CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Overview

This chapter presents the summary of this work and its findings, conclusion, pedagogical implications, suggestions for the language planners and teachers and recommendations for further research. In the first section of this chapter, a short summary of the background and purpose, review of related literature, methodology and data collection will be presented. In the next section, the conclusion and the results of the study are discussed. Then, pedagogical implications and suggestions for further research are offered in the third and fourth sections of this chapter.

Summary

Summary of Background and Purpose

In the first chapter of the present work, English and its situation in today's world was discussed. The importance of English as an international language is inevitable. In order to communicate with the outside world and to be connected to the worldwide science web, it is a must for an Iranian student to achieve the necessary means, i.e. English. As stated before, English has become the necessary means for communicating in all fields.
Considering the necessity of knowing a foreign and an international language such as English, the Iranian education system was reviewed to make its weak and strong points clear. While there was an intensive attempt to increase the level of literacy of the Iranians, less attention was paid to the augmentation of the knowledge of foreign languages, especially English, in the society. Comparing the growth of the movement carried out by the Literacy Movement Organization and the high increase in the number of private schools, it becomes clear that there was almost no attention paid to the foreign language teaching process.

Apart from the above-mentioned disregard to English in Iran, the inappropriateness of English textbooks causes failure in the foreign language-teaching curriculum. The findings of various researches on this matter indicate that these books are not suitable for Iranian students and EFL classrooms. In spite of the many efforts that have been made to design and publish suitable English textbooks, the present material that is taught in schools does not possess the actual and necessary efficiency. A great attempt was made to increase the quality of these textbooks and to make them conform to new language teaching methods.

There are many other demerits and deficiencies in the present language teaching curriculum of the Iranian education system, but the main factor that is the focus of attention in this study is the biological characteristic of Iranian students, i.e. age. Beginning to teach English to Iranian school children in grade 7 (when the students complete their twelfth year) seems to dissipate and waste the precious time during the students’ 12-year study. Starting to learn English at the age of 12 has no meaning as it fritters away the time period before that age. With reference to this fact, the present study tried to investigate the probable differences between Iranian children and adults. The hope was to make the possibility of teaching English to the children and its benefits clear. This research focused only on the learning and developing of the reading comprehension skill of Iranian children under twelve and adults in English.

**Summary of the Review of Related Literature**

Numerous studies in the field of foreign language learning all over the world have presented effectual results that shed light on this process, especially when the
The age factor is under consideration. The relationship between age and learning a foreign language is far from clear and simple. The age of the language learner perhaps is one of the most important and controversial factors, which is very influential in the process of foreign language learning. It is a complex endeavour to compare the studies that have looked at the differences between child and adult foreign language learners, for these studies have been conducted in different language learning contexts and have employed different methods and measures.

It is true that studies of immigrant children show that those who begin second language acquisition before puberty tend to develop native accents and those who start later typically do not. It is also true, however, that many who start later develop excellent accents, very close to native and many who start foreign languages young do not. For example, “heritage language” speakers, those who speak a minority language at home (e.g. American-born Chinese living in the US) often speak the heritage language with an accent, even though they have been hearing it and speaking it their entire lives. (Krashen, 2003: 104)

Findings on the effects of age still do not present a uniform picture. The inceptive point for these studies may be the proposing of a critical period hypothesis by Lenneberg (1967). This hypothesis suggests that first language acquisition occurs during a critical period and ends near the age of puberty. This process of acquisition must occur before the completion of cerebral lateralization.

According to this hypothesis, second language acquisition will be fast and qualitative during this period, that is, before the age of puberty. “... beyond which people seem relatively incapable of acquiring a native like accent of the second language.” (Brown, 1994: 93) Based on their research findings, O’Grady and Dobrovolsky (1996: 464) state, “It is now widely believed that the ability to acquire a first language in an effortless and ultimately successful way begins to decline from age six and is severely compromised by the onset of puberty.” This does not mean that an adult is incapable of learning a second or foreign language because there is no firm conclusion of any research that decisively rejects or accepts the idea presented by the critical period hypothesis. Overall, many researchers believe that the plasticity of the brain prior to puberty is an important factor to enable children to acquire a
language and it is the lateralization that causes difficulty in acquiring fluent control of a second language.

