

Language Acquisition and English Achievement at Grade Four Senior High School*

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Abstract

This study aimed to explore the relationship between language acquisition and grade four senior high school (G4SHS) students' achievement in English as a foreign language (EFL). To this end the 41-item English Language Acquisition Scale (ELAS) designed by Khodadady and Younesi (2017) was administered to 518 G4SHS students. Also to find the probable relationship between ELAS, its latent variables and participant achievement in EFL classes in EFL classes 126 participants were randomly selected out of population to answer schema-based cloze multiple choice items test (S- test) designed by Khodadady and Ghergloo (2013). To know which of the G4SHS students who took the ELAS took the S-Test as well the researcher was matched the codes of the ELAS S-test and ELTAS carefully. The results showed that the ELAS consists of five factors, i.e., Qualified, grammatization, Humanistic, Engagement and Orientation. Also the ELAS and its underlying factors show significant relationships with English achievement scores. The results of the study are discussed.

Keywords: language acquisition, language achievement. language scale.

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Introduction

The purpose of this thesis is to address the fundamental knowledge an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher should have to effectively engage in the task of addressing the language needs of English language learners (ELLs) so that they can acquire the EFL. It is important for EFL teachers who instruct ELLs to have a conscious knowledge of the conditions which help EFL students to acquire language. This knowledge of English goes beyond having a grasp of various components of the language system, such as phonology, morphology, semantics, and pragmatics or discourse. This fundamental knowledge includes the awareness and understanding of facilitative conditions which help learners to acquire a the language in EFL situations. Only by providing the most appropriate or optimal conditions for acquisition to take place can language teachers effectively help their learners.

Krashen (2002) stated that meaningful interaction, low affective filters, comprehensible input are necessary for language acquisition. Also some researchers (Brown and Hanlon, 1970; Brown, Cazden, and Bellugi, 1973) believed that error correction and explicit teaching of rules are not relevant to language acquisition. in other word extensive use of conscious grammatical rules is not necessary for language acquisition. Krashen (2009) believed in the teaching of conscious grammar extensively only when students have to do extreme "discrete-point" grammar tests, measures that test knowledge of rules and vocabulary in isolation. Gardner (1959) stated that language aptitude is the major factor in the acquisition of second language skills acquired through instruction.

Teachers can use extra-linguistic information. To do so teachers' speeches need to be concentrated on what is in the immediate environment. Also they can take advantage of the acquirer's knowledge of the world or they can use pedagogical aids such as pictures and realia. They can use topics that are to some extent familiar to the students. If the subjects are too familiar to students they do not concentrate on message. However it is not essential for input to contain only $i+1$. If the teacher could provide successful communication, $i+input$ is

automatically provided. In other word it is not necessary to provide deliberately $i+1$ or to practice a specific grammatical item and when the structure is mastered the syllabus proceeds to the next one. According to Krashen (2009) teachers' speeches should be roughly tuned to students' current level of students' competence. This roughly-tuned speech covers $i+1$ but does not focus exclusively on $i+1$. Also with natural roughly – tuned input , $i+1$ will occur and reoccur and this provides a built-in review. Consequently enough input is provided automatically and the teacher do not need to be concerned about grammatical sequencing or whether a student has mastered a particular structure. Instead the teacher should try to provide substantial qualities of comprehensible input. Krashen states that fluency and accuracy emerges and develops over time as the acquirer hears and understands more input. In other word exposure to the second language even in formal settings and attendance in class are the essential causative variables for second language acquisition.

