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The Effects of Learner Differences on Second Language Acquisition

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Abstract

Second language learning can be done in several ways. The learning inside the second language classroom is somewhat special since it is guided by an experienced teacher. However, the learning can be varied due to the influence of the age, sex, motivation and the different learning styles employed by the adult second language learners. The study selects 107 participants for the study from the age category of 25 to 56 in the second language classroom. The study shows that younger students memorize and learn lessons more effectively than older learners. Gender also plays a critical role; data indicate that female students are generally more eager to learn a second language. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is another key factor. Parental and teacher encouragement stands out as particularly impactful in fostering second language acquisition. Regarding learning styles, the study focused on two approaches: analytical and communicative. The findings reveal that female students are more inclined toward analytical learning, while male students prefer a communicative learning style.

Keywords: Learner Differences, Age, Sex, Motivation, Learning Styles.

1. Introduction

People learn foreign languages for many reasons. Even in educational institutions, they do foreign language teaching in many countries and concerning foreign language teaching and learning the teachers also employ different language teaching strategies and techniques to help the learners for better achievements. When it closely looks at language learners it is easy to understand that some people do learn well while some people face difficulties in mastering the language. Especially in the school setting Sri Lankan context, it has been observed that students learn the English Language as their second language from grade three, but face trouble communicating using the language. It is a considerable fact that second language teaching and learning and foreign language teaching and learning should gain a proper systematic approach. Over the experience of past years, it has been observed that some people almost achieve the native speaker's level of competence in foreign language learning while others never seem to progress much beyond a beginner's level. As well as some second language learners make rapid and effortless progress while others progress only very slowly and with great difficulty. Many of the students in the second language classroom seek the support of their peers in the learning tasks in addition to the support of the teacher. The reason probably is that learners all have the same capacities and abilities. The learners have different personalities and learning styles. So, each learner is different from the other.

These learner differences, according to Dörnyei, (2005) are, "enduring personal characteristics that are assumed to apply to everybody and on which people differ by degree." Human beings differ from each other due to many biological reasons, factors affected by nature and the reasons created by past experiences. In current society, learners have many accesses for a second language from watching TV and cinema to reading books and browsing social media. This adds more possibilities for better practising a second language in the practical context than memorizing in the second language classroom.

However, to conduct research to identify the effects of learner differences on second

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language learning, it is necessary to have a scientific approach to prove with data. The learner differences have been identified concerning age, sex, motivation, learning styles. The above-mentioned learner differences are interrelated with each other and play important roles in language learning. Especially, the second language teachers should have an idea about the influence of learner differences on language learning. Further to that it has been identified that these non-linguistic factors are not given much importance in many studies conducted. However, many researchers over the years have made significant attempts to study the effects of these factors.

1.1 Background of the study

It has been observed in different second language learning classrooms that students show different levels of second language learning. Even though the teacher comes with a very simple style of teaching, some students face difficulties the teaching and processing for language acquisition. In the Sri Lankan context, school students learn English as their second language within the formal setting from grade three, but in many cases unable to produce in the second Language. However, this is not similar for all students. While some students face difficulties, some master the language as native speakers of that language. Over the years this has been experienced inside the university level as well. Many scholars have taken their efforts to see the reason behind that and it has not been possible to identify what is the exact reason for the above-mentioned matter. This study tries to see effects of the learner differences on the second language learning of the second language classroom in the tertiary level second language learners.

1.2 Objectives

What are the effects of learner differences on Second language Learning?

What significant effects has it had on second language learning?

1.3 Research question

1. To identify significant learner differences in second language learning.
2. To identify the effects of learner differences on Second language Learning.

1.4 The aim of the Study

This study aims to identify the effects of learner differences on second language learning in tertiary-level second language learners. Further, this study aims to take into consideration the significant effects of learner differences on second language learning.

1.5 Methodology

The data collection will be done based on the selected sample from the ABC Institute. In this case, primary data is obtained by distributing a questionnaire among the selected sample for the study and secondary data will be collected by referring to paper articles, research papers and different books related to the subject. The collected data will be analyzed by using SPSS to add a more grading value to the study.

2. Discussion

Learner Differences in the Second Language Learning Classroom

2.1 Age

Age plays a significant role in the second language classroom. Many studies have proved that children are more capable of learning second languages than adults. In the selected sample, the adult students from the ages 25 to 56 were in the second language classroom. In the distributed questionnaire, there were five questions to check the applicability of the age as a factor to see the influence of the age for the second language learning. The below graph shows the responses given by the participants.

