



The Factors that Influence the Acquisition of English Language by Yemeni KG2 Students

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ABSTRACT

This study will investigate the internal as well as the external factors that influence the acquisition of English language by Yemeni kindergartens (KG2) students. To achieve its objectives, some different activities have been used to find out new styles to teach English language to the children at the age of 4-6 years old at three different kindergartens instruction phases. Findings show that Age and Motivation are the most important factors that affect the learning of a second language in spite of the fact that there are some other important factors, either internal or external, that affect the learning process.

Indexing terms/Keywords

Second Language Acquisition, Second Language Learning, Learning strategy, Teaching approach, Motivation, Age

INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that English language is the most commonly used language in the world. Research shows that one person among four persons can communicate using English language. In view of the dominance of English language in all of life's fields, the number people who wish to be learned is increasing from day to another, where the number of English language learners nowadays are found to be about billion learners. There is no any country, including Yemen, that does not teach English Language in its schools and universities. In spite of that, English Language is considered to be a foreign language for Arab students, and teaching a foreign language is not encouraged in schools and universities at all. Furthermore, no appropriate language teaching and learning strategies are used to help acquiring the language easily. Therefore, language learning needs to increase the number of classes per week and to apply a lot of various courses and activities due to the fact that students don't practice the language outside the class environment.

And if the children did not learn it in their childhood, it is believed by researchers that they will not get it easily in their youth and may be they will forget it soon. Therefore, children are advised to learn and to use the language as early as possible in order to acquire it faster. Teaching English Language to children at early age has also positive impact. Previous research has found out that there are some factors that affect the acquisition of a second/foreign language. And the aim of the present work is to examine the extent to which these factors can influence the acquisition of a second/foreign language. Consequently, the factors that influence the acquisition of a second/foreign language are classified into internal and external factors.

Internal Factors

Internal factors are those that the bilingual language learners bring with them to a particular learning situation.

Intelligence

The child's intelligence to acquire new languages is one of the most important factors that help him/her to get a lot of information, especially when he/she gets the information at their early stages of life. Previous studies have shown that children who can speak two languages are more intelligent than those who speak one language.

Mental Maturity

It is considered to be one of the internal factors that influence language acquisition, where the mental ability of children to acquire new language at the age of 4 years and above is higher than in any other age. Also, practicing a language with children during this age enables them to comprehend more about the language and provides mental maturity to acquire language quickly.

Age

The effect of age on second/foreign language acquisition is very important. A learner's age is one of the important factors affecting the process of second/foreign language acquisition. At a younger age, the ability to acquire language becomes higher and more intuitive.



Motivation

It is represented in the personality of the child and in his/her motivation to learn a language. If the child has a strong personality he/she can learn and acquire new languages. Strong personality will help the learner to be more motivated.

External Factors

External factors are those factors that characterize a particular situation of learning language.

Curriculum

For English Language students in particular, it is important that the totality of their educational experience is appropriate for their needs. The necessity of this appropriateness of curriculum for children at the age (4-6) years is to let them have good capacity to get new information as much as possible.

Instruction

Clearly, some language teachers are better than others in providing appropriate and effective learning experiences for the students in their classrooms. If the teacher has a strong personality and has new language teaching strategies, the students will be able to get more information.

Using Successful Education Programs

These programs include:

- To begin teaching children English Language at that early age (4-6) years.
- Teachers who are well trained and have previous experiences in their work.
- Innovative techniques of teaching.

These successful language teaching programs have great impact on language learning.

Motivation

It is another factor affecting second language acquisition. Students who are given continuing and appropriate encouragement to learn by their teachers and parents will generally fare better than those who are not.

Access to Native Speakers

Native speakers are linguistic models and can provide appropriate feedback. Clearly, language learners are likely to make slower progression, particularly in the oral aspect of language acquisition.

Using Kinematic Games and Visual learning

language learners are usually familiar with kinematic games and visual learning, where the teachers use many activities such as drawing design visible activities, and using kinematic games that have a role in the development of children's ability to learn English Language and also acquire more and deep information in order to have the best language skills.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Some students learn a new language more quickly and easily than others. There are crucial factors influencing success that are largely beyond the control of the learner. These factors can be broadly categorized as internal and external. It is their complex interplay that determines the speed and facility with which the new language is learned.

