Factors Underlying Characteristics of Acquisition of English Language in EFL Classrooms

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Abstract

This study tried to find out what factors underline the characteristics of acquisition of English language in EFL classrooms. To this end, the Characteristics of English Language Acquisition Scale (ELAS) consisting of 41 items was designed by the researchers of this study and administered to 388 pre University Iranian EFL students at various private and public schools in Neyshabour and Zebarkhan. Factor analysis was run to determine the number of factors underlying the scale. The application of Principle Axis Factoring and rotating the extracted factors showed that the characteristics loaded acceptably on twelve factors underlying the learners EFL acquisition, i.e., learning boosters, facilitation, determination, voluntary, teaching methodology, affective factors, attitudes toward foreign speakers and their culture, learner engagement, adjustment, enhancement, teachers' output and individual differences. The results are discussed and suggestions are made for future research.

Introduction

One of the main purposes of an educational program is to enable learners to use whatever they learn in their own life. Teacher centered classroom is not a successful experience to undertake this responsibility. Students can learn and use whatever they learn in a real situation if they participate actively in the process of learning. This is a reality which is emphasized by construct theory which is the basis of autonomy. In fact, constructivists believe that everyone makes his own sense of the world. They assert that events carry no meaning by themselves and their meaning depends on how individuals apply them. "We differ from each other in the way we construct events and we have different approaches to our anticipation of the same events" (Kelly, 1963, p. 53). The result of this theory in learning process is to take account of the learners as individuals actively involved in constructing meaning. When learners learn new language, they sense the language input that surrounds them as well as the tasks presented to them (Williams & Burden, 1997). Consequently, "learning processes are individual, based on the learner's pre-knowledge and can only be monitored by the learner himself" (Benson, 2006, p. 02). Piaget in his theory of cognitive development asserted that humans cannot be "given" information, which they immediately understand and use. Instead, they must "construct" their own knowledge (Norlida & Yaakub, 2004). Moreover people differ from each other in the way they construct events and they have different approaches to their anticipation of the same events (Kelly, 1953 cited in Fenner & Newby, 2000).

Thus, the learning and teaching of EFL is considered less than efficient if it is not based on learner-centered approaches. In fact, acting autonomously is the necessary condition for a successful and intelligent learner.

If the process of student's participation in their own learning is neglected in an educational system, the system is incomplete. In fact, in an EFL language classroom, students have many potential capabilities that are necessary for learning a foreign language. But these capabilities will not be useful if they remain potential. For example, students are potentially motivated for discovering, but this capability can be helpful if it is manifested in an EFL classroom. This manifestation is necessary for all affective factors. In the field of cognitive factors, they have many

potentialities too. For example, they have an inborn capacity for learning, but in an EFL classroom they should be trained how to learn a foreign language. In the field of metacognitive factors, they should know how to plan, monitor and evaluate their learning. In fact, they should learn how to manifest these potential capabilities in an EFL learning environment. This manifestation will be met completely if students undertake their own learning. The first obligation of teachers is to change these potentials factors into reality. Dörnyei (2001) asserted that teachers should give learners choices among many aspects of learning process. They should encourage student contribution and peer teaching among students. Also teacher as facilitators should help the learners find their own way through learning.

In cognitive psychology, linguistic knowledge is a complex network of associations that allows the linguistic representation and learning mechanisms processed in parallel. Long (1980) stated that "learners acquire new linguistic forms as a result of attending to them in the process of negotiating for meaning in order to address a communication problem. In other words, learning results from an interaction between the learner s mental abilities and the linguistic input" (as cited in Yanase, 2004, p.29)

Krashen indicated that there is a direct relationship between exposure to the language (written and oral) and linguistic acquisition. He suggested that linguistic-sociolinguistic competence can be acquired through comprehensible input. Also exposure to language should happen in social context and through interaction with other people since discourse competence is acquired through experiencing in a group and strategic competence is acquired through understanding during interaction to achieve an objective. Therefore, exposure to comprehensible language through a social interactive context helps learners to achieve communicative competence which includes linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Tosun, 2005). Also, interaction in social context leads to forming the social dimension of the speakers. This is a necessary part of learning a language and should never be absent in the learning process of language. This is the idea that is emphasized by sociolinguistic scholars especially Vygotsky (1962). In his view language is not the result of isolated learning, it requires a social basis. In other words, for

Vygotsky, language is a social event and a shared social activity through which individuals develop their personality within a community (Tosun, 2005). He states that the enhancement of children's personality as a different human being happens through interaction with their environment particularly with other human being around them. Communicative interaction allows consolidation of the social dimension of the speaker as human being   (Sanchez, 2004). For learners to achieve social dimension, interaction and interpersonal relations with others are the possible ways.

