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Two Types of Language Exposure as Predictors of Students' Academic Success in EFL: A Case Study of Undergraduate Students at the University of Bahrain

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Abstract. The purpose of the study reported here was to investigate the relation between the level of 'academic' proficiency in English as a foreign language attained by a sample of Bahraini university students and two qualitatively different kinds of exposure to the language: extracurricular exposure outside the formal environment of the classroom and sheltered curricular exposure through English-medium instruction in subjects other than English language. The results demonstrate a significant association between both kinds of exposure and students' performance on a cloze test for the sample as a whole and more particularly for the low achievers. However, high achievers' performance on the cloze tended to be slightly influenced only by their unsheltered exposure to the language. It is interesting to note here that none of the two kinds of exposure had any significant impact on proficiency attainment of any of the three different types of respondents. As for students' academic success at the university, it was only their proficiency attainment which tended to highly correlate with their GPA. This was also found to be true for both the high and the low achievers. Neither type of language exposure had any positive influence on students' GPA except for the low achievers whose GPA is surprisingly found to be negatively influenced by their degree of unsheltered exposure to the language. In this report, I first discuss the relevant research literature and the background and rationale of the present study and then present an analysis and interpretation of the statistical findings. I conclude by considering the pedagogic implications of the findings for different categories of learners and the theoretical implications for Krashen's Comprehensible Input Hypothesis.

1. Introduction

It has long been a widely held view that the level of proficiency attained in a foreign language is directly influenced by the amount of exposure the learner has to the target language in its natural settings. This view has a lot of common sense appeal and sustains the long-established practice of universities in Britain and elsewhere of sending their modern language students abroad for a year to a country where the target

language is spoken. It is also supported by a number of empirical studies in both foreign and second language situations that set out to determine the influence of informal contact with the target language on learning outcomes. [1- 4]

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. [5- 7] The conclusion Krashen [8- 10] 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. Although there has been a certain amount of discussion on the effect of subject matter learning in the target language, especially in connection with immersion programs[11]. I am not aware of any study that sets out to compare the influence of exposure through subject matter learning with the influence of extra curricular exposure outside the formal environment of the classroom on the development of academic proficiency in the target language[12]. The primary purpose of the present study is to determine whether sheltered curricular exposure to the target language through English medium instruction in subjects other than English language is more (or less) conducive to acquisition than unsheltered extra-curricular exposure to the language. At the same time, however, it investigates the possibility that the benefit to be derived from both kinds of exposure depends upon the level of proficiency of the learner[13].

2. Background

In many respects, Bahrain approximates more to an ESL than to an EFL environment. Certainly, the classroom is far from being the only source of comprehensible input for Bahraini learners of English. There is a very large English speaking expatriate community on the island (approximately 25 percent of the total population) with whom 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, especially in the private sector.

Despite the pervasive presence 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 [14] 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', we 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 in the form of English radio and TV channels, local English language newspapers, advertisements and road signs in English, etc. Many middle class Bahrainis, furthermore, have occasion to speak the language regularly with house servants, nannies, shop assistants, tradesmen, etc., as well as with colleagues and others at work. As for the University of Bahrain, the campus provides an extremely 'acquisition-rich' environment. Instruction in all subjects other than Arabic, Islamic Studies, the Social Sciences and Education is in English and approximately 40 percent of the teaching faculty are non-Arabic speakers. Many of the support staff with whom students come into regular contact (secretaries, librarians, cleaners, cafeteria assistants, maintenance personnel, etc.) are also non-Arabic speaking expatriates and for the most part competent speakers of English. Although most of the students are Arabs, many have had some English medium schooling and like to speak English with each other on campus. With regard to instructional resources and facilities, the English Language Centre and the Department of English jointly provide four self-access learning laboratories trigger for video-, audio- and computer-assisted learning, two self-access reading laboratories, and an extensive video- and audio-cassette library. The English-teaching faculty staff - fifty-five native speaker instructors- who are available during their office hours for regular communicative contact, and a number of native speaker language assistants who run communicative workshops for small groups of students. In addition, there is an active English Society which brings students into regular contact with the language by arranging debates, public speaking competitions, guest lectures, overseas visits, and so on. It is a reasonable assumption that learners' engagement in various curricular and 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 and that 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 [15] on the influence of environmental factors on the level of attainment of EFL learners in Bahrain, which showed a correlation coefficient of .4 ($p < .001$) between functional use of the language outside the classroom and the level of attainment in English of third year secondary school pupils.