Most of Yemeni students in our society are not aware of the importance of learning English language as a result of their inheritance of wrong concepts about learning a foreign language.

These concepts may cause misunderstanding about the importance of English as the main universal language in global transactions. People ignore that it is a dominate language, the language of sciences also treated among all countries of the world as a universal language. Yemeni students think that they should be assiduous in their Arabic language, and their fear to loss it due to the dominance of English Language.

Not to mention the negative effect of the society on second language learners who are not encouraged to speak a second language at all, except those who are working in this filed, i.e. learning or teaching a foreign language. In spite of that, it has been found that teaching English is problematic for some English Language teachers who have problems pronouncing the words correctly and this makes them unqualified to teach the students especially the child below 7 years old.

This research examined the factors that help Yemeni children to acquire English Language as a foreign language at the age of 4 to 6 years at Kindergarten instruction phase. The present study aims to find out new styles to teach the children the second language. Therefore, different activities are used in the simplest way to help them love English language.

A lot of students tend to make personal choices, and strive while developing their ability to study English at school. The learners naturally want to develop a grasp of the language and they believe they can also develop their language



proficiency via their individual learning. But the educational system with regard to foreign languages curriculum in our society is problematic which makes students tend to join English academic institutes to develop their language skills.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

We are studying the factors influencing the acquisition of English Language by Yemeni children. The present study deals with one of the most important issues in foreign language Learning. That is, the internal and external factors affecting learners' success in EFL. The aim of this study is to examine the extent to which Yemeni children are able to absorb the language in an early age, and what are the factors that help them to understand language. The internal and external factors that influence children to acquire a language are mentioned in this study. The appropriate language teaching strategies with which KG2 students are interested are also looked at. Thus, the purpose of the study is to investigate the ability of children of KG2 to acquire the English Language and to look at the problems they face as well as to examine the solutions. The objectives of the study are to:

- a. identify the ability to which KG2 students can acquire English Language.
- b. identify the external and the internal factors that influence KG2 students' acquisition of English Language.
- c. Explore the extent to which internal and external factors can be real effective factors.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study aims to show the important factors that affect children in learning a second language according to their age-period at kindergarten. It aims to fill in a gap in the body of Literature with regard to the language acquisition by looking at the extent to which Yemeni KG2 students can acquire the English Language particularly when new teaching styles and instructions are used to teach them the language. It further shows the importance of paying a great consideration to both the internal and the external factors that influence language acquisition in teaching children a new language, and how these factors can help them acquire language skills easily.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Language learning does not occur as a result of the transmission of facts about language or from a succession of rote memorization drills. It is the result of opportunities for meaningful interaction with others in the target language. Therefore, lecturing and recitation are not the most appropriate modes of language use in the second language classroom. Teachers need to move toward more richly interactive language use, such as that found in instructional conversations (Tharp & Gallimore, 1988) and collaborative classroom work (Adger, Kalyanpur, Peterson, & Bridger, 1995).

As a starting point we want to give a definition to the learning, however, there is no universal definition from theories and researchers as Shunk (2009, p. 79) said, "learning is an enduring change in behavior, or the capacity to behave in a given fashion which results from practice or other forms of experience". Besides, it was defined as "a process that brings together cognitive, emotional, and environmental influences and experiences for acquiring, enhancing, or making change in ones knowledge, skills, values, and world views". (Hwitt 2008, p. 45). We notice that the common point between these definitions is that learning causes change in the behavior of the individual.

The task of learning second foreign language is much more complex, since, "you must have a comprehensive knowledge of the entry behavior of a person, of the objectives you wish to reach of possible method". (Brown, 2000, p. 79). Therefore, there are some factors that influence students achievement in learning English; internal factors such as intelligence and perception, self esteem, and learning styles and external factor as motivation, and socio cultural status.

In this study we look at the factors that influence the acquisition of English Language by children speaking Arabic as a first language.

