

## THE IMPACTS OF ERIK H. ERIKSON'S SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORIES TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING

### Erik H. Erikson'ın Sosyokültürel Kuramlarının Yabancı Dil Öğrenimine Etkileri

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#### **Özet**

*Erik Homberger Erikson (1902-1994 ) Amerikalı gelişimsel psikoloji ve sosyal psikoloji uzmanıdır. Kendisi eğitim psikolojisi alanında kişilik gelişiminin dönemleri açılarından çok iyi bilinir. Bilim alanına, insan hayatının bütüncül gelişiminin üzerine oluşturduğu sekiz dönemlik bir kuramla ve Freud'un erişkinler ve yetişkinlerle ilgili kuramlarını genişleterek katkıda bulunmuştur. Kimlik krizi (Erikson,1959) terimini o yapmıştır ki bu terimin sosyoeffektif oylum içinde, anadil ve yabancı dil eğitimi ve öğretimi üzerine değerli katkıları olmuştur. Bu makalede, anadil ve yabancı dil eğitimi ve öğretimi üzerine olan önemli etkileri araştırılacaktır.*

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** kimlik, kimlik krizi, psiko-sosyal gelişimin epijenetik ilkeleri, insan gelişiminin ve kişilik kuramının basamak kuramı

#### **Abstract**

*Erik Homberger Erikson (1902-1994), is an American expert on developmental psychologist and social psychologist. He is best known for the stages of personality development in the field of educational psychology. His main contributions are exemplified by his theory of eight stages for the total development of human personality in human life and further extension of Freudian theory into adolescence and adulthood. He coined of the term identity crisis (Erikson, 1959), which, by handling the socio-affective domain of L1 and L2 learning, is highly valuable in teaching and learning foreign languages. He has exerted significant impacts on L1 and L2 learning and teaching, which will be explored in this article.*

**Keyword:** : identity, identity crisis, epigenetic principle, theory of psychosocial development, stage theory of human development and theory of personality

## INTRODUCTION

Erik H. Erikson is one of important precursors that signified the strong ties that take place between language, personality, identity, psycho-cultural, and psycho-cultural connections. He is the inventor of new terms, **like identity crisis, real life-span, whole learning**, which influenced the L1 and L2 learning. His explanations on lifespan learning became a background for the establishment of the principles of the European Union's project called **lifelong learning**. His theories specify identity and identity formation as universal across cultures. The stages of identity development, produced by him, are unique in recognizing the social nature of an individual's development. His ideas on cultural relativity match with Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis. In this paper, the impact of Erik Erikson's works on L1 and L2 learning and teaching will be analyzed.

## PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND OF ERIK H. ERIKSON

Erik H. Erikson, a Danish-American, was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1902, but his parents were Danish, and Danish was his mother tongue and German was his school language. He learned English in young adulthood. After completing his first degree in Vienna in art, he taught art, history, and geography in a private school in Vienna at the invitation of Anna Freud, Freud's daughter (Sharpes, 1999, p. 254). He was also graduated from the Vienna Psychoanalytic Institute. He was then trained in psychoanalysis in Vienna by Anna Freud, Freud's daughter in 1927. Erikson served for a time as a tutor in the Freud family (Erikson, 1964, p. 19).

In 1933 he moved to America and got affiliated with the Boston Medical College and Harvard University. While he was at Harvard, he studied he got interested in studying the way the ego, or consciousness, operates creatively in sane, well-ordered individuals. In 1936, he was a staff member at Yale. He went to South Dakota to explore two concepts: to study on Sioux American Indians and how Indian society adapted to individual personality differences. Also, he studied the Yurok Indians in northern California (Erikson, 1964).

