

(A case study of English language learning in EFL context of Afghanistan)

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Abstract: Teaching English has a long history in Afghanistan. English is used as a foreign language, and it is used only in the class, especially in English Department. The teachers have applied grammar translation method because it is very difficult for the learners that join English Classes for the first time. The aim of this study was to investigate the Muhammad's language learning history and personality in Afghan context. In this study data was collected through interview, questionnaire and observation, after that analyzed in systematic way. The result shows that Learning English in the EFL context is very complicated because it is used only in the class and there is not enough linguistic input. Muhammad was a learner at Kabul Education University and in English Department. When he started learning English, he experienced many challenges that affected the learning process like discrimination, civil war, poverty and lack of access to technology in Afghanistan. Finally, learning English language was a very tough time because the social factors affected his learning process.

Key words: teaching, learning, motivation, and social factors.

I. BACKGROUND

English is used as a foreign language in the context of Afghanistan, and it is not the medium of instruction at schools. There are the national languages that have played crucial role in all fields. When the learners try to learn English language, they have to go the academic centers in order to learn English language. The method that has been applying in the learning class is grammar translation. Thus, it needs more time to learn English and there should be enough linguistic input for the learners. There are some factors that can affect language learning acquisition of a person. Concepts are not always easy to define but we can consider that basically affect is related to "aspects of emotion, feeling, mood or attitude which condition behavior" (Arnold and Brown, 1999). However, to understand how this fits into the language classroom it is useful to reflect on Stevick's often cited comment: "Success [in language learning] depends less on materials, techniques and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom" (Stevick, 1976). The *inside* and *between* is basically what affect is about: on the one hand, the individual or personality factors (self-concept/self-esteem, anxiety, inhibition, attitudes, motivation, learner styles...) which we can consider as *inside* the learner, and on the other, the relational aspects which develop *between* the participants in the classroom – between students or between teacher and students - or possibly *between* learners and the target language and culture. Positive effect can provide invaluable support for learning just as negative effect can close down the mind and prevent learning from occurring altogether. With his metaphor of the affective filter, Krashen (1985) warns about the problems created for learning by the negative aspect, but just as important as avoiding negative affective reactions is finding ways to establish a positive affective climate. Any classroom situation is influenced by the relationship between learning and affect but with language learning this is especially crucial since our self-

image is more vulnerable when we do not have mastery of our vehicle for expression – language. Furthermore, as Williams (1994) points out, there is no question that learning a foreign language is different to learning other subjects. This is mainly because of the social nature of such a venture. Language, after all, belongs to a person's whole social being; it is part of one's identity. One implication here is that if teachers do not take the affective side of language learning into account, conflicts on the level of identity may well develop and make the cognitive aspect of the learning process more difficult. Affect and cognition are both part of the learner's whole-person development.

In addition, Harmer (2007) stated that motivation is some kind of internal drive which pushes someone to do things in order to achieve something. He stated that both extrinsic and intrinsic motivation can enhance the chance of success in language learning and achieving the goal. As Deci and Flaste (1995) explained 'intrinsic motivation' is personal relationship. Motivation has a direct influence on second language acquisition. There is a correlation between what students do and learn and how this influences their motivation (Pintrich, 2003). Students who are well motivated learn well; when the learning is successful they become more motivated. Motivation must include features such as persistence, attendance to tasks, a desire to achieve goals, enjoyment. Motivation is the driving force behind the effort of a learner (Gardner, 2000). According to Knowles (1995) *"there is convincing evidence that people who take the initiative in learning (proactive learners), learn things better than do people who sit passively at the feet of teachers (reactive learners). Proactive learners enter into learning more purposefully and with great motivation"* (p.22). In other words, learners' autonomy increases learning effectiveness. Dickenson (1995) describes autonomy in L2 (second 5 Rose: A Case Study of English Language Acquisition by Chechen Programme Published by ARROW and TU Dublin, 2015 6 language) learning as one of the best aspects of motivation, and at the same time, one of the most difficult things to develop. Language is what people use in their daily lives and what they use to express, create and interpret meanings and to establish and maintain social and interpersonal relationships (Kramsch, 1994). Social interaction provides the necessary opportunities to practice and improve learners' communicative competence and ability (Schuman, 1986).

