Exploring the Role of Learning Vs. Acquisition in Achieving Second Language Speaking Proficiency: Supporting the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Sk. Iftekher Ahmed Noton, Md. Jashim Uddin

Department of English and Modern Languages, IUBAT- International University of Business Agriculture and Technology

ABSTRACT

Socialization and language learning are interdependent processes through which learners become active participants in a community of practice. In pursuit of communicative competence, educational institutions play a central role in guiding learners toward mastery of their target language. This study explores the applicability of Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis within the Bangladeshi tertiary English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Employing a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with ten undergraduate students enrolled in English and Modern Languages programs across three private universities. Utilizing thematic analysis, the study identifies patterns reflecting the learners' reliance on both consciously learned language and subconsciously acquired linguistic competence. Findings indicate that while learned language use contributes to psychological scaffolding—manifested in heightened motivation and self-confidence—acquisition proves more instrumental in the development of fluent and spontaneous spoken English. The study thus supports the theoretical validity of Krashen's hypothesis in the local context and calls for pedagogical reform prioritizing acquisition-based instructional strategies in Bangladesh's tertiary-level EFL curriculum.
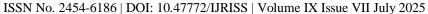
Keywords—Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis in second language education, Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context, Krashen's Monitor Model, qualitative thematic analysis in language research, speaking proficiency development in EFL learners

INTRODUCTION

Oral proficiency is a critical indicator of second language competence, particularly in academic and professional settings. Speaking, defined as the verbal articulation of thoughts and messages (Nunan, 1995), plays a central role in facilitating interpersonal and intercultural communication. In an increasingly globalized world, multilingualism offers learners greater academic, occupational, and social opportunities, prompting a growing emphasis on effective language education.

Central to second language acquisition (SLA) research is the distinction between language acquisition—a subconscious, immersive process—and language learning, which involves explicit instruction and metalinguistic awareness. Stephen Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, introduced in 1982 as part of the Monitor Model, asserts that acquisition is the primary path to achieving communicative fluency, particularly in speaking. This theory has informed pedagogical frameworks globally, though its application in local contexts such as Bangladesh remains under-examined.

In Bangladeshi tertiary education, where English serves as the primary medium of instruction but most students enter from Bangla-medium backgrounds, the development of spoken English proficiency presents ongoing challenges. Despite the theoretical prominence of acquisition, teaching practices in many institutions remain heavily learning-oriented. This study explores the extent to which Krashen's hypothesis holds explanatory and practical value within this context, aiming to identify which process—acquisition or learning—more significantly influences the speaking proficiency of EFL learners.

The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Stephen Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis, a central component of his Monitor Model (1982), posits that second language competence develops through two distinct and independent processes: acquisition and learning. Acquisition refers to a subconscious process similar to how children naturally acquire their first language, emphasizing meaningful communication over formal instruction. In contrast, learning is a conscious, formal process that involves the explicit teaching of grammar rules and vocabulary. Krashen argues that only acquisition fosters spontaneous and fluent language use, while learned knowledge serves as a monitor, used to edit language output in specific situations (Krashen, 1982).

While the hypothesis has significantly influenced language pedagogy, it has also drawn substantial scholarly critique. Researchers such as Ellis (1994) and Gregg (1984) have questioned the practicality of maintaining a strict dichotomy between acquisition and learning, noting that these processes often overlap in authentic learning environments. Gass and Selinker (1994) similarly highlight the difficulty in empirically distinguishing between the two, pointing to the inherent complexity of second language development.

Additional criticism comes from cognitive and sociolinguistic perspectives. McLaughlin (1978) contends that explicitly learned knowledge can, through repeated use, become procedural and automatic, challenging Krashen's assertion that learning cannot transform into acquisition. Mohamad Nor and Ab Rashid (2018) argue that no single theoretical model can account for the multifaceted nature of language development, which is influenced by psychological, social, and contextual factors. More recently, Lichtman and VanPatten (2021) suggest that both learned and acquired knowledge may coexist within interconnected cognitive systems, functioning simultaneously in adult learners.

