

Cognitive and Affective Characteristics of Children in EFL Classes

LES CARACTÉRISTIQUES COGNITIVES ET AFFECTIVES DES ENFANTS DANS LES CLASSES ALE

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Abstract: The role of age in second language learning has been the concern of many researchers and educators to the date since children enjoy different characteristics in comparison to adults. This qualitative study aims at investigating cognitive and affective features of successful and less successful children in EFL classes. Regarding the influential role of interaction between teachers and children, the way teachers reacted to children's cognitive and affective status has been examined too. 152 children were chosen randomly from various English institutes in Mashhad, Iran. Moreover, in order to figure out the quality of teacher talk, 43 EFL classes were observed and the voices of teachers were audio-recorded for further investigation. The findings of this study revealed that proficient students in EFL classes benefited from various cognitive and affective characteristics. In addition, the teacher discourse was richer with respect to proficient children in a way that the quality of teachers' interactions with proficient children enjoyed more positive cognitive and affective feedback. It was realized that when proficient learners lacked necessary knowledge to come up with cognitive challenges, they got positive affective feedback and positive or neutral cognitive feedback. However, with less-proficient children, teachers mostly used negative affective feedback and neutral or negative cognitive feedback. This study is fruitful for the teachers who want to improve the quality of teaching English to children and for those researchers who are interested in child second language learning.

Key words: EFL learners; Children; Cognitive characteristics; Affective features; Teacher discourse; Feedback

Résumé Le rôle de l'âge dans l'apprentissage d'une deuxième langue a été la préoccupation de nombreux chercheurs et éducateurs puisque les enfants profitent des caractéristiques différentes par rapport aux adultes. Cette étude qualitative vise à étudier les caractéristiques cognitives et affectives des enfants plus ou moins réussis dans les classes ALE. En ce qui concerne le rôle influent de l'interaction entre les enseignants et les enfants, la façon dont les enseignants ont réagi à la situation cognitive et affective des enfants a été également examinée. 152 enfants ont été choisis au hasard dans de différents instituts de l'anglais à Mashhad, en Iran. De plus, afin de comprendre la qualité de discours de l'enseignant, 43 classes ALE ont été observées et les voix des enseignants ont été enregistrées sur pour des enquêtes approfondies. Les conclusions de cette étude ont révélé que les étudiants compétents dans les classes ALE ont bénéficié de différentes caractéristiques cognitives et affectives. En outre, le discours de l'enseignant était plus riche en respect vis-à-vis des enfants compétents, alors la qualité des interactions des enseignants avec les enfants compétents ont plus de rétroaction cognitives et affectives. On a réalisé que lorsque les apprenants compétents n'avaient pas de connaissances nécessaires pour régler des problèmes cognitifs, ils pouvaient tout de même avoir des commentaires affectifs positifs et des rétroactions cognitives positives ou neutres. Cependant, avec des enfants moins compétents, les enseignants utilisaient souvent des commentaires affectifs négatifs et des rétroactions cognitives neutres ou négatives. Cette étude est fructueuse pour les enseignants qui veulent améliorer la qualité de l'enseignement de l'anglais aux enfants et pour les chercheurs qui s'intéressent à l'apprentissage des enfants d'une deuxième langue.

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INTRODUCTION

Theories of Second Language Learning

The concept of learning in general and language learning in particular carry with themselves an everlasting complexity which are tried to be decoded by so many scholastic arguments. Throughout the history of SLA, various theories of second language acquisition have been proposed. Structural linguists and behavioral psychologists were the pioneers who applied a scientific observation toward human languages (Brown, 2007). They claimed that language learning like other kinds of learning is a process of habit formation irrespective of the creativity and variability observable in language learning. In 1960s, a new perspective emerged as the result of Chomsky's generative-transformational linguistics. Chomsky (1959) rejected the S→R hypothesis and mentioned that child's environment is so poor to explain how a child learns a language. This is referred to as the *logical problem of language acquisition* (White, 2003). With the advent of cognitive psychology, the underlying structures of human behavior were emphasized in which explanatory adequacy took utmost attention (Mitchell & Myles, 2004).

In the era of post-structuralism, constructivism emerged with a new perspective about language learning. Constructivism is divided into *cognitive* and *social* versions (Kaufman, 2004). Cognitive version of constructivism, which is rooted in Piaget's work, emphasizes individuality in which learners are to process the information within the limits of their knowledge to make it their own. But in Vygotskian social constructivism the plurality of language learning is emphasized to show that each learner has potential development which is stimulated by the help of more competent peers or adults (Slavin, 2003). Thus, with proposing the concept of the zone of proximal development (ZPD), Vygotsky tried to show learners' potentiality which is ignored in Piaget's concept of constructivism.