Internal factors that influence the Acquisition of English Language

Gomleiksiz (2001) believes that age is one of the important factors affecting the process of second language acquisition. Collier (1988) expresses that successful language acquisition depends on the learner's age. In one of the earliest studies on second language acquisition, Lenneberg (1967) claims that there is a certain period in the acquisition of a second language. In this period, which is identified as the critical period hypothesis in language acquisition, Lenneberg theorizes that the acquisition of language is an innate process determined by biological factors which limit the critical period for acquisition of a language from roughly two years of age to puberty. Lenneberg believes that after lateralization, which is a process by which the two sides of the brain develop specialized functions, the brain loses plasticity and lateralization of the language function is normally completed by puberty, making post-adolescent language acquisition difficult.

However, it can be asserted that older students between the ages of 8 to 12 are faster, more efficient acquirers of school language than younger students between the ages of 4 to 7. In many of the studies, young children beginning the study of a second language between the ages of 4 and 7 take much longer to master skills needed for academic purposes than older children do. The reason why students acquire the language skills better is that children who enter school at the age of 5 or 6 have not yet acquired their first language completely, which continues through at least age 12. From age 6.

Motivation, on the other hand, is one of the important aspects of second language acquisition. Motivation is a kind of desire for learning. It is very difficult to teach a second language in a learning environment if the learner does not have a desire to learn a language. Therefore, it is important to take language learning motivation into consideration.



Other internal factors which are also different types of factors and have influencing role in the acquisition of the English Language include age, aptitude, motivation, attitude, personality, cognitive style, hemisphere specialization and learning strategies. Researchers have considered age, motivation, attitude and personality factors as the most important factors that affects language acquisition.

The internal factors are believed to be a key to acquire the foreign language (Madrid, 1995). Madrid specified the internal factors as age, motivation, aptitude and cognitive style. However, Madrid (1995) confirmed that age and motivation are the most important internal factors as mentioned in previous studies. Madrid writes about the aptitude explaining that there seems to be evidence that some students have innate abilities to acquire a second language (Neufel 1978) and others have not. So it would be interesting to know if the students with special qualities (aptitude) also obtain the highest proficiency level; if not, the cause of their low achievement must be found out.

Genese (1976) also found some correlation between intelligence, verbal reasoning and fluency with L1 and some aspects of L2. If the teacher wants to measure the students' aptitude for L2 learning, Carroll and Sapon's (1967) test battery or Pimsleur's (1966) can be very useful.

Nevertheless, these tests were standardized at the time that the audio-lingual method was predominant and their approach may be exclusively linguistic lacking validity to evaluate the student's communicative abilities. A revision of these tests and an introduction of a component that can be used to predict the student's communicative abilities may be necessary. Madrid (1995) also writes about the cognitive style that students perceive, process and organize their learning in different ways. These particular ways in which they try to learn are called cognitive styles, learning styles or cognitive strategies (see Brown 1980, Garcia Ramos 1989). The cognitive styles that have received most attention by research are field-dependence and field-independence that can be measured with Witkin et al. (1977) Embedded Figures Test (EFT). In addition, age, personality, motivation, experiences, cognitive and native language are the most important factors for children to acquire English language.

External Factors that Influence the Acquisition of a English Language.

Previous research has indicated that there are many different external factors that influence the acquisition of English Language by children between 4-6 years old. Among these factors are learning and teaching contexts, teaching a second language input and interaction, i.e. how these elements affect language learning.

In his study entitled Internal and External factors affecting foreign language teaching and learning, Madrid (1995) has mentioned that only one external factor which he focuses on and considers the most important factor which is "teacher". He asserts that "Teachers also bring individual characteristics to the L2 classroom that may have an influence on the students' performance and in their final results". He adds that the teacher formative experiences, his/her training experiences and personal characteristics are called presage variables, whereas his/her performance in the L2 classroom, teaching style and methodology are part of the learning process (Dunkin and Biddle 1974:38).

Teachers, like learners, have personal characteristics and individual differences that influence their performance in the L2 class and, consequently, their effect on the students' outcomes. For example, male and female teachers may transmit certain values and create attitudes. That may have some effect on the student's academic behavior and on his/her final results.

