Chapter 2

Literature Review

It is generally accepted that some people have ability to learn second languages and it is also a common belief that certain people have a natural talent for learning languages faster and more effectively than others while others are poor at it. Individual learners have their own learning styles, beliefs, attitudes, states, factors, motivations and strategies they employ. Success in learning a second or a foreign language is very variable from success in first language acquisition. Some learners may be more successful due to factors out of their control. Thus, the individual learner variables influence the learning outcomes. Many characteristics can influence and be associated with success in learning the new language. Many studies have been done on good language learners (GLLs), such as Naiman, Frohlich, Stern and Todesco, (1978), Rubin (1975), and Stevick (1989). However, these studies were only done in the developed or English speaking country with many available learning resources and opportunities. Therefore, this section will discuss related literature as this study where participants were from the developing countries with restricted learning resources. Related literature such as individual learner differences in cognitive and affective factors, personality characteristic, opportunities for learners, learner autonomy and home background factor will be discussed.

2.1 Learning the second language

Learning the second language or foreign language is different from the way we acquire the first language because it is concerned with fundamental theoretical issues in language learning such as learners' second or foreign language acquisition, language education, bilingualism, literacy, language representation in mind and brain, culture, cognition, pragmatics, and intergroup relations. Therefore, it is viewed by many as a long and complex procedure which is dependent on the learning process. The language learning according to Mitchell and Myles (1998), can take place formally and systematically, in a classroom setting or it may take place through informal social contact, through work, through migration, or other social forces which bring speakers of different languages into contact, and make communication a necessity. However, variable components such as learning styles, learner's individual characteristic and learning strategies which take account into the learning the language, cannot be omitted as in a sense they are all interrelated one with the other in SLA (Brown, 2006).

2.2 Individual learner differences

The researchers are also trying to find out the variation between individual learners and they seek to address the question, 'Why do some learners do better than the

others?' Learners are different from one another in many ways and they differ greatly in a degree of ultimate success which they achieve. Then, what causes them to differ from each other? Thus, it is believed that this difference can be due to the different characteristics possessed by the individual learners'. The two main characteristics can be divided into two groups as Gardner and MacIntyre (1992) suggested; cognitive and affective factors.

2.2.1 Cognitive factors

The cognitive perspective helps educators to understand language learners as people who are active processors of information. Learners need information to solve problems and reorganize what they know. They also rely on their prior knowledge to achieve new learning, and actively choose to pay attention, ignore, or make other responses as they pursue their goals. Students' languages (primary languages) are usually well developed before they enter school. But for all children, the language used in schools is different from the language they know from home. Language is used in expanded ways at school to create meaning from print, to analyze and compare information, etc. All of these activities involve cognitive factors. Students learn in many different ways using a variety of strategies and styles. The general cognitive processes that all individuals use to learn language such as learners' learning styles, strategies and abilities to learn will be discussed.

(a) Learning Style

Students learn things in many ways, by seeing and hearing; reflecting and acting; reasoning logically and intuitively; memorizing and visualizing. The idea of learning styles refers to the characteristic ways in which individual learners solve their learning problems. Willing (1988) defines learning style as inherent and pervasive and Oxford and Ehrman (1988) describe it as a blend of cognitive, affective, and behavioral elements. Nunan (1997), Richards and Lockhart (1996) and Skehan (1998) describe different learner types and learning preferences.