It is found that certain general principles of effective pedagogy such as task- oriented behaviors, use of structuring comments, clarity of speech, etc, have some influences on all types of teaching and learning. Social constructivists believe that teacher beliefs and their understanding of how language is represented, accessed and ultimately acquired have great influence on their actions in the classroom. For example a teacher who believes that a second language is acquired similar to a first language speak nothing but the target language with little or no overt grammatical instruction. They asserts that the identification of teacher beliefs about learning and change them if necessary is an important step in acting appropriately in class. Richardson (as cited in Brown 2006) states that "personal experience, experience with schooling and instruction and experience with formal knowledge are influential in teacher beliefs regarding teaching" p. 20. Brown asserts that to define effective L2 pedagogy one should concentrate and analyze fundamental issues such as target-language use, grammar instruction, error correction, language-culture

connections, and communicative language teaching all of which reveal not only how to learn another language but what language is.

Recent research (see.e.g.,Alrabai 2016) attributes student achievement in EFL classes to a complex interaction of internal and external factors. Internal factors refers to the learners'dempgraphic characteristics and external factors include sociocultural variables, instructional variables, and problems with the educational system. In fact certain external practices such as assessment in classroom, assessments, teachers' behaviors in class,etc and internal factors such as anxiety that teachers instill in their students can make school anxiety-provoking and psychologically threading even for the students who start EFL classes with motivation and this fact effects on their achievements.

Participants

The participants for this study were 518 Iranian EFL students mostly between the ages of 17 and 19 studying at Pre University grade in two different areas of Iran, namely, Neyshabour, Zebarkhan . According to statistics reported by Department of Education and Training in Khorasan Razavi 114 G4SHS students are female and 404 students (60.7) were male in these areas. 168 students (%33.8) study humanities, 187 students (%38.7) study sciences, 78 students (% 13.6) study mathematics . Their mother languages are Persian(%79.1) and Turkish (%7.1) .Also their school types are public (%82.9), private (%2.4) , shared (%.7) and gifted (%.2). The average of their English score in grade 3 varies from 10 to 18.5.Also their ages are from 16(% .9) , 17 (% 23.6), 18 (%67.8) , 19 (% 13) , 20 (% .2) and 21 (% 02). Also 126 participants were randomly selected out of population to answer Schema-Based Cloze Multiple Choice Items Test (S- test). Also to know which of the G4SHS students who took the ELAS took the S-Test and filled the questionnaire (ELAS) as well the researcher was matched the codes of the ELAS , S-test carefully.

Instruments

Demographic Scale

To collect the required data a Demographic Scale (DS) was designed and employed in this study. For gathering the data related to EFL G4SHS a Persian (DS) containing 9 questions was designed to be used with the ELAS . They dealt with students' age, field of study at school, gender, overall English achievement score in G3SHS, overall scores in G3SHS, location and type of school and language they speak at home.

English Language Acquisition Scale

The English Language Acquisition Scale (ELAS) developed , validated and designed in Persian by Khodadady and Younesi (2017) was used in this study. They developed their 41-item ELTAS addressing the Characteristics of English Language Acquisition Scale. To answer the questionnaire, The questionnaire called for reading the 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. Khodadady and Younesi administered the scale to 388 Iranian EFL students studying at Pre University and extracted twelve factors underlie their English language Acquisition Scale at this grade, 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.

Schema-Based Cloze Multiple Choice Items Test (S- test)

Also schema-based cloze multiple choice items test (S- test) designed by Khodadady and Ghergloo (2013) was administered to find out participant achievement in EFL classes. To develop a S-Test Khodadady and Ghergloo (2013) chose at least one paragraph from each of the eight lessons comprising the textbook _“*Learning to Read English for Pre University Students*” _ (Birjandi, Sarab, & Samimi, 2012) totaling to fourteen. From these paragraphs ninety single/phrasal schemata were chosen, deleted and offered as the keyed responses. To

analyze the test takers' ability to activate their knowledge of the keyed response and relate it to schemata comprising the paragraphs, the researchers chose three alternatives called “competitive” (Khodadady, 1997) from among the 1578 schema types comprising the content of the whole textbook. The competitiveness have syntactical, semantic and discoursal relationships with the keyed response. The content validity of S-test is secured by identifying and classifying all the schemata comprising the texts taught to the participants of the study .