Studies that have focused attention on the biological aspects of the language learning process have also supported aspects of the critical period hypothesis. According to these studies, children can surpass the adults in learning a second language. If children are surrounded by the target language on a daily basis, they will surely show a higher amount of success in acquiring that language than adults and adolescents. “Recent studies that use Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and Positron Emission Tomography (PET) technology, which show brain activity, support aspects of the critical period hypothesis.” (Kim, et al, 1997: 171-174)

Researchers who have worked on the learning of the different aspects of language support the critical period hypothesis in so far as certain areas of language are under consideration. Walsh and Diller (1981: 18) believe that different aspects of language are learnt at different ages. “Lower order processes such as pronunciation are dependant on early maturing and less macro neural circuits which make foreign accents difficult to overcome after childhood...” According to Brown (ibid: 57), the first 5 years of a child’s life are the best time to advance from simple cries to articulated vowels and consonants because the speech muscles develop greatly during this period.

Some research findings reject the notion of critical periods, on the grounds that the neural plasticity that affects second language acquisition is not restricted to a period of time. Some research results have shown the permanence of neural plasticity even after the age of puberty. These studies eliminated the theory propounded by Lenneberg (e.g. Flege 1987, Jacobs 1988, and Neufeld 1978 and 1979).

One of the large-scale studies in the field of child-adult differences in foreign language learning has been carried out by Robertson (2003) in Korea. Before 1999, the educational policy in Korea had initiated the teaching of English in middle schools to students at the age of 14. Later, the situation changed and students in elementary schools (at the age of 8) began to learn English. This change in the curriculum created an opportunity (a period of one year) for researchers to study the differences in foreign language learning between the two age groups simultaneously, namely 14 year old and 8 year old students whose age coincided with the critical period hypothesis debate. The samples in Robertson’s study were 880 students from
elementary schools, 820 students from middle school and 102 teachers. Of course, the process of sampling for this research was much complicated and in different ways because the study was investigating areas other than age difference. The age range was 9 year old and upward. The results demonstrated a different perspective on the critical period hypothesis from an individual’s view. This survey also statistically illustrated that young foreign language learners were better in learning the pronunciation of the taught language (English).

... the results show that there is far more work to be done, firstly in the teaching of pronunciation to students, secondly, in determining why such a large fall in those ‘who like English’ occurs after elementary school, thirdly, that English as a language seems to fail when it comes to public relations, in so far as a great percentage of applicants showed results suggesting a negativity towards the language. (Robertson, 2003:18)

As stated earlier, Iranian students begin learning English when they are 12 years old. If the necessary input for the Iranian students and those under the mentioned age was available in society, the age factor would not affect the process of foreign language learning in this country. Even in countries where authentic English language input is available through mass media or the native speaker visitors of the country there is a great effort to add extra-curricular provision for teaching foreign languages in primary schools.

Apart from the individual differences between children and adults in learning a foreign language, it has been demonstrated by many studies that as early as a child starts to learn a foreign language early, the more time will be available for him to learn it. It is true because the amount of the input that a person receives will increase with the length of time. As mentioned before, the child learns a language unconsciously and with a low grade of anxiety and stress. Krashen (2003:100-108) emphasizes the important role of comprehensible input and states:

We acquire language when we receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation, that is, when we understand what people say to us and when we understand what we read. This is the core of a general theory of language acquisition, a combination of the Comprehension (a.k.a. Input) Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. ...
do not, in other words, acquire language by learning about language, by study of the rules and by memorizing vocabulary. (102)

It is inevitable that when a child begins to learn a language other than his native, the result will be better because of being exposed to the language longer than an adult beginner. There is fairly strong research evidence that has proved the efficacy of beginning second or foreign language learning at an early age. Only those who begin second language learning at an early age will eventually be indistinguishable from native speakers. Of course, early second/foreign language learning is beneficial when this learning process does not prevent the child from developing his first language, otherwise, it will be considered as a disadvantage.

