

The positive effects of high motivation and early start of learning English on the final achievement of EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

Factors such as motivation, learning environment, learning methods, sensibilities, intelligence, and age are effective in foreign language learning. Motivation and age are the most important variables in language learning. The present study investigated the relationship between motivation and age with EFL learners' language proficiency levels. About forty-five students in intermediate-level participated from Ardabil institutes in responding to the questionnaire. They were divided into two groups: younger and older groups. A questionnaire was administered as a motivational questionnaire adopted from GEMA to assess participants' motivation. Motivational studies indicated a significant relationship between motivation and success in learning English ($r = 0.593$, $sig = 0.000$). Also, according to the assumption of variances equality, the result of the t -test indicated the p -value for two independent groups is 0.97. Therefore, there was not a significant relationship between the mean scores of the two groups. Generally, the results displayed that high motivation in students influences students' performance and increases their success in learning English. Based on the result of the study, motivation is an influential factor in developing students' proficiency and makes learners involved in learning. So, it can be considered as a base requirement that influences the success of students. Some of the weaknesses might be students' demotivation in learning and teaching that employing appropriate ways can be effective factors to increase motivation and develop learning.

Keywords: Learning, Language Proficiency, Motivation, Age

Introduction

Learners' ability to learn a foreign language varies due to the influence of different factors on foreign language learning. The factors such as motivation, learning environment, learning methods, sensibilities, intelligence, and age are effective. Motivation and age are the most important variables in language learning (Nayir, 2017; Smith, 2013).

According to the principle of psychology, motivation results from behavior changes that are not directly measured (Cherry, 2019). Motivation creates enthusiasm, energy, direction, and desire in each person. A lack of these factors leads to demotivation in the individuals. Individuals may participate in some activities because of their interests or may be motivated by engaging in activities (Bontempi, 2019). They may even

avoid engaging in activities for fear of failure. Therefore, it can be said that motivation is the intrinsic desire to do something, and individuals keep their efforts based on their performance (Caciora Simona Veronica, 2008). Motivation can be both positive and negative. Positive motivation results from pleasure or love, and negative motivation results from pain or fear and leads to desperate, helpless difficulties. Still, it cannot always be harmful (Fernandez, n.d.). To get motivated, learners work on activities that lead to the award or avoid pain (Parvez, 2014). Therefore, motivation is key to achieving goals and increasing individuals' energy to achieve their wishes (Ahmadi, 2017; Alizadeh, 2016).

In addition, age is another variable that individuals should pay attention to it. Therefore, the onset of foreign language learning is important for learners. Individuals over the age of 60 are less likely to achieve fluency than children aged one to five. Therefore, a long period of exposure to a foreign language influences learners' proficiency. Individuals' brains are also flexible before puberty, leading to easy learning (Humberto Tapia Celi, 2017). Unfortunately, the age of foreign language learning in many countries such as Iran in schools is after puberty that can influence learners' success.

The purpose of this study is to replicate earlier studies about motivation and age and their relationship with learning English as a foreign language in just one study. Although most studies point to the positive effects of high motivation and early start of learning English on the final achievement of EFL Students, these ideas are fiercely contested by some other researchers. The interaction of these two important factors is also not very comprehensively explored. This study tries to address these two issues.

Methodology

Participants

The study participants were 45 students from language institutes in Ardabil, Iran, who had three years of English language learning experience. Participants were divided into younger and older groups. They were 35 younger students and 10 older students from institutes. Their ages ranged from 12 to 21 and 22 to 30, respectively. At the same time, their motivation level was measured and was categorized into low, mid, high motivation.

Instruments

Questionnaire (GEMA, 2009)

To obtain the necessary data, initially, a questionnaire was used in the study. The questionnaire was based on the close-ended question. The questionnaire was a 3-point Likert Scale containing 16 questions about motivation. Participants were asked to mark their answers. The respondents' answers to these questions were divided into low, mid, high motivational students. In the questionnaire, respondents' age was questioned, and the respondents were divided into two younger and older groups based on the median of the age values. The questionnaire was administered based on the level of students that the institution had already determined. The level of all students was intermediate.