Another factors that can affect learner language learning is anxiety and stress. Lightbown and Spada (2006) stated that Learner anxiety, feeling worry, and stress that many students experience when learning a second language has been extensively investigated. He stated that, in fact, the majority of language anxiety scales, like the foreign language classroom anxiety scale measure in this way. For example, students are assumed to be 'anxious' if they strongly agree with statements such as ' I become anxious when I have to speak in second language classroom acknowledge that anxiety is more likely to be dynamic and dependent on particular situations and circumstance. This permits distinction to be made between for example, a student who feels anxious when giving an oral presentation in front of the class but not when discussing with peers in group work. Whatever the context, anxiety can play an important role in second language learning if it interferes with the learning process.

In addition, according to Lightbown and Spada (2006), errors are reflecting learners understanding of the second language system itself rather than an attempt to transfer characteristic of their first language. They are sometimes referred to as developmental errors because they are similar to those made by children

acquiring English as their first language. Furthermore, Harmer (2007) stated that errors types are common among most of second language learners. They make errors of spelling, grammar and punctuation that we might find it in the writing of a young native speakers of English. Such errors are reflecting learners understanding of second language. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), using vocabulary builds communication and transferring ideas and it is not important even if we place them in incorrect ordering because the purpose of using vocabulary is to make communication and vocabulary is the tools for communication, not a purpose. Furthermore, large class can be another factor which has affected on language learning. Sarwar (2001) stated that in large class it is difficult for teachers to evaluate the written and oral work of so many students and as well as teachers of large class seem to be buried under an endless pile of homework. According to Sarwar (2001), individualization is very essential for large classes, teachers should use variety of techniques for large class such as, pair works, group works, one to one study, individualized instruction, self-access instruction, self-directed learning, and autonomy, because they all focus on the learners as an individual and motivate students for learning.

The purpose of this research is to provide details information about Muhammad case study. It is important to know how this student has learned English as a foreign language in Afghanistan and which factors affect him during learning of Language. Moreover, this report, will give more information about Muhammad language learning history, learning styles and personality, oral skill assessment and written skill assessment. Therefore, data will be collected more in critical ways in order to discover what is expected in the process of this research.

Method

The data for this case study was done through open- ended questions, face-to-face interview with follow up questions and voice recording. Semi structure interview was used for language leaning history because during interview Muhammad was asked some follow up questions as well. In order to record and transcript his voice, first the participant's permission was taken, and then eleven open ended questions were asked and his voice was recorded. After that, the information was analyzed based on transcription voice.

Moreover, VAK questionnaires were used for learning style and personality. These questionnaires were 30 multiples choice questions with the explanation at the end of that in order to identify the participant learning styles easily. It means, the questionnaires were consisting of A's=B's=C's such as, if he chose A's, he has a visual learning style, if he chooses B's he has auditory learning style and finally if he chooses C's he has a kinesthetic learning style. These questionnaires took 20 minutes to answer that. In addition VAK questionnaire was taken from www.businessba.com?.../vak_learning_styles_questions.

In addition, digital recording was used for Muhammad oral skill assessment. In oral skill section, Mohammad was asked to talk about an open ended question which was about the advantages and disadvantages of internet in current situation. During speaking his voice was recorded and then transcribed. Digital record approximately took 5 minutes. Then Muhammad's speech was analyzed in order to assess his ability in the using of vocabulary, grammar, word choice and pronunciation in order to find his strengths and weaknesses in oral speaking.

Furthermore, in order to collect data about Mohammad written language, he was given one open-ended question which was about “friendship” and ask him to write a paragraph about the given topic. Muhammad was given five minutes to write the topic. The participant’s written paper was analyzed in order to evaluate his ability in organization and grammar.

Data Analysis

Muhammad is a 19 years old boy. He was born in 1395 in Panjshir province of Afghanistan. At the age of six he moved to Kabul and completed his school in Nasiry Hight school of Kabul and then after passing Kankor examination he become success in English department of Kabul Education University. His father was an army officer and his mother is housewife. He has four brothers and three sisters that they are smaller than Muhammad and they are busy with their studying in school. Muhammad is the eldest son of his family.

According to Muhammad, he grew up in an uneducated family. His parents are illiterate and they did not go to school at all because of civil wars in the country. Muhammad stated that his father is 45 years old and he works as an officer in the army since he was young. His mother is 43 years old and she is a homemaker and she is busy with the house chores. Muhammad mentioned that although his father is illiterate but he is very open-minded and he always encourage his sons to study hard and support his sons and daughters to do the best of their ability. He said that his parents can only speak in one language that is Dari and it is their Native language. They cannot speak other languages such as Pashto, Uzbaki or others because they lived in a place where there were not any people to speak Pashto, Uzbaki that they can learn.

