learners pay attention to their own standards**.**
* Good learners enjoy grammar**.**
* Good learners begin learning in childhood**.**
* Good learners have above average IQs**.**
* Good learners have good academic skills.
* Good learners have good self image and self confidence**.**

Tricia Hedge’s list focuses on *‘Self-Directed Learners’*. She believes that learners who have  
good strategies in place and who are autonomous will likely be more successful than learners  
who depend on the teacher for everything and who blindly follow without trying to process  
the information and make it their own (Hedge, 2000.p.76). Being ‘*Self-Directed’* means that you  
are motivated to learn and are willing to do whatever it takes to accomplish the task .She listed:

* Self-directed learners know their needs and work productively with the teacher towards achieving their objectives.
* Self-directed learners know how to use resources independently.
* Self-directed learners learn both inside and outside the classroom.
* Self-directed learners adjust their learning strategies as needed.
* Self-directed learners manage and divide the time in learning properly.
* Self-directed learners learn with active thinking.

Holden (2002,p.18) said:  
 “Autonomous learners are both cognitively and meta-cognitively aware of their role  
 in the learning process, seek to create their own opportunities to learn, monitor their  
 learning, and attempt actively to manage their learning in and out of the classroom.”

**2. Types of Learners:**

Tony,W.(1987) distinguished four types of learners. A classification based on actual observation of classroom interaction rather than psychological theory.

**2.1**.*The enthusiast*: This type tends towards the teacher as a point of reference, but at the same time it is concerned with the goals of the learning group.

**2.2.** *The**oracular*:This type centres on the teacher, but this time is much more oriented towards the satisfaction of personal goals.

**2.3.***The participator* focuses attention both on group goals and on group solidarity.

**2.4.***The rebels* leans towards the learning group for his/her point of reference but is mainly concerned with the satisfaction of his /her own goals.

*\*\* Great minds think alike \*\**