

EXTRA-CURRICULAR EXPOSURES AS FACTORS INFLUENCING THE DEVELOP- MENT OF PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

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التعرض لأنشطة لا منهجية كعناصر مؤثرة في درجة الإتقان في اللغة الإنجليزية

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الملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى بحث العلاقة بين مستوى الإتقان في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية لمجموعة مؤلفة من ١٠٠ من الطلبة المتخصصين في اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة البحرين وبين تعرضهم للأنشطة اللامنهجية خارج مجال بيئة التعليم الرسمية في الصف، تبين النتائج عدم وجود علاقة واضحة بين كلا المتغيرين. وقد قام الباحث بعرض الدراسات السابقة وتحليل وتفسير النتائج الإحصائية. كما أشار إلى استنتاجاته وربطها بنتائج المضامين التعليمية والمضامين النظرية لفرضية كراشن حول فهم المعلومات اللغوية.

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ABSTRACT

The study reported here aims to investigate the relation between the level of proficiency in English as a second language attained by a sample of 100 Bahraini university students and exposures to the language: extra-curricular exposures outside the formal environment of the classroom. The results demonstrate no significant association between extra exposure and proficiency for the sample. In this report, I first discuss the results and then present an analysis and interpretation of the statistical findings. I conclude by considering the pedagogic implications of the findings for the studied group and the theoretical implications for Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.

Introduction

It has long been a widely held view that learners' level of proficiency in a foreign language is directly influenced by the amount of outside exposure they have to the target language in its natural settings. This view sustains the long-established practice of universities in Britain and elsewhere of sending their modern language students abroad for a certain period of time to a country where the target language is spoken. The view is also supported by a number of empirical studies in both foreign and second language situations that set out to determine the influence on learning outcomes of informal contact with the target language (cf Carroll 1967; Upshur 1968; Hale & Budar 1970; Mason 1971; Gardner & Lambert 1972; Burstall 1974; Fathman 1975; Obanya 1976; Dittmar & Klein 1977; D'Anglejan 1978; Johnson & Krug 1980; St Martin 1980; Housen & Beardsmore 1983; Gradman & Hanania 1991). However, other researchers have found that the amount of exposure learners have to the target language outside the classroom is less significant than the amount of formal instruction they receive (cf Krashen, Seliger & Hartnett 1974; Krashen & Seliger 1976; Briere 1978; Chihara & Oller 1978; Krashen, Zelinski, Jones & Usprich 1978; Oller, Perkins & Murakami 1980; and Spolsky 1989). The conclusion Krashen (1981, 1982) draws from a review of the research literature is that insufficient exposure to the target language, or the wrong kind of exposure may fail to trigger off the language acquisition device. Only if the learner experiences sufficient meaningful interaction in the target language can he "pick up" the language without the benefit of formal instruction. The idea that not all forms of contact with the second language are equally beneficial is intuitively appealing but has so far lacked compelling empirical support from comparison studies. There has been a certain amount of discussion on the effect of subject-matter learning in the target language, especially in connection with immersion programmes (cf. Saegert, et al, 1974; Stern, et al, 1976; Cummins 1979, 1981, 1983; Bye 1983; Wigzell 1983; Wesche 1984; Edwards, et al, 1984; Yu & Atkinson 1988).

Certainly, the classroom is far from being the only source of comprehensible input for learners of English. There is a very large English-speaking expatriate community on the island (approximately 25 percent of the total population) with which most middle-class Bahrainis come into regular contact in their everyday lives both at home and in their place of work. Much of the instruction in tertiary institutions is through the medium of English and a good working knowledge of English is considered a prerequisite for many of the most sought-after jobs, espe-

cially in the private sector.

Despite the increased number of English-speaking expatriates in all strata of society and in most work environments, however, there is very little social interaction between the two communities. Schumann (1978) maintains that 'acculturation' is the major causal variable in second language acquisition, and if this is so, one would expect Bahraini learners of English to be severely handicapped in their efforts to acquire an adequate working knowledge of English. Applying Schumann's measures of 'social distance', one would judge impressionistically that most Bahraini learners of English are socially very distant indeed from the target language community. Neither group is socially dominant (positive), but the learner group does not attempt to assimilate or acculturate with the target language group (negative); it does not, by and large, share the same 'enclosures' (negative); it is relatively large and cohesive (negative); the cultures are highly incongruent (negative); the attitudes of the two groups towards each other are on the whole tolerant (neutral); and the length of residence in a target language area is minimal (negative).

