

Impact of Psychological Problems on the Construction of the Unique Language Acquisition Device among Iranian Instructors in the SLA Process

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Abstract

This study investigates the way psychological problems affect unique LAD while acquiring a second language. A qualitative study and semi-structured interview, ranging from 50 to 70 minutes were employed. Twelve professional L2 teachers have been interviewed to meet the study's findings. Participants' quotes help the researchers find that psychological problems include four main properties, namely OCD, lack of concentration, stress, and other unique psychological problems affecting the process of SLA. During the interview, the researchers found that these properties affect learners' rate of learning, interest, acquisition progress, concentration, self-confidence, interaction in the TL, motivation, and learning potential.

Keywords: Qualitative study; Psychological problems; SLA; The ULAD

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition finally happens through the mind of learners while interacting with their unique environment. Taking a look at learners' acquisition process, it can be implied that the problems learners are commonly encountered are not only in the category of linguistic problems but it also concerned with non-linguistic problems such as their mental and psychological status. There have been some related studies emphasizing the role of these kinds of psychological problems through the process of language acquisition. One of these studies divides such factors into learners' internal and external factors (Mulisawi & Hamid 2019). Another study focused on learners' psychological conditions influencing the process of second

language acquisition. One other example of such a study emphasized the important role of learners' characteristics in the language acquisition process (Khasineh, 2014).

Besides the above-mentioned studies, there has been no sign of the investigation of learners' psychological problems and those aspects of second language acquisition being affected by each of them. Therefore, in this paper, the researchers aimed at scrutinizing learners' psychological problems and their effects on the related aspects of the second language acquisition process. To that aim, the following research questions were addressed:

***RQ1.** What are SLA learners' psychological problems affecting their L2 acquisition process?*

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RQ2. *How does each psychological problem affect SLA process among Iranian EFL teachers?*

METHOD

In this qualitative study, the researchers intended to find out more about the phenomenon of psychological problems and the way it influences language acquisition of a group of L2 teachers as a particular group. To that aim, the phenomenology approach and purposeful sampling were chosen to interview 12 professional L2 instructors to find out more about psychological problems and their influences on the process of SLA.

Pilot test

With the purpose to conduct the pilot testing of this semi-structured interview, the researcher has put a lot of effort into ensuring the important things related to it that include the participants, setting, research instrument, and three procedures of the interview session (1. pre-interview stage, 2. during the interview stage and 3. post-interview stage).

1. Pre-interview Stage

Before the interview session, the researcher decided on the structure of the interview and who the participants are for this pilot test interview. Then, the related interview questions are designed according to the research objectives. Moreover, the researcher arranged the interview session details; date, time, and place of the interview session with the respondents.

2. During the Interview Stage

In this stage, the researcher, first, examined the seating arrangement. Then he takes the interview opening session, including the interview session's summarizing, explanation, process, and data recording until the interview closing into consideration. Since establishing a good rapport with the respondents is an important aspect of an interview, helping them communicate freely and willingly and creating a feeling of trust between the interviewer and the interviewees (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012), the researcher did her best to make the respondents feel at ease and comfortable during the interview

session and noticed to benefit from good seating arrangements the most to reach this goal. To that aim, before asking the interview question, the researcher started an informal conversation i.e., greetings, both interviewer and interviewee self-introduction, and suitable non-verbal communication such as a friendly handshake, proper eye contact, and smile. Then, the interviewer informed the interviewee about the research purpose, nature, and duration of the interview session. The interviewees were asked to read the instructions of the study and filled up the 'consent' form to assure the confidentiality and volunteer of the interviewees. In addition to this, the interviewer paid special attention to the way of dressing and appearance, showing the researcher's maturity and professionalism to the interviewees.