Analytic	
Authority-oriented • Responsible and dependable • Need structure and sequential progression • Relate well to teacher dominated teaching • Like to write down everything in a notebook, study grammar, learn by reading and learn new words by seeing them.	**Analytical** • Independent- like studying alone • Able to channel attention and notice detailed aspects of language- field independent • Like to solve problems and develop principals on their own. • Prefer logical, systematic presentation of new learning material • Serious and vulnerable to failure • Like-grammar, reading, finding their own mistakes
Holistic	
Concrete • Use active and direct means of taking in processing information • Interested in information that has immediate value • Curious, spontaneous • Willing to take risks • Like variety • Dislike routine learning and written work • Preference for verbal and visual experiences • Like to be entertained, as filed dependent they are people-orientated • Like to be physically involved in learning • Like- games, pictures, films, video, listening, talking in pairs and practicing English outside the class.	**Communicative** • Prefer a social approach to learning • Need personal feedback and interaction • Learn well from discussion and group activities • Like watching and listening to native speakers and watching television in English. Like using English outside the classroom. • Learn new words by hearing them and learning by conversation • Field dependent

Figure 1. Learner types and learning preferences
    Nunan (1999), Richard & Lockhart (1996) and Skehan (1998)
Figure 1 presents the different learning preferences of the learners and, in an ESL context, language learners have been encouraged to use a variation of activities such as games, films, listening, dictation, problem-solving, role-play and songs to name a few. By providing these activities to the learners, they can experience the new style of learning which will lead them to become better language learners. Puchta and Rinvolucri (2005) say that different activities also take into consideration that people

have multiple intelligences and may regularly use several intelligences at the same time. That is to say it is important to guide students to use their own ability to reach their learning goal.

Myanmar's teaching and learning context is quite different from the ESL teaching and learning context. The requirements of the education and teaching system do not offer opportunities to interact in class or carry out a variety of teaching and learning activities. Thus, it is a requirement that students memorize things by heart for some school lessons. However, they have their own strategies of how to memorize the given lessons. For some students they analyze and make themselves understand the context first, and then memorize them. For some students, they can only learn when they say the words out loud without understanding the meaning, such as in rote learning (Lwin, 2000). Another common style used by the Myanmar students is, memorizing things well by writing them down the phrases or words many times and drawing maps or figures. There are also some learners who learn things by hearing and listening while other people read to them. These learning styles can also be classified as visual, auditory and kinesthetic learning according to Reid (1987). These kinds of individual preferences also meet some criterions from the analytic style.

(b) Language learning strategies

Learners who know how to deal with L2 learning in different ways can learn more efficiently than those who do not have any approach or tack to learn new languages. Nunan (1999:171) states that the knowledge of strategies is essential as the more a learner knows about the processes implied in the acquisition of the language, the more involved they are in the learning process and thus become more effective in achieving the end results. Rubin and Thompson (1994) also say that to be a successful language learner, at first, a learner has to be in control of the way he or she learns. Therefore, it is important for the language learners to employ their own ways to manage their learning process to be successful. There has been a considerable amount of studies on language learning strategies for developing studying skills in a foreign language that have been used by the good language learners.

Learning strategies are often divided into three areas according to O'Malley et al. (1985) and Richards and Lockhart (1996); (a) Meta-cognitive strategies deal with the awareness and ability to control the process of learning as it takes place in the planning, organizing and monitoring of learners comprehension and production. Meta-cognitive strategies are also important to develop reflection and flexibility and to learn how to combine cognitive and socio-affective strategies. (b) Cognitive strategies are more directly related to learning itself and include the acts of memorization and integration. (c) Socio-affective strategies are nonacademic and involve stimulating learning by interacting with others. It includes factors such as emotions and attitudes.

The usefulness and the importance of strategies have been highlighted by many researchers because of their significant contribution to the process of language learning. The characteristics and advantages of learning strategies, according to Oxford (1990), are that language learning strategies contribute to the main goal (communicative competence), allow learners to become more self-directed, expand

the role of teacher, are problem-orientated, are specific actions taken by the learner, involve many actions taken by the learner, and support learning both directly and indirectly. In addition, they are not just cognitive and not always observable, but can be taught and are often conscious, are flexible, and are influenced by a variety of factors.

Stern (1975) also summarized ten strategies that seemed to characterize "good learners": planning, active, empathic, formal, experimental, semantic, practice, communication, monitoring, and internalization strategies. There are learners who find and use specific learning techniques that help them to succeed in learning the languages. Here is the evidence for the language learning strategies from some studies.