Yet most middle-class Bahrainis do acquire an adequate level of communicative proficiency in the language and many achieve a high level of academic or professional proficiency. Although there is very little social interaction, plentiful opportunities for developing listening and reading skills in the language are available through abundant aids outside formal learning environments, for instance, in the form of English radio and TV channels, local English language newspapers, advertisements and road signs in English. Many middle class Bahrainis have occasion to speak the language regularly with house servants, nannies, shop assistants and tradesmen, as well as with colleagues and others at work. It is a reasonable assumption that learners' engagement in various extra-curricular listening, speaking and reading activities will compensate, at least to some extent, for their lack of natural social interaction with the target language community. The more informal contact learners have with the language outside the English classroom in whatever form, the higher will be their level of proficiency. This assumption derives some support from Al-Ansari's study (1985 and 2000) on the influence of environmental factors on the level of attainment of EFL learners in Bahrain, which showed a correlation coefficient of .4 ($p < .01$) between functional use of the language outside the classroom and the level of attainment in English of third-year secondary school pupils.

Rationale

Over the past few years, however, the impression has been growing among the English-teaching faculty at the University of Bahrain that as students advance with their English studies and are required to use the language increasingly for academic purposes, extra-curricular exposure to the language becomes increasingly less relevant. The consensus view is that at some point other factors, which for convenience of exposition at this point might be referred to collectively as 'general academic ability', begin to enter and assume a dominant role. The importance of this general ability factor is quite clear by the time students approach graduation level: students who have high general academic ability as evidenced by their cumulative grade point average (cgpa), which measures their level of success across a wide spectrum of academic subjects within the liberal arts programme followed at the University of Bahrain, perform significantly better on the TOEFL than students with relatively low general ability. A highly significant correlation coefficient of .66 ($p < .001$) was found to obtain between the cgpa and the TOEFL scores obtained by 54 graduating English majors over a period of four semesters. Since the factors that influence acquisition bear directly upon the choice of teaching strategies and the allocation of instructional resources, it is obviously of considerable pedagogic relevance to know at what level, if any, the significance of extra-curricular contact with the language as a factor influencing acquisition begins to decline and with which type of students. It was decided to investigate the relation between the variables and the level of proficiency attained at the graduation level, which in the Bahrain context means after students have completed nine years of English instruction in the schools and three to four years of a BA programme at the University.

The purpose of the present study was to determine the relationship of success of Bahraini students in a BA degree at the University of Bahrain as measured by GPA, with their scores obtained on the proficiency test, together with their scores on the cloze test. The second purpose of the study was to determine whether the students' total score on the extra-curricular exposure scale or their overall score on the proficiency test tended to be a better predictor of their success at the university as measured by GPA. It would clearly be of considerable pedagogic relevance to know at what level, if any, the significance of exposure variables as factors influencing learning starts to decline and with which type of students.

Research methods

Subjects: A total number of 100 English majors approaching their graduation at the University of Bahrain volunteered to take part in the study by filling out a questionnaire. These represent more than 80% of the entire graduate student population in the programme. In addition to the students being drawn from the same specialisation, they were very homogeneous in respect of age, nationality, mother tongue and both cultural and educational background. The selection of these subjects contrasts with the samples used in many other studies. Much of earlier reported research has been conducted with linguistically and culturally heterogeneous groups of language learners. These may have been open to a wider range of background influences than the sample used in the present study.

Contact measures

A self-report questionnaire was developed for the purpose of measuring the amount of extra-curricular contact that students have with the language. The questionnaire was designed to measure learners' volume of extra-curricular contact. The researcher was conscious of the need to keep the questionnaire fairly short and simple, having learned from experience that junior students tend not to respond or to respond carelessly and inconsistently to long, complex questionnaires. The questionnaire was administered to small groups of students at a time with the researcher present to clarify questions and elicit, where necessary, appropriate responses.