Where pronunciation is concerned in the process of second/foreign language learning, there are various contradictory findings. Some of the researchers suggest that children can obtain a native-like accent in a second language (e.g. Fathman 1975; Seliger 1978; Johnson and Newport 1989; Patkowski 1990). Some other researches are on the opposite side (e.g. Olsen and Samuels 1973; Ervin-Tripp 1974; Ekstrand 1978). The diversity of the findings in this kind of research is because of the difference in the methods and measurements employed in these studies.

... although many studies appear to show an advantage of older learners over younger learners, these findings must be viewed with caution. This is because some of the early research drew conclusions from studies in which younger and older beginners were taught the same way, rather than in age-appropriate ways, which may have put younger beginners at a disadvantage. Alternatively, some studies tested both age groups using test types, which may have favoured older learners. (Martin, 2000: 68)

Fathman (ibid) compared two groups of children exposed to English for the same amount of time. He found that younger children aged 6-10 years scored higher ratings in English pronunciation but 11-15 year-old children scored higher in morphology and syntax. Another study by Jakebovits (1970) indicates that young children in formal settings (in schools) do not always attain native-like accents. The result of his study shows that starting early by itself does not guarantee a native accent.

As regards ultimate attainment, evidence would seem to suggest that if learners of different ages are matched according to the amount of time
they have been exposed to an L2, and teaching and amount of time are held constant, older learners are likely to reach higher levels of proficiency, especially in institutional contexts such as schools. Furthermore, adolescent learners do better than either children or adults where grammar and vocabulary are concerned. Furthermore, the age-related advantage of adults applies primarily to morphology and syntax and it's temporary, indicating that “faster” does not necessarily mean ‘better’ over the long term. (Martin, 2000: 13)

According to Lengyel (1995: 134) children are more capable than adults to acquire a native accent perhaps because of being naturally equipped for this purpose. Some researchers believe in the attainment of a native like accent in the second language only when the exposure to that language is extended (e.g. Lengyel ibid; Singleton 1989).

It is important to keep in mind the various factors that affect the second/foreign language process. The age of the learner is one of the most significant factors in this process but there are various factors that must not be condoned.

... language learning is affected by many factors. Among these are the personal characteristics of the learner, the structure of the native and target languages, opportunities for interaction with speakers of the target language, and access to correction and form-focused instruction. (Lightbown and Spada, 1999: 169)

After presenting a review of literature on affective development, Schumann (1975) investigates the difficulties in second language learning and the related factors. He claims “language learning difficulties after puberty may be related to the social and psychological changes an individual undergoes at that age” (229). He believes that adult and adolescent learners are more concerned with identity. They are restricted by social customs and it is difficult for them to be open to new people and customs. They are more threatened by situations in which they might appear ridiculous. They are less flexible and malleable and more suspicious of novelty. Other researchers such as Larsen and Smalley (1972) also support this opinion.

As puberty approaches and the individual is concerned with the consolidation of his personality, it apparently becomes more difficult
for him to submit to the new norms which a second language requires. As an individual’s dependence on others gives way to his own independence in satisfying needs, there seems to be less pull towards the internalisation of new norms required by a second language. (160)

Consequently, it is obvious that the ultimate greater success by children in second/foreign language learning is attributed to their ability to accept external norms. This is perhaps because of their unformed stereotypes of their own identities. There are many studies that have shown adults superior to children in learning a second/foreign language. One of the recent ones has been carried on by Cenzo in 2002 in the Basque Country. He compared English language learners aged 7 and 8 with learners aged 11 and 12. English was the learners’ third language. They used Basque and/or Spanish at home and school. Cenzo measured the progress of the two groups after six years. They had learned English during this period of time in school. The results indicated that the older learners surpassed the young learners in almost all dimensions including grammar, fluency and writing. This could be due to multilingual acquisition factors. The reasons for such a result perhaps lie in the younger learners’ academic language skills in the languages they already know. These learners perhaps need to acquire a higher degree of cognitive ability.

Although there are differences in the findings of the research that has been conducted on the child-adult differences in second/foreign language acquisition, many countries worldwide have introduced foreign languages at the primary level. “Because of the conflicting research and because of the fact that children do end up with better pronunciation if they begin early enough, a number of countries worldwide, including Egypt, have introduced foreign languages at the primary level” (El Naggar, 2003: 4).