According to Khodadady and Ghergloo (2013) the reliability coefficient of S-test is .75. Also the internal validity of S-Test was determined by utilizing the item facility (IF) and item discrimination (ID) indices. The mean IF index of the S-Test is .44 and the percentage of ID falls to 32%, i.e., 29 out of 90. Khodadady and Ghergloo . According to Boopathiraj and Chellamani (2013) Items having discrimination index above .20 are ordinarily regarded satisfactory for use in most tests of academic achievement .

Data Collection Procedure

The present researcher talked to English teachers offering Pre university courses in the high schools and asked for their cooperation in giving the questionnaires to their students during the regular class time .The instruments were administered to as many G4SHS students as possible . The participants completed them on different occasions. In the first session, they took the ELAS in about fifteen minutes. S-Test was held at the end of the school year. The researcher was present in the classrooms when the participants filled out the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

The descriptive and inferential analyses were 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) experienced TEFL teachers. However, after piloting the questionnaire, the necessary modifications were implemented. Also the

reliability of the questionnaire was measured by Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. The factors were extracted via Principal Axis Factoring (PAF) and Kaiser criterion i.e. eigenvalues higher than 1 was adopted to determine the number of factors. In order to explore the relationship between ELAS and achievement in EFL, the questionnaire and its LVs was correlated with students' scores on the S-Test.

Q1: What is the factorial structure of the ELAS when it is administered to G4SHS students?

Q2. How reliable is the ELAS and its underlying factors?

Q3. How do the LVs underlying the ELAS correlate with each other?

Q4. Do the ELAS and its factors show significant relationships with English achievement?

Results

Kolmogorov-Smirnov Test

To check the normality of data distribution, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed. This test is used to check whether the distribution deviates from a comparable normal distribution. If the p -value is non-significant ($p > .05$), we can say that the distribution of a sample is not significantly different from a normal distribution, therefore it is normal. If the p -value is significant ($p < .05$) it implies that the distribution is not normal. Table 4.1 presents the results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. As it can be seen, the obtained sig value for all variables is higher than .05. Therefore, it can safely be concluded that the data is normally distributed across all the variables.

Table 4.1. *The Results of K-S Test*

	Df	Sig.
ELAS	126	.064

4.2 Results of Research Question One:

Q1: What is the factorial structure of the ELAS when it is administered to G4SHS students?

Table 4.2 presents the descriptive statistics of items comprising the ELAS. As can be seen, their mean score ranges from 2.63 (item 6) to 3.99 (Item 25). As it can also be seen, responding to item 6, only 28 % of G4SHS students have agreed that they learn English if English rules are not taught. Seventy two percent of these students have, however, agreed that they learn English word and sentences they listen and read them very much. For these very reasons, items 6 and 25 have the lowest and highest mean scores among the attributes respectively.