In designing the questionnaire, it was necessary to make certain judgements concerning the kind of extra-curricular contact that Bahraini students might realistically be expected to have with the language and which they could readily quantify. It was decided to ignore writing completely, mainly because very few students at this level are engaged in any kind of extra-curricular writing activity in English. As far as the included items are concerned, their purpose was to measure only the amount of exposure to the target language, not the quality of the exposure. It has been suggested that in designing a questionnaire intended to measure linguistic input from informal environments, certain kinds of activity might be weighted more than others (cf Krashen, 1982). For instance, two hours of intensive verbal interaction might be counted as being worth much more than two hours spent watching a video or TV programme. It seems doubtful, however, that respondents themselves can be trusted to make reliable judgements on the value of different kinds of exposure they may have to the target language

(see in this connection Oller & Perkins 1978 and; Giota, 1995). As for the researcher assigning different numerical values to different kinds of contact in the scoring of the questionnaire items (cf Spada, 1986), this would seem to be a highly questionable methodological procedure. Judgements regarding the relative value of different kinds of exposure should be made on the basis of research findings and not made aprioristically and built into the research instruments, thereby possibly prejudicing the outcomes.

As far as the questionnaire is concerned, a set of questions, each with three alternative responses, was formulated to measure the frequency/duration of each of the following modes of contact:

Extra-curricular listening activities such as watching English videos, films and TV shows and listening to English programmes on the radio.

Out-of-class speaking activities with various categories of competent English speakers (parents, teachers, fellow-students and others, both on and off campus)

Reading activities involving different kinds of reading materials in English (eg newspapers and magazines, stories, non-fictional material other than course-related material)

Social interaction with the target language community within Bahrain (at home, in clubs, recreation centres and other venues)

Visits abroad to an English-speaking country

Each set of questions was equally weighted and the response to each question within each set was scored 2-1-0. The maximum score on this part of the questionnaire was 26. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in the appendix together with its significant degree of reliability coefficients.

Proficiency measures

The measures of extra-curricular contact were correlated with the scores obtained from a programme-neutral proficiency test incorporating a multiple-choice reading comprehension test, a multiple-choice grammar and usage test, a multiple-choice listening comprehension test, a free composition test double-marked by two independent examiners, and a cloze test in the standard format for reading, with the passage gapped at fifths and the answers marked in accordance with the acceptable word criterion. A cloze test was included merely as a

reliability check and the scores on the test were not included in the overall proficiency score since this might have given too much weight to reading. Correlation coefficients of .67 (reading), .60 (listening), .65 (grammar), and .63 (composition), all significant at the $p < .01$ level, were obtained between the results of the cloze test and the results of the proficiency test. The four components of the proficiency test were all equally weighted.

It needs to be made clear that the proficiency test was not designed as a test of functional or communicative competence. In particular, it did not incorporate a test of oral fluency. Although it did not contain any material relating directly to the students' academic programme, it may nonetheless be said to have tested the 'cognitive/academic' or 'linguistic' component of language proficiency rather than the 'communicative' or 'pragmatic' component (see in this connection Cummins 1979, 1980; Carroll, 1983). Since the ultimate purpose was to determine the influence of informal exposure to English on the students' ability to use the language for academic purposes, this bias was considered entirely appropriate. The mean score and standard deviations for the group are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Students' mean scores on the proficiency and cloze tests

| Proficiency measures | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Standard deviation |
|----------------------|---------|---------|-------|--------------------|
| Cloze | 10 | 20 | 15.20 | 2.49 |
| Proficiency | 52 | 97 | 76.53 | 9.78 |

The mean scores obtained in the table clearly indicate that the subjects selected for the study achieved a reasonable degree of English proficiency. Such results were predictable since these students were at their final year at the University. Joint distribution analyses of these results, together with their academic achievement, will be discussed in more detail at a later stage of the study.

Questionnaire scores

An analysis of the questionnaire scores for the tested extra curricular exposure variables of all the respondents is shown in table 2. The mean scores obtained for all the variables clearly indicate that the sample selected for the study did have a high degree of exposure to English. The mean scores are high in all cases. In fact, a mean score of 16.66, out of a possible 26, reflects the high

degree of extra curricular exposure the students experienced while attempting to acquire the language. The standard deviations are all less than 1.00 which further support the mean scores obtained. Had the standard deviations been closer to the mean scores, the validity of the items tested would have been called into question.