There are also particular external factors which include:

-Curriculum: For ESL students in particular, it is important that the totality of their educational experience is appropriate for their needs. Language learning is less likely to take place if students are fully submersed into the mainstream program without any extra assistance or, conversely, not allowed to be part of the mainstream until they have reached a certain level of language proficiency. (see Lightbown and Nina, 2013).

-Instruction: "Clearly, some language teachers are better than others at providing appropriate and effective learning experiences for the students in their classrooms. These students will make faster progress.

The same applies to mainstream teachers in second language situations. The science teacher, for example, who is aware that she too is responsible for the students' English Language development, and makes certain accommodations, will contribute to their linguistic development."

-Culture and status: "There is some evidence that students in situations where their own culture has a lower status than that of the culture in which they are learning the language make slower progress."

-Motivation: "Students who are given continuing, appropriate encouragement to learn by their teachers and parents will generally fare better than those who aren't. For example, students from families that place little importance on language learning are likely to progress less quickly."

-Access to native speakers: "The opportunity to interact with native speakers both within and outside of the classroom is a significant advantage. Native speakers are linguistic models and can provide appropriate feedback. Clearly, second-language learners who have no extensive access to native speakers are likely to make slower progress, particularly in the oral/aural aspects of language acquisition." (see Lightbown and Nina, 2013).

Although a few research has been done regarding the factors that influence foreign language acquisition, we tried to focus our attention on those studies that looked at the internal and external factors that help children to acquire English



language, the perfect age to teach the children English Language and other factors that help them improve their language competency.

METHODOLOGY

The participants of study

A total of thirty (30) kindergarten students from three selected schools in Yemen participated in this study. The selected schools are private schools located in Tamar city, Yemen. The study involved participants from different backgrounds with their ages ranging from 4 to 5 years old. All participants were native-speakers of Arabic. Their interaction with peers outside the classroom is low. That is to say, most learners had very little contact with English outside the schools and in most cases no contact at all.

Data Collection Procedures

The purpose of the study is to investigate the factors that influence acquisition of English Language by children. To achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher planned to apply some activities with children in the three schools. They provided new ideas so that to bring variety into the classroom. The same activities were applied equally in all sessions. After that, the reports for each and every session were prepared.

The first activity was about the letters and their sounds. Every letter had one word. Some came at the beginning of words with one word of each letter. Songs containing letters and numbers were also played so that the students could listen to them.

Another activity was used where the same words were provided to the students again but with the letters out of order and they were asked to put those letters in the right order to form a word.

As to the next activity, the students had to learn different colors using a puppet in the form of a conversation. Then, the students were shown videos about those courses and their responses were recorded.

The researcher decided to move with the students in a series of activities starting from the simplest activity to the most difficult level of activities. Firstly, some models of animals were prepared and then were presented to the students to understand their names, their shapes and their different voices. Secondly, we got the students to listen to the sounds of these animals to be able to identify their names.

After each activity, the students' comprehension was measured. Finally, the tests were checked to get the ratio of results to make comparison among all the samples of schools.

Data Analysis Procedures

The study presents detailed information about the factors that influence the acquisition of English Language by children. Two research instruments have been applied to collect data for this study. Firstly, the students' classroom observation was analyzed to note and describe both of teaching and learning strategies applied in the classroom with a view to support the impact of teaching methods on the students and the factors that influence language acquisition. Secondly, a questionnaire containing both closed and open-ended questions was statistically analyzed to get new insight about the interaction process in the target language which can be noticed to support the information collected from the students in the class sessions.

DATE ANALYSIS

This section presents the analysis of the classroom observation data through observation and questionnaire. The purpose of the classroom observation was to note and study the children's ability to acquire English Language through the application of three activities to highlight the effectiveness of internal and external factors.

Language Acquisition Activities

Table 1 shows the results of the three activities used in the present study including the letters acquisition activity, colors acquisition activity and names and shapes of animals acquisition activity.