The researcher used the interview protocol sequentially while using probing techniques to elicit rich information. He recorded the interview using a recorder and took notes of ideas revealed by the interviewees. The interview sessions ranged from 50 to 70 minutes. The researcher summarized the interview and asked for the interviewees' questions, suggestions, and thoughts while closing the interview. The researcher also asked a clearinghouse question like 'Is there anything else that you would like to add before we close the interview?' or 'Are there any final thoughts or further comments remaining to add about the interview?' Ultimately, the researcher thanked the interviewees for allocating their precious time.

3. Post-Interview Stage

In this stage, the researcher transcribed the data verbatim, coded it, and themed it based on the research objective. Next, the researcher translated the Persian transcriptions into the English language before analyzing the data. Moreover, the interview questions were refined, rephrased, and modified to be clearer to guide the researcher to conduct the actual interview later on.

Semi-structured interview

Semi-structured interviews were employed while gathering the data. The semi-structured interview is "one of the most powerful ways in which we try to understand our fellow human beings" (Fontana & Frey, 2000, p. 645).

After participants gave written informed consent, interviews were tape-recorded and subsequently transcribed. Face-to-face interviews ranged in length from 30 to 90 min occurred in the institutions. The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the participants so that the participants felt more relaxed and provided more rigorous information while being probed. Then the transcribed verbatim was translated into English.

The researcher-maintained field notes during each interview. The research questions of the study were asked of the participants. The interviewer used probes to obtain additional information. In-person interviews were conducted and recorded in a quiet, neutral location where

the participants were not in danger and there was no intimidation or coercion.

Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected through the interview process, the researchers transcribe every word verbally. Then, they translated those transcripts into English. To find the properties of the category of psychological problems, the researchers analyzed each transcript in phrases, sentences, or groups of sentences. Finally, the researchers come up with four properties with dimensions of psychological problems, namely OCD, lack of concentration, stress, and other unique psychological problems, affecting the process of SLA among the participants of the study, based on the following figure and table.

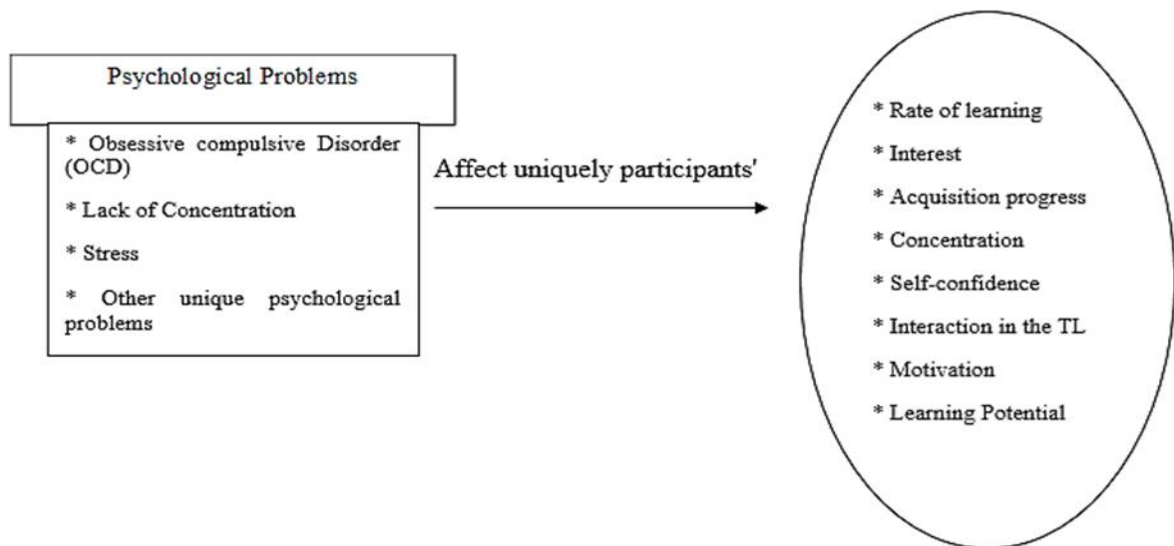


Figure 1
Unique effects of the participants' psychological problems on SLA

Table 1
The way the unique potential and specialties of the participants were affected uniquely by psychological problems