Learners use the language and practice with it especially in a communicative context. Practical work with language may be quite varied, though. Several studies (Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) indicate that there is a direct relationship between language acquisition and interaction and negotiation of meaning in a communicative context. In addition to interaction, attention to input is necessary for language acquisition. According to Hegelheimer and Chapelle (2000) the most useful interactions help learners comprehend the semantics and syntax of input and improve the comprehensibility of their own linguistic output (as cited in González-Lloret, 2003). Moreover, the output increases the control students have over already acquired structures.

Kumaravadivelu (2008) insisted that "motivation provides the driving force to sustain the long and often tedious learning process" (p.39). Deci (1995) believed that in order to help students become more intrinsically motivated, teachers should employ autonomy support by actively encouraging student self-initiation, experimentation and exploration.

Methodology
Participants
Participants in this study were 388 Iranian EFL students studying at Pre University grade in two different areas of Iran, namely, Neyshabour (26) , Zebarkhan (74). 114 students (25.3) were female and 273 students(60.7) were male. 152 students (%33.8) studied humanities, 174 students (%38.7) studied sciences, 61 students (% 13.6) studied mathematics and one student (% .2) studied vocational. Their mother languages were Persian (%79.1) and Turkish (%7.1). Also their school types were public (%82.9), private (%2.4) , shared (%.7) and gifted

(%.2). The average of their English score in grade 3 varied from 10 to 18.5.Also their ages were from 16(% .9) , 17 (% 23.6),18 (%67.8) , 19 (% 13) , 20 (% .2) and 21 (% 02).

Instrument

The Characteristics of English Language Acquisition Scale (ELAS) consisting of 41 closed questions was designed by the researchers of this study. (The English version of the ELAS is given as Appendix A). First some articles (e.g., Krashen, 2009; Snow & Ferguson 1977) related to language input and acquisitions were scruitinized to design the questionnaire. Then theoretically and practically important aspects addressed by the authorities were chosen to develop the ELAS. The scale was finally translated into the Persian language by the researchers on the basis of schema theory (e.g., Khodadady, 2001, 2008) to avoid isunderstandings on the part of participants. Based on this theory, all the words constituting the items were translated by employing their semantic, syntactic, and discoursal relationships with each other and their best Persian equivalents were chosen by employing the same relationships governing the Persian equivalents There were considerable part-whole correlations between items and the total scale. The building construct of the 41 structured items were scored on a 5 point Likert scale. The questionnaire called for reading the 41 characteristics and indicating whether the participants learned English according to the specified features on the basis of a five-point Likert scale, i.e., completely agree, agree, some extent agree, disagree and completely disagree. The scores of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1, were assigned to these points, respectively.

Procedure

In this study the researchers talked to fifteen English teachers offering pre university courses in senior high schools and asked for their cooperation in giving the questionnaires to their students during the regular class time. All of them agreed to cooperate and permitted the researchers to use their class time for distributing the questionnaires. Participants completed them in fifteen minutes in February, 2015. Researchers were present in the classrooms when the participants filled out the questionnaires and answered their questions as they filled them

out. The study investigates one research question, i.e., what factors underline the characteristics of acquisition of English language?

Data analysis

The descriptive and inferential analyses carried out by utilizing the SPSS version 18. The validity of the questionnaire used in this study for collecting the desired information was ascertained by two English university professors, 3 English language teaching experts, a psychologist (for psychological considerations of designing the questions and their effects on eliciting teachers' attitudes and beliefs on the issue) and 17 experienced TEFL teachers. However, after piloting the questionnaire, the necessary modifications were implemented. .Measuring Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, the reliability was 0./91 (p<0. 001, n= 16) was obtained. Since Cronbach's Alpha is more than 0/7, the questionnaire has enough reliability. The factors were determined based on factors analysis using advanced statistical procedures such as Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) to extract rotated factors , Kaiser criterion i.e. eignvalues higher than 1 to determine the number of factors extracted in this study and Varimax for rotation method.