In 1978, Naiman, Frohlich, Stern, and Todesco studied learning strategies that were commonly used among the "good learners". They used semistructured interviews with 34 "successful" students to explore the strategies they used. They discovered that good language learners are able to adapt learning styles to suit themselves, are actively involved in the language learning process and they are able to develop an awareness of language both as a system of rules and a means of communication, they are constantly working at expanding their language knowledge, develop the target language as a separate system which does not always have to be related to the first language, and finally they are realistically aware of the demands of learning language. In 2003, Takeuchi also did the research on three qualitative studies about good foreign language learners conducted in the Japanese EFL/FL context. The first study examines the learning behaviors appearing in the language learning biographies written by 40 good, college-level learners of EFL. A second study investigates the strategies frequently used by 18 highly advanced EFL learners. In the last study the author reads and analyzes the strategy use reported in 69 books on "how I have learned a foreign language" by 169 Second Language Learners. The overall result showed that there are some strategies uniquely preferred in the Japanese EFL/FL context. They are a) metacognitive strategies related to maximizing input and, above all, the opportunities to use a foreign language; b) skill-specific strategies related to conscious learning; c) memory strategies related to internalizing the linguistic system; and d) cognitive strategies for practicing such as imitating, shadowing, and pattern-practicing.

Different people have different learning strategies and there is no particular teaching or learning method that can suit the needs of all learners and no one style is better than others. Yet, it is undeniable that using language strategies facilitate learners to be effective and successful learners. The knowledge and idea of learning strategies has not become very popular in formal teaching contexts in Myanmar yet. The teaching and learning context is only based on translation, drilling and chalk and talk with no other activities and strategies. This was how the participants from this study had to learn the language. Although they had no knowledge about strategies, they might have their own ways of learning which helped them to become good language learners. Therefore, it is worth to find out what kind of strategies the four participants in this studies made use of, and what worked and did not work with them when they learned English in their learning   context.

(c) Ability to learn

Some learners are believed to have learning ability to learn the language and some believe it as a gift to learn the language. However, language learning is a skill that the brain picks up very differently than other skills as it's built to learn languages. Based on the learners' brains' abilities and interests, learners can find the specific strategy to learn a language that is good for their brain. The following section will discuss language aptitude and learners' memory and success in learning English.

(i) Language aptitude

Aptitude refers to the ability to learn quickly and is thought to predict success in learning. Carroll (1965) identified four factors in language aptitude as (1) Phonemic coding ability (the ability to code foreign sounds in a way that they can be remembered later). This ability is seen as related to the ability to spell and to handle sound – symbol relationships. (2) Grammatical sensitivity (the ability to recognize the grammatical functions of words in sentences). (3) Inductive language learning ability (the ability to identify patterns of correspondence and relationships involving form and meaning). (4) Rote learning ability (the ability to identify patterns of correspondence and relationships involving form and meaning). In 1980, Gardner analyzed results from twenty-nine groups of Canadian learners of French and he found that their score on his 'Attitude-Motivation Index' accounted, on average, for 14 per cent of the variation in proficiency. The results of the Modern language Aptitude Test accounted for 17 per cent. He found that the rest of the result accounted on other factors. However, the contribution of aptitude and motivation to learning is still important in success in language learning. According to Larsen-Freeman (2001), aptitude has been consistently found to be the most successful predictor of language learning success. However, its traditional definition as a largely cognitive attribute may be inadequate to describe the personal qualities that enable certain individuals to find and exploit scare learning opportunity. Although it is hypothesized that a learner with high aptitude may learn with greater ease and speed, other learners may also be successful if they persevere. As persevering and trying hard are important in Myanmar concepts, learners are willing and able to do every task they are asked and make themselves succeed. However, successful language learners from this study may not be strong in all of the components of aptitude mentioned above but learners' strengths and weakness in the different components may account for their ability to succeed. Here, perseverance and putting effort plays a more important role in Myanmar's context than belief about natural talent or giftedness.