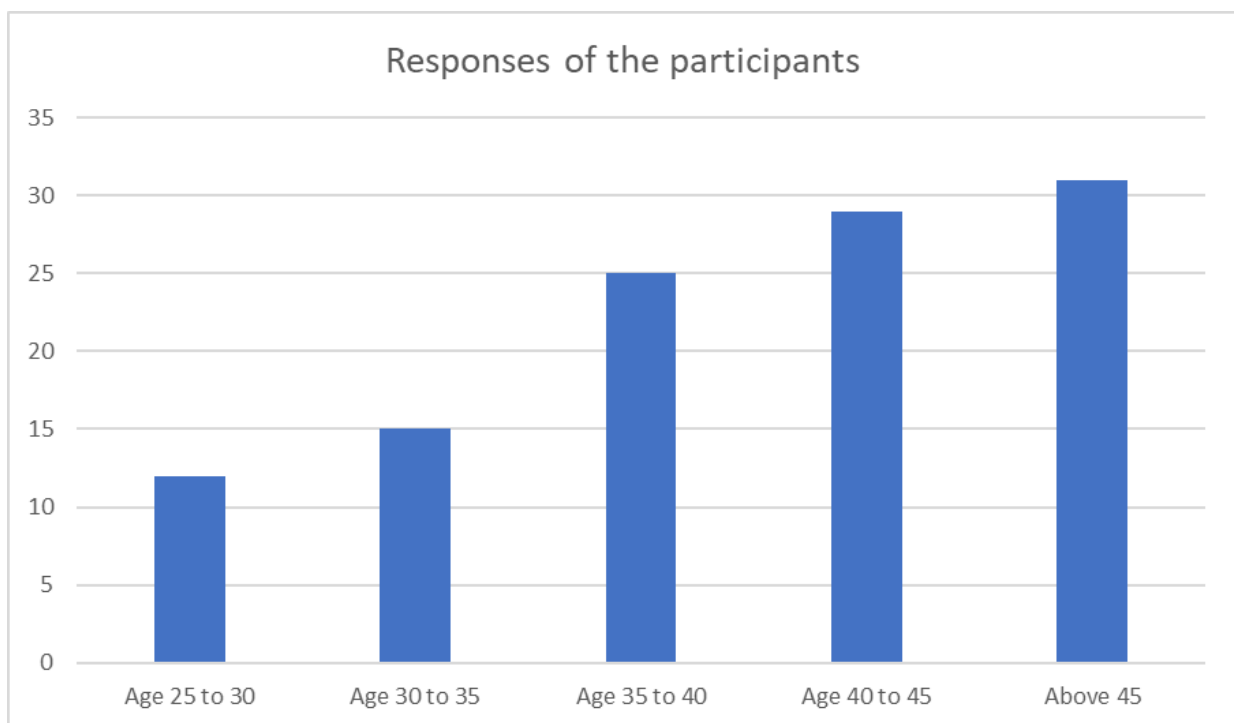


Fig. 01. I face difficulties in remembering the taught lessons inside the classroom.

The above graph shows the responses given by the students on their skills of remembering the lessons taught inside the

classroom. According to the given responses twelve students who are in the age category of 25 to 30, 15 students from 30 to 35, 25 students from 35 to 40, 29 students from 40 to 45 and 31 students from the above 45 have given responses. The collected result shows that compared to the age category 25 to 30 when it goes to the above 45, the students face many difficulties in remembering the taught lessons inside the second language classroom.

2.2 Sex

Many of the referred studies have shown that gender plays a vital role in the second language learning classroom. This may be a fact with the biological factors as well. According to the study done by Shahila Zafar and K. Meenakshi (2012) on individual learner differences, they have mentioned that Larsen-Freeman & Long (2000) believed that in the process of first language acquisition females are more capable than males, at least at the early stage. In the conducted study many of the females have responded that they are eager to learn in the second language classroom. As per the number of participating students, seventy-six students are females and forty are males. It shows that females are more interested in learning a second language than males and indirectly it denotes that females are more eager to study than males.

2.3 Motivation

Motivation is another factor that affects the learner

differences in the second language classroom. This study has tested the influence of motivation as a factor and how it is going to be affected for the students to learn a second language. The study has used motivation in two aspects intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In the distributed questionnaire, it has tested several aspects of intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects. Self-determination has been accepted by many of the female participants as a more effective factor for having differences in learning. According to the collected data out of 107 participants, 65 students believe self-determination is very effective for second language learning. Also, 42 students prefer extrinsic motivation. Under extrinsic motivation, nine kinds of motivations have been used for the study as follows: Instrumental Motivation, Integrative Motivation, Reward-Based Motivation, Punishment-Avoidance Motivation, Peer and Social Motivation, Career-Oriented Motivation, Examination Motivation, Parental or Teacher Pressure and Extracurricular or Goal-Oriented Motivation. Out of 42 students who are preferred for extrinsic motivation, 28 students like the motivation done by the parents and the class teacher. Here in this study parental motivation refers to the guardian's motivation since the participants are adult students. The following graph shows the responses of the students for extrinsic motivation.