Results and Discussions

Table 1 presents the reliability coefficients obtained in the present study**.** The reliability of the ELAS questionnaire was checked by Cronbach's Alpha method. As Table 1 shows, the Cronbach's Alpha for this questionnaire is 0/88. Since Cronbach's Alpha is more than 0/7, the questionnaire enjoys high reliability.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
883	41

To find out whether employing factor analysis to extract latent variable was appropriate the Kaiser ° Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of Sampling Adequacy was employed. The KMO statistics obtained in this study was .84. Since KMO is more than .5 .the sample selected in the study and the factor analysis employed would probably provide the appropriate common factors. The significant Bartlett's Test of Sphericity for ELAS questionnaire, i.e. $x^2 = 4152.097 \ df = 820$, p<.001, indicated that the correlation matrix was not an identity

matrix. Upon ensuring the suitability of factor analysis, the number of latent variables to be extracted was determined by adopting eigenvalues greater than one, factor loadings greater than .30. Cross-loading and low loading factors were removed. The analysis resulted in the extraction of thirteen factors for the ELAS accounting for 42.15% of the variance.

Table2:41characteristics(C) and the Initial Communalities (IC) and extracted communalities (EC) obtained via principal Axis Factoring

C	IC	EC	C	IC	EC	C	IC	EC	C	IC	EC	C	IC	EC	C	IC	EC
25	.5	.8	40	.46	.51	33	.35	.46	16	.39	.39	18	.35	.34	35	30	31
31	.48	.67	21	.34	.48	17	.40	.43	24	.38	.38	22	.29	.34	29	.25	.29
20	.44	.61	41	.42	.48	14	.36	.41	36	.35	.38	10	.28	.32	5	.24	.29
9	.53	.58	38	.38	.48	27	.32	.41	7	.30	.38	6	.23	.32	4	.28	.26
15	.44	.58	28	.31	.48	32	.37	.40	2	.31	.37	34	.23	.32	12	.19	.22
37	.36	.56	39	.41	.47	30	.37	.40	13	.34	.36	3	.28	.32	26	.17	.2
19	.39	.54	11	.35	.46	23	36	40	1	.26	.35	8	30	31			

Table 2 presents the ordered initial and extracted communalities obtained from the 41 characteristics of English Language Acquisition Scale (ELAS). The results of the extraction communalities indicate that the extracted factors are able to explain much variance in the variables. As an example 80 of variance in factor 25 is explained by extracted factors. Therefore it is not necessary to drop any variable from the analysis. The results presented in Table 2 provide support for Costello and Osborne s (2005) observation that uniformly high item communalities are unlikely to occur in real data. Also the results presented in Table 2 challenge Costello and Osborne observation that more common magnitudes in social science research are in the order of .40 to .70**.**

Table3. Rotated Factor Matrix of 21 characteristics (C) of effective inputs in EFL classes

C	Factor												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
I01		*	*	*	.51	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I02	*	*	*	*	.49	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I03	*	*	*	*	.32	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I04	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I05	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.41	*	*	*
I06	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.51	*	*	*
I07	*	.41	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I08	*	.38	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I09	.43	.44	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I10	*	.49	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I11	*	.57	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I12	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I13	*	*	*	*	.31	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I14	.57	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I15	.72	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I16	.43	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I17	.41	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I18	.34	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
I19	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.59	*	*	*	*	
I20	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.64	*	*	*	*	
I21	*	*	*	.6	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	
23	*	*	*	*	.48	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
24	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.35	*	*	*
25	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.3	*	*
26	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.43	*	.74	*	*
27	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.55	*	*	*	*
28	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.5	*	*	*	*
29	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.36	*
30	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.48	*
31	*	*	*	*	*	*	.35	*	*	*	*	.57	*
32	*	*	*	*	*	*	.47	*	*	*	*	*	*
33	*	*	*	*	*	*	.52	*	*	*	*	*	*
34	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	.53
35	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
36	*	*	.32	*	*		*	*	*	*	*	*	*
37	*	*	*	*	*	.65	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
38	*	*	*	*	*	59	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
39	*	*	.51	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
40	*	*	.59	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
41	*	*	.42	*	*	*	.32	*	*	*	*	*	*

Table 3 presents the rotated factor matrix obtained via Principal Axis Factoring, Varimax with Kaiser Normalization. As can be seen, all 41 characteristics of ELAS load acceptably i.e. 30 or higher, on thirteen factors in the present study. As can be seen in table 3, out of 41characteristics of ELAS explored in the present study 4 cross loaded on at least two factors. According to Khodadady (2010) cross loaded characteristics should be reported since they are beneficial for the research and its results i.e. its positive effect on reliability of factors extracted.