Individual Differences and Language Learning Strategies

Individual differences are really an issue in learning a foreign language because "individuals differ so much in second language attainment success" (Segalowitz, 1997, p. 85). The complexity of the issue increases with the idea that every healthy individual masters a first language in a rather short time with considerable fluency irrespective of individual differences. These differences have been the source of many distractions in the domain of social sciences since individual differences have always been a treat for valid conclusions (Dörnyei, 2005). Learners come to language institutes with different characteristics which are likely to influence the way they think and behave in EFL classes. The earlier views of individual differences took into account just *personality* and *intelligence* as the main cause of variation among individuals (Eysenck, 1994; Snow, Corno, & Jackson, 1996). However, with the pile of research conducted on individual differences, it was revealed that there are many affective factors such as *motivation* and *anxiety* which may be the cause of success or failure in language classes.

Researchers have endorsed the relationship between success in language learning and a systematic application of a battery of strategies to move toward better mastery in learning a foreign language (Brown, 2001; Oxford, 1990). Strategies are pathways to success and proficient learners use specific strategies to acquire mastery over language learning. Teachers can use strategies and characteristics of successful language learners in order to provide learners with useful tools to come up with some difficulties they may encounter learning a foreign language. This strategies-based instruction is a way to encourage learners to help themselves. It is not unlikely to see that learners in language classes are confused and do not know how to manage their own learning. Most of the time learners are unconscious about the strategies they use. This unconscious quality of strategies makes it a necessity on the part of the teachers to explicitly teach some strategies to learners in order to bring some consciousness in using strategies. Explicitly teaching strategies is useful for those who may use strategies unconsciously as well as for those who are not familiar with successful language learning strategies. So far there have been valuable researches about strategies in EFL classes. For instance, Muñoz (2007) mentioned that children begin using strategies at the age of 6 which starts with memorization and repetition in the beginning stages and moves to elaboration for older children. However, there is little known about the cognitive and affective characteristics of children in EFL classes and the way they use some strategies to come up with cumbersome task of language learning. This study sheds light on some individual differences among children in English language institutes.

SLA and Age Factor

The differences between children and adults in learning a foreign language are manifold. One of the most important issues which has been the focus of many studies is the distinction between *nature* and *nurture*. According to nativists, children

are born with a specific device called Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which helps children acquire a language in a short time and without focusing on the learning process—as it is the case with adults. This innate property is referred to as nature. At the heart of the concept of nature, is the notion of Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) which has been a controversial topic in both first and second language acquisition. Initially, the idea of CPH is related to first language acquisition; however, recently there has been a good deal of researches to find out whether CPH is applicable to second language acquisition (e.g., White, 2003). The motive behind applicability of Universal Grammar (UG) to L2 learning is that there are some aspects of learner interlanguage which are underdetermined by the L2 input and as it was mentioned by Schwartz and Sprouse (2000), there are some aspects in the grammar of second language learners which are unlikely to be learned from the input they receive from the environment. According to White (2003), if there would be general properties in L2 learners' performance, it can be indicated that interlanguage grammars are controlled by UG constraints.

As Cameron put it (2005), children are more interested in learning a second language and they are so eager to be responsible in the class even though they may have some difficulty accomplishing learning tasks. Young children are highly egocentric (Brown, 2007) and they do not separate themselves from the world around them. It is one reason why they are better language learners. When young children make mistakes, they are not self-conscious enough to be aware of themselves and, hence, there are little inhibitions.

Most of the studies on child second language acquisition have emphasized on Critical Period Hypothesis (Ioup, 2005) in which the possibility of learning a second language after puberty is questioned and sometimes rejected. Some have directed their attention toward hemispheric lateralization (Lenneberg, 1967) and some have done research on right-hemispheric participation to support the idea that in early stages children use more right hemisphere activities (Obler, 1981). Among the pile of research on different issues considering child L2 acquisition, some investigated accent acquisition in younger L2 learners (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Nevertheless, with the vast area of cognitive and affective differences children bring to L2 classrooms, there has been little known about the cognitive and emotional characteristics of proficient and less-proficient children and the relationship between these characteristics and children's success. Moreover, this is a *pattern-seeking* study rather than a *pattern-imposing* one in that learners are investigated while they were learning the language in English language institutes. Many studies considering learners' strategies have used questionnaires to find out successful language learning strategies in which the questionnaire itself may impose some ideals to the learners. In this study learners are observed while they were learning English in institutes and the characteristics are listed while learners really manifested them in the process of learning.

1. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

This study was conducted in order to find out the affective and cognitive characteristics of proficient and less-proficient children while learning a foreign language. The findings of this study are useful for EFL teachers to use affective and cognitive features of proficient children as guidelines to motivate less successful children. Moreover, this study is useful to figure out why some children are good second language learners while some get behind others and have great difficulty encountering a foreign language. Most of the studies conducted on learners' strategies are done through the use of questionnaires which may restrict learners' choices. However, in this study this limitation is avoided by actually observing learners' characteristics and the strategies they use in EFL classes. This study also aimed at finding the quality of interactions between teachers and learners as well as investigating teachers' feedback type regarding learners' performance in the class.

2. METHOD

2.1 Participants

This qualitative study took place in ten EFL institutes in Mashhad, Iran, which were randomly selected as the place of research. From these institutes 152 (99 female and 53 male) children and 43 (31 female, 12 male) teachers were chosen to be observed. Since the researchers were not able to rearrange the classes, the design of the research is quasi-experimental. Thus, in each institute some classes were randomly chosen, but the teachers and children were not rearranged. Children were aged between eight and eleven who were attending private language institutes in spring term. The background language of the participants was Persian and they were from different social status since participants were from various institutes in different areas of the city. Moreover, managers of the institutes were interviewed to gain some information about the economical and social status of children.

2.2 Procedure

In order to categorize participants into proficient and less-proficient children, the researchers observed all of the classes and investigated the children. The main criteria to realize successful and less successful children were their grades,

response time, problem-solving ability, and the ability to learn new information. After the first acquaintance with the children, which helped the researchers to get some information about proficiency level of learners, they were observed through one term (about fifty nine days) to find out their cognitive and affective characteristics. The observations were done by the researchers themselves. Teachers were audio-recorded for further examination. During data gathering phase, the way teachers related to children with different proficiency levels were also investigated.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Through a couple of sessions, researchers became familiarized with learners and their proficiency level. The first purpose of this study was to find learners' characteristics in order to categorize their cognitive and affective features and the second purpose of this study was to find out the quality of interactions between teachers and successful and less successful learners. The criteria to consider children as being proficient were their grades and their language proficiency in the class. It took a couple of sessions for the researchers to get some information about the children as well as the teachers. During the observations, the way teachers reacted to children and their discourse were carefully analyzed and audio-recorded for further investigation. Moreover, children's specific characteristics regarding their cognitive and affective features were outlined and were categorized. The following are common themes specified in two groups of children.

3.1 Affective Aspects

Many researchers have advocated the links between affective variables and achievement in L2 (Gardner, Tremblay, & Masgoret, 1997). The following are some affective factors which were obtained from observations of the classes. The main factors contributing to affective domain are: *Encouraging factors*, *Disciplinary factors*, *Motivational factors*, and *Management factors*.

3.1.1 Motivational factors

Early research in SLA has endorsed the role of attitude and motivation in improving language proficiency (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). In the observed classes it was recognized that some children were very good at sharing their feelings to someone else and discussing their emotional states in the class—it might be teachers or classmates. Whenever a difficult part was presented by the teachers, some learners talked about their inner feelings regarding their cognitive and emotional states and some remained reticent. Those who articulated their feelings had the chance to benefit from teachers' feedback. During doing-the-activities part, some children happened to be confused; when the teachers asked children about the problem, some of them felt sad and some said that they are not good at learning. It may be a kind of *defensive* strategy to show that they are not satisfied or they are confused. However, proficient children asked for clarification whenever they had difficulty or whenever they were confused.

Another considerable issue was learners' purpose of learning a foreign language. Before and after the class, researchers had the chance to establish short talks with learners. When less-proficient children were asked about their purposes, they remained silent or gave trivial reasons in comparison to proficient children. In general, Table 1 shows learners' main purposes from attending the classes:

Table 1: Learners' Purposes of Attending EFL Classes

Proficient	Less-proficient
Communicating with English speaking countries	Passing entrance exam
Conveying feeling to the world	Filing extra times
Traveling abroad	Getting better grades in school
Teaching English to others	Fulfilling an outer force (parents)

Table 1 manifests that learners which are intrinsically motivated have better language proficiency since this motivation helps them figure out what they are doing is important and meaningful for them. Learners who attend EFL classes because of an outer force or other trivial purposes do not have sufficient motivation to learn since what they are doing is not what they decided to attend or try.

