

**INSTITUT DE RECHERCHE EN GEOPOLITIQUE ET
D'ETUDES STRATEGIQUES**

Revue
Intelligence Stratégique

Vol. 009, Numéro 023, Janvier-Mars 2026

E-ISSN : 3006-5488, P-ISSN : 3006-547X

<https://doi.org/10.62912/JYFU3565>



Siège social : 292, avenue Mweka, Commune de Lingwala, Kinshasa, République
Démocratique du Congo.

Téléphone : +243 82 006 1696 ; 81 86 19 121; 89 7175 074

E-mail : felly.lukunga@revue-is.org, article@revue-is.org, info@revue-is.org ;

Internet : www.revue-is.org ; www.irges.org

Europe : 59, Rue du Rhône, 1204 Genève, Suisse, + 41 22 810 88 68, Chambre de
Commerce Suisse-RD Congo, info@ccsc.ch



Revue Intelligence Stratégique
Journal des publications scientifiques
Volume 9, numéro 23
Janvier-Mars 2026
p-ISSN : 3006-547X ; e-ISSN : 3006-5488
<https://doi.org/10.62912/JLAH2186>
www.revue-is.org

THE INFLUENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE IN A MULTILINGUAL CONTEXT : THE CASE OF THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

André MUZALA MUTENTA

Department of Letters and English Civilisation at Université de Lubumbashi/Lubumbashi-DRC
Email: mutemuand@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Today, English stands out as one of the most widely spoken languages across the globe. As a result of globalisation, the number of individuals learning English has surged dramatically, making proficiency in the language an essential skill for many. However, in addition to focusing on formal learning programmes, it is crucial to consider the role of the environment in the process of acquiring English as a second language (ESL), particularly in multilingual settings such as the Democratic Republic of the Congo. This paper delves into how various environmental factors—such as exposure to the language, sociocultural dynamics, educational frameworks, opportunities for practice, psychological influences, and the availability of resources—play a significant role in language acquisition. Additionally, the confidence and motivation of learners, along with their access to technological and financial support, greatly influence their success in mastering the language.

Keywords : *Influence, environment, language acquisition, English as a second language, multilingual setting.*

RESUME

Aujourd'hui, l'anglais s'impose comme l'une des langues les plus parlées à travers le monde. En raison de la mondialisation, le nombre de personnes apprenant l'anglais a considérablement augmenté, faisant la maîtrise de cette langue une compétence essentielle pour beaucoup. Cependant, outre les programmes d'apprentissage formels, il est crucial de prendre en compte le rôle de l'environnement dans le processus d'acquisition de l'anglais comme deuxième langue, en particulier dans des contextes multilingues tels que la République démocratique du Congo. Cet article examine comment divers facteurs environnementaux, tels que l'exposition à la langue, la dynamique socioculturelle, les cadres éducatifs, les possibilités de pratique, les influences psychologiques et la disponibilité des ressources, jouent un rôle important dans l'acquisition du langage. De

plus, la confiance et la motivation des apprenants, ainsi que leur accès à un soutien technologique et financier, influencent grandement leur réussite dans la maîtrise de la langue.

Mots-clés : *influence, environnement, acquisition du langage, anglais comme deuxième langue, environnement multilingue.*

INTRODUCTION

The journey of acquiring English as a second language (ESL) is shaped by various environmental elements that go beyond conventional classroom learning. This exploration highlights the significant factors that affect ESL development, including access to resources like technology and media, which are crucial for language learning. In nations such as India, South Africa, and Singapore, English holds a prominent place in fields like education, business, and governance, fostering a conducive learning atmosphere that enhances learners' understanding of the effects of their surroundings on English acquisition. However, the interplay of these factors varies greatly, leading to different outcomes for learners. By closely examining these environmental influences, particularly in the Democratic Republic of the Congo and specifically at the University of Lubumbashi, this research aims to reveal how these elements collectively influence the language learning journey.

I. METHODS

This study employs both descriptive and analytical approaches to examine the influence of environmental factors on the learning of English as a second language (ESL), especially in countries with multiple languages.

I. 1. Descriptive Method

The research aims to provide a thorough overview of various environmental elements that affect ESL learning, including exposure to the language, social and cultural contexts, educational settings, psychological influences, and availability of resources.

I. 2. Analytical Method

This aspect looks into how different factors either support or impede language acquisition. It explores the dynamics between passive and active exposure to the language, the significance of cultural context in grasping idioms and communication styles, and the effects of psychological elements like self-confidence and anxiety on learning results.

II. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS ON LEARNING ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

The surrounding environment significantly impacts the process of acquiring English as a second language, particularly in multilingual societies. Six key environmental factors contribute to language learning:

II. 1. Exposure to the Language

Ellen Bialystok (2001: 45) described 'exposure to language' as encompassing both the amount and quality of linguistic input, which includes both formal settings like classroom instruction and informal contexts such as daily conversations, all of which contribute to a learner's proficiency. " Essentially, Bialystok highlights the linguistic environment that provides learners with access to authentic English through various media, including television, the internet, literature, and real-life interactions. Furthermore, Stephen Krashen (1982: 20) stated that "exposure to language" refers to the "comprehensible input that learners receive, which is slightly above their current level of proficiency". This input is crucial for natural language acquisition. " Thus, exposure involves not only the language itself but also the cultural context in which it is used.

II. 2. Social and Cultural Context

Lev Vygotsky (1978: 87) stated that "social and cultural context refers to the environment in which individuals interact with others and utilise cultural tools (such as language and symbols) to enhance their learning and development." Learning occurs within the zone of proximal development, where more knowledgeable individuals assist learners. "The process of acquiring English as a second language is fundamentally shaped by socio-cultural factors, as language is inherently linked to its cultural and social contexts. The learning of ESL is influenced by social and cultural aspects, which include:

II. 2. 1. Understanding Nuances and Idioms

Linguistic systems are rich with cultural components like idioms, colloquialisms, and figurative language. Learners encounter these elements, which often embody cultural nuances. Consequently, these cultural barriers can hinder the acquisition of a second language due to a lack of familiarity with relevant sociocultural frameworks.

II. 2. 2. Pragmatics and Communication Styles

Communication styles differ among cultures, reflecting unique standards for formality, directness, and nonverbal communication. By recognising these cultural differences, language learners can improve their interactions and reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings.

II. 2. 3. Social Acceptance

The cultural significance of English shapes both motivation and the respect it commands.

II. 2. 4. Family Community

For many learners, acquiring a new language is closely linked to their sense of identity and their wish to engage with a specific culture or community. Support from family and community can foster encouragement and create opportunities for meaningful interactions.

II. 2. 5. Social Interaction and Practice

Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991: 29) noted that the "social and cultural context is the setting in which learning is 'situated'. ' Learning is not merely an individual endeavour; it is a social process that unfolds through participation in communities of practice." This underscores the idea that when learners interact with native speakers and participate in community activities, they enhance their communicative skills.

II. 2. 6. Cultural Attitudes

Favourable attitudes toward English and its perceived value, such as its role in global communication, can drive learners to dedicate more effort to mastering the language. This perspective encourages learners to transcend basic grammar and vocabulary, enabling them to use English in ways that are culturally and socially suitable.

II. 3. The educational environment or systems

The educational environment encompasses the physical space, social dynamics, psychological conditions, and cultural context that shape the learning experience.

II. 3. 1. Physical Factors

Physical factors include classroom design, which covers the arrangement of furniture, lighting, air quality, and accessibility; Educational resources, such as textbooks, technological tools, libraries, and laboratory equipment, including audio-visual aids; and considerations for safety and comfort, which ensure a hygienic, secure, and inviting atmosphere for effective learning.

II. 3. 2. Social Environment

The social environment is primarily characterised by the relationship between teachers and students, which reflects the quality of their interactions. Additionally, peer relationships focus on collaboration, support, and communication among students.

II. 3. 3. Psychological Environment

Learners are encouraged to engage with intellectual curiosity, active participation, and a mindset geared toward growth. Emotional safety is vital, creating an atmosphere where students feel free to express themselves without fear of judgement or failure. Clearly outlined expectations and constructive feedback help establish achievable goals and high standards.

II. 4. Practice Opportunities

Providing students with opportunities to use English in real-world contexts fosters fluency, accuracy, and confidence within the classroom. Regular practice and interaction are essential for effective language learning, enabling students to refine their vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and overall communication skills.

II. 5. Psychological Factors

Albert Bandura (1977:22) described psychological factors as including self-efficacy, observational learning, and cognitive processes, which affect how individuals perceive and respond to their surroundings.

Expanding on this, B.F. Skinner (1953:64) noted that psychological factors are shaped by external stimuli and reinforcement, indicating that behaviour is moulded by conditioning and environmental influences rather than solely by internal mental processes. Carol Dweck (2006:12) defined psychological factors as encompassing mindset (whether fixed or growth), which affects motivation, resilience, and achievement.