3. 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 cut in 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 program 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.

Although there is a feeling that extracurricular exposure has a diminishing effect beyond the intermediate level, however, there remains a strong impression that sheltered curricular exposure through subject matter instruction in English continues to exert a positive influence throughout the undergraduate program. This impression is reinforced by the fact that Science students, who receive most of their instruction through the medium of English, perform consistently better in English language proficiency tests than Arts students (including English majors), who generally receive much less English-medium instruction than the Science students. It is also the case, however, that Science students at the University of Bahrain are, generally speaking, academically more gifted than Arts students - a judgement which is borne out by the fact that the admission requirements for entry into the BSc. program are significantly higher than those for entry into the BA program. This fact needs to be borne in mind when evaluating the results of the present study.

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 student. It is no less important to know whether subject matter learning in English exerts a significant influence on proficiency levels, and if so, how early in the program. It was decided to start by investigating the relation between each of the two variables and the level of proficiency attained at the first-year undergraduate level, which in the Bahrain context means after students have completed nine years of English instruction in the schools and a one year preparatory program at

the University, a major component of which is an intensive English language course providing 12 hours of formal instruction per week over two semesters.

The present study, however, was not motivated solely by practical considerations. A critical issue in second language acquisition studies is whether, other things being equal, certain kinds of input in certain kinds of environments are more likely to be absorbed as 'intake' than others. Of course, in language acquisition other things are very rarely if ever equal, but by comparing the influence of two quite different kinds of input on attainment in respect of a relatively homogeneous group of ESL learners, one might hope to gain some insight into the kind of input and the kind of environment that favor acquisition and those that do not. Sheltered curricular exposure to the target language through English medium instruction would seem intuitively to be a qualitatively different and potentially much richer source of intake than other less sheltered kinds of exposure, particularly as far as the development of academic proficiency in the target language is concerned [9;16-18].

In an English medium classroom, the level of input is usually consciously controlled by the subject teacher and kept either within or only slightly above the student's level of proficiency. The input is intrinsically relevant since it forms part of the student's chosen program of study, and the student's focus is primarily on the comprehension of the message conveyed and not on the linguistic form of the input. Moreover, since classes at the University of Bahrain are generally small (rarely above 25) the students have ample opportunity both in and out of class to negotiate meaning with their instructors by trial and error manipulation of the target language structures and lexis (see Swain 1983 on the role of comprehensible output as a source of acquisition) [19]. It remains to be seen, however, whether the impression that sheltered subject-matter learning through English medium is a richer source of intake than unsheltered, raw exposure to the language outside an academic environment is borne out by the following research evidence.

4. Subjects

The sample consisted of 94 students from various degree programs taking a common first year level English language course as part of their college requirements. Generally speaking, a student's specialization at the University of Bahrain determines the amount of instruction in subjects other than English language he or she receives through the medium of English. Thus, Science majors might receive as much as 80 percent of their instruction in English, whereas, at the other extreme, Arabic or Islamic Studies majors might receive as much as 80 percent of their instruction through the medium of Arabic. Although drawn from different specializations, the group was highly homogeneous in terms of age, nationality, mother tongue, and cultural and educational background. In this respect, it contrasts with the samples used in many other second language acquisition studies. Much of the research reported in the literature has been carried out with linguistically and culturally heterogeneous groups

whose members may be assumed to have been open to a much wider range of background influences than the sample used in the present study.