In 1939, he moved to San Fransisco where he started a clinical practice in psychoanalysis. At Berkely, the University of California, he became a professor of psychology and worked there until 1942. He refused to sign a loyalty oath required by the University of California in 1950, he resigned his post. He then returned to Harvard as a lecturer and professor (1960–70) and professor emeritus (from 1970 until his death). In 1950, he

published a book titled *Childhood and Society* in which he described the eight stages of human development. This book brought him an international reputation. A later work, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, expands on this theory (Sharpes, 1999, p. 255). He continued to publish books. In 1970, he earned a winner of the National Book Award by his book called *Gandi* (*Gandi's Truth*) in which he expounded and exemplified his theories of human development through societal and cultural differences. He then returned to Harvard as a lecturer and professor (1960–70) and professor emeritus, lived there until his retirement in 1970. He died in 1994.

### ERIKSON'S STAGES OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Like Freud, he researched on *id*, *ego*, and *superego* and is, therefore, rightly characterized as a p nalytic theorist. He explained the difficulties of researching identity sychoa and religious development in a person's lifespan. Faith development and education therefore begin to intersect with developmental psychology, a field pioneered by Erik Erikson and Jean Piaget, among others. Even the etymology of the word psychology points toward the study of the soul (Watt and Fairfield, 2008, p.363). The cause of an individual's life predetermines his soul while works out the development of this cause. Erikson indicated that during one's lifespan, people progress through their eight stages like basic trust vs. mistrust, autonomy vs. role confusion, intimacy vs. shame and doubt, initiative vs. guilt, industry vs. stagnation, and integrity vs. despair. Each of these stages poses a particular type of challenge or crisis. If the individual handles these challenges by the help of others, he can smoothly go on over to the next stage. Adolescence is seen by Erikson as a period which the search for identity provides the key challenge (Williams and Burden, 1997, p.33). Adolescents with a strong sense of self identity has been described as less susceptible to peer pressure, having a high level of self-acceptance, optimistic and firm in their belief that they are in control of their own destinies (Erikson, 1968; Hamacheck, 1988).

So, according to Erikson, human psychological development passes through the following predetermined maturational stages: he calls this case as fundamental epigenetic principle:

### Erikson's Psychosocial Stages Summary Chart

#### Erikson's Stages of Psychosocial Development

Stage	Basic Conflict	Important Events	Outcome
<b>Infancy (birth to 18 months)</b>	Trust vs. Mistrust	Feeding	Children develop a sense of trust when caregivers provide reliability, care, and affection. A lack of this will lead to mistrust.
<b>Early Childhood (2 to 3 years)</b>	Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Toilet Training	Children need to develop a sense of personal control over physical skills and a sense of independence. Success leads to feelings of autonomy, failure results in feelings of shame and doubt.
<b>Preschool (3 to 5 years)</b>	Initiative vs. Guilt	Exploration	Children need to begin asserting control and power over the environment. Success in this stage leads to a sense of purpose. Children who try to exert too much power experience disapproval, resulting in a sense of guilt.
<b>School Age (6 to 11 years)</b>	Industry vs. Inferiority	School	Children need to cope with new social and academic demands. Success leads to a sense of competence, while failure results in feelings of inferiority.
<b>Adolescence (12 to 18 years)</b>	Identity vs. Role Confusion	Social Relationships	Teens need to develop a sense of self and personal identity. Success leads to an ability to stay true to yourself, while failure leads to role confusion and a weak sense of self.
<b>Young Adulthood (19 to 40 years)</b>	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Relationships	Young adults need to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. Success leads to strong relationships, while failure results in loneliness and isolation.
<b>Middle Adulthood (40 to 65 years)</b>	Generativity vs. Stagnation	Work and Parenthood	Adults need to create or nurture things that will outlast them, often by having children or creating a positive change that benefits other people. Success leads to feelings of usefulness and accomplishment, while failure results in shallow involvement in the world.

