

Empirically Based Research on English and Farsi Literacy

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Abstract

Reading literacy as the outstanding subfield in second language acquisition has influenced teaching and assessment; however, literacy program in the L1 along with second or foreign languages requires further research in an EFL situation. Thus, the current study aims to focus on learning Farsi as the first language, and English as the second language of 15 random sampled first grade elementary participants. In order to observe the rate of success in each language, three features which are number of pauses (Robinson, Ting & Unwin 1995), false starts and repetitions (Skehan & Foster 1999) were analyzed so as to have a thick description, and to reach saturation. The obtained results show that there is no relationship between these three features in pairs except false starts and repetitions in English pretest and posttest, which is to some extent strong. Among three stated features, in English pretest the number of pauses and in posttest the number of false starts received the highest mean scores which indicate participants' problems in English Language learning. Therefore, it is worth noting the importance of developing first language reading literacy and then to promote the second language at first grade of elementary school.

Keywords: False Start; Pause; Reading Literacy; Repetition; Sandwich Model

Introduction

With the advent of the twenty first century, many scholars (Kachru 1992; Kachru & Nelson 1996; Kasper 1998; Pennycook 1999, 2000; Seidelhofer 1999; & Widdowson 1994, 1997) have argued the significance of English Language Teaching. Cook (1999: 185) also posited that 'language teaching would benefit by paying detailed attention to second language users; therefore, second language researchers face a subject of considerable debate on simultaneous learning of both English as a second language and First as a first language in an EFL situation. In recent century, Adams (1990), Balmuth (1982), Chall (1983a), and Huey (1908) also proposed the paramount importance of 'literacy instruction' as one of heated debates in education.

There were also some problems from some scholars' like Athey (1976, 1982); Dunwant (1982); Lloyd (1978); Snider and Tarver (1987) point of view that any earlier failure to develop basic reading abilities may lead to later academic, economic, and social-emotional difficulties. Thus, some models such as sight word, phonics and linguistic approaches have been proposed to explain how children could learn to read. In addition, 'breaking the code' (Chall 1983b; Flesch 1955; Gough 1972; & Gunning 1995) of written language was also considered in order to become a proficient reader (Adams 1990; Chall 1983b; & Henry 1993), because the development of mental flexibility and problem solving skills may lead into making the learning of second language rooted in strong foundation in the first language.

Carpenter, Fujii, and Kataoka (1995) among others allocated their entire attention to the identification of suitable protocols for young learners' interlanguage assessment, because proficiency in two or more languages aids metalinguistic awareness. The process of language acquisition in first language (L1) also resulted in the proficiency in two or more languages (Ringbom 1987; Cenoz & Valencia 1994; & Lasagabaster 1998). This is precisely what makes the difference between an 'expert' who is master in L1 literacy and then moves to learn second or third language and a 'novice' learner who is not perfectly literate in L1 (McLaughlin & Nayak 1989). This can be justified by the fact that bilingualism adds awareness to a child compared to monolingual learners, and through learning more strategies bilinguals require putting less effort to achieve success in the process of learning a new language. In some schools like Belgium, Switzerland and Sweden; for example, multiliteracy was encouraged as a strong foundation in the native language (Wojtowicz 2006) which emphasized literacy awareness. Some scholars like Magnan (1988), and Larsen-Freeman (2006) also conducted in-depth analyses of learner performance.

According to Krashen (1993) L1 literacy aids in L2 acquisition since it is almost powerful enough to result in language acquisition. His theory promoted by the fact that L1 literacy is the foundation of language education in different areas; such as a tool for accentuating repertoire of vocabulary, reading, writing, spelling and comprehending which enhances readers' language awareness and proficiency. It will also provide 'resources to employ, as they move into second language reading and writing' (Hudleson 1987, as cited in Swain et al., 1990, 67, & Tokuhama-Espinosa 2001).