Table 2: Mean scores and standard deviations for the variables tested

| Extra-curricular exposure variables | min | max. | mean | s. d. |
|---|-------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| 1. I meet with people who speak English. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.17 | .57 |
| 2. I speak English with my parents. | .00 | 2.00 | .38 | .56 |
| 3. I speak English with my classmates. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.12 | .59 |
| 4. I speak English with my teacher during the class. | 1.00 | 2.00 | 1.9 | .27 |
| 5. I speak English with my teacher after class. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.54 | .57 |
| 6. I watch English language movies on the video. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.69 | .54 |
| 7. I listen to English language music on records or cassettes | .00 | 2.00 | 1.34 | .70 |
| 8. I read English language books and stories. | 1.00 | 2.00 | 1.80 | .39 |
| 9. I read English language magazines. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.38 | .60 |
| 10. I read the daily/weekly English language newspapers. | .00 | 2.00 | .108 | .62 |
| 11. I watch English language programmes and films on TV. | 1.00 | 2.00 | .189 | .30 |
| 12. I listen to English language programmes on the radio. | .00 | 2.00 | 1.51 | .71 |
| 13. Have you ever visited any foreign country such as the United Kingdom or the USA for the purpose of learning English language or for any other purpose? If your answer is YES, state when you visited the country and how long you stayed. | .00 | 2.00 | .45 | .84 |
| Extra curricular exposure (total) | 1.00 | 26.00 | 16.66 | 3.78 |

The correlation matrix obtained in Table 3 is high in most cases. In other words, exposures associated with learning the language tend to correlate highly significantly with each other. The fact is that their total extra curricular exposure is found to be highly correlating with all the variables tested. This further supports the reliability of the exposure scale used.

Table 3: Pearson correlation matrix for the extra-curricular variables

| variables | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 |
|-----------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|----|
| 1 | — | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | .29 | — | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 3 | .02 | .40 | — | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 4 | .09 | .20 | .18 | — | | | | | | | | | | |
| 5 | .05 | .23 | .19 | .41 | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 6 | -.00 | .11 | .07 | .03 | -.11 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 7 | .19 | .34 | .08 | .09 | -.07 | .43 | — | | | | | | | |
| 8 | .05 | .05 | .05 | -.14 | -.2 | .05 | .09 | — | | | | | | |
| 9 | .08 | .17 | .19 | -.05 | -.18 | .29 | .52 | .27 | — | | | | | |
| 10 | .19 | .23 | .17 | -.02 | .04 | -.04 | .05 | .31 | .19 | — | | | | |
| 11 | -.08 | .04 | .00 | .14 | -.15 | .30 | .06 | .08 | .04 | -.06 | — | | | |
| 12 | .17 | .34 | .21 | .06 | -.05 | .17 | .52 | .10 | .34 | .18 | .07 | — | | |
| 13 | .14 | .16 | -.10 | .07 | -.08 | .25 | .26 | .07 | .14 | -.07 | .17 | .19 | — | |
| Total | .32 | .58 | .35 | .25 | .20 | .45 | .67 | .32 | .56 | .38 | .20 | .63 | .45 | |

In this table correlations of $\pm .20$ or higher are significant at $p < .05$; correlations of $\pm .26$ or higher are significant at $p < .01$; and correlations of $\pm .34$ or higher are significant at $p < .001$. (The significant results are in bold type)

Factor analysis results

A principal factor analysis was made of all the thirteen variables. An orthogonal (varimax) rotation was employed, and a criterion value of 0.40 was used to examine the factor pattern to describe which factors were more influential than others. Using a minimum-eigenvalue criterion of 1.0, five factors were extracted. Varimax rotation produced a relatively simple factor structure with the five factors loading heavily on different variables, and explaining 48.4% of the total variance (Table 4).

Factor 1 obtained appreciable loadings (i.e., loadings of 0.40 and more) from five variables (2, 6, 7, 9 and 12). All of them are concerned with the learner's manipulative skills in learning the language. Therefore this factor can be unambiguously labelled as overall language skills.

Table 4: Rotated Factor Matrix for the Variables

| | Factors | | | | |
|-------------|---------|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Variable 1 | — | — | — | — | .69 |
| Variable 2 | .46 | .54 | — | — | — |
| Variable 3 | — | .49 | — | — | — |
| Variable 4 | — | .74 | — | — | — |
| Variable 5 | — | .76 | — | — | — |
| Variable 6 | .54 | — | — | .52 | — |
| Variable 7 | .83 | — | — | — | — |
| Variable 8 | — | — | .81 | — | — |
| Variable 9 | .72 | — | — | — | — |
| Variable 10 | — | — | .77 | — | — |
| Variable 11 | — | — | — | .87 | — |
| Variable 12 | .70 | — | — | — | — |
| Variable 13 | — | — | — | .41 | .69 |

Factor 2 loads heavily on three variables (2,3,4.5), all of which reflect speaking reasons for learning English as foreign language. This factor can be referred to as developing speaking skills. Factor 3 is predominated by two variables (8 and 10), which are concerned with the amount of effort and time a student expends reading in the target language. This factor is labelled as developing reading skills. Factor 4 has appreciable loadings on three variables (6, 11 and 13). It will be termed language cultural exposure. Factor 5 has loadings on two variables (1 and 13) which can be unmistakably labelled as meeting native speakers of English.