Learners who were placed in less-proficient group have encountered some peer pressure. They were too sensitive about other's behaviour toward themselves. When less-proficient learners made a mistake and the teacher corrected them, they thought that they are guilty and they began to defend their ego by leaving the class or by being reticent. Learners sometimes showed this pressure by staying outside of the class more at the times of short break or by showing unwillingness to stay at the class. The view of being a loser made them disconnect themselves from the outer world. This feature made it too difficult for teachers to give feedback to less-proficient learners since learners with low self confidence regarded it as a sign of failure. The following shows the point (T means teacher and L means learner):

L: Are you have a big crayon?

T: It is not correct!
L: I don't know [In Persian].
T: You should use *do*?
L: Don't ask me [In Persian].

Piaget, the leader of cognitive constructivism, put forward that during the concrete operation stage, children need more approval since they are highly sensitive to environment (Piaget, 1970). In the aforementioned example, when the teacher declared that there is something wrong in the sentence, the child saw this error as a sign of failure and reacted in a defensive way using sentences such as *Don't ask me*. Proficient learners hardly ever used negative sentences such as "I can't..." phrases even though they were not able to provide the answer or when they made errors.

3.1.2 Encouraging factors

Proficient children used more rewarding sentences than less-proficient ones. In one of the classes, the teacher wanted the children to memorize a conversation within five minutes. Children were divided in groups of two. The discourse of two children during this particular activity is mentioned below:

L1: We are able to memorize the dialogue. It is easy (In Persian).
L2: No, we don't have enough time to do so (In Persian).

Maybe one of the sources which may cause learners use discouraging sentences is low self confidence or lack of proficiency. However, practicing has useful effects on learners' proficiency even though they may have some problems dealing with activities. Those who encourage themselves to try practicing in the class, will surely succeed much more than those who decide not to do so.

3.1.3 Disciplinary factors

Proficient children were more organized in many aspects. Disciplinary factors in EFL classes to some extent show learners' motivational factors since if there would be no motivation in learning a foreign language, disorders in disciplinary factors appear. For instance, children's books and notebooks are a good point. Almost all of the proficient children had very neat and carefully written notebooks and their books were clean. Some successful children were so concerned about their notebooks that wanted the teacher not to sign or write something in their notebooks. Moreover, less-proficient learners made noise much more than proficient ones. This lack of discipline on the part of less successful learners may be a sign of dissatisfaction or they wanted to stimulate others not to listen to the teacher. Another important issue is that when teachers wanted to give feedback to children, proficient ones were more apt to receive the feedback and they accepted their mistakes, but less-proficient learners were obstinate and they did not want to be corrected or to be given any feedback. The following is a conversation between the teacher and a less-proficient child:

T: You should not use *do* with *can*.
L: I will say later [In Persian].
T: Why? Say it again.
L: I will try later [In Persian, with a sad expression on the face].

This unwillingness to be corrected or to be talked to is a rare case but it exists. The source of the problem may be because of the fact that these learners have been forced to attend the classes or they might have a frustrating experience with their teachers. However, teachers can lead this situation by talking to learners or by increasing learners' self confidence. If the learner feels that the teacher is a friend and wants to help, this defensive behavior will be reduced to a considerable degree.

3.1.4 Management factors

Some learners are highly motivated to control others—to be leaders—especially in EFL classes which have a dialogic atmosphere in which talking and discussing is a lot. Teachers can benefit from those learners who have high leadership abilities. In the observed classes it was recognized that proficient children were eager to be leaders. It should be mentioned that, some children unconsciously take the lead of the class and do not allow others to contribute; however, teachers can control the situation by informing that every individual is responsible for the success of the group. For instance, teachers can appoint some leaders and give them task to do in groups while specifying each learner's responsibilities. This would help others to rely on themselves and would give them a great sense of independence. Being in groups helps others to be acquainted with many learning strategies. Group work increases learners' creative thinking since they become familiar with different ideas and information. However, when appointing leaders it should be noted that others should contribute equally. It means that other learners should be responsible for the success of the group. Being responsible is a key to success. Most learners in proficient group were to a high degree responsible for what they do and what they have been told. Giving children responsibilities is a useful practice for increasing learners' accountability and self confidence. This responsibility can be given to learners through choosing representatives in the class. Whenever there is a case in which

further clarification is needed, teachers can ask the representatives to teach the learners who have difficulty learning the language.