Despite these debates, Krashen's hypothesis has had lasting pedagogical relevance, particularly in promoting communicative and learner-centered instructional practices. However, the assumption of a rigid divide between acquisition and learning has limited empirical support. A more nuanced interpretation—acknowledging the dynamic interaction between conscious and subconscious processes—may offer a more accurate and adaptable framework for understanding second language acquisition, especially within diverse educational contexts such as Bangladesh.

Scope of the Study

Language teaching methodology is informed by various domains, including Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory, applied linguistics, and pedagogical intuition. Krashen (1982) emphasizes that among these, intuitive understanding often plays a central role in addressing practical teaching challenges. Within his Monitor Model, the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis stands as a foundational concept, proposing that language acquisition—defined as a subconscious and natural process—has a more substantial impact on speaking proficiency than conscious learning.

This study aims to explore the applicability of this hypothesis within the context of Bangladeshi tertiary education, where English is taught primarily through formal instruction. Existing literature indicates that teaching practices at the tertiary level in Bangladesh continue to prioritize explicit grammar-focused methods over communicative, acquisition-driven approaches. Accordingly, this study seeks to investigate whether acquisition-oriented strategies may offer greater benefits for speaking proficiency among EFL learners in this setting.

While Krashen's theory has been predominantly tested in Western contexts, the unique sociolinguistic and instructional environment of Bangladesh presents an opportunity to examine its relevance in a different cultural and pedagogical framework. The intention is not to generalize findings beyond the studied context, but rather to contribute to ongoing discussions regarding the efficacy of SLA theories in varied instructional settings. The findings may offer preliminary insights that could inform future research and policy discourse, particularly in contexts where Western-imported methodologies are often applied without sufficient contextual adaptation (Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014).

This inquiry aligns with the evolving demands of 21st-century language education, which call for adaptive curricula responsive to learners' communicative needs (Baygin et al., 2016). While the present study is exploratory in nature, it may provide supporting evidence for the Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis in non-Western EFL environments and help identify potential pedagogical gaps in current tertiary-level English instruction in Bangladesh.

Research Objectives

To examine the validity of Stephen Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis within the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context.

To identify which process—acquisition or learning—more significantly contributes to the development of second language speaking proficiency.

Research Questions

Which process, acquisition or learning, has a greater impact on learners' attainment of speaking proficiency in a second language?

To what extent is Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis applicable in the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The development of speaking proficiency among Bangladeshi EFL learners is shaped by a constellation of interrelated factors. Existing scholarship converges around four thematic dimensions: psychological factors, language exposure, linguistic barriers, and pedagogical practices. Synthesizing these themes offers insight into the applicability of Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis and the conditions necessary for developing oral fluency in a non-native context.
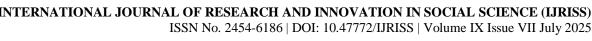
Psychological Factors

Self-confidence and motivation are consistently identified as key psychological variables in second language speaking development. Learners with higher self-confidence are more inclined to participate in conversations and less likely to experience speech anxiety (Es-Shaikh & Mbarek, 2020; Akanda, Firoz, & Marzan, 2023). Motivation—whether intrinsic or extrinsic—reinforces this effect by sustaining learner engagement and effort across time (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017; Shahinaz, Bukhary, &Bahanshal, 2013). However, these psychological benefits may be constrained when instruction emphasizes rule memorization over meaningful interaction, limiting learners' opportunities to build authentic communicative confidence.

Language Exposure and Interaction

Research widely agrees that both classroom-based and informal exposure to the target language significantly enhance oral proficiency (Yang & Zhang, 2020; Azadi, Aliakbari, &Azizifar, 2015). Classroom interaction facilitates structured practice, while outside exposure—through media or peer conversation—reinforces acquisition through naturalistic input (Akanda & Marzan, 2023). Yet, input alone is insufficient unless it is both comprehensible and slightly above the learner's current level (Kadri & Zeka, 2015). The literature implies that Bangladeshi learners often encounter input in passive or one-way formats, which limits spontaneous language use and acquisition. A communicative environment that balances input and output remains essential for developing spoken fluency.