II. 6. Access to Resources

Robert Putnam (2000: 19) highlighted that access to resources involves social capital, referring to the networks, norms, and trust that empower individuals to act collectively and utilise shared resources. This emphasises the vital role of social connections and community ties in obtaining educational, economic, or linguistic resources.

It also facilitates students' engagement with technology and media. For instance, access to English-language books, films, podcasts, and online materials can complement formal education. Furthermore, language learning tools, such as apps, courses, and language exchange programmes, can significantly improve learning outcomes. Martha Nussbaum (2011: 33) stated that "access to resources is essential for achieving basic human capabilities, such as health, education, and political participation", which underscores the importance of ensuring individuals have the means to lead dignified lives.

III. ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS.

The learning environment offers both advantages and disadvantages when it comes to acquiring English as a second language.

III. 1. Advantages

There are several benefits associated with the environment in which English is learned as a second language:

III. 1. 1. Enhanced Cognitive Flexibility

This concept relates to the brain's capacity to seamlessly shift between various concepts, rules, or languages. In a multilingual setting, learning English enhances this ability, which in turn facilitates language acquisition. For instance, exposure to different languages boosts metalinguistic awareness, allowing learners to grasp how languages function.

III. 1. 2. Natural Code-Switching

This phenomenon occurs when multilingual speakers blend languages, such as French and English, which can help fill gaps in their English fluency. As a result, learners can articulate complex ideas even if their English vocabulary is limited.

III. 1. 3. Greater Exposure to English in Daily Life

In countries like South Africa and Nigeria, English is prevalent in the media, business, and education, providing passive immersion opportunities. Conversely, in the Democratic Republic of Congo, English is primarily utilised in business and universities. Additionally, multilingual cities such as Singapore and Dubai feature signs, advertisements, and public announcements in English, further reinforcing the learning experience.

III. 1. 4. Peer Learning Opportunities

Multilingual classrooms enable students to clarify English concepts using their native languages, enhancing understanding. Group discussions in a mix of languages can alleviate anxiety compared to settings that enforce exclusive use of English.

III. 1. 5. Cultural Adaptability and Motivation

In multilingual environments, learners often perceive English as a neutral lingua franca, which reduces resistance to learning. The economic benefits associated with English, including job prospects and global communication, tend to motivate learners more than in monolingual contexts.

III. 2. Disadvantages

However, learning in a multilingual context also presents certain challenges:

III. 2. 1. Limited Immersion and Over-Reliance in Native Language

These issues are common hurdles in language acquisition, affecting progress in the following ways:

a. Limited Immersion

Learners may not engage sufficiently with the target language in real-world situations. For example, they might avoid conversations with native speakers or seldom practice outside structured lessons.

b. Over-Reliance on the Native Language

Learners might depend too heavily on their first language while trying to learn a new one. An example of this would be translating everything literally instead of thinking directly in the target language.

III. 2. 2. Interference from Other Languages (Negative Transfer)

Rod Ellis (1997) describes negative transfer as resulting in non-target-like usage of the second language, distinguishing it from positive transfer, where the first language supports the acquisition of the second.

III. 2. 3. Uneven Proficiency Levels in Classrooms

In multilingual educational settings, some students may be nearly fluent, while others may find the language challenging. This disparity can complicate teaching, as instructors may need to simplify lessons, which can hinder more advanced learners.

III. 2. 4. Social and Political Tensions Affecting Motivation

In certain areas, English is viewed as a remnant of colonialism, which can lead to resistance, particularly in parts of Africa and Quebec. Additionally, governments may prioritise local languages, which can negatively affect the quality of English instruction.

III. 2. 5. Lack of Standardised Pronunciation Models

Learners may encounter various English accents, including Indian, British, and American, leading to confusion. For instance, non-native teachers might inadvertently promote localized pronunciations, such as replacing the English "th" sound with a "t" sound in contexts influenced by German, where the voiceless "th" (/θ/) is often substituted with "t" (e.g., "think" pronounced as "tink").

IV. DISCUSSION

After examining the environmental elements that affect ESL learning and evaluating how these elements work together to support or obstruct language acquisition, it is essential to determine whether the environment at the University of Lubumbashi influences English language learning within its multilingual setting.

Given that the quality of the learning environment significantly affects students' outcomes, the focus will be on three aspects: physical, social, and cultural environments.