<b>Maturity (65 to death)</b>	Ego Integrity vs. Despair	Reflection on Life	Older adults need to look back on life and feel a sense of fulfillment. Success at this stage leads to feelings of wisdom, while failure results in regret, bitterness, and despair.
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Experiences of assimilation and accommodation play significant roles in moving people through the life stages....as people encounter something new, they can either assimilate or accommodate it into their working framework (Watt and Fairfield, 2008, p.363). In an individual's lifespan, development takes place in this way. It must also be noted that the psychosocial stages mentioned above are highly helpful for the understanding of babbling, holophrastic stage and telegraphic stage, and Critical Age Hypothesis in L1 acquisition.

### **BASIC FEATURES OF THE PRINCIPLES OF ERIKSONS'THEORIES**

Theories developed by Erikson are the Theory of Psychosocial Development, Stage Theory of Human Development and Theory of Personality. The features of the principles of his **three theories** can be summarized as follows:

1. Epigenetic principle is the core of human development. It is a step-by-step growth of each organ in accordance with genetic processes.
2. Personality development goes on a parallel with genetic development in the body.
3. Just as in fetal development certain organs of the body appear to combine with other organic developments occurring simultaneously, so also in life development occur periodically but separately (Erikson, 1950, p. 65)
4. The environment in which a child lives is crucial to providing growth, adjustment, a source of self awareness and identity.
5. Each successive stage of life development in the individual parallels developing elements in society (Erikson, 1950, p. 250.)
6. Identity formation is "located in the core of the individual and yet also in the core of his communal culture" (Erikson, 1968, p.22).
7. The consciousness of feeling of having a personal identity is based on two

simultaneous observations: perception of selfsameness and continuity... (Erikson, 1968, p. 50).

8. His theories describe the impact of social experience across the whole lifespan.

9. Human beings' ego identity, due to new experience and information we acquire in our daily interactions with others, is constantly changing. It is due to this principle that he had been described as an "ego psychologist" investigating the stages of development in the entire lifespan of human beings.

10. A sense of competence also motivates behaviors and actions. Each stage in Erikson's theory of human development is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life.

11. If a stage is ill-managed, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy that creates a conflict which serves as a turning point in development

12. Ego identity enables each person to have a sense of individuality during adolescence.

13. Identity is not something that can begin or end through a crisis, period or stage of one's life.

Thus, it is clear to understand that in his vision education has got a primary function to enable the learners to advance themselves as individuals in their own right so as to accomplish self-actualization.

### **Strong Points of Erikson's Theories**

His theories expose certain strong points, which are highly valuable to L1 and L2 teachers:

1. He stressed the centrality of the co-development of the individual and society
2. Obviously, he recognized the social nature of an individual's development; he recognized the social as central to his theory of identity development
3. He highlighted how individuals and society co-develop.
4. He looked to ways humans could flourish within social and institutional

milieus, reminding us of education can furnish development of...

5. His three theories on human development have been dominant during the 20th century, each addressing different aspects of psychological growth.
6. He is highly credited with being one of the first originators of Ego psychology, which emphasized the role of the ego as being more than a servant of the id.
7. Current “traditional psychoanalytic method . . . cannot quite grasp identity because it has not developed terms to conceptualize the environment” (Erikson, 1968, p. 24). That’s why he went on further developing the ideas of Freud.
8. The social, in his vision, is consistent with, and is central to the concepts of psychosocial and cultural relativity.
9. His theories provide additional research concepts and tools for cultural researchers conducting identity and personality research
10. He fully acknowledges that the “constant shock like transitions between the selves” (as father, community member, male, American, etc.) are everpresent within the Self of an achieved, coherent ego identity (1968, p. 217). Again, one’s ego identity is never finished or “static and unchangeable” (p. 24)—by way of participation in different figured worlds, events and crises can arise or can create moratorium, and can result in a reorientation or readjustment of one’s ego identity.
11. The co-development of the individual and society occupies a centrality position

#### **Weak Points of Erikson’s Theories**

Erikson’s theories are not without critiques. The following criticisms are targeted on his ideas and applications:

1. In retrospect, his theories on human development are said to have been both not logically rigorous and adequate to account for both intellectual and emotional growth of individuals within the same framework. Yet it must be borne in mind that researches made in the field in his life time tended to be descriptive because developmental psychology lacked a tight net of interlocking theoretical propositions that reliably permit the production of giving satisfying explanations on human development..
2. In an oversimplified account of Erikson’s theory, he overlooks the

centrality of the co-development of the individual and society within his theory of identity development

3. His psychosocial theory is often positioned as an *essentialist theory*, which created the groundwork for criticisms about the resolution of crises as a universal aspect of human identity development, linearly moving through a series of stages in adolescence, to obtain a unified and coherent Self. He has discarded the centrality of the *co-development of the individual and society* within his theory of identity development.
4. Cultural theorists reject this essentialist position in favor of concepts of identity that are contextually bound (Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977), (re)made through on-going struggles to participate in cultural worlds of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003),
5. Due to stage development concept, Erikson's theories are commonly portrayed and criticized for being a rigid, normative, and hierarchical stage-structured approach (Kinnval, 2004).
6. Cultural theorists reject this essentialist position in favor of concepts of identity that are contextually bound (Bourdieu, 1977; Willis, 1977), (re)made through on-going struggles to participate in cultural worlds of practice (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003),
7. Cultural studies of the person, within a significant proportion of the anthropological research on cultural identity, expose the existence of an opposition to a general western notion of identity. The projects of these 20<sup>th</sup> century studies are quite unlike that of Erikson. They focus on the tasks any person must successfully accomplish to resolve the psychodynamic dilemmas of maturation and thus establish a coherent identity. That is to say, the broken identities can be rehabilitated.
8. Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity, being framed by biological and psychological concepts, does not consider the multiple, conflicting, and irresolvable nature of self-hood. Apparently, it has an inadequate consideration of cultural interactions and associated social power.
9. Holland et al. (1998, p.7) claim that his theory revolves around "tasks any person must successfully accomplish to resolve the psychodynamic dilemmas of maturation and thus establish a coherent identity," and sets up their critique that Erikson fails to recognize "social forces that make such an integrated subject an unlikely occurrence" (p. 7).
10. Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity formation became a model for



research. J. Marcia (1966) has attempted to employ Erikson's theory in a way that ego identity could be measured empirically. Marcia (1966), based on Erikson's psycho-social theory of identity, attempted to assess ego identity. Through semi-structured interviews to identify an individual's specific identity status he advanced some measures of ego identity via identity status paradigm, which is based on such developmental progression through the identity statuses as diffused, foreclosed, moratorium and identity achieved. Some scholars state that the developmental order of Marcia (1966) is loosely based on Erikson's research.

11. Erikson's psychosocial theory, being generally regarded in its essence as an essentialist theory, is confused with Freud's psychosexual theory. As a result, his theory is often dismissed by cultural researchers

### **RELATIONS TO FOREIGN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING**

Erikson's ideas are very effective on L1 and L2 learning and teaching through educational psychology. The following represents the impacts of his ideas:

#### **Erikson and Howard Gardner**

Erikson also studied with Howard Gardner and Jerome S. Bruner (Sharpe, 1999, p.301). He influenced them by the principles of his theories and was influenced by the ideas of especially Gardner's on **Multiple Intelligences Theory** that were later on turned out to be the Multiple Intelligences Theory. Gardner seems to be in agreement with Erikson in rejecting the idea of single construct for the seven types of intelligences.

#### **Erikson and the Accommodation Theory**

We can see the overlapping traces of features of Erikson and Giles's Accommodation Theory. According to Erikson, each successive stage of life development in the individual parallels developing elements in society (Erikson, 1950, p.250): this is a case of personal accommodation. Similarly, Erikson's concept of accommodation, extending the ideas of Piaget, handles concept of personal accommodation into development factors that the culture imposes. Likewise, in the Accommodation Theory, which is socio-linguistically grounded, people modify their style of speaking, just like in the stages of Stage Theory of Human Development of Erikson, in order to bring it into approximation with the addressees. Such an issue is useful in handling the spoken skill of the non-native students.