Linguistic Barriers: Vocabulary and Grammar

Despite extensive instruction, Bangladeshi learners frequently face difficulty applying vocabulary and grammatical rules in real-time communication (Urrutia & Vega, 2010; Umme, Sharmin, & Kabir, 2014). Grammatical monitoring often imposes cognitive strain, disrupting fluency and increasing anxiety (Firoz &

Marzan, 2023). Learners' overreliance on learned structures, coupled with limited proceduralization, reflects a key limitation of learning-based approaches. While grammatical accuracy remains important, an overemphasis on rule application may hinder the development of intuitive and automatic language use—suggesting a pedagogical misalignment with acquisition-focused instruction (Shams, Islam, & Parvin, 2023).

Teaching Methodology

In Bangladeshi tertiary education, traditional lecture-based instruction dominates EFL classrooms (Ibna Seraj et al., 2021). Teachers tend to emphasize grammar translation and formal correctness over interaction and fluency-building activities (Akhtar & Haque, 2014). As a result, learners are often evaluated on rote knowledge rather than communicative competence. This tendency is further reinforced by curriculum models borrowed from Western contexts that fail to account for local sociolinguistic realities (Rahman & Pandian, 2018; Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014). Several local studies (e.g., Alam, 2022; Chowdhury et al., 2024) have noted that learners in such environments are discouraged from risk-taking in speech, a condition that inhibits acquisition and promotes mechanical language use.

Synthesis and Research Gap

Across the literature, there is strong consensus that affective, cognitive, and environmental variables influence speaking development. However, few studies attempt to synthesize these elements within the specific context of Bangladeshi tertiary EFL classrooms. More importantly, while Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis is often cited, its empirical relevance in the Bangladeshi setting has not been systematically examined from learners' perspectives. This study addresses that gap by investigating which process—acquisition or learning—learners perceive as more influential in achieving speaking proficiency. In doing so, it contributes to contextualizing SLA theory within a culturally and pedagogically distinct environment.

Rationale Forqualitative Findings

Qualitative method is the umbrella term for a range of research method that uses language data. (P.137, Donald, 2005). This methodological approach draws heavily on empirical evidence from a variety of domains to accommodate the complexity and inevitable paradoxes omnipresent within reality. It allows us to understand the basic patterns and incentives (Braun, Virginia & Clarke, Victoria 2006). According to Uddin, Md. (2024), the outcomes of research are shaped by the researcher's perspectives, as well as the political and social backdrop at the time of the study. Additionally, Qualitative research can provide a comprehensive description and evaluation of the dimensions or components of specific programs (Meterns, 1997) (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994).
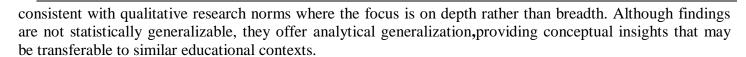
METHODOLOGY

Participants

A purposive sampling strategy was adopted to identify participants who possessed relevant knowledge and experience concerning English language learning at the tertiary level. Ten undergraduate students were selected from three private universities in Bangladesh. All participants were enrolled in the Department of English and Modern Languages and were in either their third or fourth year of study, ensuring adequate exposure to English language instruction in academic settings.

The selection process aimed to ensure maximum variation across institutions while maintaining relevance to the research question. Participants were selected based on criteria such as academic level, institutional diversity, and sustained engagement with English as a medium of instruction. While purposive sampling inherently involves selection bias, it was chosen here to allow for a deep, context-rich exploration of learner perspectives (McLaughlin, 1981).

Interviews were conducted using semi-structured protocols, with a combination of in-person and remote interviews (via WhatsApp audio call) depending on participant availability. The sample size (n = 10) is

consistent with qualitative research norms where the focus is on depth rather than breadth. Although findings are not statistically generalizable, they offer analytical generalization,providing conceptual insights that may be transferable to similar educational contexts.

Research Procedure

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to elaborate on their personal experiences and perceptions. Each participant responded to two open-ended questions directly tied to the study's research objectives. This format enabled participants to articulate nuanced views while allowing the researcher to probe for clarity and depth.