As a matter of fact, Muhammad can speak two languages Dari and English. The first language that he is exposed to learn was for sure his mother tongue i.e. Dari. He lived in a monolingual place where all people spoke one language and that was Dari language. According to Muhammad he acquired his mother tongue at the very early days of his life when he was interacting with family members and those kids around him. Therefore, he only speaks in Dari and he does not know Pashto, Uzbaki or other local language of Afghanistan. He stated that this is because that he lived in a place where people only speak in Dari and also his parents do not know other language to speak with him in order to help him to learn the other local languages.

Mohammad began to learn English language in Kabul at the age of thirteen when he was in the eighth grade at Ghula Haidar khan high school. At school he was very polite and active student in his class. From school he only learned English alphabets and some simple words and sentences up to eight grades. Then he noticed that his English was very poor and because of having lots of interest for learning English he started to learn language by following some English courses. Mohammad was intrinsically motivated by himself to learn English language. When he was a child he did not like to study but when he became younger he thought with himself that if he learns English language then his life becomes better in the future, after that he decided and started learning English for one year with IRC system in Broshna Course which is located in Khair Khana. After one year he thought with himself that his English was not improved or he could not learn that as much as his expectation, then he went to Azrakhsh course that was the famous and best course on that time and taught English for ten months. After that he did not joined to any courses but in 1394 after passing Kankor examination he joined to Kabul Education University (KEU), and become successes in English Department. Now he is continuing his study in KEU and he is in the sophomore English class. Mohammad learns English

as an informal language from the courses and as well as he learns somehow from university. He did not have any foreign trips to learn other foreign languages there.

Moreover, Muhammad was an intrinsic motivated student, besides following English courses he always listened to the radios, BBC news, and American English films in order to can speak English fluently as soon as possible. It means that social factors and intrinsic motivation can affected him to learn English as well.

The most important factor which helped him go after English was the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation such as his family motivate him a lot to learn English. Secondly, existence of American offices in Afghanistan and their necessity for translator motivate him to learn English and try his best as much as possible. In addition, Muhammad said that one of the psychological factors which affects him in language learning was finding a good job which could help him grow up financially to support his family.

In Afghanistan Muhammad was faced with lots of problems. There were some problems and issues which caused or affected Mohammad language learning in Afghanistan. For example, Mohammad was faced with economic problems such as his father was an officer in the Afghan army and the one who secure family budget. Mohammad was the oldest son in his family that had some more responsibility too. Although, his family economy was not good his father encouraged Mohammad to focus just on his lessons and try his best to learn it without thinking about the economic problems. His father always supports him to learn his lessons. In addition, Muhammad was affected by civil wars, conflicts, discriminations, suicide attacks, and robbery in the country which had a negative impact on his language learning process on that time and right now. Muhammad believes that the pointed problems in Afghanistan became the cause that his English is not very well as native English speakers. Mohammad stated that, "I was watching TVs and listening to the radios which were all about crimes and bad situations of Afghanistan". Moreover, he said that his father was an officer in the army and he was always in the war with the enemies of Afghanistan and Mohammad was concerned for losing his father in the wars. He stated that "these feelings have bad effect on my language learning too".

Moreover, there were some social factors that affected Muhammad learning when he is in the KEU. For example, when Muhammad joined the English department of Kabul Education University as an undergraduate student in 2015, he faced with lots of problems that had bad effect on his attitude and interest to learning English. He stated that in KEU there are some students that their English speaking is not good, when they want to give oral speeches they make mistakes and students laugh on them. These social factors such as environment, and social problems cause Muhammad that cannot speak English correctly and fluently. He said "although I try my best, I always listen to BBC news and watch TVs' English programs, listen to English music but mentally I do not feel relax to participate in the lesson without any anxiety or worry and I suffer from that too much.

Furthermore, the other social factor that affected on Mohammad language learning was huge number of students in the class and as well as lack of interaction in his learning. Due to large number of students in the class there was not much chance to him to practice his speaking, and teacher did not give him feedback when he made mistakes during speaking and it really made him unwillingness for learning English. Therefore,

students think that teacher does not have attention to them, very little learning takes place and as well as they lose their interest for learning.