Interventionist Dynamic Assessment–Sandwich Model

According to Emberson (1987), the relationship between assessment and instruction can be defined through dynamic assessment. It attempts to provide instructions in order to modify learner's performance and elicit

higher achievement level. As defined by Vygotsky, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is also designed to diagnose reading problems, and modify learning potentials. Thus, it is divided into two categories including 'interventionist' and 'interactionist'. Regarding the interventionist as one of the approaches in DA and the focus of the present study, it is a quantitative approach and lends itself to a psychometrics orientation. Moreover, Sandwich model, as one of the sub-categorization of interventionist approach, is a standardized menu of hints, ranging from implicit to explicit provided with mediation (Lantolf & Poehner, 2004). Hence, the 'sandwich' indicates the hints and test items in which each question and problem are required to be assessed before moving to the next item. In this model, the role of teacher is interactive and collaborates in accomplishing the task (Lidz, 1987). Therefore, the aim of deploying this model in the present study is to promote cognitive and literacy development. In so doing, the researcher is required to generate learner profiles comprising two axes in pretest, intervention, and posttest so as to measure how quickly examinees are able to learn the new patterns and how far they can extend this knowledge to novel problems (Brown & Ferrara, 1985).

Fluency

Fluency refers to general language proficiency; particularly, characterized by perceptions of ease, eloquence, and smoothness of speech or writing (Lennon 1990; Chambers 1997; Guillot 1999; Freed 2000; Koponen & Riggensbach 2000; & Hilton 2008). Successful language performance in literacy has often been characterized as reading at normal rate without interruption resulting in fluency. It is worth mentioning that written language fluency can also be measured. However, since the oral fluency is the main concern of this study, it will not consider here.

According to Higgs (1982), the current fluency trend in a graph presents as follows:

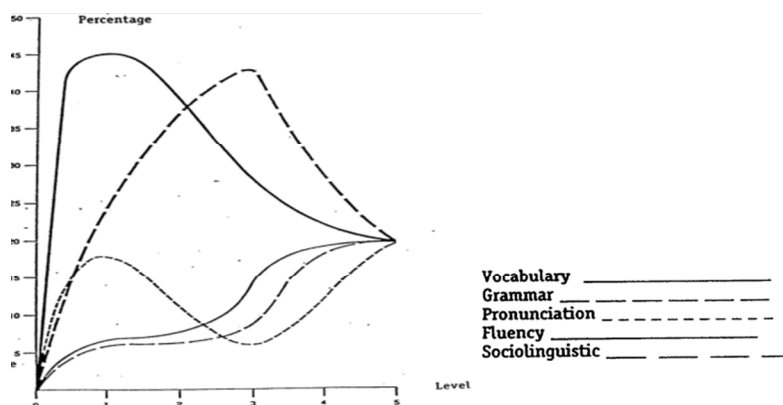


Figure 1. Higgs Graph of Learner needs

Figure 1 depicts vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, fluency, and sociolinguistic. Interestingly, fluency which is the main concern of the present study ranked the first in reaching the peak. That is to say by developing knowledge, learners' fluency can move an upward trend. The reason backs to the fact that there is a trade-off between accuracy, fluency, and complexity of language learners. This can also be justified on the basis of cognitive factors. Lennon (2000: 26) proposed that fluency refers to 'rapid, smooth, accurate, lucid and efficient translation of thought or communicative intention into language under the temporal constraints of on-line processing'. In addition, the steady improvement in the measurement of fluency among language learners can be attributed to expanding cognitive ability. As the level increases, they can have control over the trade-off between accuracy and fluency. Accuracy in Figure 1 also concerned with grammar and vocabulary.

Fluency, in this research, attempts to investigate the growth of Farsi as the first language and English as the second language on reading literacy program in which the number of pauses, false starts and repetitions can be estimated. In order to analyze the rate of success or failure in participants' performance, a model was also needed. In this study, the sandwich model was in accordance with new methods of evaluation and teaching (Anderson 1992; Anderson & Fincham 1994; Dekeyser 2001; LaBerge & Samuel 1974). In what follows, the classifications and methods of estimating these criteria were presented.