In Austrian primary schools, the Lollipop project, which offers English for an hour a week, has included six-year old beginners (Schrand 1998,…) and coincides with school starting age. In Italy, the Bolzano project (Taeschner 1991) involved six year olds. (Martin, 2000:9)

As the results of the present study show, Iranian children are able to learn a foreign language not only like adults but also better than them. Of course, it is not possible to extend the findings of this work to all Iranian students, but it can be generalized for a majority of them. The reason for this is that almost all of the samples of the present research were from the middle level of the society, i.e. the largest class.
Summary of the Methodology and Data Collection

A group of Iranian children aged 9-12 and another group of adults aged 19-22 learning English as their foreign language were selected as samples of the present study. Each group consisted of forty students. These students were selected from among the students of Pardise-Goldis Institute. They were homogeneous and had passed the entrance examination of the institute which has been derived from TOFEL test and has also been used to determine the suitable level for the students. Another test, Preliminary English Test, was given to them (by the present researcher) in order to make sure of their homogeneity.

The material that was taught to these children and adults was *New Interchange I*. Two other books, *Elementary* and *Intermediate Steps to Understanding*, were introduced and worked on during two terms. Each term lasted for two months with a ten-day-long holiday in between. Some story books were introduced to the learners to be read at home. This work was done in order to design an extensive reading program for them. There was an attempt to prepare both classroom and outside activities for students in a systematic way.

At the end of the second term a test was given to the samples to evaluate their achieved knowledge. This test was based on the materials that they were taught in the class during the two terms.

A questionnaire with nine questions was developed to get information about the learners’ socioeconomic status. This was of great benefit for generalising the results of the research and for determining the students’ social level.

The procedure of the present study and the development and preparation of the tests and the questionnaire were explained in detail at the end of the third chapter.

Conclusion

The concept of foreign language learning carries a range of meaning in different parts of the world and the status of a certain language that is considered to be a foreign language in various countries may differ from one country to another. For example, English is a foreign language in Japan and Korea and probably, because the
circumstances are the same, it will be possible to devise a similar curriculum for both the countries. But this is not true in the case of countries such as Iran. In a country like Turkey that receives so many European and American tourists each year, the various magazines and newspapers issued in English, and the availability of hundreds of TV channels makes foreign language learning a completely different concept in comparison with Iran. The situation of learning English as a foreign language in Iran is to some extent, and may be deeply different from most other countries. In a country in which the English language input for its learners is at its minimum, discussing the foreign language theories and applying them to the curriculum is an arduous job.

The objective of the present study was to investigate the probable differences between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a second language. For this purpose the following null hypothesis was proposed:
- There is no difference between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language.

As the result of the present study shows, the null hypothesis is rejected and it becomes clear that Iranian children possess the capability of learning English as a foreign language. They showed superiority over the adults in this process. Therefore, based on the findings of the present work, it can be hypothesised that there are differences between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language.

As explained in the first chapter of this work, the condition of foreign language learning in Iran is widely different from most other countries. There is a lack of suitable language input in the society, inappropriate materials are used in schools (especially in government schools) and English is taught by inexpert teachers. English is taught as a foreign language quite late to the children at the age of 12 or 13 in government schools, which makes the condition completely different from other countries.

Some countries where English is taught as a foreign language have a similar curriculum as it is in Iran, i.e. children are taught English at the age of 12. Since, those countries apply certain modern methods, use new type of materials, recruit skilled teachers and create appropriate educational atmospheres this makes them different from Iran. Other negative factors affecting the process of foreign language learning do not exist or at least their influence has convincingly been decreased.
Apart from the various factors that have important roles in language teaching learning process, the present research focused attention only on the age factor. The result of this work showed differences between Iranian children and adults in reading comprehension ability in EFL classrooms and the null hypothesis was rejected. The mean of children’s scores that was 90.9 indicated a clear superiority over adults with a mean score of 83.5. The point that is important to mention here is that although they were homogeneous in the beginning of the study, the ways through which they had gained their background knowledge were different. It means that the adult had studied English for almost 5 years in secondary and high schools but the children had studied this language for a few terms (a period shorter than one year) in the mentioned institute (PGI) or other private language teaching centres. Although the aim of the present research was limited to find out the differences between these two groups, it made some other important facts clear as well.