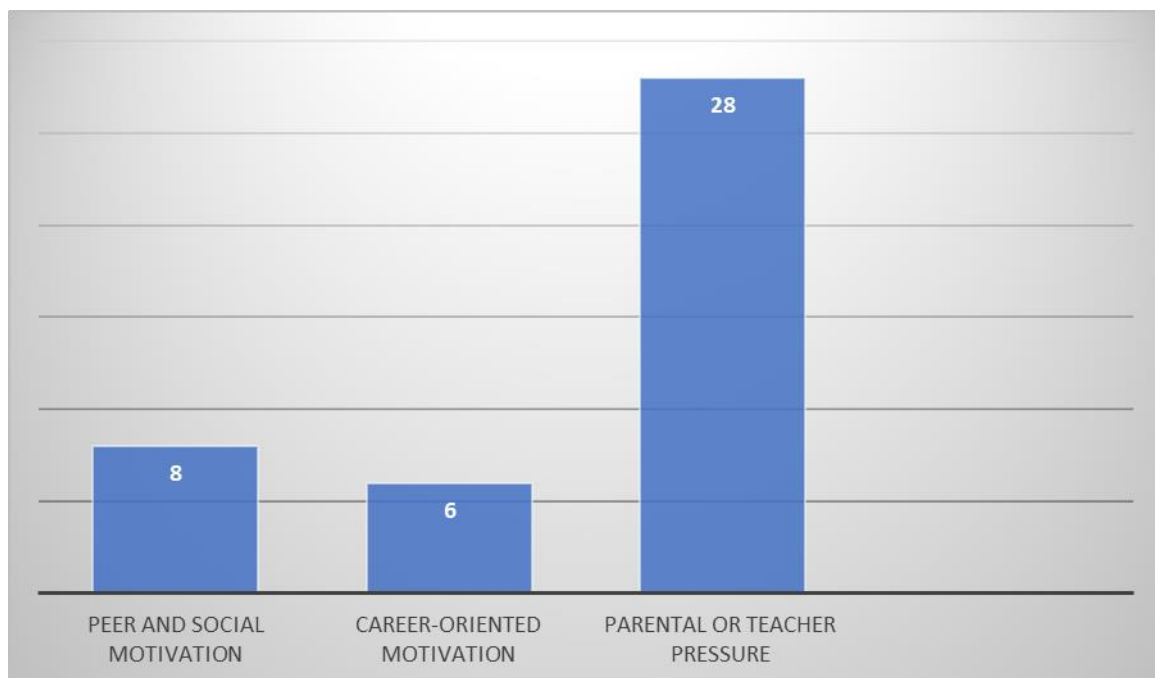


Fig. 02. Responses for the Extrinsic Motivation.

2.4 Learning Styles

Learning styles play an important role in the context of a second language learning classroom. In this study, the adult learners have been used as the participants and it shows somewhat different learning styles than the children. Analytical learning style and Communicative learning style have been employed mainly in this study to see the kinds of learning styles that the learners prefer to adhere to within the second language classroom. The Learners who are with an analytical style are independent. They like to have their ways of conducting studies and solving problems that they encounter when they are in the learning process of a second

language. They do not seek others' opinions and find their ways of learning after the instructions of the class teachers. Such learners prefer a logical, systematic presentation of new learning material with opportunities for learners to follow up on their own. Analytical learners are serious about learning and do hard work for the learning. Learners who have with communicative learning style prefer a social approach to learning. They like to have feedback and interaction with their peers and learn well from discussions and group activities. This study has shown that most male students prefer for communicative learning style and females for an analytical learning style. However, out of 107

participants, 85 participants followed the communicative learning style.

3. Findings and Recommendations

3.1 Findings

The following findings have been identified from the details given in the above sections. Accordingly, the effects of learner differences are evident concerning some of the identified factors. It has been noticed that age, sex, motivation, and learning styles play a vital role in the learning differences in the second language classroom. When it comes the age, the study shows that there is more capacity for young students to easily memorize the taught lessons than the aged students. Further to that it has been identified that sex also plays an important role in the second language learning classroom. The analyzed data denotes that female students are more eager to learn in the second language classroom. In the motivational aspect, the study talks about both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational aspects and it has been identified that parental and the teacher's motivation is the outstanding factor. In the learning styles, the study employed two learning styles including analytical learning style and communicative learning style. According to the analyzed data, it shows that females are more likely to be analytical type and males prefer the communicative learning style.

1.6 Recommendation

This study has only focused on four factors that can affect learner differences in the second language classroom. In addition, it is recommended that future researchers study the learning strategies that adult learners may employ in the second language classroom.

Conclusion

This study talks about the effects of learner differences in the second language classroom. Accordingly, it has investigated four factors which will affect the learner differences. The study has focused on age, sex, motivation and learning styles to see the effects of learner differences. Age, gender, motivation, and learning styles significantly influence learning differences in second-language classrooms. Studies show that younger students tend to memorize lessons more effectively than older learners. Gender also plays a critical role; data indicate that female students are generally more eager to learn a second language. Motivation, both intrinsic and extrinsic, is another key factor. Parental and teacher encouragement stands out as particularly impactful in fostering second language acquisition. Regarding learning styles, the study focused on two approaches: analytical and communicative. The findings reveal that female students are more inclined toward analytical learning, while male students prefer a communicative learning style.

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