Theme	Sub-theme	codes	Extract example	Factors affected uniquely by the sub-theme
Psychological problems	OCD	Spending too much time on an issue	When I want to learn something new, I have OCD. It happened to me a lot that I spend too much time on an issue while studying, but I found that I would learn it more easily if I read the rest of the lesson.	Rate of learning, Acquisition progress, Interest
			When I want to sleep, I check the alarm clock every 10 min to see whether I tune the clock correctly and whether a.m. or p.m. is correct. I have had these challenges many nights. Similar challenges also happen to me during my language acquisition process.	

	Thinking that I don't learn something	I had this problem in primary school. I used to think that I didn't understand something that I was reading, and I read it again and again. Sometimes I was reading a page for 2 hours. Most of my classmates finished that page, but I was still struggling to read the page.	
	OCD with repeated thoughts	I have intensive OCD, an OCD with repeated thoughts. I even made an appointment with a counselor twice to cure it. It was cured in my life, but not in language acquisition. It means that if somebody tells me a sentence, that sentence would be repeated in my mind more than a thousand times. I somehow cured it, but it entered into language acquisition. An issue that the others spend an hour or two on it, I would spend 15 or 16 hours on it.	
	Overthinking an issue	I suffered a lot from OCD. I have OCD concerning my thoughts. It means that something comes to my mind and I couldn't stop thinking about that. I mean that I couldn't manage that. It bothered me all the time, for example, while walking in the street, studying, teaching, and doing everything. It affected my progress negatively, especially while acquiring a second language.	
	OCD relates to learning a subject completely	I have OCD, especially concerning learning a subject completely. If a book didn't teach every aspect of an issue thoroughly, I would lose my interest to learn the subject.	
Lack of concentration	General problems with concentration	I have generally a problem with concentration. It is not just related to studying. I have problems with concentration while doing everything. Everything that makes my mind busy out of the time studying would make my mind busy at the time of studying.	
	Getting easily distracted	I easily get distracted, and I should go to a quiet zone. It is a disincentive factor. I have had this problem since childhood. I couldn't concentrate except in a quiet zone. "I study well in a quiet zone, however, I sometimes get distracted even in a quiet zone."	Self-confidence, Interaction in the TL, Acquisition progress, Interest
	Theme		
	Thinking about an unrelated subject	I had a problem with a lack of concentration. Imagine that you are studying the target language, and after 20 minutes, you see that an hour is spent and you have just been thinking about an unrelated subject in your mind, and you haven't paid any attention to the materials that you have been studying. It both wastes your time and makes you the illusion that you have read that subject.	
	Losing concentration while focusing on an issue	I have a really big problem with concentration. If I lose my concentration, this happens to me a lot, I have to read a sentence more than 10 times and never understand. I generally tend to lose concentration when I try to concentrate on something. I had also all these problems in second language acquisition.	
Stress	Experiencing too much stress	Sometimes I experienced stress and I couldn't maintain it at the normal level. So it had a really bad effect on my learning, especially concerning the L2 acquisition.	Motivation, Learning potential, Acquisition progress, Self-confidence, Interest
	Suffering from intense stress	One of my learners suffered from intense stress. She was 11 years old. She had such stress that made her lose her self-confidence. She even took medicines to come up with this problem. She told me 'I couldn't learn anything because of my stress.' I saw that she always tried to hide in class and not cooperate in class activities because of the stress she had. Her stress didn't let her use the new materials in the class context.	