The difference between learning English in public schools and private institutes is absolutely clear. Many researches have been conducted on this matter in Iran. For example, Hedayati (1999) has compared the evaluation of EFL programs in public schools and private language institutes in Iran. The results of his study illustrate a great difference between these two language-learning environments and prove the superior quality of English language learning in the Iranian private institutes.

As stated before, 40 children and 40 adults were selected as two groups of subjects to be worked on in the present study. At the end of the experiment that lasted for two terms (4 months), child learners surpassed the adults in learning reading comprehension in English. This result coincides completely with the findings of many other studies conducted in other countries.

Comparing the information illustrated in figures in the previous chapters (4-1 to 4-4), it becomes clear that children learn in a similar way. The distribution of their scores is not in a vast range. But the distribution of the adults’ scores is much broader than the children’s. It can be concluded that the factors that affect the nature of the learning process of these two groups are absolutely different. The reason for this can be investigated in the differences between the cognitive and psychological characteristics of these two groups of language learners. Adults are restricted by social and cultural rules. Possessing various personalities makes them different from
one another and consequently, applying a unique teaching method won't be led to a uniform result.

In case of the children, it is obvious that, to some extent, they can be considered as similar language learners, with almost similar capabilities. Of course, the intellectual differences among them must not be neglected and considering them as homogeneous foreign language learners is valid only when they are compared with the adults.

The data gained through the questionnaire, gives an overall view of the learners' socio-economic status. The answers for question 1 showed that all the children were primary or secondary school students, i.e. grades 4 to 7. In case of adult learners, the fact was that 57.5 percent of them were high school graduates and surprisingly, 42.5 percent were university undergraduates. The reason for this is the inappropriateness of the curriculum that is applied in the educational system of Iran (see chapter I). It is obvious that these university students have come across with some difficulties perhaps in dealing with their source books or in communicating with foreigners.

The second and fourth questions of the questionnaire give rough information about the financial and economic status of the learners' families. Comparing the achieved data through these questions with the information about the average income and expenditure of Iranian families (tables, 2-7 and 2-8), results in the fact that the subjects of the present study are all from the middle class of society. It means that the findings of the present work are applicable only to the middle level of society.

The third question of the questionnaire shows that both children and adults were studying or had studied in the same kind of schools, i.e. private or public. Although the results do not show an exact equality between children and adults, they don’t affect the findings of the study or the information achieved through the questionnaire.

Questions no. 5 to 9 indicate the cultural and educational level of the subjects' families. According to the data gained through these questions, the majority, both children and adults are from educated families. Fortunately, after the Islamic Revolution in 1978, there was a great attempt to increase the level of literacy in Iran.
Tables 2-9 and 2-10 illustrate the number of students and also the number of literate people in this country.

Undertaking the present experiment for four months in a private language institute, created the opportunity for the present researcher to observe the different ways in which Iranian children and adults deal with the process of language learning. Many interesting differences were observed between them in these EFL classrooms. Some of these remarkable points are summarised as follows:

**Table 5-1**

**Observed Characteristics of child and adult learners**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHILDREN</th>
<th>ADULTS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>They cooperate with the teacher when the atmosphere of the class is less formal</td>
<td>They like to be taught and treated formally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They like play-like activities more than serious ones.</td>
<td>They learn structured lessons better.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They enjoy imitating the teacher or the characters of a movie.</td>
<td>They are worried about their “reflections”.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They like watching movies and singing songs.</td>
<td>They prefer to be taught directly by the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They learn easier and faster when illustrations are presented and when they are engaged in activities.</td>
<td>They like to sit in rows and to listen to the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They react and respond better when the teacher is young and much better when they are taught by a girl!</td>
<td>They don’t rely on a very young teacher and prefer to be taught by a sophisticated veteran.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>They are not bound to obey the rules.</td>
<td>They follow the rules and regulations much better than the children do.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By and large, the findings of the present study show that Iranian children can learn a foreign language better than adults. Beginning to teach English to Iranian students is one of the solutions to the problems that can be solved before the others.
Therefore, it will be appropriate and profitable to begin teaching this language to the Iranian students at least a few years earlier, i.e. around age 8 or 9. The advantage of this is to give the children as much time and a reasonable opportunity to develop and acquire the necessary proficiency in English.