Muhammad's writing was in intermediate level because his writing was good based on his level. In addition, when Muhammad was asked to write a paragraph about "friendship", he writes his paragraph on 5 minutes without any preparation. However, Muhammad's writing was very good but it has some problems as well.

So, it is important to talk about some skills of Muhammad in terms of grammar. Muhammad's grammatical errors were very few and one of his errors was with the use of "is and are" in the sentences. For instance, in the sentences "Life without friend are death without witness". In these sentences he makes mistake with the use of is and are because there was not any plural subject that he used are. Instead Muhammad should use "life without friend is death without witness". Because, it is obvious that we always use singular subjects with is and plural subjects with are. As, life is singular then it is necessary that he used is with that. It is obvious that Muhammad has not made a mistake intentionally. This is because he writes the paragraph in less time without any preparation. And in his whole writing there were two mistakes that he did.

Moreover, Muhammad writing was in intermediate level based on the organization. Because based on his level he can write a paragraph without any previous preparation and it was good at all. For instance, he used some indent on his writing which is very appropriate and was based on APA style, as well as the capitalization in his writing was very good. However, he has some problems based on the organizing of ideas, topic sentences, body paragraph and concluding sentence which were about friendship. For instance, Muhammad's topic sentence was not good because it was not his idea and at the same time does not have any controlling ideas to make the body paragraph clear for the readers. It means controlling ideas in the paragraph makes the topic clear for the people that the topic will discuss about these issues, unfortunately it does not have. Furthermore, the body in his paragraph does not support the topic sentences well because in the body, people should write something that can support the topic sentences, but actually in Muhammad's writing there was not any example, evidence and good ideas to support his topic sentence. Beside these, it is very necessary that a paragraph should have concluding sentences to summarize the main ideas and can give clear understanding from the topic to the readers. Unfortunately, Muhammad writing does not have concluding sentences at all. From observation what Muhammad did that he has lots of organization problems and it is because in Afghanistan there are not many professional teacher to help students with good writing as well as due to large number of students in the Afghan classes specially in language classes teachers cannot give feedback on students writing.

Furthermore, Muhammad's vocabulary was in intermediate level, because he used words which were very clear for the reader and he avoids the rubbish words which are not appropriate in academic writing. However, he has some problems in the usage of some words which make the sentences irrelevant. For instance, "it is obvious that friendship is a necessity, as human cannot overcome the problems alone and does not enjoy life without friends. But it is necessary to identify good friend and choose the best....." Muhammad said. In this sentences overcome is not very good word and instead he used to solve it was much appropriate than that. For instance, Muhammad has used a variety of words and vocabulary which some of them are not

appropriate places, but they transfer ideas pretty well. In addition, he uses but in the sentences which is not appropriate there and that makes the sentences non sense. In my point of view, it is better to omit “but” in the sentences and instead he should use therefore, or so.

In conclusion, Muhammad writing was good because his grammar competence was reasonable to some extent and he has very few mistakes that can solve it through practice. In addition, his writing was not good based on organization, because in Afghanistan there is not many proficient teachers to help students in their writing and in order to help them to improve their writing give them good feedback. Furthermore, Muhammad vocabulary was very nice and it was very clear for readers to read and can catch the meaning easily. As a teacher, I suggest Muhammad to read the grammar books and make sentences or use that in his daily speeches. In addition, he should read the books and focus on the writing and read the books which have paragraph writing, essay writing and focus on the organization. Beside this, he should ask teacher to solve and check his paper and gives him feedback and if teacher cannot solve his problems he should give his paper to his classmates to give him feedback. Furthermore, he should read books and focus on the usages of words.

Discussion and Teaching Implications

As the subject background was evaluated, it was founded some social factors that Muhammad was affected such as, civil wars, conflicts, discriminations, suicide attacks, economical problems and robbery in the country which had a negative impact on his language learning process on that time and right now. It was believed that the pointed problems in Afghanistan become the cause that his English is not very well as native English speakers. In addition, some other factor that affected in his learning was worry of losing his father in the war. He said that as his father was an officer in the army and he was always in the war with the enemies of Afghanistan and Mohammad had lots of worry for losing his father in the wars. He stated that “these feelings have bad effect on my language learning too. In the teaching class, for instance, teacher tone of voice can be simulation or facial expression can create simulation, eyes contact, linking the lesson with students’ life can create simulation. Sarwar (2001) stated that teacher should use variety of activities in his or her lesson in order to motivate students to can take place simultaneously and as well as he or she should use materials relevant to learners need.