Procedure

An appropriate questionnaire was translated into Persian to ensure no problem arose to gather data about the students' motivation and age concerning understanding the content of the questions and enhancing the validity. Generally, the questionnaire consisted of 16 questions that were divided into extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. All students were female. They were 45 divided into 35 participants from young groups and 10 participants from old groups. Then, the questionnaires were given to the students to be filled out. The students were asked to provide real information and answer the questions honestly. After collecting data and obtaining the results of the test, the data were submitted to analysis. At the analysis stage, the reliability of the test was calculated, and an appropriate statistical procedure (SPSS) was used.

Design

The independent variables of this study were the students' motivation and age. These variables were measured through the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed to accurately evaluate the effect of motivation and age on EFL learners' language proficiency level.

Data analysis

SPSS 20 software was used to analyze the data collected from participants. Pearson correlation was used to discuss the relationship between two variables. Additionally, the Kolmogorov Smirnov test was used to determine the normality of the distribution of data. In the end, an independent sample T-test was employed to compare two groups to examine the relationship between ages and participants' success.

Results

Preliminary Analyses

Questionnaire (GEMA)

The questionnaire was administered to assess the level of students' motivation. Table 1 shows Pearson Correlation between scores of two variables ($p\text{-value}=0.593 > 0.05$ and $\text{sig}=0.000$). Therefore, it can be said: there was a significant relationship between motivation and success in learning English.

Table 1. Correlations between Scores of Two Variables.

		Motivation	Success
Motivation	Pearson Correlation	1	0.593
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	45	45
Success	Pearson Correlation	0.593	1
	Sig.	0.000	
	N	45	45

Table 2 shows no significant relationship between younger and older ages of onset and success in learning English according to the assumption of mean equality.

Table 2. Group Statistics for Computing Mean of Two Groups.

	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Success	Younger	35	20.4286	2.70387	0.45704
	Older	10	20.4000	2.71621	0.85894

Table 3 shows that 'equal variance was assumed', the significance rate is 0.66 which is greater than 0.05 ($p\text{-value}= 0.66 > 0.05$). The data in the first row are considered. The result of the t-test indicated that the p-value for the two independent groups is 0.97. Therefore, there was not a significant relationship between the mean scores of the two groups.

Table 3. Independent Sample Test on Success of EFL Learners.

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances					t-test for Equality of Means			
		F	Sig.	t	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Differences	Std. Error Differences	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Success	Equal variance Assumed	0.195	0.661	0.029	43	0.9777	0.02857	0.97045	-1.92853	1.98567
	Equal variance not Assumed			0.029	14.510	0.9777	0.02857	0.97297	-2.05137	2.10852

Examining Hypothesis of the Study

Appropriate statistical analysis was necessary to compare the performance of groups to examine the hypothesis of the study. The scores were submitted to One-Sample Kolmogorov Smirnov Test to investigate the normality of scores.

NPar Tests

Table 4 shows the normality check to scores of two groups. The results revealed that scores were normally distributed.

Table 4. One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test for Checking Normality of Data.

		Motivation	Success	Age
Normal Parameters	Mean	45	45	45
	Std. Deviation	18.4222	20.4222	1.2222
	Absolute	2.64995	2.67555	0.42044
Most Extreme Differences	Positive	0.109	0.145	0.479
	Negative	0.109	0.106	0.479
Kolmogorov-Smirnov Z		-0.097	-0.145	-0.299
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)		0.728	0.970	3.215
		0.664	0.304	0.000

According to Table 5, the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test shows the normality of data distribution. Parametric tests may be used if the data are normal distribution. Otherwise, non-parametric tests should be used. In the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test results, if the test was significant, the p-value was less than 0.05, which means the distribution is not normal and non-parametric tests should be used. Therefore, if the result of this test is not significant, it is possible to use parametric tests. Since two variables are normal, Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used to measure the relationship between these two variables and since the result of sig. is equal to 0.000 and less than 0.05. The result indicates that there is a significant relationship between motivation and success in learning. According to ($p > 0$), the relationship between two variables is straightforward, and in ($p < 0$), the relationship between two variables is opposite. Given that, the value of this relation is equal to 0.593. It is straightforward. That means that the greater the motivation, the greater the success rate of learning and vice versa.