In estimating fluency, three rubrics including 'number of pauses' as the subcategorisation of temporal variable, and an indicator of speakers' dysfluency; 'false starts' as the subcategorisation of hesitation phenomena, and 'repetitions' (adapted from Ellis & Barkhuizen 2005, 157) are used. To delve into the descriptions of measurements, number of pauses: *the total number of filled and unfilled pauses for each speaker* (Robinson, Ting & Unwin 1995), false starts: *utterances/sentences that is not complete. They may or may not be followed by reformulation* (Skehan & Foster 1999), and for repetitions: *words, phrases or clauses that are repeated without any modification whatsoever* (Skehan & Foster 1999) were counted in order to investigate the performance of the young first grade elementary school language learners in reading literacy program in both learning of Farsi

and English Languages. In so doing, some research questions are provided, as follows:

Research questions

The following research questions are posited in order to take into account the effectiveness of the courses of instruction in both Farsi and English languages in literacy programs.

RQ1: What are the relative contributions of pauses, false starts and repetitions in Farsi language?

RQ2: What are the relative contributions of pauses, false starts and repetitions in English language?

RQ3: Will two groups differ in their choice of number of pauses, false starts and repetitions in interventionist sandwich model?

Methods

Some measures were taken so as to observe the effectiveness of promoting bilingual literacy program in an EFL situation for first grade elementary students. In so doing, collected sample was analyzed in details in order to have a thick description. Also, the performance of the same group of test takers was measured to depict whether language learners can take advantage of concurrent reading literacy programs in learning English as the second language and Farsi as the first language.

Participants

The present research aimed at studying on 15 random sampled young male participants schooling at a non-profit first grade elementary from 6 to 7 years of age. All participants were supposed to pass a year at pre-elementary level at the very school before starting the first grade of schooling at elementary level. Thus, they had received the same academic knowledge in English and Farsi. Moreover in order to have saturated and in depth analysis, all participants were taken IDs. Farsi teacher and supervisor of the English department were all consented for quality improvement of their educational program. And all parents were quite willing to enroll in fruitful bilingual literacy programs.

Instruments

In order to meet the standards and offer fully accredited courses, “Starters” (Cambridge University Press, 2011) for teaching English language and “Farsi Bekhanim” (Ministry of Education, 2014) for teaching Farsi language were adopted. In both languages, classes were run in five days per week, and the set time was 90 minutes for each language class. It is worth noting that both books aimed at promoting reading literacy skills in English and Farsi languages.

Procedure

From October to June, the year of academic schooling, participants were supposed to take part in literacy programs. Contrary to public schools which include merely Farsi language in the first year of elementary school, some non-profit schools required students to learn both English and Farsi languages in the same year. Therefore, the corpus of the study was collected from a non-profit elementary school. Also, all students were scheduled to attend literacy programs in both English and Farsi languages. It is worth noting that the English teacher was experienced enough in teaching English as a second Language, and the veteran Farsi teacher had attended some offered in service training programs. As for the present study, a pretest was run in October, and after passing nine months of instruction a posttest was administered in line with sandwich format. The researcher was recorded all the oral performances of participants who were supposed to complete the task independently in order to control diffusion as a kind of internal validity threat.

This study was also provided with two passages in English and Farsi by the related supervisor and teacher, respectively. Then, the researcher asked two other English and Farsi teachers to confirm the content validity and difficulty level of the adopted passages. Moreover, data collection was accomplished under the supervision of English and Farsi teachers.

Test administration task–sandwich model

National literacy curriculum aimed at a nine month program to promote literacy among all students; however, due to the importance of English language many non-profit schools offered to develop literacy in both Farsi as a first Language and English as a second Language from October to June. It was also expected that all participants can develop their abilities to read in two languages. Generally, in running pretest all participants could not read from the text in any languages. After a nine month of intervention, they were required to sit for the posttest in order to read two assigned passages in English and Farsi languages. During tests administration, some participants also asked for confirmation check, clarification for request, and feedback.

Results

The three features including the number of pauses, false starts, and repetitions were measured. In so doing, the

researcher transcribed and analyzed the collected data. Tables 1 and 2 show the number of occurrence in pretest and posttest of both Farsi and English Languages, respectively. It is worth noting that all participants were identified by the cardinal numbers.