Analyses

A general linear multivariate regression was made using the SPSS for all the extra-curricular exposure variables, together with their proficiency measures. These analyses were supplemented by a stepwise regression to explore the contribution of certain sub-scores to the multivariate model. The general linear multivariate regression was also applied for the students' composite grade point average (GPA) and for their GPA in the English courses (ENGPA). The general linear model differs from a stepwise regression in its considerations of the contributions of all the test scores simultaneously. In effect, the final product of

a stepwise regression in which all of the independent variables were entered into the model is equivalent to the linear regression.

Based on the multivariate regression equations, predicted grade point averages (GPAs) were computed. For students who achieved each rounded predicted GPAs, the mean observed GPA was computed and these were plotted against the predicted GPAs. These plots were examined to determine if they fitted the predicted GPAs and that they were equally accurate throughout the range of observed GPAs, which is in relation to the level of the students' academic success in the language.

1 Bivariate (zero order) correlations

It is clear in Table 5 that none of the extra curricular exposure variables or any of the factors derived from the factor analytic method studied here correlate with any of the scores relating to students' academic attainment in English. Their GPA and ENGPA are found to correlate highly with their performance on the cloze test and their proficiency attainment only.

Table 5: Bivariate correlation coefficients among extra curricular exposure variables, cloze, proficiency, GPA and GPA in English courses (ENGPA)

| Variable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|------|------------|------------|------------|----|
| 1) Factor 1 | — | | | | | | | | | |
| 2) Factor 2 | .31 | — | | | | | | | | |
| 3) Factor 3 | .21 | .13 | — | | | | | | | |
| 4) Factor 4 | .49 | .01 | -.01 | — | | | | | | |
| 5) Factor 5 | .32 | .08 | .07 | .69 | — | | | | | |
| 6) Extra curri. exposure | .87 | .52 | .43 | .56 | .51 | — | | | | |
| 7) Cloze | -.00 | .20 | .05 | .04 | -.02 | .12 | — | | | |
| 8) Proficiency | -.02 | .03 | .02 | -.08 | -.19 | -.04 | .39 | — | | |
| 9) GPA | -.02 | .04 | -.10 | -.06 | -.09 | .11 | .47 | .62 | — | |
| 10) ENGPA | -.02 | .08 | -.03 | .02 | -.09 | .09 | .49 | .69 | .68 | — |

In this table correlations of $\pm .21$ or higher are significant at $p < .05$; correlations of $\pm .31$ or higher are significant at $p < .01$; and correlations of $\pm .39$ or higher are significant at $p < .001$. (The significant results are in bold type)

It can be seen from the above table that the factors pertaining to the extra curricular exposures to the language tended to correlate highly significantly with each other. However, no significant correlation was observed between any of these factors and students' academic success in the language. This was found to correlate highly significantly with their proficiency attainment. To confirm further these results, stepwise regression analyses were conducted and the results are discussed below.

2 Multivariate correlations

Tables 6 and 7 show the results of the stepwise regression predicting students' grade point average GPA, and GPA in English courses, respectively, using the components scores of variables and academic proficiency as independent variables. Note that none of the extra curricular exposure variables contribute enough to the prediction of students' GPA to be maintained in the linear model. The same appears to be true with regard to the students' GPA in English courses.