Table 1: Results of the language acquisition activities

The activity	The explanation	The percentage (%)
Letters acquisition	This activity was about the alphabetical letters and their sounds and numbers with their songs for. Each letter had one word with pictures. Those words were out of order to let children organize them by themselves.	94%

Colors acquisition	This activity was about some colors using a puppet in a form of conversation, with videos about the different colors.	97%
Names and shapes of animals acquisition	This activity was about learning names, shapes and sounds of animals using models of animals and songs.	98%

Figure 1 presents the same results with regards to the three activities: the letters acquisition activity, colors acquisition activity and names and shapes of animals acquisition activity more visually.

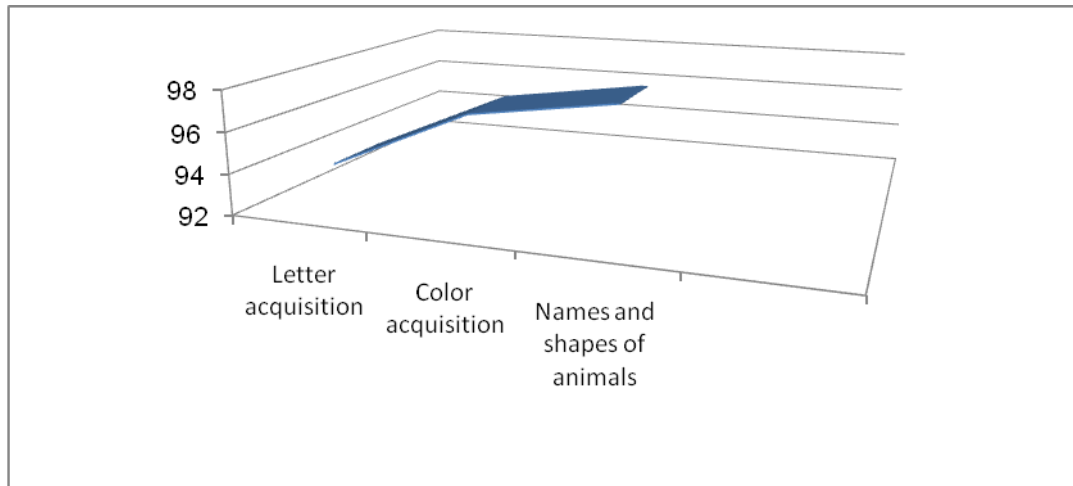


Fig 1: Results of the Language Acquisition Activities

Result of the close-ended questionnaire.

In this section the analysis of the answers of the teacher's questionnaire are presented.

33% of the teachers said that their students can express themselves very well. While 66% have said that their students could not express themselves very well.

99% of the teachers said that their students have some difficulties with new words.

66% of the teachers commented that their students learn new English Language vocabularies after a few tries, while 33% said that their students learn new English Language vocabularies at the same day.

Result of the open-ended questionnaire.

Here, we will present the analysis of the answers of the teacher's open-ended questionnaire:

99% of the teachers agreed about the necessity of learning and teaching English Language to children at the age of 4-6 years because they believe that this phase is the best phase to understand and comprehend the language.

89% of the teachers responded when they were asked about the extent to which children can pronounce English Language words properly. Such issue depend on the words themselves where some students pronounce the words quickly, other students face some difficulties and some others need at least two days to be able to pronounce the word properly. However, class observation had shown that the students' pronunciation depends totally on their teachers' pronunciation.

66% of the teachers have admitted that their students are not able to put words together to make short sentences, while 33% of the teachers have claimed that their students can easily put words together to make short sentences.

67% of the teachers created class activities such as short stories, songs, videos and so on, while 33% of the teachers did not create class activities because they did not have enough facilities from the school itself.

90% of the teachers believed that the student's family plays the most important role in supporting their children to improve their English Language achievement. Through the questionnaires, there were some kinds of activities which the teachers practiced with their students in the classroom. Among these activities are:

1. Reading short stories
2. Listening to educational songs
3. Acting in class
4. Making competitions between the students



5.

Using some pictures for letters, words and numbers.

Thus, the results and the kinds of activities which were applied through classroom observation were presented above. The discussion of the results will be presented in the fifth section.

DISCUSSION AND INTERPRETATION

The results of the internal as well as the external factors will be presented and discussed.