## THE PLACE OF THE THEORY OF PERSONALITY AND THE THEORY OF PSYCHOSOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

### Personality Factor

Personality factor in language learning and teaching is a crucial issue. He proposed eight stages of personality development that correspond stages of psychosocial crises, which he called “dichotomies.” These eight stages, being typical stages of socio-effective domain, go on a par with both with personality development and L1 learning.

The role of personality in first and second language acquisition is a key concept whose results have improved the language teaching methods. Personality factor, which is an intrinsic side of language learning, is a crucial case that contributes in certain ways to the success or failure in language learning. The extrinsic factors in this process are socio-cultural variables that bring mother tongue and second language, native culture and second language culture into contact. The learner in some sense has to learn a second culture along with a second language at the same time. In a sense culture conflict is also responsible for most language learning problems.

### Ego identity and Personal Identity

Personality development universally involves in growth and development of one’s experiences and assessments. Adolescence is seen by Erikson as a period within which the search for identity provides the key challenge (Williams and Burden, 1997, p.32). Ego, in relation to personality, is an important stepping stone in self-awareness and sameness with others. Ego identity is a “well-organized ego within social reality... Ego identity has its normative crisis in adolescence” (Erikson, 1968). In the psychology of foreign language learning, ego is a part and parcel of self-esteem, inhibition, risk taking, anxiety, empathy (especially, the perception of one’s self-sameness with the others), motivation, and personality types that are important variables of personality in second language learning. The personality types like *introversion*, *extraversion*, and a later development like the *ambivert* personality type, are better defined by his theories. So, Erikson has contributed directly to the field of L1 and indirectly to the studies of L2 by his socio-culturally based theories. Identity for him was both an individual and cultural trait (Sharpes, 1999, p.259-260).

Erik Erikson’s theories focus on the interaction of the child with the society, provides a view of personality development from birth cradle,

adolescence, and to old age. Through his theory we can learn how youngsters advance thrust, autonomy in learning, initiative taking, and gaining identities in relation to the ways people treat and act to the child. Through a psychosocial development of personality the can grow personality-wise in the times of crisis, resulting in progression or regression. This way crisis influence one's personality in making him more integrated or diffuse in the society: this is what underlies Erikson's theory. Through his interactions in a social community, the child, who later gets to be the adult, has a chance to develop a healthy personality in perceiving the world and oneself accurately in terms of self-actualization: at this point his ideas come closer to Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow.

### ERIKSON'S THEORIES AND EDUCATORS

Erikson's three theories are important to educators for a number of reasons. Firstly, they provide a 'life span' psychology, which helps us to recognize learning and development as lifelong rather than restricted to a particular phase of one's life (William and Burden, 1997, p. 33). Secondly, alluding to the **Task-Based Learning** in 1959 by focusing on more important tasks at different stages of an individual's life, he helps us to see the matter of the fact, which is that real-life learning involves challenges in a socio-cultural life. Thirdly, he signifies that learning is cumulative process: it is as if he ii if heralding the birth of the **Whole Language Approach** in 1980s. In addition, to him, education must be viewed as involving the emotions, feelings and the whole person; he is again, at this junction, it is as if he is alluding to the birth of **Humanistic Approach** by Carl Rogers in 1969. The following points signify his general outlook on education:

1. Centrality of the co-development of the individual and society are crucial in learners social and intercultural development.
2. The use of the words 'to do well' (Erikson, 1968), of course, points up to the whole question of cultural relativity.
3. It has been previously stressed that, in his vision, the social, is consistent with, and is central to the concepts of psychosocial and cultural relativity.
4. Erikson's psychosocial theory of identity formation created a dialogic space for socio-cultural researchers to consider the exploration of the relationships between identity, agency, power of mind and cultural worlds of practice.
5. Identity is a dynamic change process; it is influenced by continuous

interactions between person and social systems, and is continuously created, maintained and recreated throughout adulthood.