3.2 Cognitive Aspects

Children cognitive characteristics were also investigated and six major categories were found. The most common characteristics are: *Classroom participation, Learnability aspects, Interfering factors, Practicing, Facilitative factors, and Managing input.*

3.2.1 Classroom participation

Proficient children volunteered most of the time in comparison to less-proficient ones in observed classes. Whenever teachers asked a question from one of the learners and it happened that the learner cannot provide the answer, proficient children raised their hands to provide the answer. Less-proficient children did not participate in classroom activities as much as the proficient ones and remained reticent much more than proficient children. For instance, proficient children asked more questions and they were given useful feedbacks. Proficient children were more cognizant about the meaning of words and sometimes they asked the questions they knew the answer to which as a sign of participation:

L: What is the meaning of astronaut?

T: A person who studies stars.

L: What dose astronomer mean?

T: [Thinking...]

T: Both of them have the same meaning [In Persian].

L: But here is the picture of a space center in front of the word astronaut! [In Persian]

T: [Thinking...] Yes. Astronaut means a person who travels in a spacecraft.

As it is exemplified in the earlier conversation, proficient children are more sensitive to the input they receive and maybe it is why they proceed much faster than the other learners in the class. This is maybe the answer to the question that why some learners proceed faster? This and similar questions have been addressed by other researchers too. Wang (2011, p. 273) mentioned that “No matter what method the teachers use, I noticed that there were always some learners more successful than the rest in the same classroom using the same materials with the same teacher. What makes some students better language learners?” Maybe cognitive and affective characteristics of learners in EFL classes influence the performance of learners which the literature available proves to be so. *Constructive interaction* is so important in improving learners’ L2 knowledge. The phenomenon of constructive interaction plays an important role in language classrooms since it is one of the learners’ strategies to move toward mastery of a foreign language. Constructive interaction is more suitable for proficient learners since they are more cognitively aware of L2 language system and they can verbalize their thoughts easier. The following is another example which shows how constructive interaction works:

L: My book is mine.

T: No. Mine is excessive [In Persian].

L: My book is ... [Silent...].

T: This.

L: My book is this.

T: No. This is ...

L: This is mine.

T: Ok. Use my.

L: This is my book.

Constructive interaction is a powerful tool to make the process of language learning meaningful since the learners are to think about what is going to complete the sentence based on the feedback they receive. Therefore, they use a trial and error activity in which their sensitivity toward L2 structure will increase gradually. It is helpful to get children involved to make the process of learning meaningful. To help learners benefit from constructive interaction, teachers can resort to learners’ first language in order to give them some cues.

3.2.2 Learnability aspects

Proficient learners were more skilful at pronouncing words correctly and they had less difficulty recognizing subtle differences of various sounds. Proficient learners understood teacher discourse better and, therefore, they were able to answer teachers’ questions most of the time. This is a problem of *skill interference* in which a deficiency in one skill leads to problems in other skills. There were some learners who could not respond to teachers when they were *orally* asked. This is obvious in the following discourse between the teacher and the learner:

T: What did you do yesterday? [Verbalized the question]

L: [Silent...]

T: You didn't study?

L: Yes I did.

L: Please write the question on the board [In Persian].

The aforementioned conversation shows that the learner has difficulty recognizing the flow of words produced orally by the teacher; the learner asked the teacher to write the question on the board in order to compensate for his low proficiency in listening. This problem happens because learners have not a good listening proficiency so they are not able to answer the questions. When the skills are mixed, which we call that skill interference, some problems may occur. In addition, proficient learners were ahead of the others regarding the following areas:

- Reading words and sentences
- Writing grammatical sentences
- Avoiding syntactic problems
- Providing answers to the questions

3.2.3 Interfering factors

Interfering factors can be defined in two ways. On the one hand, there are distracting effects of *educational tools*—like pencil or pen—on the learners' attention. On the other hand, there are the interfering effects of *first language* on learning L2. For instance, proficient learners used their educational tools in a decent way. Less-proficient learners most of the time played with their pencils or something else which might distract their attention. Moreover, for less-proficient learners, since they are not proficient in L2, L1 was the main source of information to resort most of the time and therefore the interfering effects of L1 was more an issue in less-proficient learners. In pronouncing words, less-proficient learners had more deviations from the standard pronunciation (English or American accent). Deviations in pronunciation were more vivid for L2 words which were more similar to vocabularies in learners' mother tongue.