Table 4.2. *Descriptive Statistics of the Items Comprising the ELAS*

Item	Mean	SD	skew	Kurd	item	mean	SD	Skew	Kurd
1	3.26	1.25	-.37	-.82	٢٥	3.99	1.18	1.02	.032
2	3.32	1.13	-.38	-.64	٢٦	2.94	1.27	.097	-.96
3	3.62	1.2	-.63	-.49	٢٧	3.55	1.20	-.68	-.42
4	3.81	1.21	-.85	-.25	٢٨	3.42	1.05	-.3	-.31
5	3.59	1.14	-.55	-.43	٢٩	3.47	1.19	-.4	-.64
6	2.63	1.35	.33	-1.08	٣٠	3.82	1.13	-.93	.14
7	3.62	1.28	-.62	-.67	٣١	3.80	1.20	-.86	-.15
8	3.59	1.34	-.53	-.97	٣٢	3.38	1.17	-.43	-.57
9	3.97	1.16	-.12	.40	٣٣	3.69	1.16	-.67	-.4
10	3.57	1.22	-.64	-.48	٣٤	3.16	1.24	-.11	-.96
11	3.73	1.26	-.84	-.27	٣٥	3.65	1.23	-.63	-.54
12	3.26	1.92	7.81	125.3	٣٦	3.51	1.23	-.60	-.55
13	3.42	1.3	-.46	-.85	٣٧	3.31	1.27	-.34	-.89
14	3.57	1.25	-.06	3.21	٣٨	3.57	1.21	-.53	-.58
15	3.81	1.18	-.93	.029	٣٩	3.65	1.17	-.74	-.26
١٦	3.66	1.19	-.69	-.40	٤٠	3.63	1.15	-.73	-.17
١٧	3.36	1.21	-.54	-.54	٤١	3.71	1.30	-.79	-.46
١٨	3.69	1.33	-.72	-.59					
١٩	3.51	1.26	-.69	-.5					
٢٠	3.32	1.1	-.34	-.37					
٢١	3.48	1.33	-.47	-.93					
٢٢	3.57	1.18	.16	4.22					
٢٣	3.50	1.18	-.5	-.54					
٢٤	3.63	1.21	-.74	-.28					

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 .86. 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 questinnare i.e. $x^2 = 5208.257$ $df = 820$, $p < .001$, indicated that the correlation matrix was not an identity matrix (See Table 4.3).

Table 4.3. *KMO and Bartlett's Test*

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.	.865
Bartlett's Test of Spher: Approx. Chi-Square	5208.257
Df	820
Sig.	.000

In order to assure the construct validity of the test, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) with principal component analysis and varimax rotation was run. The assumptions of EFA were met in this study. KMO was . $\wedge \delta$ and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant. Screen plot and eigenvalues above 1 were examined to determine the number of factors. Moreover, the highest loading for each item was considered as the appropriate factor for that item. Cross-loadings and loadings less than .30 were removed. Results of the EFA can be seen in Table ν, ν . As Table ν, ν shows, the eleven factors can be regarded as the ten constructs that the test claims to measure, namely: 1) Qualified (6items), 2) Humanistic (6items), 3) Engagement (5items), 4) Facilitation (2 items), 5) Orientation (5 items), 6) NLE (2 items), 7) Grammarization (3items), 8) Personalization (2 items), 9) Lesson-wise (2 items), 10) Mediation (2 items), 11) Implicitness (2 items). All the two items factors were omitted from the questionnaire due to low validity. Therefore, six subscales were deleted and five subscales remained for further analysis (CFA).

Table 4.4. Results of EFA

F	Factors																						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	C	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1										.39		22					.49						
2										.49		23					.32						
3												24								.39			
4		.32										25								.58			
5											.33	26						.45					
6											.53	27						.57					
7		.41										28						.42					
8		.44										29									.35		
9		.56	.34									30				.43							
10		.51										31	.44			.43							
11		.55										32	.45										
12						.38						33	.44										
13						.38						34									.51		
114		.56										35											
115		.72										36	.37										
116		.32	.36									37					.60						
117		.38										38					.62						
118		.30										39	.38								.32		
119				.55								40	.58										
120				.61								41	.54										
121					.44																		

Following EFA, confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was run to see whether the factor solution obtained in EFA can be confirmed. For this purpose, CFA was run to assess the fit of the model. Based on the CFA analysis, the association between each sub-factor of the proposed model was analyzed. Figure 4.1 shows the CFA model of the ELAS questionnaire.

Results of Research Question Two: Reliability of the Questionnaires

Table 4.6 summarizes the information obtained from Cronbach alpha analyses. As can be seen, the utilized questionnaires gained acceptable indexes of Cronbach alpha as a whole as well as in their subscales.

