

Iranian Adult and Young EFL Learners' Perceptions of learning Strategies and Effective Teaching in English Language

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Abstract

Language learning strategies are the thoughts and activities that learners employ to achieve a learning goal. The effective teaching are included of, driving toward goals, clarity make the content simple, engagement and enthusiastic in learning. Extensive research has identified strategies used by EFL learners, but limited research has been carried out with regard to the adult and young perceptions of using strategies and effective teaching. The model had been used was Knowles' (1984). The aims of this study: Firstly, it was the identification difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of learning strategies in learning English. Secondly, it was discovering differences between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in language learning. Participants were 384 adult and young EFL learners in English Institute, they filled out the Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) and the Effective Teaching questionnaire. After gathering data by the researchers SPSS software was used for gaining statistical information. For finding the responses of the research questions t-test had been used. Results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of learning strategies in English language. There were significant differences between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in English language.

Keywords: adult learning; effective teaching; learning strategies; young learning.

1. Introduction

The word "teaching" provokes in mind the image as a teacher while "learning" incites in mind a student-centered activity and these explanations depend on the beliefs, motivation and attitudes of the learner. In order to create a suitable English language-learning environment, it is so important to know the learners' perceptions of learning and effective teaching in English language. Language learners' perceptions of teaching and learning have been studied by many researchers to create a more interesting and effective foreign language learning environment and atmosphere.

The main idea about adult learning had started by [1] and other researchers had shown interest in the problem of adult learning such as [2] and [3]. The interest in adult learners came from the idea that adult students learn differently from the young ones. Based on this idea, the American educator Malcolm Knowles developed the principle of "andragogy", or learner-centered approach, which represented the art and science of mature learning. Knowles' [1] andragogical model is based on the following assumptions about the adult learners: the first, adult learners tend to be self-directed; they can direct their own learning. The second, rich experiences of life help their learning. The third, they can easily learn when they assume life roles or new social. The fourth, they have a task or problem-focus orientation to learning. The fifth, adult learners have the ability to apply new materials of learning immediately. The sixth, internal factors in adult are more power full in compare with external factors [1].

The aim of present study was to investigate the adult EFL learners' perceptions of choosing learning strategies in language learning versus the young EFL learners' perceptions. The other aim of this study was the perception of adult and young learners of effective teaching; that can be useable for teachers in order to find the new perspective for their teaching with considering the age of their students.

English teachers must be aware of the differences between the teaching and learning patterns of young and adult learners. Based on [4] there is a difference between perceptions and practices of teacher and learner in the teaching and learning process; and these mismatches can be a source of difficulty in implementation. Indeed, there are many factors beyond teachers' control that can affect students' learning.

According to [1] learners often develop a concern, or they are dissatisfied when their expectations are inconsistent with the instructional activities that are used by the teacher. Therefore, if language teachers want to understand feeling of their learners and why learners react in a particular way during the learning process, they should pay attention to the perceptions of learners about the nature of

Language-learning, the role of the teacher, the role of feedback, the degree of learner autonomy in the language learning process, and the selection of learning strategies.

These learners' beliefs are useful when teachers are looking to find effective teaching strategies for different age groups; because it is revealed that various learners have different expectations and as a result teachers can gear their teaching towards more effective teaching strategies. The interesting aspect of this study is using of learner- centered frame work that nowadays is so important in all countries. When the language learners' position is occupied by adult learners, the teaching procedure is considered to be more problematic. Knowing about the learners' perception of learning and effective teaching are critical matters for the teachers to teach and authors to write beneficial books. To address the objectives of the study, the researchers proposed the following research questions.

Q1: Is there any significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of learning strategies in learning English?

Q2: Is there any significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in learning English?

Based on the mentioned questions had posed by the researcher, the following null hypothesis was stated:

H01: There is no significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of learning strategies in English language.

H02: There is no significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in learning English.

Literature Review

2.1. Adult learners

Adult learning is a concept that refers to any development in the direction of participants' learning and understanding, where the participants respect themselves and are regarded by others as generally mature [6]. Assumption under andragogical model has clear implications for teaching practice: if learning of adult differs from young learning, then adults should be taught differently [7]. The evidences that the models of teaching and learning start from adult age are connected to the wide information which is a key learning resource, then with considering that the adult learners concentrate on problem-solving and use of them immediately to the conditions which they were challenged. Based on above, for the adult age, one can talk about experimental learning [8] and [9] and according to [10] and learning by solving problems [11].

2.2. Young learner

[12] Recorded that the term 'young learner' is unclear and can lead to confusion. Officially, a 'young learner' may be anybody under the age of 18; actuality, however, using one word to cover such a different age range was unhelpful. Instead, [13] suggested that at least, a division between before and after (19 or 12) years old should be made. This is because of the vast differences in 'physical, spiritual, social, emotional, conceptual and cognitive improvement' among kids in these age groups, leading to very different methods to teaching. Indeed, for many children into the world, being bilingual or multilingual is an everyday reality [14].