(ii) Learners' memory and the success in learning English

Memory is one of the sub factors of aptitude and plays a great role in learning. According to Schmidt (1990), individual differences in processing ability concern the learner's capacity to deal with the range of forms in input. This seems to be an individual difference variable in that some people will be more effective input processors than others and be more able to notice, for given input, new forms which may be integrated into their language development because some people have greater working memory attentional capacity or because the analytic process within working memory is carried out at greater speed.

Skehan (1986) studied soldiers learning foreign languages and found three groups of successful learners: 1. "Memory-based" learners were usually younger and were not particularly sensitive to grammar but had good memories. 2. "Analytic" learners were slightly older and were poorer at memory but had good grammatical sensitivity. 3. "Even" learners were good overall.

Therefore, there seems to be two sides of aptitude: a memory-based side and a language-based side. Lack of memory capability in older students can be compensated for by greater grammatical sensitivity. Lack of grammatical sensitivity in younger students can be compensated for by better memory. Students do well if they have both attributes but they also do well if they have either of them. Kyoung (n.d.) also did a study on the relationship between learners' memory and the success in learning English of 180 Korean elementary learners and the result showed that memory is the key factor to distinguish fast learners from slow learners. Therefore this study shows that memory affects the success of Korean elementary students in learning English.

However, recently, the notion of the 'good language learner' has been reevaluated from a sociocultural perspective, and researchers have argued that 'internal characteristics of the learners were less important than the characteristics of their social interactions as well as the practices in the communities in which they were learning English' (Norton and Toohey, 2001). For instance, Norton did research on immigrant learners and found that the most successful learner among the adult immigrants she studied in Canada was not necessarily the brightest or most active, but the one who 'was able to negotiate entry into the Anglophone social networks in her workplace'. However, this study has been carried out where the learners have direct access with native speakers and their personality, with positive attitudes, played a more important role than any other factors such as memory or brightness. While some researchers believe that learners with good memory learn faster and these learners are said to be the brightest and most intelligent, it will be crucial not to discount sociocultural perspective in the success of language learners.

In the Myanmar learning context, memory based learning plays an important role in students' learning. However, in acquiring the language, having good memory alone is not enough to achieve the language competence as other factors such as effort, attitude and motivation and social factors play the significant role.

2.2.2 Affective factors

Affective factors are emotional factors which influence learning and relate to the learner's emotional state and attitude toward the target language. On the other hand, the affective factor is what the individuals become aware of in their environment and respond to with feelings, and act according to them. Second language researchers have long been aware that second language learning is often associated with affective factors and they believe that affective factors are important for successful language learning. Learners' motivation and attitude will be discussed for this study.

(a) Motivation

Gardner (1985) defines motivation as "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes toward learning the language". Gardner also believes that motivation is a key factor which influences the success of language learning and performance. Most researchers also agree that motivation plays a vital role in the learner's achievement. Gardner and Lambert (1959) suggested two kinds of motivation; integrative and instrumental. Integrative motivation refers to positive attitudes and feelings toward the target language group. Instrumental motivation refers to the potential utilitarian gains of second language proficiency, such as getting a better job or higher salary. Both integrative and instrumental are essential element of success.

Gardner and his colleagues conducted several studies on French learning in Canada which indicated that both monetary rewards and integrative desires were positively related to various aspects of second language learning, such as length of learning, effectiveness of learning, behaviors in the classroom, and willingness to interact with members of that community (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1991; Gardner et al., 1992). However, these studies were carried out only in the developed countries or a situation where language learners are in the language target group.