Table 1. Pretest Raw Data

<i>Candidates (Cardinal Numbers)</i>	<i>Farsi Language</i>			<i>English Language</i>		
	<i>No of Pauses</i>	<i>No of False Starts</i>	<i>No of Repetitions</i>	<i>No of Pauses</i>	<i>No of False Starts</i>	<i>No of Repetitions</i>
1	8	4.0	3	5	4	5
2	4	1.0	3	8	16	5
3	3	2.0	1	19	23	8
4	5	5.0	10	9	20	8
5	5	10.0	11	24	32	4
6	7	1.0	2	2	0	0
7	12	7.0	8	26	38	21
8	10	3.0	18	6	1	0
9	2	5.0	3	5	17	2
10	4	6.0	8	11	10	1
11	6	5.0	3	7	0	0
12	5	7.0	9	0	2	0
13	7	3.0	3	37	0	0
14	6	2.0	3	13	1	0
15	7	4.0	4	23	10	5

Table 2. Posttest Raw Data

<i>Candidates (Cardinal Numbers)</i>	<i>Farsi Language</i>			<i>English Language</i>		
	<i>No of Pauses</i>	<i>No of False Starts</i>	<i>No of Repetitions</i>	<i>No of Pauses</i>	<i>No of False Starts</i>	<i>No of Repetitions</i>
1	1	3	0	0	24	3
2	1	2	10	1	10	5
3	1	5	10	0	17	45
4	2	0	3	4	11	11
5	1	0	4	1	5	0
6	0	0	0	0	14	0
7	0	3	2	0	15	6
8	2	5	0	9	18	5
9	0	3	0	0	9	0
10	0	4	1	0	13	11
11	3	26	10	1	24	8
12	0	0	1	0	10	0
13	0	2	6	0	23	16
14	0	0	6	0	28	18
15	0	5	7	0	12	8

Table 3 depicts descriptive statistics of the number of pauses, false starts, and repetitions in Farsi and English Languages pretest.

Table 3. Pretest Descriptive Statistics

	<i>No of Participants</i>	<i>Farsi Language</i>		<i>English Language</i>	
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Pauses</i>	15	6.06	2.60	13	10.52
<i>False Starts</i>	15	4.33	2.49	11.60	12.37
<i>Repetitions</i>	15	5.93	4.63	3.93	5.56

Interestingly, the mean score of pauses in both Farsi, and English Languages ranked the first that are 6.06, and 13, orderly. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics of the number of pauses, false starts, and repetitions in Farsi and English Languages posttest.

Table 4. Posttest Descriptive Statistics

	<i>No of Participants</i>	<i>Farsi Language</i>		<i>English Language</i>	
		<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
<i>Pauses</i>	15	0.73	0.96	1.06	2.43
<i>False Starts</i>	15	3.86	6.42	15.53	6.65
<i>Repetitions</i>	15	4.00	3.89	9.06	11.45

According to Table 4, the mean score in repetitions was 4.00 and in false starts was 15.53 in Farsi and English Languages; respectively. Low mean scores in pretest and posttest entails that both languages had not fossilized.

After entering the data into SPSS and calculating mean scores and standard deviations, spearman's rank-order correlation coefficient was run to measure the correlations between pauses, false starts and repetitions in pairs. Tables 5 and 6 indicate the results of pretest and posttest in Farsi Language.

Table 5. Non-parametric Correlations in Farsi Pretest

	<i>Pauses– False Starts</i>	<i>Pauses– Repetitions</i>	<i>False Starts–Repetitions</i>
<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.86	0.49	0.008
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	–0.49	0.19	0.65

P < .05

Table 6. Non-parametric Correlations in Farsi Posttest

	<i>Pauses– False Starts</i>	<i>Pauses– Repetitions</i>	<i>False Starts–Repetitions</i>
<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.305	0.404	0.466
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.28	0.23	0.20

P < .05

The obtained results, which are the correlation between pauses and false starts, pauses and repetitions, and false starts and repetitions, show that there is a slight relationship between false starts and repetitions in Farsi language pretest that is 0.65; however, this correlation cannot be observed in posttest.