Overall, it can be concluded that beginning to teach English to Iranian students earlier will be more profitable. As is obvious, the results of the present study can be generalized to the middle level of society, that is, the largest social class in Iran. As stated in the first chapter of this work, there is an increasing interest and penchant to learn English among Iranian children and their families who send them to private language institutes. Hence, it will be quite wise to begin this job in the government schools in order to endow all Iranian children with this edge.

**Suggestions and Pedagogical Implications**

The failure of foreign language education is due to various factors such as methodology, amount of time devoted to the language and so on. The factor that has been considered in the present study is the age of the learner. As the results of the experiment showed, Iranian children did better in EFL classroom with reading comprehension under consideration. As discussed in the review of literature, some studies showed a disadvantage in beginning to learn a second/foreign language by young children. Numerous researches have indicated the superiority of children, aged 7-12, in comparison with adults in this process. According to the findings of the present study, beginning to teach English to Iranian students at the age of 7 or 8 will be more profitable than the present language teaching plan. This job will require new educational programmes and methodology. The findings of many researches were discussed earlier that indicated the necessity of using different language teaching methods for children and adults. In order to start teaching English to Iranian students from the beginning grades in primary schools, namely second or third grade, the language planners, material designers, and all others who are responsible for these kinds of projects should work together to prepare the suitable field for such a vast programme.

Starting to learn English at the early grades of primary schools will prepare the students with much opportunity to acquire this international means of communication.
It should be born in mind that children need not gain a great amount of grammatical and syntactic knowledge of the new language. Instead, they need to acquire the practical features of a language. In other words, to motivate children to learn a foreign language certain activities, tasks and methods will be required. The following are some suggestions for having a fruitful language-teaching programme for children, which differs deeply from adults.

Satchwell (1999, cited in Martin, ibid: 18) emphasises the importance of being exposed to written words. He views the “work in the foreign language as an important reinforcement of children’s general literacy skills. Work can include classroom display, posters, signs, notices and newspapers in corridors and classrooms” (18). Low et al (1995, cited in Martin, ibid: 18) note that primary teachers are more willing to use English, especially reading and writing.

Krashen (2003) gives some suggestions for teaching English to children as follows:

All we need do in language pedagogy is to help students reach the intermediate level, defined as the level at which students have acquired enough of the language to continue to acquire on their own. In other words, they can then obtain comprehensible input outside the language classroom. This means that the goal of the language class is not to produce error-free performance and complete understanding of all rules of grammar. (104)

Yaghoubi (1997) who has worked on the differences between Iranian children and adults in formal and informal settings, suggests “... they [children] can be considered as better foreign language learners than the adults. But, according to the revealed interactional effects of our factors (age & setting), younger foreign language learners have appeared better in informal settings” (84). He continues that “based on the theoretical principals underlying this research and the findings reported here, learning the foreign language at an early age is recommended. The informal language teaching setting complements the age factor” (85).

Saiedi (1997) who has undertaken another research on an activity-based approach to the teaching of English to Iranian children (aged 7 years and over), gives her suggestions as follows:
- There should be a clearly defined teaching framework.
- Group support should be encouraged in the classroom.
- Physical activities where the main focus is on the physical response or physical activity, and not the spoken word, should be developed.
- Children should be introduced to language and content through a variety of steps and activities.
- Stories should be used effectively to provide a rich source of language and creative thought input.
- Flexible classroom arrangement should be used to encourage interaction between children and facilitate a wide range of communicative activities.
- Time as an important factor which may affect the way the teacher teaches can be managed properly if the teacher follows a quite clear lesson plan and ... (summarised from Saiedi, 1997: 148-150)

She believes that “the materials and activities should suit the needs of children in terms of interest and cognitive skills” (150).