5. Contact Measures

A self-report questionnaire in two parts was developed in Arabic for the purpose of measuring the amount of curricular and extracurricular contact that students have with the language. The first part of the questionnaire was designed to measure the amount of extracurricular contact and the second part the amount of curricular contact through English medium instruction in subjects other than English language. The researcher was conscious of the need to keep the questionnaire fairly short and simple, having learnt 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 first part of the questionnaire, it was necessary to make certain judgements concerning the kind of extracurricular 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 known to be engaged in any kind of extracurricular 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 [9, p. 62]. 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 program. 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 [20; 21]. As for the researcher assigning different numerical values to different kinds of contact in the scoring of the questionnaire items [22], 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 a priori and built into the research instruments, thereby possibly prejudicing the outcomes.

For the first part of the questionnaire, a set of questions, each with three alternative responses, was formulated to measure the frequency/duration of each of the following modes of contact:

1. Extracurricular listening activities (watching English videos, films and TV shows, listening to English programs on the radio, etc.).

2. Out of class speaking activities with various categories of competent English speakers (parents, teachers, fellow-students and others, both on and off campus).
3. Reading activities involving different kinds of reading materials in English (e.g., newspapers and magazines, stories, non-fictional material other than course related material).
4. Social interaction with the target language community within Bahrain (at home, in clubs, recreation centers and other enclosures)
5. 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 60, whilst on the second part it was 10, the latter representing 20 or more contact hours of English-medium instruction per week.

6. Proficiency Measures

The measures of extracurricular contact were correlated with the scores obtained from a program 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. The 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 any test of oral fluency. Although it did not contain any material relating directly to the students' academic program, it may nonetheless be said to have tested the 'cognitive/academic' or 'linguistic' component of language proficiency rather than the 'communicative' or 'pragmatic' component. 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 [23- 25].

The mean score in the proficiency test was used as the basis for dividing the students into two groups: high achievers and low achievers, those scoring above the mean being considered high achievers and those scoring below the mean being

considered low achievers. Of the 94 students tested, 41 came out as high achievers and 53 as low achievers. The mean score and standard deviations for the group as a whole and for the low and high achievers are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Proficiency scores (out of 40).

Respondents	Mean score	Standard deviation
All subjects	19.30	7.14
Low achievers	13.90	3.46
High achievers	25.36	5.98

The table shows an 11- point difference between the mean score of the high achievers and the mean score of the low achievers. A much narrower spread, of course, would have called into question the validity of the distinction between relatively high and relatively low achievers in respect of this sample.

7. Questionnaire Scores

An analysis of the results obtained from the first part of the questionnaire is shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Unsheltered extracurricular contact scores (out of 60).

Respondents	Mean score	Standard deviation
All subjects	34.53	9.45
Low achievers	32.43	10.04
High achievers	35.88	8.00

The rather low mean scores recorded here can be explained to a large extent by the fact that only 22 percent of the respondents reported having spent any time at all in an English-speaking country. Only a handful of these claimed to have spent more than one month in the country or countries concerned. Generally low scores were recorded, furthermore, on the questions relating to social interaction and reading. The results nonetheless indicate that the relatively high achievers have slightly more contact with the language outside the classroom than the relatively low achievers. There is thus *prima facie* evidence to support the conventional wisdom that the more exposure students have to the language, the higher will be their level of proficiency.

The following table shows the results obtained from the second part of the questionnaire.

Table 3. Sheltered curricular contact scores (out of 10).

Respondents	Mean score	Standard deviation
All subjects	5.03	2.49
Low achievers	4.26	2.50
High achievers	5.74	2.14

The results show that the high achievers have somewhat more sheltered curricular contact with the language than the low achievers and are therefore consistent with the results obtained from the first part of the questionnaire.