The results of correlation in English Language pretest and posttest depict in Tables 7 and 8.

Table 7. Non-parametric Correlations in English Pretest

	<i>Pauses– False Starts</i>	<i>Pauses– Repetitions</i>	<i>False Starts– Repetitions</i>
<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.17	0.18	0.00
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	0.36	0.36	0.85

P < .05

Table 8. Non-parametric Correlations in English Posttest

	<i>Pauses– False Starts</i>	<i>Pauses– Repetitions</i>	<i>False Starts– Repetitions</i>
<i>Sig. (2-tailed)</i>	0.583	0.756	0.038
<i>Spearman's rho</i>	–0.15	–0.08	0.54

P < .05

As Table 8 depicts, likewise pretest in Farsi Language, there was a strong correlation between false starts and repetitions. In addition, this case can be observed in posttest correlation between false starts and repetitions although it was not so strong that is 0.54.

Discussion and Conclusions

According to Richards and Renandyn (2002: 158–9) young learners need to be assisted through 'noticing, discovering rules, restructuring and experimentation'. However, this point cannot be easily materialized since the participants schooling at the elementary level are merely familiar with the phonics rather than spellings. Swain et al.s (1990: 67) also emphasized the fact that when two languages use different writing systems, language learners need to use some 'cognitive and linguistic strategies' of learning the first language in reading the second language. As for the present study, participants are quite unfamiliar with the cognitive and linguistic strategies in the first language; hence, they cannot outperform in the second language that is English. Considering the purpose of the present study, the relationship between false starts and repetitions are mainly observed in Farsi and English posttests. Therefore, they could not internalize their first language properly, and cannot employ the second language quite perfectly.

From the interventionist perspective in dynamic assessment, this study is also reminiscent of the sandwich

model. Since dynamic assessment estimates degree of learner's level, or degree of modifiability of the learner's learning, and positive changes in cognitive functioning which can be triggered, because 'literacy is completely bound up with their lives outside the classroom in numerous and complex cultural, social, and personal ways that affect their L1 and L2 identities' (Burns, 2003: 22).

Freeman and Freeman (2003) provided the category of English language learners who exposed to two languages simultaneously, Table 9.

Table 9. Categories of English Language Learners

Students exposed to two languages simultaneously

- Live in communities of speakers who primarily communicate in their L1 or go back and forth between languages,
- Have grown up being exposed to two languages simultaneously,
- May have not developed academic literacy in either L1 or L2 (second language),
- Often engage in extensive code-switching, thus making use of both linguistic systems to communicate, and
- Have acquired oral proficiency in a language other than English first but may not have learned to read or write in that language.

Note. Adapted from Freeman and Freeman (2003).

Based on Table 9, the item which defined some language learners as those who 'May have not developed academic literacy in either L1 or L2 (second language)' is related to present study, because participants cannot develop the two languages simultaneously. This can be justified by the fact that correlation between the number of false starts and repetitions in both English pretest and posttest can be observed.

Skehan and Foster (2001) also proposed that foreign language learners are not able to pay simultaneous attention to both "task content" and "language production", as opposed to native speakers who can simultaneously control over language content and production. As a result, greater amount of attention should be devoted to content so as to automatize the language. This automatization, as a sign of 'language awareness,' needs to be exposed to various tools such as books or newspaper (Swain et al.s 1990). It is also suggested to teach reading literacy in L1 and later L2. Interestingly enough, the importance of 'metalinguistic awareness in language acquisition' was emphasized which focused on different linguistic abilities, different groups with the variety of age ranges (Wagner et al.'s 1989). Swain et al. (1990) also isolated "biliterates from bilinguals" since developing metalinguistic awareness in first and subsequent languages help to produce language.

According to 'Descriptions of Reading Skill in Second Language Acquisition and Literacy Development' some tasks need to be exercised in order to manage thorough literacy and second language development (Adapted from English as a Second Language and English Literacy Development, Ministry of Education 2001).