		I have a learner who was ridiculed by her friends although she was a beautiful and smart girl. I couldn't believe it when she came to the class for the first time, she had a lot of stress that she vomited. She had stressed when she wanted to communicate in the TL. She had stressed speaking in class.	
Other unique psychological problems	Lack of mental balance	I don't usually have mental balance. Mostly, concerning the decisions that I made. If I want to relate it to language acquisition, I could say that sometimes I progress well and learn a lot. Sometimes I don't take a look at it for 3 or 4 days. If I use something a lot, I suddenly get tired of it and put it aside.	
	mood disorder	I think that the mental status, different types of moods, and the level of happiness and sadness that a person experiences in their life are influential in the process of learning. I remember that, for a period in my life, I didn't pay any attention to language learning because of my feeling conditions. I got depressed and I was disappointed. Because the surrounding environment is not the place that you have expected to be, and it is not compared with your ideals. These kinds of thoughts made me stop thinking about my progress. I could have learned the Italian language better, but I didn't have the normal psychological condition to accept it. I rejected it because of my mental status. For these reasons, I haven't improved my productive skills well but my comprehension of the Italian language is fantastic.	Motivation, Learning progress, Learning potential, Intention

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Quotes from the participants of the study showed that the category of psychological problems contains properties with dimensions of psychological factors that somehow affect the process of these participants' second language acquisition. The properties in this category are OCD, lack of concentration, stress, and other unique psychological problems.

OCD. One of the most influential psychological factors that most of the participants suffered from was OCD. This psychological problem, directly and indirectly, affected the second language acquisition process among these participants. Sometimes the participants of the study had some unique OCD in their life that somehow stretched to SLA. As Armin mentioned,

I think that I tend to repeat things. I try to stop it when I feel it is too much preventive for my learning. For example, sometimes I feel that I have to know all about an issue and I am really in a hurry to learn more about the issue. It made me allocate lots of time to the issue so that I got too tired and I never like learning about the issue.

In this extract, we saw how this participant's unique OCD had an influence on his learning process. He had such an OCD concerning some

learning subjects that he never wanted to learn the subject. This quote showed how this psychological problem negatively affects interest, motivation, acquisition progress, learning potential, and rate of learning during the SLA process.

About this property, Mahdis quoted that,

When I want to learn something new, I have an OCD, obsessive-compulsive disorder. It happened to me so many times that I spend too much time on an issue while studying, but I found that I would learn it more easily when I read the rest of the lesson.

In this extract, we can see how the problem of OCD affected this participant's rate of learning, acquisition progress, and learning potential, especially while learning a new thing. At this moment the researcher asked her "How about the issues that you understand? Are you used to reading again and repeating those materials that you have learned?" she mentioned, "Yes, yes, this is because of the lack of concentration. For example, I read and understand the previous page, but suddenly I come back to the previous page unconsciously and read it again."

At this time, the interviewer asked her whether she has such a problem in her real life or not. She answered,

Yes, yes, yes, for example, I have an alarm clock. When I want to sleep, I check the alarm clock every 10 min to see whether I tune the clock correctly, whether a.m. or p.m. is correct. I have had these challenges many nights. It somehow affects my language acquisition process.

According to the above-mentioned quotes, we can see how OCD in life may influence the process of this participant's language learning.

Another participant, concerning this theme, quoted that "I usually think that I haven't learned the subject that I studied". Meanwhile, the researcher asked her whether she doesn't learn the subject or she has an OCD concerning learning the subject, and she replied, "No, I learned. It is an OCD. I generally learn soon, but sometimes I suffer from OCD and have a phobia about learning the issue." Then the researcher asked her "do you have a problem unrelated to language learning in your life that you think somehow interacts with your L2 acquisition process?" and she noted,

Oh, yes. For example, when I want to go out, I check everything many times. I check the oven, the water faucets, my purse, etc. It is somehow out of the normal rates, but I may check my purse more than once to be sure that I took everything with me. It means that I am an idealist person, and I think everything should be perfect. I also have this sense of idealism in language acquisition. I even have this idealism concerning the people who are going to enter my life.

Here we can notice how this participant had OCD in both her ordinary life and second language acquisition. her OCD in real life somehow stretches to her L2 acquisition process. The quotes of this participant also showed how her OCD influences the rate of learning, acquisition progress, and learning potential in the SLA process.