2.3. Teaching style

Teaching style referenced to educators' activities in their classroom [15]. In one study, Kulinna, [16] also studied teachers' perceived teaching styles. The researchers compared the results of their study with those of [17] that investigated college students' views of teaching styles. The study discovered that teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching styles varied significantly.

Teachers used somewhat more styles than students. The study also claimed that based on teachers' and students' attitude teaching styles had different values; however, the two groups had different opinions about which teaching styles improved motivation and learning. Assumptions that teachers of adults should use an approach and style of teaching so different from that were used with young was based on "informed professional opinion; philosophical assumptions associated with humanistic psychology and progressive education; and a growing body of research and theory of adult learning, development, and socialization" [7].

2.4. Effective Teaching

The "Four Aces of Effective Teaching" [18] stated the most dominant recommendations for the teaching-effectiveness. These four aces were included of, outcomes ("drive hard toward clear goals"), clarity ("make the content as clear and simple as possible") engagement ("people learn what they do so have students do everything that you want them to learn") and enthusiasm ("the only key to motivation is a success"). They were the strongest associations between what teachers can do and what the students can attain. The Four Aces represented a hybrid way of thinking about the "process" of teaching as it affected the "product" (student learning). Student learning is, faster, better and more continuing when teachers use the Four Aces. Effective teaching required the teacher to adopt a different role [19].

2.5. Learning strategies

[20] Defined language-learning strategies as “the techniques or devices which a learner may use to acquire knowledge” (p. 43). A vital problem that has been broadly sought from different perspectives is the underlying reason of the different styles of students to learning. A reasonable response may be found in learner perception or attitudes “beliefs about the nature of language, about the language-learning task, about likely outcomes, about learners' personal language learning strengths and limitations” [21] p. 474).

[22] Stated that English is not learned as a tool for understanding and teaching US or British cultural values. English, however, have become a tool for universal communication in transferring, trade, banking, tourism, technology, diplomacy, and systematic research. According to [23] the rate of learners' success was low when they used the strategies and knowledge sources they had at their access, success was associated more to the quality rather than the quantity of the strategies used. His findings challenge a one-dimensional conception of the role of strategies in L2 lexical inference and instead support a differencing model that separates strategies and the ability to use them suitably and effectively in combination with various sources of knowledge in lexical inference.

Method

3.1. Participants and setting

Participants of this research were randomly selected from Iran based on the condition of researcher's accessibility. In this study, 384 participants who were all EFL learners in different English language Institutes. They were from both genders and different ages (12-19) as young learners and (20-39) as adult learners with different years of studies and at least with the level of (A) one. Adult learners were about 189 EFL learners and young about 195 EFL learners. Collecting data were started in June 2017 and were lasted for about two months. The probable needed time for filling out questionnaire was about 45-60 minutes. Gathering data were summarized in SPSS software. Considering the 95% of the level of confidence and 0.05 degree of accuracy.

3.2. Instruments

Two questionnaires as instruments were used for conducting this study: Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL) Oxford (1990) questionnaire scale was used, that had prepared by Oxford consisting of 50 Likert-type statements. (See Appendix A for the (SILL) questionnaire. and Effective English Language Teacher questionnaire by Brown (2009) was used. The questionnaire consisted of 24 items. (See Appendix B for the Effective English Language Teacher Questionnaire).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1. Testing the first hypothesis:

To test the first hypothesis Independent Sample t- test was conducted. According to the table 4.4, the significance level of the test was 0.000, which was less than 0.05 ($\text{Sig} = 0.000 < 0.05$) therefore, with 95% confidence, the null hypothesis (H0) was rejected, and it could be said that there were significant differences between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of learning strategies in English language. And according to the mean values it was clear that the adults EFL learners' perception of learning strategies in English language was more than young's. The test results were presented in the following table.

Table 1 *T-test for Equality of Means*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	0.198		Young	189	3.13	0.48	0.70	2.14	382	.000*
Equal variances not assumed			Adult	195	3.83	0.45				

*. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

4.2. Testing the second hypothesis:

According to the table 2 for testing hypothesis two, an independent sample T-Test was used statistically for the comparison of two mean scores of two different groups. The significance level of Levene's test,

i.e. the p- value was 0.623 and it was more than 0.05. So it can be said the variances were equal for two groups (young and adult).

Also according table 2 it was observed that the mean of the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in English language respectively were 3.02 and 3.66. The significance level of the test was 0.000, which was less than (0.05(Sig = 0.000 < 0.05, therefore, with 95% confidence, the null hypothesis (H₀) was rejected and according to the mean values it was clear that the adults EFL learners' perception of effective teaching in English language was more than young's. So the rejection of the null hypothesis (H₀) means there was a significant difference between the adult and young EFL learners' perceptions of effective teaching in English language.