6. His discovery of “Identity crisis” is realistic because it can arise at any stage of foreign language learning.

7. His theory of identity is true because it is framed within biological and psychological concepts. He also elaborated on Freud’s consciousness of inner identity.

8. The individual is able to remove the identity crisis, can re-emerge from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment and an increase in the capacity ‘to do well’ ... according to his own standards and to the standards of those who are significant to him (Erikson, 1968). Obviously, “inner unity” is the appropriation of ‘doing well.’”

9. In terms of being autonomous learners, winning over the identity crisis and adapting a way to handle culture shock, his concept of patterns of ego identity provide a means to examine the different ways that persons orchestrate their multiple selves. At this junction, a question like “Do foreign language teachers have double identities” can be answered. His words “orchestrate their multiple selves” are helpful to create the understanding that non-native teachers don’t have a second identity, but have a professional identity.

10. His psychosocial theory of ego identity paves the way to be an autonomous learner in a foreign language and provides opportunity to explore how self-authoring happens.

11. His description and application of ego identity in social life with issues of coherence in education provide valuable insights into the evaluation of the concept of self-authoring in the sense of making the non/native foreign language learners as autonomous learners.

12. Learner’s maturation can be followed. For example, foreclosure and moratorium through participation in society can be better explored.

13. Building on his theory, foreign language learners who have obtained a more coherent sense of ego identity may experience higher levels of self-efficacy in their abilities to achieve in the future and such a case may have a direct impact on the future foreign language success of that person.

## CONCLUSION

Being trained as a psychoanalyst, Erikson has written extensively about the adolescent identity and identity crisis, which are extremely crucial turning points in one's life span. He also further expanded on Freud's concept of ego extending it beyond the child to include adolescence. It must be noted that in elaborating on personality Freud has analyzed almost exclusively the psychosexual background of personality while Jung worked on the nature of collective unconscious. But Erikson focused more on the social and cultural determinants of personality and behavior (Sharpes, 1999, p. 254; Erikson, 1950, 1964). The terms like social and cultural determinants are highly valued units of measurements in the understanding and evaluation of non-native foreign language learners.

His principal contributions to the socio-psychology of L1 and L2 studies are exemplified by his theory of eight stages, the eight stages of human personality in relation to social and cultural determinants of personality and behavior (Erikson, 1950, 1968). Moreover, he coined a new term like **identity crisis**, which occupies an important junction in L2 studies (Brown, 2007). Another topic that he studied is how personality is influenced by culture.

His theories are the complementary by nature and provide a potentially more balanced understanding of the development of identity and agency within cross-cultural worlds: again, this is very valuable in organizing the teaching approaches in multinational classes wherein several different student types come together. The importance of the resolution of identity crisis is much more understandable by his theories because such terms like culture shock and language shock are now evaluated from a different angle in viewing teacher education.

Humanistic education is generally described as learner-centered teaching. What the humanist teachers do in and out of the class has a significant effect on personal growth and development of students. In this respect, he has shown through his theories that humanistic teaching is not only learner-centered but also person-centered via his handling of the socio-effective domain of L1 and L2 learning. It is clear that his theories have influenced the birth and development Humanistic Approach. The influence of the developmental theories of such psychologists, as Maslow and Erikson provides the foundation upon which this approach [humanistic approach] is based (Williams and Burden, 1997, p.63.)

Also, his theories with a consistent social and psychosocial nature bridge the gap between cultural, social, historical, and psychological theories for future research. Consequently, his ideas can be viewed as starting points for future discussions of other areas of overlap between cultural, intercultural, and psychological theories in foreign language learning and teaching.

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