Concerning this theme, another participant noted that

I had this problem from primary school. I used to think that I didn't understand something that I was reading, and I read it again and again. Sometimes I was reading a page for 2 hours. Most of my classmates finished that page, but I was still struggling to read the page.

At this time, the researcher asked her, "wasn't that because you didn't understand the page?" she replied,

No, I learned it very well. I even learned that better than my classmates. I also explained that to my classmates. But I finished that later than the others and stayed awake until 3 am because I just had to read and write it again and again, especially while learning vocabulary.

From the above extract, we can see how this participant suffered from OCD while learning a second language. It has a negative influence on her rate of learning, acquisition progress, and learning potential in the process of SLA. Then the researcher asked her whether she knows something about where it comes from or the root of this OCD. She replied,

I was a really sensitive girl between the ages of 14 and 17. It might be an effective factor. But my mother had OCD concerning washing and cleaning. It didn't have such an effect on me because I don't have OCD about washing and cleaning. Eee... but sometimes I also have this kind of OCD. Moreover, I repeat some things so many times. For example, when I go out, I come back from the middle of the alley to check whether the door is closed or not, however, I checked it so many times before.

The above extract showed that OCD could have genetic roots. We also found how this problem may have roots in the ordinary life of this participant. She had this psychological problem in her ordinary life, and it somehow affected her learning process, especially concerning L2 acquisition.

Shima concerning this property when she was asked whether she had a psychological problem affecting second language acquisition quoted that,

I have an intensive OCD, an OCD with repeated thoughts. I even made an appointment with a counselor twice to cure it. It was a cure in my life, but not in language acquisition. I have OCD with repeated thoughts. It is not repeated actions. It means that if somebody tells me a sentence, that sentence would be repeated in my mind more than a thousand times. If I got bothered by something, my mind would be bothered a lot. It made me a sensational girl. I somehow cured it, but it entered into language

acquisition. when it entered into the language, the people are not important any longer and their sentences have not repeated in my mind. But I have this OCD while acquiring a second language. an issue that the others spend an hour or two on it, I would spend 15 or 16 hours on the issue.

From the above extract, we see how this psychological problem influenced this participant's second language acquisition. It negatively affected this participant's rate of learning, acquisition progress, and learning potential in SLA. She would less suffer and progress more in the target language if she didn't have such an OCD.

Another participant, Sepideh, about this property told that,

I suffered a lot from OCD. I have OCD concerning my thoughts. It means that something comes to my mind and I couldn't stop thinking about that. I couldn't just think about that at a specific time. I mean that I couldn't manage that. It bothered me all the time, for example, it came to my mind while walking in the street, studying, teaching, and doing everything. It negatively affected my progress, especially while acquiring a second language. I believe that language learning directly relates to the mental health of the learners. It is a fact that a bad memory from the target language or anything else could destroy you. It could make you hate the target language acquisition.

In this extract, it is clear how this psychological problem was suffered by this participant in every aspect of life, especially in the target language acquisition. this quote showed that OCD influenced the rate of learning, acquisition progress, interest, motivation, and learning potential of this participant in the process of SLA.

Concerning this theme, another participant quoted, "I have an OCD, especially about learning a subject completely. If a book didn't give a complete definition concerning that subject, I would lose my interest to learn the subject." He continued that this feature made him lose his interest while acquiring a second language. when the researcher asked him whether he has such a problem in his ordinary life, he replied yes, he had such OCD in his ordinary life. Here we can

find how this unique OCD this participant affects his interest and motivation in SLA.

From the above-mentioned extracts from the participants of the study, we found how a psychological problem such as OCD influences every aspect of the life of all these participants, especially while acquiring a second language. Most of the participants had a unique OCD uniquely affecting their language acquisition. OCD negatively affects interest, motivation, acquisition progress, learning potential, and rate of learning.

lack of concentration. Another factor influencing the participants' lack of concentration. Concerning this theme, Mahdis quoted that,

I have generally a problem with concentration. It is not just related to studying. I have problems with concentration while doing everything. Everything that makes my mind busy outside of the time of studying would make my mind busy at the time of studying. It means that I don't have enough power to stop thinking about them while studying. For example, when I want to practice the piano, I couldn't practice well on it since it needs a high level of concentration. I don't have enough concentration even for 20 minutes.

