

Factors that Can Affect Learning

There are a number of factors that may affect how adult ESL learners become skilled at the English language. Here are just a few to consider.

Native Language

When tutoring ESL, it's important to remember that most ESL learners you tutor are not learning English to replace their native language, but rather to cope in an English-speaking country. It's also worth noting that learners may already know several other languages—they just haven't learned English yet. For this reason, some people use the term English as an Additional Language (EAL).

The native language the learner speaks will affect how they learn English pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary.

- **Pronunciation**
Some of your learners' native languages will not have the same sounds as in English. For example, 'v', 'r', and 'th' sounds may not exist in their first language.
- **Grammar**
English is a complex language with a sentence pattern that may seem strange to some ESL learners.
- **Vocabulary**
Definitions of words, situations in which they are used, and the social consequences of their use all have to be considered by the learner. Idioms (e.g. *raining cats and dogs*, *make a killing*) are particularly difficult to understand.

Cultural Background

Culture includes values, beliefs, and social practices. The cultural background of your learner may affect your tutoring sessions. In some cultures it's considered rude to ask questions, or tell a teacher that you don't understand, or call teachers by their first name. It may take some encouragement before learners are comfortable expressing their needs and wants.

Although cultural differences may be frustrating at times, your tolerance and support will help ease the learner's transition to using a new language.

Level of Literacy

Some adult ESL learners may be highly educated in their own language and may even have a strong foundation in English. However, they may still need help with English grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary. Other learners may have had very little schooling, if any, in their home country, so English may be the first language in which they are learning to read and write.

Experiences Prior to Immigration

Individuals who, for various reasons, were forced to leave their home country may have greater stress adjusting to life in Canada. This could impact their self-confidence and motivation to learn English. Others who have had highly successful professional careers may feel inadequate if they have difficulty learning English. These and other experiences will affect the learners' ability to concentrate their attention on learning English.

Learner's Personality

Is the learner quiet and shy? Gregarious, talkative and willing to ask questions? Eager to attend social events? Is the learner easy going and flexible, or somewhat rigid and inflexible when confronted with new ideas or possible problems? Personality can influence the learner's ability to learn English, as well as affect how quickly he or she feels comfortable in a new culture.

VAKT Learning Styles Model

The VAKT learning styles model suggests that most people possess a dominant or preferred learning style. VAKT is an acronym for the four senses that are most involved in the learning process: **v**isual, **a**uditory, and **k**inaesthetic-tactile, which is physical movement and touch. The following chart describes some features of these three sensory learning styles.

