

Multilingualism as a Lifelong Learning

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Multilingualism has become a part of education strategy of many countries because of the growing influence of transnational migration and globalization. According to the definition proposed by the European Commission, multilingualism is the ability of individuals, groups, or societies to engage in the process of communication by using more than one language (as cited in Calafato, 2019). Multilingualism ensures individual mobility, personal growth, and additional opportunities (Calafato, 2019). At the same time, to become a multilingual person, people should invest numerous efforts into developing the necessary skills while also paying attention to the learning environment and the presence of a professional teacher as they contribute to the development of language mastery. Moreover, socio-cultural environment plays a crucial role in the individual's adaptation in a new country. Being a non-native English teacher requires the ability of a person to work with students on developing their pronunciation, grammar, and writing skills. In this regard, multilingualism is a lifelong learning because an individual should constantly develop their language and work with students to boost their knowledge.

My Journey as a Learner

One of the major factors that bolster students' achievements in language learning is the environment. In general, every learning environment can be divided into three broad categories. They entail academic environment, which includes performance and learning strategy, physical environment based on classroom and materials, as well as psychological environment focused on values and attitudes (Kiatkheeree, 2018). For instance, Romania's education system has a solid foundation of language learning, covering the development of all four language skills and incorporating numerous practice activities into it. As a result, from an early age, I had an opportunity to learn Latin, English, and French. Moreover, during my childhood, I watched foreign movies and listened to foreign radio stations, such as Voice of America and Radio Free Europe. Even though I did not understand English during that time, this experience evoked my interest in foreign languages. Italian and Esperanto are languages I learnt from curiosity because of the similarities with previously mentioned ones.

In educational process, a teacher plays a major role in the establishment of a positive academic environment. In particular, he or she is responsible for understanding the purpose and the content of the curriculum, selecting effective teaching approaches, creating stimulating classroom environment, and reflecting on the students' answers as well as his or her own teaching methods. In this regard,

one of the strongest factors that influence the success in language learning is interaction between a teacher and students (Kiatkheeree, 2018). For instance, I was taught by professional teachers because the educational establishment I was attending was one of the top junior and senior high schools specializing in science. Together with my biology teacher, Mrs. Agachi, who became my model later, I studied biology up to the point when I could participate in related academic competitions. As a result, in 1987, I took the second place in a National Biology Academic Competition. Moreover, with the assistance of Mrs. Irimia, who has lived in France, I possess a satisfying command of French. However, back at school, learning languages was neither my strong point nor my final goal. My English teacher was another model I have for her beauty and elegance. I perceived foreign languages as a tool that could help me meet my short- and long term goals, such as learning additional information for my tests, translating a peer-reviewed mainly scientific article that I was interested in, later as a university student, being able to travel and communicate with foreigners. Even the communication with my teacher, professor Hideaki Taira from Niigata University, through whom I later made my connection to Japan, was in English.

My life is directly linked to Japan because I have married a Japanese. Before going to this country, I enrolled in the Japanese language and culture course organized by volunteers from Japan International Cooperation Agency. This course helped me obtain the basic knowledge about this foreign language and culture, which fascinated

me from the first lesson. As a result, after graduating from the university, my husband and I moved to Japan.

When moving to another country, a person might find themselves in the unfamiliar socio-cultural context. In particular, cultural gaps in social skills and behaviors in particular complicate cross-cultural communication. According to Tanaka and Okunishi (2015), many students coming to Japan for the first time face difficulties in adjusting to a new environment, and building relationships with the host nation appeared to be one of the major complications. The support from the host nation, other foreigners, and compatriots plays a special role in the socio-cultural adaptation to the new surroundings (Tanaka & Okunishi, 2015). Even though I had a basic knowledge about Japan, I still struggled with adjusting to my new environment, being almost friendless. Moreover, I had to learn many new things completely from scratch. To improve my knowledge of Japanese, I studied at the city's cultural center and had private lessons with Mrs. Soma from Ochanomizu University. Having two diplomas, I was hired as an English teacher. However, I still decided to improve my English skills and receive a diploma in English teaching.

Being an English Teacher

Working as a non-native English teacher is a challenging task that requires numerous efforts. In order to become a better teacher, every summer, I took specialized English language courses to learn more related to English teaching and increase my proficiency level. For

instance, in 2018, I participated in the English teaching program organized by Oxford University. It helped me receive a better understanding of different teaching strategies and the learning process as a whole. Moreover, I improved my knowledge of English pronunciation.