In this extract, we found how this participant suffered from a lack of concentration. We also inferred how this lack of concentration affected this participant's language acquisition process.

Another participant, Sepideh, about this theme quoted,

I had a problem with a lack of concentration. Imagine that you are studying the target language, and after 20 minutes, you see that an hour is spent and you have just been thinking about an unrelated subject in your mind, and you haven't paid any attention to the materials that you have been studying. It both wastes your time and makes you the illusion that you have read that subject. It happened to me when I was preparing for the MA exam. I wasn't successful as I expected because I couldn't concentrate well while I was preparing for the exam.

She continued that "It is a lack of concentration when you sit down and think that you are studying, however, most of the time your mind is busy with another subject."

From the above-mentioned extract, we explore how her lack of concentration affects the process of SLA. She just had the concentration for about 20 minutes. Onwards, she thought that she was studying, but her mind was busy with another subject. It also affected her university entrance exam. This extract showed how lack of concentration affects the rate of learning, acquisition progress, concentration, and learning potential.

Concerning this theme, another participant quoted that,

I generally tend to lose concentration when I try to concentrate on something. It means that I tried to concentrate on a sentence to find what it is about, while my mind was busy concerning different issues such as if you fail the exam, you have to study this lesson again for the next semester and you have to commute this way again. A small thought in my mind, such as failing an exam, would change to critical thinking, such as I would not be a successful person in my 60s. I had such struggles in my mind as a result of the lack of concentration. I had also all these problems in second language acquisition.

The above extract from this participant showed how this participant suffered from a lack of concentration in SLA. It had a negative effect on this participant's rate of learning, acquisition progress, concentration, and learning potential.

Based on the experience of the participants of the study, we found that lack of concentration had a negative influence on SLA. Most of the participants had a unique lack of concentration having a unique negative impact on their L2 acquisition. It affects the rate of learning, acquisition progress, concentration, and learning potential.

Stress. Another psychological problem that affected SLA among the participants was stress. As Armin quoted,

I could say that it affects my acquisition process negatively when I experience stress. Sometimes I experienced stress and I couldn't maintain it at the normal level. So it had a really bad effect on my learning. For example, I had a year full of stress when I was preparing for the university entrance exam. It had a really bad effect on my exam. It got me not to study and

not go to my English class. It made me distance myself from everything because I couldn't concentrate when I have stress.

About this theme, this participant continued,

There was something in my mind that bothered me, especially when I had stress. There was something that I had never come up with it and it bothered me, especially when I wanted to concentrate on an issue. There were both related to the future and past, bad memories of the past and concerns about the future.

This extract showed how stress affected the rate of learning, acquisition progress, concentration, and learning potential. Sometimes he had such stress that it made him not go to English class. In this extract, it is clear how stress affected this participant's concentration. In this situation, the participant could not concentrate well on an issue during the acquisition process.

Concerning this theme, another participant quoted the impact of stress on one of her L2 learners. She quoted,

One of my learners suffered from intense stress. She was 11 years old. She had such stress that made her lose her self-confidence. She even took medicines to come up with this problem. She told me 'I couldn't learn anything because of my stress.' I saw that she always tried to hide in class and not cooperate in class activities because of the stress she had. Her stress didn't let her use the new materials in the class context.

In this extract, the way that stresses affected this learner's SLA. She has problems with learning the materials as a result of her intense stress. Moreover, she didn't have enough self-confidence because of her stress, and she didn't practice new materials. Therefore, it had a negative influence on self-confidence, interaction in the TL, rate of learning, learning potential, and concentration while acquiring an L2.