8. Analysis

A general linear multivariate regression was made using the SPSS for the overall score of all the scores of the variables tested. These analyses were supplemented by a stepwise regression to explore the contribution of certain sub scores to the multivariate model. The same general linear multivariate regression was computed. The general linear multivariate was also applied for the students' composite grade point (GPA). The general linear model differs from a stepwise regression in its considerations of the contributions of all test scores simultaneously. In effect, the final product of a stepwise regression in which all the independent variables were entered into the model is equivalent to the general linear regression.

Based on the multiregression equations predicted grade point averages (GPAs) were computed. For examinees, who achieved each rounded predicted GPAs, the mean plots were examined to determine if the fits of the predicted GPAs were equally accurate throughout the range of observed GPAs, that is, in relation to the level of the examinees' proficiency attainment.

9. Bivariate (Zero Order) Correlations

The students' proficiency scores were correlated with their extra curricular contact scores using the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient. The correlations are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Bivariate correlation coefficients between sheltered curricular and unsheltered extra curricular exposure, proficiency and GPA (all subjects).

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Cloze					
(2) Proficiency	.49**				
(3) Sheltered exposure	.22*	-.00			
(4) Unsheltered exposure	.49**	.12	.17		
(5) GPA	.11	.62**	-.02	-.23*	

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

The above result clearly indicates that the students' performance on the cloze is highly influenced by their proficiency in English. In other words, the more they are proficient in the language, the better they tended to perform on the cloze. This is obvious and the high correlation between the two scores confirms the reliability of the proficiency test used here. What is interesting here is that both kinds of language exposure are seen to be significantly correlating with the cloze result, most particularly

that of the unsheltered exposure. Students who made the efforts to manipulate the language in its various extracurricular settings tend to perform better on the cloze. This clearly shows the sociolinguistic association between what the students are exposed to on cloze tests and the type of linguistic assimilation of the language encountered outside the curriculum environment. The students' GPA tends to highly correlate with their proficiency attainment in the language. In other words, their GPA is determined by their proficiency.

Table 5. Bivariate correlation coefficients between sheltered curricular and unsheltered extra curricular exposure, proficiency and GPA (high-achievers).

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Cloze	—				
(2) Proficiency	.23	—			
(3) Sheltered exposure	.01	-.09	—		
(4) Unsheltered exposure	.32*	.17	.15	—	
(5) GPA	-.16	.47**	-.00	-.17	—

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

Table 5 gives the result for the high achievers. As for these students, there is a high significant positive correlation between the cloze score and their unsheltered extra curricular exposure. No significant correlation was found for the sheltered curricular exposure. None of the other variables is found to correlate with their GPA.

Some striking results have emerged for the low achievers. These are shown in table 6 below.

Table 6. Bivariate correlation coefficients between sheltered curricular and unsheltered extra curricular exposure, proficiency and GPA (low-achievers).

Variable	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
(1) Cloze	—				
(2) Proficiency	.21	—			
(3) Sheltered exposure	.46**	.19	—		
(4) Unsheltered exposure	.58**	-.13	.20	—	
(5) GPA	-.13	.45**	-.02	-.47**	—

* $p < .05$

** $p < .001$

It is clear from the table that the low achievers' score on the cloze test is highly significantly influenced by their degree of both sheltered curricular exposure and unsheltered extracurricular exposure to the language. In other words, the more language comprehensible input they derive from formal instruction in the classroom or exploit functional use of the language in its informal contexts, the higher is their score on the cloze test. Once again, these students' proficiency attainment is found to be also influencing their overall academic GPA. However, their GPA is highly negatively influenced by the amount of unsheltered extracurricular exposure they exhibit in

learning the language. This appears that the more unsheltered exposure they have with the language, the lower their GPA becomes. The only explanation for this result is that these students might have been exposed to the wrong kind of exposure which may have failed to trigger off their language acquisition device [8; 9]. This has totally not been the case with that of the high achievers.