Thus, Svanes (1987) argues that although European and American students were considered integratively motivated in a study at university in Norway, while Middle Eastern, Africa and Asian students were considered instrumentally motivated. In supporting Svanes, Vaezi (2008) had done a study on Iranian undergraduate students to find out their integrative and instrumental motivation toward learning English as a foreign language. For this study, 79 non-English major students from the Islamic Republic of Iran were selected to complete a questionnaire reflecting their motivation for learning English. In order to determine the students' tendency towards the two kind of motivation, a modified 25-item survey was administered to undergraduate students in Iran. The results of the studies showed that Iranian students had very high motivation and positive attitude towards learning English and they were more instrumentally motivated to learn English which could lead them to achieve their goal. Therefore, these studies reveal that students' motivation can be different due to their goals, needs and backgrounds. Dornyei (1990) proposes yet another motivational framework such as extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. According to Dornyei (1994), extrinsically motivated behaviors are the ones that the individual performs to "receive some extrinsic award" (for example, good grades) or to avoid punishment; while intrinsically motivated behaviors are internal rewards (for example, the joy of doing a particular activity or satisfying one's curiosity)". In the Myanmar context, where the native speakers are not so common, it is likely that instrumental, extrinsic and intrinsic motivations can play significant roles in learners learning the language.

(b) Attitudes

Language attitudes are the emotions that people feel about their own language variety and also include attitudes towards speakers of a particular language. The variation of learners' attitudes defined by Ellis (2003) are attitudes towards the target language, target language speakers, the target-language culture, the social value of learning the

L2, particular uses of the target language and themselves as members of their own culture. Generally, Ellis asserts that positive attitudes towards the target language, its speakers and culture are expected to enhance learning and negative attitudes to impede learning. Ellis also adds that social factors help to shape learners' attitudes which in turn influence learning outcomes. Although the role of social context in language learning has been highlighted as an important issue, Dornyei (1990) states that "foreign language learners often have not had enough contact with the target language community to form attitudes about them". In a case like this, it is likely that attitudes relate more directly to learning as it is experienced in the classroom. The possible aspect of this situation is the image of the community which the learners derive from the teacher and the materials. Ellis also points out if the learners have a strong reason for learning then positive attitudes can affect L2 learning. Therefore, positive attitudes towards the target language will help learners to achieve their goals although they have not had enough contact with the target language community. According to Thwin (1997), Myanmar people attach their traditions and culture to the learning environment which influences their point of view on Western culture. However, English language learners have to bear in mind that language and culture go together and learners should be clear that learning and copying are not the same.

(c) Beliefs

According to Thomas and Augstein (1983) learners' beliefs are important, as early psychological studies into learners' perceptions and beliefs about learning "opened a whole new Aladdin's cave of personal beliefs, myths, understandings, and superstitions as they were revealed by the persons' thoughts and feelings about their learning. Language learners have variety of beliefs toward learning the second language or foreign language and they bring a set of beliefs to the classroom with them which affects their learning outcome. Brown (2007) also states that beliefs can influence positive and negative attitudes towards the language, the nature of the language, the language learning process and learners goals and expectations.

Thus, Arnold (1999) claims that beliefs have also been said to "act as very strong filters of reality". Horwitz's (1985) studies have shown that some of these beliefs held by learners have damaging effects on their learning. For instance, if a learner thinks language learning is for gifted and intelligent people and if he/she believes only children are good at learning the language, then it will be hard for that learner to succeed in learning the language. Learners may be directly influenced by their perception of their own success and levels of expectancy, with realistically high expectations helping to build confidence, and low (or unrealistically high) goals helping to build incompetence (Puchta, 1999).

There are times when beliefs can be changed according to the learners' positive or negative learning experiences. Peacock (2001) investigates changes in the beliefs about second language learning of 146 trainee ESL students over their 3 year program at the City University of Hong Kong. He reports differences in three key areas; learning a second language means learning a lot of vocabulary and grammar rules and the belief that those speaking more than one language well are very intelligent. However, no significant changes have been found. He concludes that these participants when preparing their classroom tasks and materials, might over-

emphasize the learning of vocabulary and grammar rules compared to other classroom tasks necessary for foreign language learning. It can be assumed that those believing that people who can speak more than one language are very intelligent might negatively affect their capacity to assess their future students' progress.