Table 4. Factors analysis for ELAS

Factor	Label	eignvalue	variance	Culminative variance
Factor 1	Learning boosters	2.155	5.257	5.257
Factor 2	Facilitation	1.701	4.149	9.405
Factor 3	Determination	1.636	3.990	13.395
Factor 4	Voluntary	1.286	3.136	16.531
Factor 5	Teaching methodology	1.267	3.090	19.621
Factor 6	Affective factors	1.260	3.073	22.694
Factor 7	Attitudes toward foreign speakers and their culture	1.224	2.985	25.679
Factor 8	Learner engagement	1.212	2.957	28.636
Factor 9	Adjustment	1.204	2.938	31.573
Factor 10	Enhancement.	1.141	2.784	34.357
Factor 11	Teacher's output..	1.123	2.740	37.097
Factor 12	Individual differences	1.107	2.699	39.796

After varimax rotation, a nine-factor solution was chosen which accounted for 39.7% of the total variance in the motivation subtest

Table5. Six characteristics forming the first factor of learning boosters.

Characteristics	Loading	Factors cross loading
9. I learn English best by interacting with English speakers	.43	(44)
14. I learn English best when I do meaningful pattern practice.	.57	-
15. I learn English best when I focus on the message rather than on the form.	.72	-
16. I learn English best when I improve my accuracy through monitoring	.43	-
17. I learn English best when I monitor what I say or write in English	.41	-

Table 5 presents the six characteristics loading acceptably on the first factor named learning booster in this study i.e. 9, 14, 15, 16, 17 **Learning booster**s are the factors that can increase learning . Item 9 (interaction with English speakers) helps learners learn new materials through interaction, item 14 strengths the processing of information through practicing. Item 15 strengths students' perception of meaning. Item 16 and 17 improves students' accuracy through monitoring Item 18 helps them to learn from the input they receive.

Table 6.Six characteristics forming the second factor of facilitation.

Characteristics	Loading
7. I learn English because I want to live in an English speaking country.	.41
8. Learn English best by doing a lot of drills.	.38
9. I learn English best by interacting with English speakers	.44
10. I learn English best through extensive use of.	.49
11. I learn English best when I am at ease in the classroom	.57

Table 6 presents the five characteristics loading acceptably on the second factor named facilitation in this study i.e. 7, 8, 9, 10, 11.**Facilitation**s are factors facilitating learning new information .Item 7 facilitate the learning since it acts as a motivating factor for students, item 8 facilities the learning process since educational contents are taught by drilling .Item 9 as an motivational factor strengths the process of facilitating new information since students like to learn English to be able to interact with native speakers. Item 10 refers to the extensive use of conscious grammatical rules in class. Also the use of conscious grammatical rules has its own problems i.e. reduction of authenticity, it facilitate the learning process specifically at elementary levels since it enhance comprehensibility of information.   By decreasing the level of stress and anxiety in class, item 18 facilitate learning specifically at elementary levels.

The items loading the highest on the third factor can be categorized into one categories: determinative factors to learn English well (language aptitude, use of native language, linguistic input, need). This factor might be labeled expectation of success, but it seems to us even stronger than that, and we have called it   determination.

Table 7. Four characteristics forming the third factor of determination.

Characteristics	loading	Factors cross loading
36. Linguistic input is necessary to learn English	.32	-
39. People with language aptitude learn English well.	.51	-
40. When I need to know a rule I learn English well	.59	-
41. When I want to say or write in English, I say or write it in Persian first.	.42	7(.32)

Table 8. 0ne characteristics forming the fourth factor of volunteering.

Characteristics	Loading
21. I learn English best when I volunteer to answer questions	.6

Table 8 presents the one characteristics loading on forth factor named voluntary this study i.e. 21. Volunteering is the process of answering the questions and participate in class activities voluntarily.

Table 9. Four characteristics forming the fifth factor of teaching methodology.

Characteristics	Loading
1. Grammatical exercises are necessary to learn English	.51
2. I communicate in English best when I learn it consciously.	.49
3. I do not learn a language when I do not like it.	.32

Table 9 presents the three characteristics loading acceptably on fifth factor named **personal needs** i.e. 1, 2, and 3. **Personal needs** are individual factors that their existence are necessary for leaning a new language and determines by the students themselves and vary from one student to other students. Item 1 refers to the importance of grammar exercises and   in learning materials for some students. Item 2 emphasizes that it necessary for some students to have conscious learning before practicing communication. Finally item 3 refers to the importance of enjoyment in teaching of new material.

Table 10 .Two characteristics forming the sixth factor of affective factors.