3.2.4 Practicing

One of the issues which has been neglected in the domain of second language learning is the quality of *free talk* which learners have among each other. By free talk it means the time when, for instance, there is a break and learners are free. When there is a break or when children are doing the exercises, they may talk to themselves or to their friends which is called free talk. However, this talking is not part of the teaching process. Investigating learners' free talk can provide useful information in order to build a decent theory of SLA. It was observed that proficient children repeated words and chants as the free talk more than the others. Proficient learners asked more questions as the free talk. Another useful effect of practicing can be obtained through writing activities. Writing is a beneficial tool to learn new words and sentences. Proficient learners practiced writing more than the others in activities. They usually wrote what have been presented on the board. However, less-proficient learners skipped writing new information.

3.2.5 Facilitative Factors

Another important factor in progressing toward mastery of a foreign language, is the effect of facilitating strategies learners use to make the process of learning easier. For instance, proficient learners take advantages of what they have already learned to understand new information. The range of vocabulary knowledge was also different in proficient and less-proficient learners. Proficient learners had more vocabulary knowledge which helped them understand new lessons as well as the teacher discourse. For instance, when the teacher asked some of the children to *make a question*, there were some learners who did not understand the teacher purpose since they had difficulty decoding what they heard. There may be some arguments that learners remained reticent because they may not know the answer; however, in cases the question was translated into learners' mother tongue it was observed that they are able to answer. This idea shows that if learners figure out what they are asked to do, they will be able to provide the answer which weakens the argument presented earlier. Learners who had difficulty understanding teachers' questions, reacted in three ways: (a) remained reticent; (b) answered wrongly; or (c) asked the teacher to write the question on the board. Vocabulary knowledge is always an important factor, but not the only factor, why some have difficulty communicating with others.

In the observed classes it was recognized that learners who had slow hand writing were also weak language learners. It is a good area of research to investigate whether hand writing has anything to do with language proficiency. To put it in another way, do the learners who have faster hand writing are better language learners? Most of the children who were placed in proficient group had fast hand writing in comparison to less-proficient learners.

3.2.6 Managing input

Note taking is a crucial part of every classroom and language classrooms are not the exception. It is a way of attending and organizing input and provides the learners with a chance to review the information later after the class is over. However, there is little known about the role of note taking in EFL classes. For instance, does the quality of note taking improve

learning a second language? Or whether note taking strategies are different among language learners? Proficient learners in observed classes used more note taking than the others. It is not uncommon to see that most of the time learners borrow notebooks from classmates who are more proficient than the others.

Proficient children used specific symbols for new information to make the learning more meaningful. For instance, one of the learners used Persian symbols to remember the pronunciation of new words. The word *any* is sometimes pronounced as /æni/. In order to avoid this mispronunciation, some children wrote a Persian symbol, pronounced as /e/, under the letter *a* in *any*. Marking and managing new information is also possible through using colored pencils. Colored pencils can help learners to make a comprehensible map in a way the mind will recognize schematic pages much faster than those pages which are blank or highlighted with one particular pencil—for example, black. The use of colored pencils is a suitable way to make learning meaningful through making a concept map. In addition, the process of recall would be much easier when using different pencils or pens instead of using only one black or blue pen.

3.3 Teachers' Feedback Type and Reaction

After figuring out cognitive and affective characteristics of children in EFL classes, the way teachers interacted with children were investigated. Since beginning learners are highly dependent on the teacher (Brown, 2001), the way a teacher relates to learners can influence them in various ways. During the observations, it was recognized that teachers' discourse was in favor of proficient children in both cognitive and affective domains. When a proficient learner made an error in cognitive domain, first, the teachers mostly responded with positive affective feedback and then with positive cognitive feedback:

- L: What's the date going tomorrow?
T: Thanks. It's ok.
T: Look at your book?
L: Ok.
T: You should say going to be tomorrow.
T: Now tell me again.
L: What's the date going to be tomorrow?

Teachers were more inclined to explain difficult parts for proficient learners than less-proficient children:

- L: What is thin?
T: Look at the board [Teacher drew some pictures].
L: [Watching...].
T: This man is thin [Teacher pointed to the picture of a thin man].
L: [Seemed confused] I don't know.
T: [Teacher drew another man but he is fat] This man is not thin. He is fat.
L: Yes. I understood [In Persian].