Table 4.4. *Results of Cronbach Alpha Indexes After Validation*

Scale	Subscales	Number of items	Cronbach alpha
ELAS Scale	Qualified	6	.73
	Humanistic	6	.70
	Engagement	5	.75
	Orientation	5	.63
	Grammarization	3	.65
	Total ELAS	25	.84

The Cronbach alpha for Total ELAS with 25 items is (.84) suggest that the items have relatively good internal consistency.

Descriptive Statistics.

Table 4.5 presents descriptive statistics of sub-constructs of ELAS Scale (Qualified, Humanistic, Engagement, Orientation, and Grammarization) including the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores. The comparison of these scores appears in the following pages. Because the number of items was different in the various subscales of the ELAS questionnaire, an average item score was computed for each sub-construct, ranging from 1 to 5.

Table 4.5. *Descriptive Statistics of sub-constructs of ELAS Scale*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Mean per item	Std. Deviation
Qualified	126	9.00	30.00	19.78	3.29	3.11
Humanistic	126	8.00	30.00	18.45	3.07	2.89
Engagement	126	6.00	25.00	14.69	2.93	1.58
Orientation	126	5.00	24.00	13.15	2.63	1.98
Grammarization	126	3.00	15.00	8.99	2.99	1.01
Total	126	31.00	124.00	73.55	2.94	4.87

The possible range of score for Qualified and Humanistic factors with 6 items is between 6 and 30, for the Engagement and Orientation factors with 5 items is between 5 and 25, for the Grammarization factor with 3 items is between 3 and 15, and for total ELAS scale with 25 items is between 25 and 125. As it can be seen in table 4.5 Qualified has the highest mean score (3.29) and Orientation has the lowest mean score (Orientation). In addition, the table shows that number of teacher

participant was 126. Table 4.6 presents descriptive statistics of sub-constructs of ELTAS.

Table 4.7 *Descriptive Statistics of achievement score*

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
achievement score	126	5.00	90.00	54.67	24.01

The possible range of score for achievement score with 90 questions is between 0 and 90. As it can be seen in table 4.7, the minimum score is 5.00 and the maximum score is 90.00. The mean score of achievement score 54.67 with standard deviation of 24.01.

Results of Research Question Two

Q3. *How do the LVs underlying the ELAS correlate with each other?*

Table 4.8 indicates the results of correlation between Sub-constructs of ELAS.

Table 4.8. *Results of Correlation between Sub-constructs of ELAS*

	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Qualified	1.00					
2. Humanistic	.402**	1.00				
3. Engagement	.438**	.560**	1.00			
4. Orientation	.441**	.278**	.331**	1.00		
5. rammarization	.316**	.152**	.222**	.189**	1.00	
6. ELAS	.781**	.729**	.761**	.669**	.453**	1.00

**Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

As it can be seen in Table 4.8, among five sub-factors of ELAS, qualified has the highest positive and significant correlation ($r=.781$, $p<.01$) and Grammarization has the lowest correlation positive and significant correlation ($r=.453$, $p<.01$) with Total ELAS.

4.5 Results of Research Question Three

Q4. *Do the ELAS and its factors show significant relationships with English achievement?*

Table 4.9 indicates the results of correlation between Sub-constructs of ELAS.

Table 4.9. Results of Correlation between ELAS and English achievement

	Qualified	Humanistic	Engagement	Orientation	Grammarization	ELAS
English Achievement	.821*	.315**	.467**	.321**	.107*	.490**

**Correlation is significant at the level of 0.01

*Correlation is significant at the level of 0.05

As it can be seen in Table 4.9, among five sub-factors of ELAS, qualified has the highest positive and significant correlation ($r=.821$, $p<.01$) and Grammarization has the lowest correlation positive and significant correlation ($r=.107$, $p<.05$) with English Achievement.