Characteristics	Loading
37. My feelings affect my English language learning.	.65
38. My motivation is more important than my language ability to learn English	59

Table 10 presents the two characteristics loading on sixth factor named affective factors 37, and 38. Item 37 and 38 refers to the importance of affective factors i.e., feelings and motivation in learning a foreign language.

Factor 7 consists of four items concerning target language speakers and American and British culture. We label this factor   attitudes toward foreign speakers and their culture. This factor might also be considered to represent an integrative orientation.

Table 11 .four characteristics forming the 7th factor of attitudes toward foreign speakers and their culture.

Characteristics	loading	cross loading
31. I learn English well when I accept my English teacher.	.35	-
32. I love English and English speakers	.47	-
33. I love English and want to be like English speakers	.52	-
41. When I want to say or write in English, I say or write it in Persian first.	.32	3(.42)

Table 12. Two characteristics forming the eighth factor of learner engagement.

Characteristics	Loading
19. I learn English best when I spend enough time to monitor what I say or write in English	.59
20. I learn English best when I understand what is taught in the class.	.64

Table 12 presents the two characteristics loading acceptably on the eighth factor named leaner engagement, i.e. 19, and 20 in learning. These items refer to the techniques that students   use in their classes to engage in their learning.

Table 13. Three characteristics forming the 9th   factor of adjustment.

Characteristics	loading	cross loading
26. I learn English best when my teacher s speech is understandable to me.	.43	11(.74)
27. I learn English best when what I am taught is a little above what I know.	.55	-
28. I learn English best when what is taught is relevant to my personal life	.5	-

Table 13 presents the three characteristics loading acceptably on the ninth factor named adjustment, i.e. 26, 27, and 28. Adjustment which refers to the adaptation between whatever presented in class and students' capability to learn materials. These items suggest how teaches can make their presentations beneficial for students in classrooms.

Table 14. Two characteristics forming the 10ᵗʰ factor of enhancement.

Characteristics	Loading
5. I have confidence in my English language ability.	.41
6. I learn a word or sentence best when I hear or read it most.	.51
24. I learn English best when its rules are taught on the basis of their complexity.	.35

Table 14 presents the three characteristics loading acceptably on the tenth factor named enhancement, i.e. 5, 6, 24. The items loading on this factor concern two different aspects of the language classroom, affective factor (self-confidence) and learners' preferred strategies for learning a rule and sentences. We label this factor enhancement, to reflect the items that load on it. In fact students' learning is enhanced when they have enough confidence, receive frequent oral and written input and rules according to their complexity.

Table 15. Two characteristics forming the 11ᵗʰ factor of teacher's output.

Characteristics	loading	cross loading
25. I learn English best when my teacher corrects my errors.	.3	-
26. I learn English best when my teacher s speech is understandable to me.	. 74	9(43)

Table 15 presents the two characteristics loading acceptably on the eleventh factor named **teacher's** output i.e. 25, and 26. Items loading on this factor concern the output as an important factor of learners acquisition of English.

Table 16. Three characteristics forming the 12ᵗʰ factor of individual differences.

Characteristics	loading	cross loading
29. I learn English even if its grammar is not taught.	.36	-
30. I learn English to have a better job, income and life.	.48	-
31. I learn English well when I accept my English teacher.	.57	7(35)

Table 16 presents the three characteristics loading acceptably on fifth factor named individual differences i.e. 29, 30, and 31. Teaching grammar is necessary but not determinative for some students to learn language. They highlight the fact that students follow different purposes for learning a foreign language. Moreover, it is important for some students to accept their teacher.

Conclusion
In EFL situations reception of language inputs, use of foreign language and interaction with other people in foreign language are limited to classrooms. Therefore, proficient teachers in EFL situations attend to determinative role of EFL classes and try to prepare class conditions that help students to acquire FL as much as possible. This study established learning boosters, facilitation, determination, voluntary, teaching methodology, affective factors, attitudes toward foreign speakers and their culture, learner engagement, adjustment, enhancement, teachers' output and individual differences as the main aspects of EFL acquisition.

The findings emphasize the fact that the English language should be the language of interaction in the classroom. By elaborating English language, teachers can make it more comprehensible for students. In fact, teachers can facilitate the process of language learning if they can create an educational environment where the language is used as a means of exchanging information and communication within the context of classroom depeding first and foremost on their proficiency

in the language. Also the students native language as a means of education or interaction can be employed in limited and absolutely necessary situations.

Finally, this study highlighted that teachers role in EFL acquisition and emphasizes its various components such as immediate correction of the errors. The teachers should adjust the extent of emphasis on different parts of language input based on their linguistic and cognitive importance.

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