Table 5. Evaluating the Relationship between High and Low Motivation and Success in Learning English.

Variables	Statistic tests	
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Pearson Test
Motivation	P = 0.664	P = 0.593
Success in learning	P = 0.304	Sig. = 0.000

According to Table 6, since one of the variables is not normal, the mean test for two independent groups is used to measure the relationship between these two variables. It should be noted that the assumption of the equality of variances with using levon test should be examined before performing the test for two independent groups. If the assumption of inequality of variances is rejected, the decision will be made about equality of means. Since the level of significance of levon test is (0.661), and the error level is (F=0.195). It is more than 0.05. The results assume the equality of variances. The test results, including (t= 0.029) and (sig 0.977), mean that based on the sig, is related to the assumption of the equality of means because sig value is more than 0.05. Therefore, it can be concluded that there is no significant relationship between younger and older ages of onset and success in learning English.

Table 6. Evaluating the Relationship between Younger and Older Ages of Onset and Success in Learning English.

Variables	Statistic tests		
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test	Assumption of Variances Equality	Test for Two Independent Group
Age	P = 0.000	F = 0.195	T = 0.29
Success in learning	P = 0.304	Sig. = 0.661	Sig. = 0.977

Discussion

This study aimed to investigate the relationship between motivation and age with EFL learners' language proficiency levels. The study was a quantitative research type. Learning English has caught the attention of many learners. Therefore, engagement and interest of students are important factors for active learning. For this, students must have high motivation to create more effort and engagement in learning. Knowing the level of students' motivation is important for active engagement in the learning environment (Nayir, 2017). The role of the teacher is also important in this regard. Teachers can use different strategies to develop students' motivation in the classroom (Almashy, 2018).

It is observable in some studies that motivation and motivational strategies can affect learning English. Methods used in learning English must be selected based on students' age to assist learners in learning English. The research question about motivation and age addressed in this study includes 1) Is there any relationship between high and low motivation and success in EFL learning? 2) Is there any relationship between younger and older ages of onset and success in EFL learning? The first question displayed a significant relationship between motivation and success in EFL learning that means high motivation leads to more success in learning. The result of the second question displayed no significant relationship between younger and older ages of onset and success in EFL learning.

These findings were consistent with Anatheer (2013), who suggested the motivation determines learners' success in learning English. Motivated learners, like Saudi students in Australia, were deeply involved in their learning. Learners' motivation determined how to develop their ability to understand, speak, and write the second language. In addition, these findings were in line with Aliakbari and Mahjub (2016), who investigated the relationship between age and willingness to communicate in the Iranian EFL context. The result indicated that significance was 0.236, which means there was no meaningful relationship between age and WTC of participants. To sum up, the results of this study showed that motivation plays an effective role in the development of learning English, and the age of participants cannot be a limitation in learning English. The main limitations of this study were the limitation of time and the small number of students generalized for doing research. More time is necessary to study with more consistency. Other limitations are lack of effective sources, incoordination of some institutions in the process of study.

Conclusion

The result of motivational studies indicated a significant relationship between motivation and success in learning English. Also, according to the assumption of variances equality that was considered, the result of the t-test indicated that there was not a significant relationship between the mean scores of the two groups. Generally, the results displayed that high motivation in students influences students' performance and increases their success in learning English. As a result of the study, motivation is an influential factor in developing students' proficiency and engaging learners in learning. So, it can be considered as a base requirement that influences the success of students. That is why some weaknesses might be students' demotivation in learning and teaching that employing appropriate ways can be effective factors to increase motivation and develop learning.

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