Teachers interacted with proficient learners much more than the others. When a less successful made a problem, teachers tried to correct the child using L1 or reacting with single words. However, with proficient learners teachers used elaboration and longer stretch of sentences to instruct them.

In pronouncing words, when children made errors, teachers used more useful strategies for proficient children:

- L: It's rainy now [Pronounced now as know].
T: No. You pronounced now wrongly.
T: Do you read Quran?
L: Yes.
T: [Wrote the word 'æusæt' (middle) in Arabic on the board] Read this.
L: æusæt [Pronounced it in Arabic]
T: Good. Now is N+æu.

Proficient children are high input generators (HIGs) in a way that they are able to generate input from teachers and peers (Seliger, 1983). Through the observations, it was revealed that teachers are more inclined to establish a positive cognitive relationship with proficient children. For example, teachers asked more questions from proficient children. When a teacher asked a child and in a case the child was not able to provide the answer, the teacher wanted a more proficient child to give the answer. Moreover, when a child was not able to provide the answer or made an error, more proficient children took the lead and volunteered to correct the error or to provide the answer.

Teachers used more *conceptualization* (which is a cognitive strategy) to teach new vocabularies to proficient children. Contextualization is defined as "Placing a word or phrase in a meaningful language sequence" (O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, & Kupper., 1985, pp. 582-584). However, in teaching new words for less-proficient

children, some teachers used the child's L1 language. For example, in one of the classes the teacher wanted to make the definition of *birthday* clear. The teacher established the following discourse with one of the proficient learners:

- T: What is birthday? [Drew some candles on the board]
L: [Silent...]
T: We eat cake at birthday.
L: Candles [Pointed to the drawings of candles on the board].
L: Yes [The child pointed to the picture of birthdays in the book]

However, there were some children who did not understand the meaning of the word *birthday* and some misinterpret it as being a *party*. In this case, the teacher used children's mother tongue (Persian) to make the meaning clear.

In cognitive domain, there are many strategies that students can use in order to make the process of language learning easier. One of these strategies is *transfer*. O'Malley, Chamot, Stewner-Manzanares, Russo, and Kupper (1985) defined transfer as "Using previously acquired linguistic and/or conceptual knowledge to facilitate a new language learning task" (pp. 582-584). In the case of less successful children, there were less use of transfer and most of the teachers tried to reiterate the previous lessons by explaining them or by asking proficient learners to review the previous lessons. When presenting a new topic or grammar point, teachers mostly wanted the proficient children to use what they have learned to facilitate learning new information; however, less-proficient children were explicitly given the information without asking them to use their previous knowledge. Most of the teachers asked less-proficient children just to know how much they have progressed and not as a facilitative strategy.

The effect of *translation* in EFL classes is an important issue since it is a useful tool in beginning stages of language learning when the learner mostly resorts to L1 knowledge as the main tool to come up with the cumbersome task of learning a foreign language. Teachers also use translation as a facilitative strategy to get the meaning across and to avoid potential misunderstanding. However, the way teachers use this strategy is to some extent vague and needs large-scale research and enquiry. In the observed classes, translation was almost part of every teacher's plan. Since children are not linguistically competent enough to use conceptualization for difficult parts, teachers had great difficulty to teach some vocabularies or grammatical points and they used translation in their classes especially when it came to vocabulary. Therefore, it can be concluded that translation can be avoided in advanced levels, but for children it is sometimes a must. For example, when an error occurred by the learners, some teachers used translation as a kind of feedback:

- L: My father an astronaut.
T: [The teacher translated the sentence into Persian and emphasized on the verb]
L: I forgot [In Persian].
T: What?
L: Is.
L: My father is an astronaut.