On the basis of the above findings and following the experimental results, many useful implications can be drawn from the present study.

As mentioned before, some researchers believe that beginning to teach a second/foreign language to children at early ages (pre-school ages) may harm their proficiency in their first language. But various research findings indicate that starting to learn a second/foreign language at ages like 7 or 8 will result in a high degree of proficiency at least in some areas of language such as pronunciation. While children are capable of learning a foreign language better than adults, it will be profitable to begin to teach them a foreign language in primary schools. This job requires certain facilities and methods, because it is not possible to treat them like adults. For, children are biologically and psychologically different from adults. Hence, teaching English, (a foreign language in Iran) to Iranian children should not be done completely in a formal way like it is done at present. It seems better to add this programme (learning English) to the students’ study timetable not as a school subject but as an extensive and extra one.
While there is not a reasonable amount of English language input available for the Iranian students, it is strongly suggested that this opportunity, i.e. the exposure to the language, should be available as early as possible during their study years. It is possible to create conditions such as extra school hours in which children can watch English movies in a simplified language. Activity-based classes, newspapers and posters that can be displayed in classrooms and corridors and so many other activities can be planned to increase the amount of language exposure for children in primary schools. These activities and programmes can be carried out easily without harming the students’ first language development and their regular school programmes.

To increase the Iranian children’s exposure to English the following suggestions are made:

- To add English classes to their regular timetable; even as optional classes, to begin with.
- To develop and determine proper language teaching methods suitable for children.
- To design books and materials based on modern language teaching methods that include illustrations, pictures or signs attractive for children to motivate them to engage in the process voluntarily.
- To prepare informal and natural settings, may be out of the classroom.
- To distribute simple storybooks among them, not as textbooks but to be read in leisure time, for extensive reading.
- To use audio and visual tools insofar as possible.
- To add special sections in the libraries of the schools for English book and maybe video cassettes and CDs.
- To display posters and newspapers in classrooms.
- To prepare camps or extra classes for them during their holidays.
- To broadcast movies, especially cartoons, in English on TV.
- To issue special magazines or newspapers for them.

It is worthwhile to mention that almost all of these suggestions can be implemented because most of the Iranian schools (at least in cities) are capable of preparing these simple facilities and the government can be involved in this enterprise.
Suggestions for Further Study

The present study investigated the differences between Iranian children and adults in learning English. The learners’ reading comprehension ability was the only area of the target language under consideration in this work. Other research can be carried out to find out the probable differences among different age groups in other areas and other language skills. It is obvious that reading comprehension research reveals the tip of iceberg and a further exploration will reveal larger problem areas.

Overall, this research did not deal with the differences in teaching methods suitable for children and adults. It is clear that there are certain methods, materials, situations, facilities and so many other things suitable for each age group (children and adults). Cultural differences between the learners’ native language and the target one, differences between different age groups from different social classes, differences between learners with different native languages and other social, economic, political and religious areas and factors can be discussed in relation to the foreign language teaching/learning process. These areas can be the subjects for other researches. By and large, the differences between child and adult English language learners is a vast research area in Iran because, unfortunately, it has remained untouched in this country and a great amount of research is needed to be undertaken in this field.

Similar researches can be carried out on other areas to investigate the differences between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language. The following points can be considered in further researches:

- Child-adult differences in listening and speaking skills. (writing is considered a complex skill that is not introduced too early in Iran).
- Different language teaching methods or approaches for children and adults.
- Different settings in which a foreign language can be taught to children and adults.
- The effect of the children’s first language in learning a second or foreign language in comparison with the adults’.
• The role of motivation in learning a foreign language and the differences between children and adults.
• The role of the children’s and adults’ personality in learning a foreign language

In conclusion, this researcher would like to offer a personal experience. The wife (thirty three years old) and daughter (three and half years old) of this researcher were in India for two years. While the daughter picked up both Hindi and English at an amazing pace, the wife, an adult and a graduate could pick up just a random word here and there and could not display even a fraction of the daughter’s fluency. When they went back to Iran, the daughter had made more Indian friends than the wife had!