All interviews were recorded (with participant consent) to ensure accuracy and enable detailed transcription. Ethical protocols were observed throughout the process, including informed consent, participant anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study at any point.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed thematic analysis as the primary analytical framework, following the six-phase model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), due to its flexibility in identifying, organizing, and interpreting patterns across qualitative data in alignment with the research objectives. The process began with familiarization, where all interviews were transcribed verbatim and repeatedly reviewed to identify initial impressions. This was followed by line-by-line manual coding, where recurring ideas—such as "fluency through repetition," "grammar awareness," and "automatic use of idioms"—were tagged as preliminary codes. Related codes were then clustered to form broader thematic categories, including Psychological Factors, Language Enclosures, Barriers to Speaking, and Learning and Comprehending the Language. The Themes were refined through multiple iterations to ensure distinctiveness, coherence, and alignment with the research questions. Definitions and labels were finalized before constructing a detailed analytical narrative supported by direct quotations from participants. Although qualitative software tools like NVivo were not utilized due to the manageable sample size, manual coding allowed for deep engagement with the data. Rigor was maintained through practices such as memo writing and an audit trail documenting analytical decisions. This structured approach enhances the credibility, transparency, and potential replicability of the study's findings.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained by adhering to standard research ethics guidelines. Participants were fully informed about the nature and purpose of the study and were assured that their data would remain confidential. Identifying details were anonymized, and participation was entirely voluntary. All data were stored securely and used solely for academic purposes.

Methodological Limitations

While the qualitative approach offered rich insight, it also presents limitations. The small, purposively selected sample restricts the generalizability of findings to broader populations. Moreover, self-reported data may be influenced by participants' subjective interpretations or social desirability bias. Nonetheless, the study offers an in-depth, context-specific understanding of learner experiences that can inform future quantitative or mixed-methods research.

RESULTS

The participants were asked 2 questions in total. The first question was- "While speaking, do you strictly follow grammatical rules or gradually feel that you are uttering the right sentence? Give your opinion:" The second question was- "Do the phrases and words you used while speaking draw from those you learned consciously or emerge from those you acquired in your subconscious mind? What do you think?" The responses to two questions by participants blended some common and similar patterns. A thorough analysis found recurring patterns in the responses from the participants. Thematic analysis was chosen as the medium

to present the results to help readers understand and evaluate the findings in more detail and frivolity. The participants will be mentioned as P1 to P15. The developed 4 themes- psychological factor, the effect of the enclosure, barriers to developing and mastering the speaking skills, and the mixture of learning and acquisition- were not built on any specific question but rather in a broader view to justify the research questions.

Theme-1: Psychological Factor

Self-confidence	Motivation
Interviewee 5: "If I strictly follow the grammatical rules, I feel confident enough as I know the rules, and by knowing the rules of grammar, it makes me feel that I am uttering the right words and sentences."	Interviewee 7: If I say the right words, it prevents me from being judged by anybody. It gives me the motivation to communicate in my second language with utmost accuracy."
Interviewee 13: :" if I get stuck while speaking, I tend to consciously follow the grammar rules, which helps me stay calm, confident, and on track."	Interviewee 15: "I believe that if I follow grammar rules strictly, it makes my speech more accurate and to the point. So, I try to follow the grammar rules as much as possible.

Psychological factors, specifically self-confidenceandmotivation, are crucial in the development of speaking proficiency in a second language. These factors directly influence learners' emotional connection to the language and their willingness to engage in communication. Self-confidence is linked to learners' understanding of grammatical rules. Interviewees 5 and 13 both emphasized how following grammar rules provided structure and stability, boosting their confidence and helping them stay focused when speaking. This sense of control alleviates anxiety, which is essential for fluent speech. Motivation, on the other hand, propels learners to actively communicate. Interviewee 7 expressed how motivation to avoid judgment fuels their desire to speak, while Interviewee 15 demonstrated that motivation is strengthened by using grammar rules, ensuring more accurate and effective communication. In summary, self-confidence and motivation are vital psychological drivers that enable learners to overcome barriers and use language more confidently and effectively

Theme-2: Effect of Enclosure

Exposure	Intreaction
Interviewee 3: "my language is shaped by constant exposure to reading classroom material."	Interviewee 4:"I think my engagement in the classes as well as practicing it at home with my parents and brother helped me a lot"
Interviewee 1: "When I am watching cinemas or movies, I kind of grab very specific phrases and words and I use them frequently",	Interviewee 8:"the conversation I have with people around me could be my teacher and parents so my vocabulary is shaped by using"