Discussing about the learners' belief, the influence of religious belief is not so commonly discussed in SLA although it has the impact on learners' learning outcomes. According to Fagan (2010), the social sciences show religious practice has very beneficial effects on the educational attainment of children. It may well trump income in its effects on educational outcomes. He further states the direct and indirect positive effects of religious practice as follows;

The direct positive effects of religious practice by the students include:
   • Higher grade point averages,
   • More time spent on homework, and
   • A significant decrease in high school drop-out rates.

Indirect positive effects of religious practice help students to:
   • Internalize values and norms that help achievement,
   • Foster high personal expectations, internal locus of control, productive routines, and
   • Avoid socially deviant behavior.

Therefore, religious practice is directly and significantly correlated with academic outcomes and educational attainment and research should also be done on this religious factor in SLA as well to see how it affects the learning outcomes.

2.3 Personality Characteristics

Personality is also one factor that contributes to success or failure in language learning. Personality such as extroversion and introversion characterize individual achievement in learning the second language. Eysenck and Chan (1982: 154) explain that "Extrovert is sociable, like parties, have many friends and need excitement; they are sensation-seekers and risk takers, like practical jokes and are lively and active. On the other hand extroverts are more interested in what is happening around them than in their own thoughts and emotions. That is to say, the extrovert prefers to experience the world more through contact with others and shared experience than through self-examination or study. If there is any problem that happens to them, they would find someone to help. Conversely introverts are quiet, prefer reading to meeting people, have few but close friends and usually avoid excitement." If problems happen to them, introverts are more likely to find their own solutions and solve their own problems.

Many researchers such as Naiman, et al. (1978), Strong (1983), and Robson (1992) have found evidence that extroversion was an advantage and extroverted learners were more likely to engage in oral participation. However, none of these studies found that extroverted learners enjoyed significantly better academic success. However, there are other studies where extroverted learners were shown to learn quicker than introverted learners. Naiman, et al. (1978) did research on 72 Canadian high school students from grades 8, 10 and 12 who were studying French as a second language. The subjects were given questionnaires to establish their psychological

profiles. A French listening test and imitation test were also included. According to the results, approximately 70% of the students with the higher grades (B or higher) would consider themselves as extroverts. Extroverts are willing to try to communicate even if they are not sure they will succeed. Introversion has the greatest chance of negatively. Therefore, the study has shown that extroverted learners (or unreserved and outgoing people) acquire a second language better than introverted learners (shy people). Wesche (1977) studied 37 Canadian civil servants in an intensive French course and found a correlation between "role playing" and proficiency in listening comprehension and speaking skills. In this case role playing indicates students' willingness to take the part of a character in a dialogue or role-playing situation, with speech characterized by prosodic expressions of feeling appropriate to the context and by accompanying gestures and facial expressions". This reflects extroversion, self-confidence, and satisfaction with the learning situation, as well as general anxiety level. Another study was with U.S students after their study abroad program in France 2003. This study was conducted by Kinginger and Farrell (2004) who interviewed those students and found that many of them would avoid interacting with native speakers at all costs while others grabbed the opportunity to speak the language. Thus, those who avoided interaction were typically quiet, reserved people. All these studies were done in Western countries with purposeful learning environments where classrooms offer many learning activities which involve the students' participation.

In contrast, in the Myanmar context, students are required to keep quiet in the classroom while the teacher is teaching and they are to behave well so that they will be considered that they are giving respect to their teacher. The introverted-type students are also sometimes considered as obedient. Another big difference is the culture influence. Western culture is different from Myanmar culture. For example, attending parties or hanging out with friends at a pub will be seen as Western culture in the Myanmar context as people in Myanmar remain attached to their country's traditions (Thwin, 1997). However, this does not mean that people in Myanmar are not sociable.