With regard to her experience of teaching related to this theme, another participant quoted,

I have a learner who was ridiculed by her friends although she was a beautiful and smart girl. I couldn't believe when she came to the class for the first time, she had a lot of stress that she vomited. She had stress when she

wanted to communicate in the target language. She had stress speaking in class.

The above extract showed the way this learner's L2 acquisition was affected by intense stress. It affected this participant's self-confidence, learning potential, and interaction in the TL. It has a negative effect on her interest and motivation.

Another participant, about this theme, mentioned that "I am a stressful person. It somehow affects my learning process, especially in some specific subjects. I think it is because of one of my teachers. This stress made me hate learning some subjects."

These extracts from the participants of the study and their experiences showed that stress somehow affected the process of SLA negatively. Sometimes stress made the participants stop learning, practicing, concentrating, etc. while acquiring an L2. Sometimes stress made learners stop cooperating and using new target language materials in the class when it is not at a normal level and cannot be controlled by learners. It affects negatively self-confidence, learning potential, and interaction in the TL. rate of learning, learning potential, and concentration

Other unique psychological problems. Based on the answers prepared by the participants of the study, we found that other psychological factors affect SLA, such as depression, mood levels, etc.

Concerning this, Armin mentioned,

I think that the mental status, different types of moods, and the level of happiness and sadness that a person experiences in their life are influential in the process of learning. For example, I knew a person from high school. He was really intelligent because he could talk about different issues and topics very well. His knowledge was more than his age. But he always felt lonely because his parents were old and he didn't have any relatives. He felt lonely. This made him lose his motivation. He changed his desires. His desire was not progress anymore. He just wanted to fill the gap of his loneliness. He experienced intense pain and this pain, loneliness, has never let him use his potential in learning.

This quote showed how the mood and happiness level of the mentioned learner affected

negatively his motivation, acquisition progress, learning potential, interest, and rate of learning for this learner.

Another participant, with regard to psychological problems, affecting the process of second language acquisition, mentioned,

I don't usually have mental balance. Mostly, concerning the decisions that I made. If I want to relate it to language acquisition, I could say that sometimes I progress well and learn a lot. Sometimes I don't take a look at it for 3 or 4 days. If I use something a lot, I suddenly get tired of it and put it aside.

Based on the above extracts, we can see how these participants' unique psychological problems affect the SLA process. These problems somehow affect motivation, interest, learning potential, acquisition progress, and rate of learning during the SLA process.

About her unique psychological problem, Sahar quoted that,

I remember that for a while in my life, I didn't pay any attention to language learning because of my feeling conditions. I got depressed and I was disappointed. Because the surrounding environment is not the place that you have expected to be, and it is not compared with your ideals. These kinds of thoughts made me stop thinking about my progress. I could have learned the Italian language better, but I didn't have the normal psychological condition to accept it. I rejected it because of my mental status. For these reasons, I haven't improved my productive skills well but my comprehension of the Italian language is fantastic.

The above-mentioned extract by this participant of the study showed how her feeling conditions, depression, and mental status affects the process of L2 acquisition negatively. These problems had a negative influence on their rate of learning, acquisition progress, motivation, interest, and learning potential, especially on her productive skills.

CONCLUSION

The present study attempted to investigate the way that psychological problems affected the SLA process among learners. Through data gathering and analysis, the participants of the

study referred to some main psychological problems affecting their acquisition process in different ways. OCD, lack of concentration, stress, and other unique psychological problems were the main properties of this concept. The researcher found 133 codes concerning this concept and its properties among the quotations and extracts of the participants of the study. Concerning the SLA process, OCD affected learners' Rate of learning, Acquisition progress, and Interest; lack of concentration had a unique influence on learners' Self-confidence, Interaction in the TL, Acquisition progress, and Interest; Stress uniquely affected participants' Motivation, learning potential, Acquisition progress, Self-confidence, and Interest; there are other psychological problems unique to each learner that uniquely affected their Unique LAD in SLA process. With regard to the participants of the study, this property affected their Motivation, learning progress, Learning potential, and Intention uniquely.

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Biodata

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