The test results were presented in the following table.

Table 2 *T-Test for Equality of Means.*

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means							
	F	Sig.	group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig.
Equal variances assumed	0.623		young	189	3.02	0.27	0.64	2.19	382	.000*
Equal variances not assumed			adult	195	3.66	0.25				

*. Significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

5. Conclusions

This study was conducted to investigate the relationship between two variables of learning strategies and effective teaching in learning English among adult and young Iranian EFL learners, and showed there is different between adult and young perceptions of learning strategies and effective teaching. In response to the first research question; assumption under andragogical model had clear implications for teaching practice: if learning of adult differs from young learning, then adults should be taught differently [7].

Benefit from research in learning strategies field might help a teacher to bring true decisions according to the strategy research findings. The results showed that there is statistically significant difference in the frequency of using strategies between adult and young. Additionally, the survey findings have confirmed that learning strategy use differs by ages. Teaching learners how to use learning strategies permits them to find their own strategy for being successful language learning and to improve autonomy in the process of foreign language learning.

In response to the second question it came out that there were some differences between Iranian adult' and young' beliefs about effective language teaching. According to the existing literature on the beliefs commonly held by language learners, these beliefs have an essential role in the success or failure of language learning and teaching process, that is, to achieve the maximum amount of success, and the gap between students' and teachers' perceptions should be bridged as much as possible [24].

This result is in line with this result that teachers of adults should use an approach and style of teaching so different from that were used with young was based on "informed professional opinion; philosophical assumptions associated with humanistic psychology and progressive education; and a growing body of research and theory of adult learning, development, and socialization" [7]

The result of this study confirms with those of [17] that investigated college students' views of teaching styles. The study discovered that teachers' and students' perceptions of teaching styles varied significantly. Teachers used somewhat more styles than students. The study also claimed that based on teachers' and students' attitude teaching styles had different values; however, the two groups had different opinions about which teaching styles improved motivation and learning.

The result of this study that can be useable for teachers in order to find the new perspective for their teaching with considering the age of their students.

English teachers must be aware of the differences between the teaching and learning patterns of young and adult learners; and these mismatches can be a source of difficulty in implementation. Indeed, there are many factors beyond teachers' control that can affect students' learning.

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APPENDIX (A)

Strategy Inventory for Language Learning (SILL)

This form of the strategy inventory for language learning (SILL) was for students of a foreign or second language (FL or SL). Please read each statement and fill in the bubble of the response (1, 2, 3, 4, or 5) that tells HOW TRUE THE STATEMENT WAS.

1. Never or almost never true of me
2. Usually not true of me
3. Somewhat true of me
4. Usually true of me
5. Always or almost always true of me

Answer in terms of how well the statement describes you. Do not answer how you think you should be, or what other people do. **There were no rights or wrong answers** to these statements.

Part A

1. I think of relationships between what I already know and new things I learn in the SL.
1 2 3 4 5
2. I use new SL words in a sentence so I can remember them. 1 2 3 4 5
3. I connect the sound of a new SL word and an image or picture of the word to help me remember the word. 1 2 3 4 5
4. I remember a new SL word by making a mental picture of a situation in which the word might be used. 1 2 3 4 5
5. I use rhymes to remember new SL words. 1 2 3 4 5
6. I use flashcards to remember new SL words. 1 2 3 4 5
7. I physically act out new SL words. 1 2 3 4 5
8. I review SL lessons often. 1 2 3 4 5
9. I remember new SL words or phrases by remembering their location on the page, on the board, or on a street sign. 1 2 3 4 5

Part B

10. I say or write new SL words several times. 1 2 3 4 5
11. I try to talk like native SL speakers. 1 2 3 4 5
12. I practice the sounds of SL. 1 2 3 4 5
13. I use the SL words I know in different ways. 1 2 3 4 5
14. I start conversations in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
15. I watch SL language TV shown spoken in SL or go to movies spoken in SL. 1 2 3 4 5
16. I read for pleasure in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
17. I write notes, messages, letters, or reports in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
18. I first skim an SL passage (read over the passage quickly) then go back and read carefully. 1 2 3 4 5
19. I look for words in my own language that were similar to new words in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
20. I try to find patterns in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
21. I find the meaning of an SL word by dividing it into parts that I understand. 1 2 3 4 5
22. I try not to translate word for word. 1 2 3 4 5
23. I make summaries of information that I hear or read in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5