While developing their pronunciation and accent, the prevailing majority of students state that they favor a native speaker teacher. At the same time, many language learners encounter difficulties with understanding an English speaker who has a strong accent that differs from the standards used in learning materials. Meanwhile, students taught by a non-native speaker benefit from it by acquiring the ability to understand a bigger diversity of English accents (Calafato, 2019). In this regard, oral fluency of a non-native speaker depends not only on the ability to speak correctly, but also on the constant practice aimed at enhancing their level of English proficiency. Being a non-native speaker, I admit that students make mistakes, but I pay special attention to their word usage, which should be comprehensible and have a correct meaning.

The main benefit of grammar being taught by a non-native speaker is that such teacher can employ various metalinguistic techniques to develop their students' awareness of language. For instance, knowing two languages helps in the usage of analogies, metaphors, and cross-linguistic comparisons that assist in achieving a better understanding of the material. Moreover, this approach allows explaining language

structures and the morphosyntactic differences between the target and the first languages (Calafato, 2019). At the same time, I believe that grammar is less important when a person only starts learning a language or in informal situations.

Many language learners prefer developing their writing skills with non-native speakers. According to Calafato (2019), it is done because the latter have a better understanding of how the language is structured from the perspective of a foreigner. Moreover, native speakers sometimes confuse formal language with its more conversational variant. A multilingual instructor, on the contrary, helps enhance literacy skills due to the implementation of creative teaching techniques and knowledge of the effective writing development strategies (Calafato, 2019). In this regard, a non-native speaker can be more effective in developing the writing skills of a learner.

Non-native speaker teachers can function as a role model for language learners. In particular, a multilingual person enhances the desire of his or her students to learn a foreign language by demonstrating their own success in this area. Furthermore, by knowing the pragmatic aspects of language learning, a teacher provides a deeper insight into the cultural aspects of foreign environment (Calafato, 2019). From my personal experience, I know that a teacher is a lifelong learner because the educational environment is constantly changing. A true professional is always interested in enriching their individual

knowledge to deliver better lessons and enhance their teaching style. This way, students can be inspired and motivated by a teacher who constantly works on self-improvement.

Multilingualism has a positive effect on the individual learning abilities both in the sphere of language learning and other subjects. For instance, people who use a foreign language are more prone to have a higher level of literacy skills; they expand their vocabulary more easily and have a better knowledge of syntax. Multilingual people who learn a new additional language do it more successfully than other individuals because they apply learning strategies, concepts, and skills obtained during their previous language learning experience (Calafato, 2019). For instance, knowing Romanian had a positive effect on my English and Japanese learning because it covers all sounds of these two languages. Moreover, multilingualism positively influences one's mathematical learning, cognitive abilities, problem-solving skills, and creativity (Calafato, 2019). Thus, a person benefits from learning a new language because it leads to the development of numerous skills.

A special role in the development of an English teacher is played by professional organizations. The Japan Association for Language Teaching (JALT) is a nonprofit firm specializing in the enhancement of language learning and teaching. It encourages excellence by providing people involved in language education with a chance to collaborate, meet, and share their perceptions (The Japan Association

for Language Teaching, n.d.). For me, JALT is a unique opportunity to share experience, refine my ideas, and communicate with people who share the same interests, namely, language teaching. Hence, professional organizations such as JALT help individuals to enrich their knowledge and communicate with like-minded people.

In conclusion, multilingualism is a lifelong learning because a person should constantly develop their individual language skills and work with students to boost their knowledge. Learning environment plays a major role in successful language acquisition. Being taught in Romanian school with solid educational foundation helped me learn several languages. Moreover, the academic environment and the presence of professional teachers determine the outcome of language learning activities. Still, one of the major challenges encountered by a person who decides to move to a foreign country is a socio-cultural gap that requires the adaptation to new surroundings. Working as a non-native English teacher demands constant improvement and skill development. Even though the majority of students prefer native speakers while developing pronunciation, non-native ones can help a student increase his or her awareness about the variety of English accents. In addition, a non-native speaker has special techniques in teaching grammar and writing skills. Finally, such teacher can become a role model for students. A multilingual person can benefit from both the mother tongue and the participation in various professional organizations.

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