

Characteristics of ‘good language learners’

In the 1970s, the realization that some individuals were more successful language learners than others led to an increasing interest in the characteristics of ‘good language learners’, and the hope that these traits might be encouraged and developed among all learners. In an early investigation, Rubin (1975) identified seven characteristics, which, she claimed, ‘good language learners’ share. Good language learners:

- are willing and accurate guessers who are comfortable with uncertainty;
- have a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from communication, and are willing to do many things to get their message across;
- are often not inhibited and are willing to appear foolish if reasonable communication results;
- are prepared to attend to form, constantly looking for patterns in the language;
- practise, and also seek out opportunities to practise;
- monitor their own speech and the speech of others, constantly attending to how well their speech is being received and whether their performance meets the standards they have learned;
- attend to meaning, knowing that in order to understand a message, it is not sufficient to attend only to the grammar or surface form of a language. (Cited in Rubin, 1975: 45–8)

Meanwhile, Naiman et al. (1978: 30–3) argued that good language learners:

- have an active approach and positive response to language learning tasks;
- develop or exploit an awareness that language is a system which they can make inferences about;
- understand that language is a means of communicating (i.e., conveying and receiving messages) and interacting (i.e., behaving in a culturally appropriate manner);
- manage affective demands such as inhibition and anxiety well;
- monitor their own L2 performance. (Cited in Hall, 2011: 144-145)