The theme of exposure andinteraction highlights the significant impact of environmental factors on second language acquisition. Exposure to language, through both formal and informal channels, is essential for acquiring vocabulary and improving fluency. Interviewee 3 mentioned that their language was shaped by "constant exposure to reading classroom material," while Interviewee 1 pointed out that watching movies helped them "grab very specific phrases and words" for frequent use. This exposure allows learners to internalize phrases and structures naturally. Interactionfurther solidifies language learning, enabling learners to apply acquired knowledge in real-time. Interviewee 4 emphasized how both class engagement and practicing at home with family helped their language skills. Interviewee 8 highlighted the importance of conversational practice, stating that "the conversation I have with people around me...shapes my vocabulary." Together,

exposureand interactionplay crucial roles in helping learners internalize and confidently use the language in daily situations.

Theme-3: Barriers to Developing and Mastering the Speaking Skills

Vocabulary constraints	Grammatical constraints
Interviewee 9: "I have always wanted to learn new words and new phrases. But I don't know why whatever I learned very consciously, I don't use them at all."	Interviewee 11:"I try to follow the grammar rules more closely when I'm speaking in a formal setting. But sometimes, when I'm speaking casually, I don't focus as much on grammar."
Interviewee 14: "I use both memorized vocabulary and spontaneous words, but sometimes I find myself forgetting the learned vocabulary when I need it the most."	Interviewee 11:"I try to follow the grammar rules more closely when I'm speaking in a formal setting. But sometimes, when I'm speaking casually, I don't focus as much on grammar."

This theme presents two main barriers faced by language learners: vocabulary and grammar constraints. For vocabulary, learners often face difficulties in recalling and using words they have consciously learned. One participant mentioned that although they have actively tried to learn new words and phrases, they often struggle to use them when speaking. Another learner noted that while they use both learned and spontaneous vocabulary, they sometimes forget the learned vocabulary when needed the most. Regarding grammar, learners also encounter challenges in applying grammatical rules, particularly in casual conversations. One participant explained that they try to follow grammar rules more closely in formal settings, but become less focused on grammar in informal settings. Another participant emphasized that after years of using English, they rely more on their internal sense of correctness rather than actively thinking about grammar. This theme highlights the practical difficulties learners face when trying to speak fluently and accurately, especially in real-time conversations.

Theme-4: Learning and Comprehending the Language

Language Constraints in Speaking	Naturalization of Learned Language
Interviewee 3: "So, it a mixture of learning and knowing about the language that derives my L2 proficiency"	Interviewee 10: "So what I mean to say is some of them are learned consciously and some of them are not, for example, Idioms I use while talking, I memorized them "
Interviewee 10:"I would say that as someone who has spoken English since childhood with my friends and my teachers regularly. It comes naturally to me. So, I don't have to focus that much on the grammatical rules per se so my proficiency that I have it has developed gradually with practice"	Interviewee 2: "When I speak, those learned words or phrases eventually come naturally without much thought."

This theme explores the interaction between learned and acquired knowledge, highlighting how both contribute to second language proficiency. Language constraints in speaking involve learners navigating between consciously learned knowledge (e.g., vocabulary, idioms) and language picked up naturally over time. As Interviewee 3 mentioned, it is a "mixture of learning and knowing about the language" that drives their language proficiency. Similarly, Interviewee 10 pointed out that some words are consciously memorized, while others come naturally through exposure. The naturalization of learned language occurs as learners repeatedly use learned language in conversation, making it more automatic and fluid. Interviewee 10 shared that after years of practice, speaking in English "comes naturally" without focusing on grammar rules, while Interviewee 2 stated, "learned words or phrases eventually come naturally without much thought." This reflects

how regular usage reduces the need for conscious effort, leading to more intuitive communication. Furthermore, learned and acquired knowledge combine to enhance speaking fluency, where learned language gradually becomes natural and integrated into everyday speech.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to evaluate the relevance of Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis within the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context and to explore whether acquisition or conscious learning plays a more prominent role in developing speaking proficiency. The findings provide not only support for Krashen's theoretical distinctions but also nuance our understanding of how these processes manifest within an underexplored linguistic and pedagogical setting.