The internal factors

Through classroom observation, results show that there are some internal and external factors. It has also been found that all internal factors had been achieved, which are:

Intelligence

Intelligence is one of the most important internal factor which has been observed through the application of the activities, where children have displayed intelligence in the letters activity and were able to organize the letters which were out of order. Classroom observation lead to the conclusion that some students showing certain personality traits obtain good results systematically, whereas other behaviors impede effective learning.

Mental Maturity

The mental abilities of children at the age (4-6) is higher than any other phases of age to acquire new input and the evidence is that the achievement and the effectiveness of children in the activities were increasing from one student to the other with percentages of (94%, 97%, 98%) respectively for each activity (see Table 1).

Age

A learner's age is one of the important factors affecting the process of second/foreign language acquisitions. The kindergarten (KG) instruction phase is the best phase for children to acquire a new language better than teaching them a language in later phase. Young learners grow and, at different stages, develop a set of cognitive, emotional, physical and social characteristics that are essential in order to orient the L2 teaching and understand their learning.

The belief that young learners are better at learning languages than adults is supported by the critical period hypothesis (see Penfield and Roberts 1959, Andersson 1960, Lenneberg 1967). This hypothesis states that the early years before puberty offer the most favourable stage for L2 learning to take place naturally and with ease. After this span of years this capacity decreases.

Motivation

Motivation is represented in the personality of the child. Classroom observation indicated a very high reaction to different activities which is actually a clear representation of children's motivation to acquire new input.

The External factors

The external factors have not been all achieved by the learners. However, there are some of the external factors which have been investigated, which are:

Curriculum

The necessity of the appropriateness of curriculum for children at the age of (4-6) years is to make them have a good capacity to get new information as much as possible. This factor was achieved in the three schools through the application of the activities.

Motivation

This factor affects second language acquisition. A good atmosphere was created for the students. They were encouraged and motivated and their attention was attracted by firstly using interesting ways and then giving them some sweets after each activity. It is likely that the relationship between motivation and achievement is an interactive one. A high level of motivation does stimulate learning.

Using Kinematic Games and Visual learning.

Teachers use many activities such as drawing designs and visual activities, and using kinematic games that have a role in the development of children's ability to learn English Language and also acquire more and deep information in order to achieve the best language skills.

On the other hand, the external factors which have not been achieved in the present study are:

Instruction.



Through observation, the results show that 66% of the teachers were not proficient in English Language in most private schools when it comes to kindergarten instruction phase. Furthermore, the schools did not consider the course of English Language as a main subject for children.

Using successful education programs.

This factor has not been achieved, as according to the teachers' comments in the questionnaire:

There are not enough facilities to teach children different English Language skills specially the equipment required for listening and speaking.

The allotted time for English language course is very limited so the teachers could not cover all the activities at the same time.

Access to native speakers

In general, in our country we do not have native speakers as models to learn the language. That is to say, there was no a direct access to native speakers' language.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data obtained revealed certain difficulties in learning English. The present research attempted to examine and describe the factors influencing Yemeni kindergartens (KG2) students' success in learning English. In this work, we shed light on the factors hindering or encouraging students of English in general and Yemeni KG2 students in particular. The success in teaching and learning English language depends on many factors. Age and motivation factors are among the most important ones and some other factors that influence the acquisition of a second/ foreign language. Earlier studies have shown that if a learner has a competency in his or her own language, he or she can improve faster than those who have no competency in their first language. As for motivation, it has been found that motivated students are more successful in foreign language acquisition than those who are not motivated.

While conducting the present study, some general points have been noticed as well as suggested on the appropriate ways of teaching English Language which are confined to five points. Furthermore, managers of schools and teachers should give teaching and learning English Language more interest and priority and should encourage learning English through the following steps:

- to offer students with more classes in English courses, about 2-3 classes weekly;
- to assign classes to the beginning of the school day, because it is considered to be a new language for them, so it needs the students to be more active, to pay attention and to concentrate on the new language structures;
- to take notice that teaching English language should not affect their mother tongue;
- to generalize the teaching of English language on all schools either public schools or private schools in early age.
- to work in groups because; this way helps them to improve their level quickly through cooperation.

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