10. Multivariate Correlations

Tables 7, 8 and 9 show the results of the stepwise regression predicting student's grade point average (GPA), and GPA in English courses, respectively, using the component scores of the cloze, the proficiency, sheltered curricular exposure and unsheltered extracurricular exposure as independent variables.

Table 7. Stepwise regression of variables scores onto the overall GPA (all subjects).

Dependent variable	Entry order	Independent variables	Partial r-square
Overall GPA	1	Cloze	.38
		Proficiency	
	2	Sheltered exposure	.09
		Unsheltered exposure	0.47
Total r-square			

Table 8. Stepwise regression of variables scores onto the overall GPA (high achievers).

Dependent variable	Entry order	Independent variables	Partial r-square
Overall GPA	2	Cloze	.07
	1	Proficiency	.21
		Sheltered exposure	
		Unsheltered exposure	.28
Total r-square			

Table 9. Stepwise regression of variables scores onto the overall GPA (low achievers).

Dependent variable	Entry order	Independent variables	Partial r-square
Overall GPA	2	Cloze	.15
		Proficiency	
	1	Sheltered exposure	.20
		Unsheltered exposure	
Total r-square			0.35

In all the three cases, proficiency is found to be the most influencing factor determining students' overall GPA at the university except for the low achievers whose GPA is also partly influenced by the unsheltered exposure variability. However, this influence as indicated earlier tends to exert negatively on the low achievers' GPA.

11. Interpretation of the Statistical Findings

A number of statistical interpretations can be drawn from this study. Extra-curricular exposure to the target language is found to exert a significant influence on students' performance on cloze tests particularly with the low achievers. However, its importance diminishes with the high achievers whose command of the language is above the intermediate level and which permits them to study English primarily for academic purposes.

Students' academic success at the university as demonstrated by their overall GPA was also found to be highly significantly influenced by their proficiency attainment in the language test. All the different student categories have shared a similar correlation magnitude. No significant correlation was obtained between students' overall proficiency attainment in English and either type of language exposure. Apparently either the amount of extracurricular exposure to the language or the type of its comprehensible input was not sufficient or effective enough to account for students' level of proficiency in English. Further statistical analysis for other data or study needs to be carried out to confirm this notion. Separate analysis of each component of extracurricular exposure to the language can perhaps prove to be a better research tool to come up with alternative findings.

As for the subjects studied here, their unsheltered extra curricular exposure to the language was perhaps good enough to account for their performance on a cloze proficiency test but not for an overall proficiency test that measures students' all round skills in the language. Generally speaking, the content of any language cloze test is highly associated with the type of language encountered in its extra curricular settings. This is a clear explanation for the correlation obtained between this type of proficiency test and students' unsheltered extracurricular exposure to the language. However, this was not seen true for the overall proficiency language tests which normally measure their language command in assimilating content language materials found only in their proficiency language skills textbooks. A different type of questionnaire measuring their language skills more accurately might prove to be an alternate research approach to examining the whole issue.

12. Pedagogic Implications

The results obtained in respect of curricular contact, although of some theoretical interest, have little pedagogic relevance since the amount of English-medium instruction received is not normally a matter over which either the students or the English language instructors have any control. The fact that positive correlations were obtained for the sample as a whole and for the low achievers, however, might encourage educational planners and decision makers in English medium contexts to entertain the possibility that more hours spent on English medium instruction in 'content' subjects and correspondingly fewer hours spent on formal English language

instruction might be more beneficial in the long run, both with regard to concept development in the subject area and the development of academic proficiency in English.

The findings with regard to unsheltered extracurricular contact have different implications for different categories of learners. As far as the moderate achievers are concerned, the implications are clear: in order to improve their proficiency level, they need to be more engaged in various extra curricular activities in the target language, especially listening and speaking activities. Since most students who involve themselves in outside activities in the language do so in their own time and without much immediate reward, it may be assumed that as far as averagely gifted learners are concerned inner motivation or desire to learn plays a dominant role in language acquisition, especially in the earlier stages [26].