While Krashen (1982) argues that acquisition is a subconscious process akin to first-language development, the results of this study show that this process is not only present among Bangladeshi learners but perceived as more effective in promoting fluent and spontaneous speech. Participants attributed their oral fluency to repeated exposure, interaction, and immersion in informal contexts—conditions that align closely with Krashen's notion of "comprehensible input." These findings offer empirical support for his model but also extend it by situating acquisition within a sociocultural environment where English is not a dominant communicative medium.

Importantly, psychological support derived from learned knowledge—particularly motivation and self-confidence—was also acknowledged by participants. This highlights an area where Krashen's model may underemphasize the affective benefits of explicit learning. While he proposes that learning serves only as a Monitor for output, this study suggests that conscious knowledge can play a preparatory or even transitional role. Learners often reported initially relying on learned rules to gain confidence, eventually integrating these into more automatic, fluent usage. This observation resonates with claims by scholars like Ortega (2013) and Skehan (1988), who argue for the complementary functioning of rule-based and exemplar-based systems in L2 performance.

Moreover, the emergence of grammatical and lexical barriers in learners who relied predominantly on "learned" knowledge underscores one of Krashen's most contentious claims—that learning cannot transform into acquisition. However, many participants reported that repeated conscious use of learned structures eventually resulted in automaticity, suggesting a continuum rather than a dichotomy. This position is supported by Ellis (2015) and Gregg (1984), both of whom critique Krashen for oversimplifying the distinction between the two processes. The current findings align with the view that explicit learning, through sustained practice, can lead to proceduralization and eventual subconscious use, thereby blurring Krashen's strict separation.

Another critical implication emerges from the learners' frequent reference to interaction and exposure outside of formal classroom settings. This points to a significant pedagogical gap in Bangladeshi EFL education, where instruction remains heavily lecture-based and assessment-focused (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Ibna Seraj et al., 2021). If acquisition is facilitated by meaningful use in authentic contexts, then current teaching methodologies—which prioritize grammatical accuracy and written competence—may inadvertently hinder oral development. The findings thus suggest a need to realign instructional practices with communicative goals, particularly in speaking-focused curricula.

Theoretically, this study contributes to SLA discourse by demonstrating that Krashen's hypothesis—though often criticized for its lack of empirical rigor—holds contextual validity when situated in environments where learners have limited access to immersive L2 experiences. However, it also challenges his rigid conceptual boundary between acquisition and learning. The data support a more integrative model where learned knowledge can, through meaningful practice, transition into acquired competence—an idea also explored by contemporary researchers advocating for skill acquisition theory (DeKeyser, 2007).

In sum, while the findings broadly validate Krashen's hypothesis, they also point toward a more dynamic interplay between learning and acquisition than originally posited. Rather than viewing them as separate and static systems, it may be more productive to conceptualize second language development as a fluid continuum,

shaped by individual cognitive processes, social interaction, and instructional design. These insights should inform future curriculum reform in Bangladesh's tertiary EFL programs, emphasizing sustained interaction, immersive input, and a balanced integration of explicit and implicit learning strategies.

Limitations of the Study

When interpreting the results of this study, it is essential to acknowledge several methodological limitations that may affect the interpretation and transferability of the findings. First, the study is based solely on qualitative data obtained from semi-structured interviews, without the support of quantitative evidence. As a result, the findings are not statistically generalizable and instead offer context-bound insights that require cautious interpretation when applied to broader populations.

Second, the use of purposive sampling and a relatively small sample size (n = 10) may limit the representativeness of participant perspectives. While participants were drawn from three private universities and had relevant academic backgrounds, their experiences may not reflect the diversity of learners across public institutions or other socio-economic contexts in Bangladesh. Moreover, due to the limited number of interviews, it is possible that data saturation—the point at which no new themes emerge—was not fully achieved.

Third, the potential for researcher bias should be considered. The researcher's prior familiarity with SLA theories and expectations around Krashen's hypothesis may have influenced both the formulation of interview questions and the thematic interpretation of responses. While measures such as audit trails and verbatim transcription were employed to enhance trustworthiness, complete objectivity cannot be guaranteed in qualitative inquiry.

