

Advanced Language Learning as a Complex Issue: An Introduction

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How to attain a new level of language proficiency (for example, discourse-level) has always been the question that second language (L2) learners ask after they have achieved a survival level of proficiency. From a review and our knowledge of the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and pedagogy over the past 15 years, we find much of the research in SLA has devoted systematic and sustained attention to the development of survival language skills. Beginning and intermediate levels of students have constantly been the focus of research, providing sustained attention that has significantly promoted learners' language proficiency, especially at the survival level. However, for a significant number of L2 learners, especially those who are pursuing advanced degrees, the language-learning journey does not end at the survival level but must continue to advanced academic and professional levels.

In an English as a Second Language (ESL) learning context, it is commonly observed that university admissions requirements for the L2 component imply that accepted ESL students are able to or should be able to *swim* instead of *sink* in the mainstream classes because the classes they take are in English and no further focused attention to their language improvement is needed; English language learning is assumed to be a self-monitoring, or a *laissez-faire*, process at this academic level of learning, meaning that improvement depends upon how much each individual is motivated to continue to learn or to what degree the classes or jobs demand. Given the evidence in existing literature and reality, we wonder where the attention has been given regarding advanced learning and why there is insufficient research on advanced L2 learning, especially advanced English language learning. One explanation is that the complexity and numerous associated subtle aspects of the advanced language learning (ALL) issue that could not be addressed at lower levels might have made this question even more complicated, resulting