Table 6: Stepwise regression of all the tested scores onto overall GPA

| Dependent Variable | Entry Order | Independent Variables | Partial r-square |
|--------------------|-------------|---|------------------|
| Overall GPA | 1 | All extra curricular exposure variables | — |
| | 2 | Proficiency Cloze | .44 .06 |
| Total r-square | | | .50 |

Table 7: Stepwise regression of all the tested scores onto overall GPA in English

| Dependent Variable | Entry Order | Independent Variables | Partial r-square |
|--------------------|-------------|---|------------------|
| Overall GPA | 1 | All extra curricular exposure variables | — |
| | 2 | Proficiency Cloze | .53 .04 |
| Total r-square | | | .57 |

3 Joint distribution

Table 8 below gives the joint distribution for the students' academic success at the University. It is difficult to interpret the data since there is no exact agreement among the tests of the construct under measure. However, some interesting patterns have emerged. Students whose academic success at the University was high tends to share an almost equal number to those with less proficiency

attainment in English tests. These low low level students tend to represent only a small proportion of the bulk of the students used in the study. This has been predictable since the subjects here are approaching their final year at the University and are bound to be attaining an acceptable standard in the degree programme in order to graduate successfully. Thus not less than 80% of the subjects can be identified as moderate or high achievers. Only 20% can be labeled as low achievers.

Table 8: Joint frequencies of both the proficiency and academic measures

| Proficiency total | Cloze total | GPA | ENGPA |
|--|---|---|---|
| Less than 70 <i>N</i> (15) % 20.8 | 10 -12 <i>N</i> (14) % 17.9 | 1.19 - 1.93 <i>N</i> (6) % 7.8 | .00 - 1.33 <i>N</i> (13) % 17.1 |
| 70 – 75 <i>N</i> (12) % 17 | 13 –14 <i>N</i> (17) % 21.8 | 2.05 – 2.30 <i>N</i> (16) % 20.8 | 2.00 - 2.32 <i>N</i> (29) % 48.7 |
| 76 - 79.5 <i>N</i> (19) % 24.8 | 15 – 16 <i>N</i> (22) % 28.2 | 2.31 - 2.66 <i>N</i> (22) % 28.6 | 2.33 - 2.67 <i>N</i> (13) % 15.8 |
| 80 - 83.70 <i>N</i> (12) % 15.6 | 17 – 18 <i>N</i> (17) % 21.8 | 2.67 - 2.99 <i>N</i> (7) % 9 | 3.00 - 3.33 <i>N</i> (15) % 14.4 |
| 85 – 97 <i>N</i> (17) % 22.2 | 19 – 20 <i>N</i> (8) % 10.2 | 3.00 – 4.00 <i>N</i> (26) % 33.8 | 3.67 - 4.00 <i>N</i> (6) % 3.9 |

Discussion

Results of this study show that the students' composite GPA and their GPA in English courses are highly correlated only with their scores on the cloze and proficiency tests. This means that their academic success at the University is highly influenced by their proficiency attainment and not by their extra-curricular exposures to the language outside the classroom environment. This is found to be true for students approaching their final year at the University. At this stage, they reach a proficiency stage at which they can be easily identified as being bilinguals in terms of being capable of learning English as a medium of instruction. In other words, it is the adoption of cognitive strategies in learning

the language that accounts for their success in the subject matter. Their extra-curricular exposure variables have not been found to be influential here. These may act as a driving force by which their cognitive skills can be triggered off. Although the subjects as a group show a high degree of exposure to the language, this great degree of exposure apparently does not account for their high attainment. The conclusion that might be drawn is extra-curricular exposure to the language exerts a significant influence on the level of attainment only with learners up to about the intermediate level and that thereafter its importance diminishes, particularly when English is being studied primarily for academic purposes. It appears that at upper levels of language learning, students' success in language learning is determined by their lexical and syntactic knowledge in comprehending the language together with their ability to understand and produce correct grammatical sentences.

In attempting to interpret the present findings, it needs to be borne in mind that beyond a certain level, progressively higher amounts of exposure outlooks are needed to achieve progressively smaller amounts of improvement in proficiency. If this is so, then the present findings with regard to the subjects studied here may be partly explained by the fact that the amount of exposure, whatever type, is not sufficient to account for the difference in attainment on the kind of test that was administered.

Implications

The findings with regard to extra-curricular contact have different implications for different categories of learners. As far as moderate achievers are concerned, the implications are clear: in order to improve proficiency level, they need to be more engaged in various extra-curricular activities in the target language, especially listening and speaking activities. It may therefore prove necessary to incorporate compulsory extra-curricular activities systematically into the instructional programme. How this can be done without loss of effectiveness, however, is a question that practitioners have hardly begun to address (but see Tumanov 1983 and Oxford & Shearin 1995). Practising language teachers rarely expend anything like the same amount of time or effort in arranging and promoting extra-curricular activities as they spend in formal lesson preparation. To the extent that it takes place at all, extra-curricular contact with the target language is usually to a large extent unguided, unassisted and unmonitored.