Therefore extroversion has little to do with the situation inside the classroom in the context of Myanmar. However, there are other vital personality qualities that should be considered in learning the new languages according to the learners' context from this study; qualities such as perseverance, overcoming frustrations, achieving a satisfactory level of proficiency after many trials and errors, positive task orientation, ego- involvement, need achievement, high level of aspiration, goal orientation and perseverance (Naiman, et al., 1978 and Stern, 1983:380).

2.4 Opportunities for learners

For a developing country like Myanmar, school is the main place of English language learning. Some learners will have more chances to learn English depending on the learning opportunities which the environment offers. Here, two aspects, opportunities of learning the language and opportunities for using the language (out put), will be discussed.

2.4.1 Opportunities for learning the language

Language learning opportunities are other vital influences that affect proficiency. Researchers such as Pickard and Nunan have found that opportunities for language exposure play an important role in learning a foreign or second language. For instance, Pickard (1996) studied advanced German learners of English in the UK and Nunan (1990) studied Asian ESL learners in Australia. They have found that learners learn the language through purposeful study at home, in libraries or in private language schools, through social or work-based contact with English-speaking people and through access to the mass media, including the Internet. According to their findings it is obvious that opportunities for language exposure and use will almost certainly exist outside the formal school classroom and there are plenty of opportunities for the learners who learn English in English- speaking countries. However, in the Myanmar context, such communities were often unable to provide the conditions in which language skills can develop. Learners were not regularly exposed to comprehensible input while opportunities to use the language in real communication, especially in spoken communication, were rare. In addition to limited resources for learners, teachers themselves may lack the language skills and methodological awareness to improve the achievement of their lower level learners.

Most researchers, for example Shehan (1989), Ellis (1994), and Breen (2001), have mainly focused on the formal study of languages in the developed world where the learning environment is quite convenient for language learners. Most studies are also done with the university level students. For instance, Malcolm (2004) investigated successful English language learners in Arab medical schools to discover the methods and ways learners managed their studies. The questionnaire concentrated on how much of their English ability they attributed to formal or informal environments, some beliefs about learning English, how they managed their English learning and which methods they felt to be most successful. Most attributed their English proficiency to out-of-school exposure and practice. The most common reported ways to improve English were watching TV and movies and speaking with native speakers. Most found English an easy language to learn and were able to find ways to practise it on their own. However, resources to learn the foreign language are still likely to be restricted in some places for Myanmar students although out-of-class learning may notably contribute to successful learners' progress in EFL settings. For a developing country setting, where both formal and informal learning resources are relatively deprived, it is likely that individual differences will be related to success.

2.4.2 Opportunities for using the language

The opportunity of having output is essential for the learners to apply what they have learnt. Although input and output are two important factors of the language learning process, output had been neglected or minimized for a long time. It has been proposed that comprehensible output may offer at least three things that input could not do; (a) provide the learner with opportunities for contextualized, meaningful use, (b) allow them to test out hypotheses and (c) force them to move them from semantic to syntactic processing of the target language. In 1985, Swain did studies focusing on output processes which suggested that producing the target language is not only a way to enhance fluency and indirectly generate more comprehensible input, but also

facilitates language learning by providing learners with adequate opportunities to use their inter-language system for a better control and improvement of the target language.

Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985) also did experimental research on two groups where a control group received grammar instruction only. The experimental group received instruction and also had opportunities to use the language communicatively outside the classroom. At the end of the research both groups were tested and obviously the experimental group performed better than the control group on tests of communicative interaction. To their surprise, the experimental group performed better on tests of grammar even though they had received comparatively less grammatical instruction. Montgomery and Eisenstein concluded that both instruction and interaction were necessary for acquisition. Therefore, the result supported the idea that opportunities to practice the language in communicative situations were important for language acquisition.