Part C

24. To understand unfamiliar SL words, I make guesses. 1 2 3 4 5
25. When I can't think of a word during a conversation in the SL, I use gestures. 1 2 3 4 5
26. I make up new words if I do not know the right ones in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
27. I read SL without looking up every new word. 1 2 3 4 5
28. I try to guess what the other person will say next in the SL. 1 2 3 4 5
29. If I can't think of an SL word, I use a word or phrase that means the same thing. 1 2 3 4 5

Part D

30. I try to find as many ways as I can to use my SL. 1 2 3 4 5
31. I notice my SL mistakes and use that information to help me do better. 1 2 3 4 5
32. I pay attention when someone was speaking SL. 1 2 3 4 5
33. I try to find out how to be a better learner of SL. 1 2 3 4 5
34. I plan my schedule so I will had enough time to study SL. 1 2 3 4 5
35. I look for people I can talk to in SL. 1 2 3 4 5
36. I look for opportunities to read as much as possible in SL. 1 2 3 4 5
37. I had clear goals for improving my SL skills. 1 2 3 4 5

38. I think about my progress in learning SL. 1 2 3 4 5

Part E

39. I try to relax whenever I feel afraid of using SL. 1 2 3 4 5

40. I encourage myself to speak SL even when I am afraid of making a mistake. 1 2 3 4 5

41. I give myself a reward or treat when I do well in SL. 1 2 3 4 5

42. I notice if I am tense or nervous when I am studying or using SL. 1 2 3 4 5

43. I write down my feelings in a language learning dairy. 1 2 3 4 5

44. I talk to someone else about how I feel when I am learning SL. 1 2 3 4 5

Part F

45. If I do not understand something in SL, I ask the other person to slow down or say it again. 1 2 3 4

5

46. I ask SL speakers to correct me when I talk. 1 2 3 4 5

47. I practice SL with other students. 1 2 3 4 5

48. I ask for help from SL speakers. 1 2 3 4 5

49. I ask questions in SL. 1 2 3 4 5

50. I try to learn about the culture of SL speakers. 1 2 3 4 5

APPENDIX (B)

Effective Teacher Questionnaire

Instructions: Please reflect on your personal perception about characterizes of effective foreign language teaching. Carefully read each statement and indicate to what extent you agree or disagree by circling the statement that best describes your opinion. There was no right or wrong answers, just those that were right for you. Your sincere, personal responses will guarantee the success of the study. Thank you.

Effective foreign language teachers should: Strongly Agree, (1) Agree (2), Disagree (3), Strongly Disagree (4).

1. Frequently use computer-based technologies (Internet, CD-ROM, email) in teaching the language.1
2 3 4
2. Base at least some part of students' grades on completion of assigned group tasks.1 2 3 4
3. Devote as much time to the teaching of culture as to the teaching of language.1 2 3 4
4. Require students to use the language outside of class with other speakers of the language (e.g., Internet, email, clubs, community events, etc.).1 2 3 4
5. Not correct students immediately after they make a mistake in speaking.1 2 3 4
6. Allow students to respond to test questions in listening and reading via English rather than the foreign language.1 2 3 4
7. Not use English in the foreign language classroom.1 2 3 4
8. Only correct students indirectly when they produce oral errors instead of directly (e.g., correctly repeating back to them rather than directly stating that they were incorrect).1 2 3 4
9. be as knowledgeable about the culture(s) of those who speak the language as the language itself.1 2
3 4
10. Not grade language production (i.e., speaking and writing) primarily for grammatical accuracy.1 2
3 4
11. Teach the language primarily by having students complete specific tasks (e.g., finding out prices of rooms and rates at a hotel) rather than grammar-focused exercises.1 2 3 4

12. Had students respond to commands physically in the foreign language (e.g., “stand up,” “pick up your book,” etc.).1 2 3 4
13. Address errors by immediately providing explanations as to why students’ responses were incorrect.1 2 3 4
14. Require students to speak in the foreign language beginning the first day of class.1 2 3 4
15. Not use predominantly small groups or pair works to complete activities in class.1 2 3 4
16. Mostly use activities that practice specific grammar points rather than activities whose goal was merely to exchange information.1 2 3 4
17. Ask students to begin speaking the foreign language only when they feel they were ready to.1 2 3 4
18. Not present a particular grammar point without illustrating how the structure was used in a specific, real-world context.1 2 3 4
19. Speak the foreign language with native-like control of both grammar and accent.1 2 3 4
20. Teach grammar by giving examples of grammatical structures before explaining the grammar rules.1 2 3 4
21. Use predominantly real-life materials (e.g., music, pictures, foods, and clothing) in teaching the language and the culture rather than the textbook.1 2 3 4
22. Not simplify or alter how they speak so that students can understand every word being said.1 2 3 4
23. Base at least some part of students’ grades on their ability to interact with classmates successfully in the foreign language.1 2 3 4
24. Use activities where students had to find out unknown information from classmates using the foreign language.1 2 3 4