Regardless of some social factors that affected Muhammad learning such as, discrimination among teachers and students and giving high number for students who do not study the lesson and as well as huge number of students in the class and luck of giving chance for them to participate in the lesson affected on Muhammad language learning. It will be useful if the teachers give group works and asks students from different provinces of Afghanistan with different level of learning to participate in a group and share their ideas, this will help students to do not think about discrimination and as well as it will motivate those students that feel they are in low level. In the original (1983) formulation of the Interaction Hypothesis, long inferred that modified interaction is necessary for language acquisition, as the following relationships: Interaction modification makes input comprehensible. 2 comprehensible inputs promote acquisition. 3 Interaction modifications promote acquisition.

After analyzing the questionnaires, it was found that Mohammad is visual learner and he learn the lesson very well when he looks at something, watching TVs. This visual helps him to learn best through what

he sees. He learns best when he uses graphical ways to represent what he studying and prefer when the information is represented in diagrams or graphs. Eheman and Oxford (1990) stated that visual learners like to read and obtain a great deal from visual stimulation. For them lectures, conversation and oral instructions without any visual backup can be very confusing. If I have such types of students I use video, picture, and charts to involve learners in the learning process and motivate them. For instance, in conversation class, I hung different pictures on the wall and ask students that with their pairs go around the class and see the pictures then describe the pictures to each other. This kind of activity will help students to improve their speaking and as well as it motivates visual learners to do not get bored.

In general, Muhammad has some oral mistakes. For example, he used some words which were inappropriate or it was incorrect based on the situation or sentences. For example, several times he used “mistakenly” instead of “wrong” and “practice” instead of “use”. For instance, “There is a lot of mistakenly information on the internet”. The correct sentences is, there is a lot of wrong information on the internet. Also he used “apply” instead of “use”. For instance, Muhammad said that “even when I face problems I apply net to solve my problems”. The correct sentences is, even when I face problems I use net to solve my problems. Therefore, using of these words show that Muhammad had different variety of words in his head or mind but does not know the usages of that. It was thought that this problem is due to lack of knowledge of words and due to memorizing words without reading from text or academic materials. As a teacher when I faced with such type of students, I will use group work in the class, and ask groups to present their ideas in front of the class, during presentation I note students’ mistakes after that I explain to them the right or appropriate words, I do the same with grammar problems. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006), learners should encounter word many times in order to learn it well enough to recognized it in new contexts or produce it in their own speaking and writing. I suggest that teacher should ask students to read the books in their homes and do margin note, then teacher should ask them to explain that in the class. This help student to improve their reading and understand the usages of words in the sentences and as well as it improves their speaking when they explain it to the class.

Based on writing, Muhammad had some problems such as organization, vocabulary and grammar problems. Muhammad’s grammatical errors were very few and one of his errors was in the use of “is and are “in the sentences. He did not know how to use and are based on the subject. For instance, in the sentences “Life without friend are death without witness”. In these sentences he makes mistake with the use of is and are because there was not any plural subject that he used are. Instead Muhammad should use “life without friend is death without witness”. Because, it is obvious that we always use singular subjects with is and plural subjects with are. As, life is singular then it is necessary that he used is with that. As teacher, if I have such students, first I will explain them the usages of is and are orally, then I write some sentences and after that I asked themselves to make sentences. When they make sentences I will check and give him feedback and correct his mistakes. This will help him to learn it easily and never forget it. Ur (2012) stated that teacher should use exercise in the class and asks students to fill the blanks then at the end if students had problem teacher should tell the correct usage of that.

Conclusion

Finally, bringing the major findings into a successful conclusion of Muhammad's language learning history and personality was affected by social environmental factors. These factors influenced his language learning background, personality and lifestyle. Although, he faced with lots of problem he could improve his English very well. Though, he had lots of problem and if some others were instead of him he or she could not learn language has Muhammad learn. Muhammad can read, write, listen and speak English well but some problem that he faces is because he was not with native speaker and he learn language in an environment where English is not their language and it does not much focus on learning that. Because of this, I can suggest that Muhammad is very intelligent and hard worker students who learnt language in one year.

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