ABSTRACT

The recent decades have witnessed growth in the importance of English as an essential means of communication in all fields such as science, education, economics, business, politics, etc. In those countries where English is a native or second language, the need for an international medium is not felt seriously. But in countries such as Iran, where this language is considered as a foreign language, possessing the ability to communicate with the outside world is a must.

The present study is an attempt to investigate the differences between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language. Iranian children begin learning English at the age of Twelve (grade seven) as a school subject. In a country where the lack of foreign language input is considered a great disadvantage for language learners, starting to learn English in secondary school does not seem wise and logical. Therefore, this study attempted to find the answer for the question whether there is a difference between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language. It is worthwhile to mention that in order to undertake an accurate research, the area of investigation was limited to the reading comprehension ability in English. The null hypothesis that was proposed for this research was: “There is not any difference between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language”.

It should be born in mind that there are many factors affecting the process of language learning in Iran, but, to achieve a precise result, the present research endeavours to investigate the possible effects of the age differences in learning English as a foreign language by Iranian children and adults. For this purpose, two groups of child and adult learners were selected from a private language teaching institute. Each group included forty learners, both girls and boys.

A pre-test was given to the learners to make sure of their homogeneity. After teaching English for four months (two terms), another test based on the materials that was taught to them, was given to examine the differences in the level of the students’ learned knowledge. A questionnaire was developed to get the necessary information about the socioeconomic status of the subjects and their families. The obtained scores and the information gained through the questionnaire were analysed statistically and
the results have been illustrated through tables and figures. Finally, the null hypothesis was rejected and the findings indicated a clear difference between Iranian children and adults in learning English as a foreign language. At the end of the study, child learners surpassed the adults in achieving the ability of reading comprehension in English.

Thus, it is concluded that it will be profitable to teach English to the Iranian students in primary schools. Teaching English from the primary school stage will create the opportunity for the children to be exposed to a great amount of English language input. Suggestions for developing a successful and fruitful foreign language teaching curriculum in Iran are proposed at the end of the present work.