"...Stage A₁, Grade1–3: Students read and comprehend simple written English. They recognize the alphabet in print; read pictures and use picture clues; participate in shared reading activities, choral reading, and rehearsed reading in a small group; know the direction of English print; select appropriate reading materials, with assistance; recognize familiar words and repeated phrases in plays, poems, stories, and environmental print; begin to use phonetic and context clues and sight recognition to understand simple texts (e.g., pattern books, charts, stories, songs, chants, rhymes)"(p. 30).

Stage A₁ facilitates language learning or better to name biliterates, and program planners have to ensure that language is used in natural and practical contexts (Ministry of Education 2001).

Milton and Meara (2003) also conducted a study on Cambridge exams at all levels of the CEFR and estimated test takers vocabulary sizes through using the XLex tests. The results are shown in Table 10.

Table 10. Approximate vocabulary size scores associated with CEFR levels (adapted from Meara & Milton, 2003, p. 8)

CEFR Levels Cambridge Exams XLex (5000 Max)

A1 Starters, Movers and Flyers <1500

A2 Kernel English Test 1500 - 2500

B1 Preliminary English Test 2750 - 3250

B2 First Certificate in English 3250 - 3750

C1 Cambridge Advanced English 3750 - 4500

C2 Cambridge Proficiency in English 4500 - 5000

It is essential to specify that the participants of the present study did not reach the minimum level of A1 based on CEFR that is learning less than 1500 words. A1 descriptors from Council of Europe (2001, 26–27) offered some requirements in order to be able to read with no difficulty (Table 11).

Table 11. A1 level descriptor from Council of Europe (2001: 26–27)

LEVEL READING

A1 *I can understand familiar*

names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.

Since the hallmark of skilled behavior is automaticity, the needed time to perform the task can be decreased. According to Fitts and Posner (1967), automatization viewed as a development starting with controlled processing of declarative knowledge that is knowledge of letters, combination of groups of letters and letter sound correspondences in smaller units and larger units. And, after much practice this conscious knowledge will result in attention free processing of ‘chunks’ (Anderson & Lebiere 1998, 5). LaBerge and Samuels (1974) proposed the significance of ‘feedback’ in language production to integrate language knowledge and make considerable progress. However, still it is not clear when language learners can reach automaticity in second language learning production; especially in heterogeneous group of participants. Generally, the findings of this study might be helpful for curriculum developers to reconsider first language and second language literacy planning.

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Appendix I

Sample of Farsi

- Baba dar baran amad.
- Madaram daman darad.
- Dar dandan mar sam ast.
- Dar an roosta rood ast.
- Oo ba baradaram doost bod.
- Oo ba Sara doost ast.
- Adam dar badan sar, abroo, dandan, ran darad.

Sample of English

I say, "I want my teddy bear."

Where is it. Dad?" He says, "We'll look for it. Don't be sad." I say, "I want my teddy bear. It is red."

I look on my desk, and I look under my bed.

I say, "I want my teddy bear. Where can it be?" Mom says, "I know where it is. Come with me."

I say, "Oh, I see. Maria likes my teddy bear. I think that I'll just leave him there."

Appendix II

Symbol	Stand for
\$	Pause
&	False Start
*	Repetition

A Farsi Codified Sample

- Baba dar baran amad.
- Madar daman darad.
- Dar dar* dandane\$ dar* dandane* mar rasm&sam darad& ast.
- Dar an dar* an* roosta rood ast dar* an* roosta* rood* ast*.
- Oo ba bara daram doost bood.
- Oo ba Sara doost ast.
- Adam dar badan sar, abroo, dandan, ran darad.

\$ 1

& 2

* 10

An English Codified Sample

I say\$, "I want me& teddy bear."

Where is it Dad?" He says, "We'll look for it. Don't be said&." I say I* say*, "I want me& teddy bear. It is red."

I look on me& desk, and I look under me& bed.

Where can it be?" Mom says, "I know where it is. Come with me."

I say, "Oh, I say& I* see. Maria& kes& me& me& teddy bear. I think that I'll just leave leave* leave*there."

\$ 1

& 10

* 5