Motivation, of course, is notoriously difficult to control, and it may therefore prove necessary to incorporate compulsory extra-curricular activities systematically into the instructional program. How this can be done without loss of effectiveness, however, is a question that practitioners have hardly begun to address [27; 28] Practicing 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 [29; 30].

The results obtained for high achievers and low achievers, however, suggest that contact with the language outside the classroom is not a panacea that will guarantee further linguistic development at all levels of attainment. With regard to the underachievers or false beginners, the findings are consistent with two possible inferences: either their level of proficiency is too low for them to derive any benefit from the kind of extracurricular exposure they get to the language, which would suggest that much of the input they receive is largely incomprehensible, or they do not 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 extracurricular exposure. Experimental work in a variety of different contact situations might eventually provide some partial answers to this question.

Regarding the high achievers, it would obviously be unwise to make any methodological prescriptions in the absence of any clear indication 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 [12; 31]. There is no evidence, furthermore, that convincingly links any such characteristics to a specific methodology.

13. Theoretical Implications

In recent years, theoretical speculation on foreign 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. This claim is borne out by the present findings, which show that unsheltered extracurricular exposure correlates more consistently with certain type of attained levels of proficiency than sheltered curricular exposure. The fact that very low achievers do not seem to derive much benefit from any form of contact, furthermore, is perfectly consistent with the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis: if the kind of language learners are exposed to is well beyond their level of comprehension, there will be no intake and therefore no linguistic development. On the other hand, however, the fact that the proficiency scores of high achievers 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' [32] 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 conceptualized 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. In the absence of any compelling empirical evidence to the contrary, this may be assumed to be genetically determined.

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نوعا التعرض للغة كمؤشرات لنجاح الطلبة أكاديميا: دراسة حالة لمجموعة من الطلبة الجامعيين في جامعة البحرين.

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ملخص البحث. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى البحث في علاقة بين مستوى الكفاءة الأكاديمية لمجموعة من الطلبة البحرينيين في الجامعة ومجموعتين ذواتا نوعيتين مختلفتين من الطلاب الذين اكتسبوا مهارات لغوية عبر التعرض لأنشطة لا منهجية خارج مجال بيئة التعليم الرسمية في الصف والتعرض المنهجي لوسائل التعليم باللغة الإنجليزية في مواد غير مواد اللغة الإنجليزية. وتبين النتائج وجود علاقة واضحة بين كلا النوعين من الممارسة وأداء الطلاب في اختبار إكمال الفراغات في نص أعد للعينة ككل وبوجه خاص للطلبة ذوي الأداء المتدني. إلا أن أداء الطلبة ذوي القدرات المرتفعة في هذا الاختبار أظهر وجود تأثير بسيط نتيجة التعرض الغير مقيد (المفتوح) للغة.

ومن الملاحظ أن كلا النوعين من التعرض للغة لم يظهر أي تأثير واضح على الأداء التحصيلي لأي من المجموعات الثلاث المختلفة. أما فيما يتعلق بالنجاح الأكاديمي للطلاب في الجامعة، فقد لوحظ أن تحصيلهم وكفاءتهم ترتبطان ارتباطا وثيقا بمعدلهم التراكمي. كما أن هذه النتيجة تنطبق على الطلبة ذوي التحصيل المتدني. كما أن نوعي التعرض للغة لم يكن لهما أي تأثير إيجابي على معدل الطلبة التراكمي إلا في حالة الطلاب ذوي التحصيل

المتدني الذي تبين أن معدلهم التراكمي قد تأثر سلباً بدرجة التعرض المفتوح للغة. وقد قام الباحث بعرض الدراسات السابقة والحاجة لمثل هذا البحث وتحليل وتفسير النتائج الإحصائية. وقد أشار الباحث إلى استنتاجاته وربطها بنتائج المضامين التعليمية لمجموعات مختلفة من المتعلمين والمضامين النظرية لفرضية كراشن حول فهم المعلومات اللغوية.