In the Myanmar context, where instruction is based on traditional instruction and grammatical explanation, the students can perform better in sentence structure than spoken language since they have little opportunity to socialize inside and outside the classroom. Language output is not less important than input. If there is only input for the learners and no occasion to apply what they have learnt, then it will be hard to know whether the learners understand what they have learnt or they will not know how to produce the target language. Therefore, it is important for all the learners to have opportunity to use the language in order to acquire and generate the language.

2.5 Learner autonomy

Learner autonomy is also getting attention to help students effectively to become independent learners so that they could benefit more from the innovation. According to Holec (1981) and Allwright (1990), autonomous learners were seen as those who are able to reflect on their own learning through knowledge about learning and who are willing to learn in collaboration with others. Scharle and Szabo (2000) define autonomy as "the freedom and ability to manage one's own affairs, which entails the right to make decisions as well". Research in SLA emphasizes the need to help L2 learners notice their own L2 use in comparison to the use of the target language as produced authentically. Thanasoulas D.(2000) asserts that an autonomous learner must:
> • Have insights into their learning styles and strategies
> • Take an active approach to the learning task at hand
> • Be willing to take risks – i.e. to communicate in the target language at all costs
> • Complete homework whether or not it is assessed
> • Place importance on accuracy as well as appropriacy – edit own work.

Therefore, in order for learners to make informed decisions about their learning, Ellis (1999) and Sinclair (1999) suggest that they need to have developed an awareness of at least four important areas of metacognition: learner awareness, subject matter awareness of the target language, learning process awareness, social awareness. Thus, to develop learner autonomy it is important to find a way to help students to be aware

awareness, process and situational awareness, and task awareness. Ellis (1994) states that learners must be aware of the gap or mismatch between what they produce and what proficient native language speakers produce before they truly acquire L2. By experiencing this conscious 'noting- the- gap', learners can develop into more proficient L2 speakers. Many a finding relating to attention studies have found the significant role awareness plays in accounting for SLA. For example, Leow (2000) observed that aware learners significantly increased learners' ability to recognize and produce the target forms in L2 Spanish, whereas unaware learners did not.

Due to the limited and restricted learning situation, the country education system might not encourage the Myanmar students to become the autonomous learners as the classrooms are traditional where students largely depend on the teachers. Thus, Lightbown and Spada (1999) claim that one important aspect of classroom language teaching is helping learners to notice form in the L2 through various techniques that direct learners to pay attention to form in the process of learning L2. Therefore, it is a need that teachers know the knowledge about learners' autonomy and impart it to the learners to enable the learners to be more independent pursuing their learning goal.

2.6 Home background factor

Home support is also significant for students learning a second or foreign language. Griffin et al. (2004) proposed that parental support also influenced student achievement. When parents are well-educated and have positive attitudes towards the second language, they can support their children to do better in learning the second language. Woods et al. (2007) studied 2133 Hong Kong primary students and their parents, sampled from 140 primary schools that had employed a native-speaking teacher of English to work with the students. The result shows higher than average improvement in English proficiency was associated with the students attitudes to learning, their opportunities to use English in everyday life, and parents support of their child's English studies. Griffin et al., also state that students tend to do better on tests of English achievement and have more positive attitudes to learning if they had well-educated parents who took a keen interest in their studies, as well as access to many books in any language at home and at school, and regular opportunities to speak English outside school. Parents are also suggested to use only English at home with their children who are studying English (Rodriguez, 1982). This suggestion probably is not possible for parents who are not well-educated. However, although parents are not well-educated they can still support their children by showing interest in their children's progress and providing for their needs. Hence, according to the studies, parents support and home background factors are also associated with the students' development of second language acquisition.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, the review of the literature shows that there are many factors that affect the learners learning the language and researchers have different perspectives in this area. Although most of the research is based on the different contexts and settings of ESL in the developed world, the findings from these studies may have some relevance for learners from Myanmar. This current study can also contribute usefully to the body of previous literature, by showing a context where access to learning resources is limited and learning takes place more as product of the subtle interaction between the personal attribution of learners and their positioning within their families, their instructors and their community.