Discussion

The first two hypothesis stated ELAS is reliable and valid enough to measure the acquisition of English language in EFL classrooms. The administration of the ELAS to a representative sample of G4SHS students asserted that five LVs explain the determinative factors effective in student's English acquisition, i.e., Qualified, Engagement, Humanistic, Orientation, and Grammarization. The use of Cronbach alpha and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) followed by goodness of fit indices indicated that ELAS and its LVs enjoyed not only acceptable levels of reliability but also factorial and empirical validities. The inclusion of a large and homogeneous sample in this study has caused high reliability coefficient (.75) of English language Acquisition Scale (ELAS) questionnaire. Among ELAS subscales engagement has highest internal consistency.

The third hypothesis states that there is no correlation between LVs underlying the ELAS. The results of table 4.8 states that there is a significant relationship among factors underlying ELAS at the level of 0.01. Among the LVs, engagement reveals the highest relationship with Humanistic as a trait indicating that in EFL setting students' engagement depends greatly on humanistic factors, i.e., anxiety, motivation, desire to learn EFL, etc. Also severity and weakness of the humanistic factors on language learning in EFL setting depend greatly on teachers' ability to engage their students in the process of language learning. Moreover

there is a noticeable reciprocal relationship between students' orientation toward native speakers, their country and qualified factor. In other words positive orientation causes EFL learners to follow their class eagerly, increases the sense of need to learn a foreign language, encourages them to participate in class and answers questions voluntarily. A self-oriented student devotes enough time to scrutinize the language that he produces. As a result he learns English better. Also a learner who likes to learn a language, finds out the necessity of learning a foreign language, is active in the classroom and takes the time to monitor the language to learn in better has a high level of orientation toward the native speakers of that language and their culture.

The fourth hypothesis states that there is no significant relationship between ELAS and English achievement. The results of table 4.9 states that English achievement in EFL settings depends greatly on ELAS and its LVs. For example qualified factor had the highest positive and significant correlation ($r=.821, p<.01$). In other word desire and need to learn a foreign language, participation in classroom activity e.g. answering the question voluntary, correction of students' errors, devotion of enough time to produce language and simultaneous production and supervision of language had great and positive correlation with students' achievement. Also G4SHS students' EFL achievement correlated significantly with ELAS i.e. $r=0.490, p<.01$. Among LVs grammatization had significant but lowest correlation with students' achievement. This idea was confirmed by Darmono (2013). He found that there is a very weak correlation between grammar achievement and reading comprehension achievement at the first semester of English department of Islamic University of Malang. He used documentation- scores of both grammar achievement and reading comprehension to find out the coefficient of correlation between two variables. He found that the coefficient correlation obtained from the computation was significant ($r= 0.038, p<.05$) but the level of correlation coefficient (r-observed) was 0,154. when the researcher compared it with the critical value (r-critical) at the table with $N=33$ at

0,05 level of significant it is found that the value of r-observed was lower than r-critical.

Conclusion

English Language learning and teaching as a foreign language are complex processes suffering from enormous restrictions. Students in EFL setting has no access to native speakers and their leaning is restricted to classroom. Although technology, computer and specially internet developed the process of interaction all over the world and computers have provided wonderful academic situations through papering useful softwares for students to learn a foreign language they cannot prepare a real situation similar to the context students experience in ESL settings. Besides these facilities are not available for everyone.

In these conditions helping students to acquire a foreign language is a hard task. Many perquisites should be ready to facilitate the process of language acquisition . According to the results of this study students' engagement in the process of language acquisition, attention to emotional factors such as anxiety, stress , desire , etc , development of quality in teaching process and grammar are the key factors necessary for language acquisition in EFL settings.

The results of this study asserted that factors underlying ELAS is able to predict G4SHS students' achievement. The main purpose of English education in pre- university course is to develop students' reading comprehension skill. Obviously teachers having up to date knowledge of course content, avoid discrimination and treats all fairly, specify methods of evaluation clearly, maintain a welcoming environment for all students, helps learners in and out of the class and involve all students in learning and teaching processes are able to create circumstances in which their students are motivated enough to achieve the language. They engage in the process of language achievement and have positive orientation toward language achievement.

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