Methodological debate in the field of foreign and second language teaching needs to focus much more on ways of promoting and managing extra-curricular activities and correspondingly less on instructional techniques and classroom management (for further ideas on group dynamics for the purpose of increasing extra-curricular activities, see Dornyei, 1997 and Dornyei & Malderez, 1997).

The results obtained for the sample suggest that contact with the language outside the classroom is not a panacea that will guarantee further linguistic development at all levels of attainment. The findings are consistent with two possible inferences: either their level of proficiency is too high for them to derive any benefit from the kind of extra-curricular exposure they get to the language, which would suggest that much of the input they receive is already comprehensible, or they have the necessary cognitive and verbal characteristics to derive the kind of benefit from their exposure that would be reflected in higher scores in an academically biased proficiency test. What the evidence does not tell us, of course, is whether they would derive any benefit from more guided and more sheltered extra-curricular exposure. Experimental work in a variety of different contact situations might eventually provide some partial answers to this question.

It would obviously be unwise to make methodological prescriptions in the absence of clear indications of what the factors influencing learning at higher levels are. It is premature to conclude that at higher levels a more explicit, analytic approach should be adopted, drawing upon the considerable insights into the nature of language that have been gained during the past few decades. We draw attention at the outset to the importance of 'general academic ability', but this designation is just a convenient umbrella term covering a variety of different cognitive and verbal characteristics (cf Stern, 1983). There is no evidence, furthermore, that convincingly links any such characteristics to a specific methodology. Clearly, more empirical research is needed before the pedagogic implications of the present study for the high achievers at the university level can be properly evaluated.

In recent years, theoretical speculation on second language acquisition has tended to stress the importance of comprehensible input and acculturation. The Bahraini experience generally and the results of the present study in particular lend only partial and qualified support to the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis. As for the Acculturation Hypothesis, this simply does not apply in the Bahraini context.

Much of what has emerged from the present study lends support to Krashen's views. Central to his main thesis is the claim that certain linguistic environments and certain kinds of linguistic activity are a richer source of intake than others. However, the fact that the proficiency scores of the group of learners studied here were found not to correlate significantly with the amount of out-of-class contact they have with the language suggests that something other than comprehensible input and a low 'affective filter' (Dulay & Burt, 1977) are necessary for acquisition beyond a certain level of proficiency. Independent evidence was adduced which strongly suggests that beyond the intermediate stage the level of academic proficiency attained is strongly influenced by a general academic ability factor that determines how much input is efficiently processed and assimilated, and not merely 'comprehended'. Within this general ability factor there may well be a critical component that is traditionally thought of as 'language aptitude' or 'verbal intelligence' but which might be better conceptualised as some kind of mechanism that functions with varying degrees of efficiency. The findings of the present study are entirely compatible with the belief that the rate of acquisition is determined not only by the amount of filtered, comprehended input received but also, and perhaps more critically at higher levels, by the efficiency of the acquirer's language acquisition device.

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Appendix

| Extra curricular exposure variables | |
|---|----------------------------|
| 1. I meet with people who speak English. | (Cronbach α = .45) |
| 2. I speak English with my parents. | |
| 3. I speak English with my class mates. | (Cronbach α = .24) |
| 4. I speak English with my teacher during the class. | |
| 4. I speak English with my teacher during the class. | (Cronbach α = .48) |
| 5. I speak English with my teacher after class. | |
| 6. I watch English language movies on the video. | (Cronbach α = .59) |
| 7. I listen to English language music on records or cassettes | |
| 8. I read English language books and stories. | (Cronbach α = .39) |
| 9. I read English language magazines. | |
| 9. I read English language magazines. | (Cronbach α = .32) |
| 10. I read the daily/weekly English language newspapers. | |
| 11. I watch English language programmes and films on TV. | (Cronbach α = .10) |
| 12. I listen to English language programmes on the radio. | |
| 12. I listen to English language programmes on the radio. | (Cronbach α = .31) |
| 13. Have you ever visited any foreign country such as the United kingdom or the USA for the purpose of learning English language or for any other purpose? If your answer is YES, state when you visited the country And how long you stayed. | |
| | (Guttman split-half = .58) |