The feedback types that teachers provided were different regarding proficient and less-proficient children. Proficient children were given more implicit feedback types such as *metalinguistic* and *elicitation*; however, teachers used more explicit and direct types of feedback to correct less-proficient children—*repetition* and *explicit correction*. The following are examples from incompetent children and the way teachers provided feedback for them:

- L: Please away put your book. [T: You should say put away (explicit correction)]
L: Point the poster. [T: Point to the poster (repetition)]
L: She want a dog. [T: She wants a dog (repetition)]
L: She can't to go. [T: to should be omitted (explicit correction—in Persian)]

With more proficient learners, teachers used more implicit feedback type such as *metalinguistic feedback* and *elicitation*:

- L: We can going to school. [T: After can we use simple form of the verb (metalinguistic feedback)]
L: She wants a eraser. [T: She wants an ...? (elicitation)]
L: They opens the letter. [T: Verb + s is used for third person singular (metalinguistic feedback)]
S: My book on the table. [T: Every sentence has a verb (metalinguistic feedback)]

Teachers also used different cognitive and affective feedback when an error occurred by the children. However, the nature of feedbacks was different regarding proficient and less-proficient children. After a couple of sessions, teachers became familiar with the proficiency level of children and this familiarity brought with itself a sense of prejudice.

Table 2: Teachers' Feedback Type Regarding Proficient and Less-Proficient Learners

Learners	Feedback type	Examples
Proficient	Cognitive	Meaning is clear but some changes should be done. It is better to say it in another way. I will explain more.
	Affective	Don't worry. We are your friend. Every body knows that you are a good student. It's ok. Keep on.
Less-proficient	Cognitive	It's totally wrong. It doesn't make sense. It is not what I have told you.
	Affective	It is the result of your laziness. I knew you would make a mistake. You are always the same.

According to Piaget and neo-Piagetian scholars, child development happens in a sequence of stages. The first stage which extends from 18 months to 7 years of age (Muñoz, 2007) is called "concrete operations" which is divided into preconceptual and intuitive thoughts (Piaget, 1970). According to developmental cognitive perspectives, during the concrete operational period, learners become self-conscious and as a result, critical self-evaluations increases which are likely to reduce self-esteem (Muñoz, 2007). Therefore, children are so sensitive about the environment and they may get upset when their sense of self-esteem is at danger. Table 2 reveals that less-proficient learners are usually exposed to destructive affective feedback which may have negative effects on their self-esteem.

CONCLUSION

This study revealed that children's characteristics varied among successful and less successful learners in both cognitive and affective domains. The study conducted by Schouten-van Parreren (1992), which showed that the strategies learners use are a strong predictor of their success in learning vocabulary, advocates the results of this study. Through the findings of this study it was revealed that proficient learners used a battery of productive strategies and enjoyed useful characteristics both in cognitive and affective domains in order to manage their learning process. Table 3 provides a summary of characteristics regarding successful and less successful learners in English language institutes.

Table 3: Children' Affective and Cognitive Characteristics

Domain	Characteristic	Example
Affective	Motivational factors	Purpose of learning Peer pressure
	Encouraging factors	Rewarding sentences
	Disciplinary factors	Making noise Books and notebooks
	Management factors	Leadership Accountability
	Classroom participation	Volunteering Constructive instruction
Cognitive	Learnability aspects	Skill interference Understanding input
	Interfering factors	Educational tools L1 interference
	Practicing	Free talk Asking
	Facilitative factors	Vocabulary knowledge Hand writing
	Managing input	Note taking

Comparing learners' characteristics regarding their proficiency, it was revealed that successful learners enjoyed much more fruitful characteristics in both cognitive and affective aspects. However, many of the characteristics proposed in this study need to be verified through further investigation. For instance, much more research is needed to find out the effects of note taking on learners' proficiency. The list of cognitive and affective characteristics which were presented in this article can prove to be useful for teachers to instruct less successful learners. Explicitly teaching useful characteristics and strategies have been endorsed by many researchers (Brown, 2001; Oxford, 1990). It is argued that learners are peripherally aware of strategies they use without knowing its effect. Therefore, teaching these characteristics can be helpful for both proficient and less-proficient learners. It was also revealed that proficient learners benefited from more positive feedback than less-proficient learners in both cognitive and affective domain. Successful learners generated more

cognitive feedback from their teachers. Moreover, the way teachers provided cognitive feedback for proficient learners was through a rich affective feedback channel which is more likely to influence learners.

Individuals attend language institutes bringing with themselves different characteristics and strategies which may undoubtedly affect the way they learn a foreign language. Most of the time, the difference between being a successful learner and being a less successful learner is trivial and needs slight changes. Learners may be able to progress much better if teachers teach some good strategies to them. There may be some learners who are not conscious about the beneficial characteristics or strategies they possess. Thus, explicitly teaching some characteristics and strategies of successful learners can be useful for both proficient and less-proficient learners. This is the main purpose of books such as *study skills*. To reach satisfactory results, it is not necessarily how much one tries, but the path one chooses to approach success.

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