IV. 1. Influence of physical environment.

When discussing the physical environment, it is crucial to recognise that it encompasses three main components:

IV. 1. 1. The quietness of the learning place

This refers to the setting where learning takes place. A calm atmosphere can greatly enhance students' ability to focus and improve their learning. Conversely, excessive noise can disrupt concentration and hinder cognitive processes, ultimately decreasing learning effectiveness. A conducive learning environment is vital for ESL learners. Is this true at the University of Lubumbashi? Yes, indeed. For instance, in the faculty of arts, the relatively quiet environment fosters better concentration and learning, even in the presence of minimal noise.

IV. 1. 2. The comfort level of learning place

This includes factors such as comfortable seating, suitable temperature, adequate lighting, and the overall ambiance of the learning area, all of which can influence students' mood and motivation. However, when comparing these aspects at the University of Lubumbashi, it becomes apparent that the learning conditions are less than ideal due to uncomfortable seating and insufficient lighting. Despite these shortcomings, students still show interest and motivation in their English studies within this environment.

IV. 1. 3. Learning resources

This category encompasses library resources, computers, internet access, educational materials, and multimedia facilities. Such resources can significantly enrich the learning experience and enhance the efficiency of language acquisition. Unfortunately, the University of Lubumbashi lacks many of these essential resources, posing considerable challenges for students in their English learning journey.

IV. 2. Influence of cultural environment.

The cultural environment relates to the context and atmosphere in which students learn. At this point, it is important to understand that varying cultural

backgrounds can affect students' comprehension and acceptance of the English language and its associated culture. Differences in values, beliefs, customs, and social behaviours contribute to this dynamic. Furthermore, disparities in grammatical and syntactical structures of English among students from diverse linguistic backgrounds can also play a role. It is essential to recognise that English language learners come from a variety of linguistic contexts, each with distinct native languages, phonologies, and vocabulary.

This diversity can influence language acquisition and the transfer of knowledge. Discussing the impact of the learning environment can be challenging, as learners may not engage with speakers from other countries. However, interference from the first language to the second language is often observed among students.

IV. 3. Influence of social environment.

The social environment significantly impacts English language learning. A supportive social atmosphere can boost learners' motivation and academic achievement while fostering positive development in their English studies. To enhance the social environment, educators and policymakers should focus on cultivating a positive social context, encouraging peer interactions and teacher-student relationships, creating an engaging learning atmosphere, and ensuring favourable learning conditions for students. This can be problematic at the University of Lubumbashi, as students may not experience the same supportive environment that learners in other countries benefit from, thereby affecting their educational experience.

CONCLUSION

The environmental milieu in which English as a Second Language (ESL) is received as a decisive factor that develops far beyond conventional classroom instruction. This interpretation supports that language development is formed by six key environmental elements such as exposure to the language, the socio-cultural context, the educational setting, practice opportunities, psychological factors, and access to resources. These factors collectively establish whether the learning journey is sustained or blocked.

In multilingual societies, the environment offers a dual nature. While it gives out significant advantages such as enhanced cognitive flexibility, natural code-

switching, and passive exposure through day-to-day life, it also presents significant disadvantages. These challenges involve the risk of limited immersion, negative transfer or interference from a learner's native language, and social or political tensions that can restrain motivation.

This case study of the University of Lubumbashi presents a concrete example of how these theoretical factors manifest. The research shows that the local learning environment has a mixed impact:

- **Physical Environment:** While the respective quietness of certain faculties (like the arts faculty) supports concentration, important lacks in comfort (seating and lighting) and a serious lack of essential learning resources (libraries, internet, and multimedia) develop considerable barriers for students.
- **Cultural Environment:** The difference of linguistic backgrounds among students shows a visible interference from first languages, having an impact on the acquisition of English grammar and phonology. A lack of contact with native speakers further complicates the understanding of cultural nuances.
- **Social Environment:** The social climate at the university may not produce the same level of support and convinced interaction that learners in other contexts gain from, which can negatively influence student motivation and academic success.

In conclusion, the environment at the University of Lubumbashi meaningfully influences English language learning, but not every time in a positive way. While natural quietness and student motivation present a foundation, the shortcomings in physical resources, the complexities of a multicultural setting, and a less-than-optimal social support system.

This underscores the fundamental need for educators and policymakers to engage in conversation on all the following three dimensions: physical, cultural, and social; to work towards a truly conducive environment for ESL acquisition.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social learning theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Bialystok, E. (2001). *Bilingualism in development: Language, literacy, and cognition*. Cambridge University Press.
- Dweck, C. (2006). *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *Second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Pergamon Press.
- Lave, J., & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2011). *Creating capabilities: The human development approach*. Harvard University Press.
- Putnam, R. D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. Simon & Schuster.
- Skinner, B. F. (1953). *Science and human behaviour*. Macmillan.
- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.