Additionally, interviewer influence may have shaped participant responses, especially in face-to-face or voice-call interviews. Subtle cues in tone, phrasing, or emphasis could have affected how openly participants shared their views. Although efforts were made to establish rapport and maintain neutrality, this dynamicremains an inherent limitation in interview-based research.

Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable exploratory insights into the perceived relevance of Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis in a tertiary EFL context. Future research employing mixed methods, larger sample sizes, and comparative institutional sampling would help build on these findings and improve both robustness and applicability
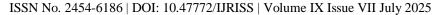
RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and thematic insights of this study, several targeted recommendations are proposed to enhance English language education within the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context. Each recommendation directly corresponds to the core themes and evidence identified in the research.

Leverage Learned Knowledge for Psychological Support

Findings under the theme Psychological Factors revealed that learned language knowledge contributes significantly to students' self-confidence and motivation—two key determinants of speaking performance. Therefore, structured grammar and vocabulary instruction should continue to be emphasized, especially at earlier stages, to offer learners psychological scaffolding that reduces anxiety and builds communicative courage.

Increase Informal Exposure to Target Language

The theme Language Enclosures highlighted the impact of language exposure through media and informal settings on the development of fluency. Students should be actively encouraged to immerse themselves in the target language environment by engaging with English movies, audiobooks, songs, and books. This aligns with Krashen's notion of "acquisition through comprehensible input" and supports the internalization of vocabulary and structures.

Promote Interactive Communication with Native and Peer Speakers

Interaction emerged as a vital driver of acquisition. Based on findings related to Language Enclosures and The Interplay of Acquisition and Learning, learners should be provided with opportunities for spontaneous communication, including peer conversations, language exchange programs, or virtual dialogues with native speakers. This enhances the automaticity and natural usage of language, strengthening acquisition-based competence.

Integrate Speaking Practice into Classroom Instruction

Barriers to speaking—especially related to grammar anxiety and limited oral practice—were recurrent in the findings. To counteract this, the teaching methodology must evolve to include regular, meaningful speaking activities within the classroom. Adopting task-based learning, role-playing, and communicative exercises can address these obstacles and better align instruction with real-world language use.

Revise Instructional Medium and Curriculum Materials

Several participants reported the challenge of adapting to English-medium instruction with limited prior exposure. In line with findings on acquisition support, early introduction to English-medium content and materials is recommended at secondary and higher-secondary levels. This would reduce reliance on external coaching and foster a smoother transition to university-level English use.

Shift from Teacher-Centered to Learner-Centered Pedagogy

The study critiques Bangladesh's traditional lecture-based pedagogy, identifying it as a hindrance to acquisition and oral proficiency. A paradigm shift toward learner-centered, communicative, and acquisition-driven approaches is strongly recommended. This recommendation directly stems from the overarching theme of Teaching Methodology and is critical for aligning pedagogical practice with second language acquisition theory.
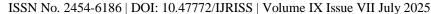
CONCLUSION

Speaking is a core component in demonstrating second language proficiency, as it reflects learners' ability to communicate effectively across varying contexts and audiences. As Lightbown and Spada (2001) note, oral proficiency involves selecting contextually appropriate vocabulary and grammatical structures, making it a multifaceted linguistic skill. This study explored Krashen's Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis within the Bangladeshi tertiary EFL context and identified patterns in learner experience that align with several core tenets of the theory, particularly the emphasis on acquisition through meaningful exposure and interaction.

The findings also highlight critical limitations in conventional teaching methodologies that prioritize form-focused instruction over communicative engagement. This paper adds to the ongoingdiscourse advocatingfor pedagogical reform, emphasizing the importance of creating acquisition-rich environments and integrating learner-centered strategies in ELP instruction.

However, given the qualitative nature and limited scope of this study, these findings should be viewed as exploratory rather than confirmatory. While the results lend support to aspects of Krashen's hypothesis, broader and more robust empirical studies—incorporating larger and more diverse samples, mixed methods, and longitudinal designs—are necessary to substantiate or challenge these observations more conclusively. Future research should investigate the dynamic interplay between learning and acquisition across varied educational contexts to build a more comprehensive evidence base for informed curricular and pedagogical innovation

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

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