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A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF PLACED VERSUS PROMOTED STUDENTS' PERFORMANCE
IN ORAL AND WRITTEN TESTS: THE CASE OF ILI LANGUAGE LEARNERS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the present study was to investigate the possible differences between placed and promoted students' performance in their oral and written tests. To do so, first the available literature in this field including the optimal age for learning and advances in designing various language placement tests was reviewed. Then, a total of 320 language learners from the Iran Language Institute (ILI), Babol branch, were selected as the participants of the study. The oral performances were assessed during the term and their written performances were recorded by conducting the final exam of the ILI. The obtained data were analyzed through utilizing both descriptive and inferential statistics including independent sample t-test. The result of the statistical analyses revealed that promoted students had a better performance. The findings of this study gave some implications for educational policy makers at the ILI, syllabus designers at the research center of the ILI and EFL teachers in the language teaching profession to pay more attention to the age factor of language learners and their educational background and take into consideration the shortcomings of placement tests and procedures in language learning process.

Keywords: placed student, promoted student, institutes, EFL learners

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INTRODUCTION

The learning of a foreign language is such a complex process that involves a multitude of factors. Among these factors, one can mention the age and length of exposure to language as two determining and influential factors. The present researchers' years of teaching experiences show that students who start language learning before the puberty age are different from those who start their language education at later times. Besides, the learners' intellectual and cognitive maturity makes them perform differently in different skills. Another important variable is the duration of language education. These factors have been covered to a large extent by different scholars. Outstanding among them is the famous critical period hypothesis.

There are two ways to acquire second or foreign languages. It can be in a formal way such as attending language classrooms or informal way such as being a culturally active participant of the society. This is feasible by attending schools in the target country, watching television, listening to radio and reading newspapers in second language. By being actively involved in the learning atmosphere, the learner is always in touch with the target language through normal daily chores. It is extremely vital in second language acquisition to look at the learning environment and investigate if the age factor has any relevant effect.

Five phases of Second Language Acquisition are as follows: It is generally believed that the process of second language acquisition takes place in various stages. In order to examine SLA, looking at the five stages of second language acquisition seems inevitable. Haynes (2007) calls the first stage as 'preproduction' which is also referred to as "the silent period" in which language learners gradually constitute their vocabulary to a range of 500 words without being able to speak the language but just pretending to echo the language. After that comes the second stage called 'early production' in which learners will accumulate around 1000 word vocabulary with the ability to build words in short phrases and memorize and use short language forms although not necessarily properly (Haynes, 2000). The third stage is called 'speech emergence' by Haynes where learners have mastered around 3000 words and are supposed to be able to utter short sentences and simple phrases. By now, learners are expected to be able to participate in conversation and ask a range of grammatically simple questions. They can understand short stories as well if they are supported with pictures. In the fourth development stage i.e. 'intermediate fluency' he explains that the learners have an active vocabulary of 6000 words. Also, he believes that students can now form longer and more complex structures both spoken and written with grammatical errors but demonstrate excellent comprehension. The last development stage is called 'advanced fluency' and as he points out, it takes around 5-10 years to achieve proficiency in second language acquisition and by now the learners are considered to have a native-like proficiency. Indeed, Haynes asserts that on the surface it may seem quite effortless to learn a second language but there are several factors which can have impact on the learning process and thus making it cumbersome such as motivation and age.

The critical period hypothesis is the subject of a long-standing debate in linguistics and language acquisition over the extent to which the ability to acquire language is biologically dependent to age. The hypothesis states that there is a perfect time window to acquire language in a linguistically natural rich environment and after that further language acquisition becomes much more cumbersome and effortful.

The critical period hypothesis holds that the first few years of life is the crucial time in which an individual can acquire a first language if presented with enough stimuli. If language input is not available until after this time, the individual is not likely to achieve a thorough command of language – especially grammatical systems.

The evidence for such a critical period seems to be rare, and support comes largely from theoretical arguments and analogies to other critical periods in biology such as visual development, though being rather widely accepted. However, the nature of such a period has been one of the most widely debated issues in psycholinguistics and cognitive science in general for decades. Some writers have suggested a 'sensitive' or 'optimal' period rather than a critical one; others dispute the causes like physical maturation and cognitive factors. The length of the period also varies greatly in different accounts.

In second-language acquisition, the most reliable and acceptable evidence for the critical period hypothesis is in the study of accent, in which older students are not able to achieve a native-like level. However, under certain circumstances, native-like accent has been reported which suggests that accent is influenced by multiple factors like identity and motivation and not a critical period biological limit (Moyer, 1999; Bongaerts et.al., 1995; Young-Scholten, 2002).

A widely accepted finding shows that children are slower at SLA than adolescents. However, they tend to reach higher levels of proficiency in the long run. Some studies on successful adults' ultimate gain and attainment go beyond the traditional CPH research methodology and debate; they tap into a number of variables, involve a range of first languages, use tests of performance, and consider different "opportunities

afforded to individual learners" (Moyer, 2004, p. 147) and to what extent they are eager to be taken for native speakers.

Language institutes rely on their placement tests to decide who should go to what level. This, in most cases fails to take into account the above important factors. Placement tests focus on language skills and not on cognitive, affective and other related factors. Using a placement test in private language schools has been a common tradition since long ago. A placement test is designed to quickly place language learners into homogeneous ability levels. Depending on the type of placement test, it is usually supposed to provide an accurate assessment of test takers general receptive language proficiency in different skill areas such as listening comprehension, grammatical and vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Though having many advantages, these tests are not free of disadvantages. These tests do not test the general language skills such as analytical or critical thinking, relationship between ideas and inference making abilities.

Statement of the Problem

Although placement tests have long been used in language institutes to assign students to the right levels and guarantee the homogeneity of the groups, they have almost always failed to take into account the cognitive and affective differences among the learners who are put in the same groups. The researchers' fairly long experience in teaching English as a foreign language shows that these instruments (placement tests) are not free of shortcomings. Although both adults and young adults pass through the same procedures (taking written and oral placement tests), after some terms the attrition rate of adults who have not passed the preliminary young adult courses is expected to be to some extent higher than the other group. Williams and Burden (1997) assert that giving language aptitude tests to students prior to the beginning of the course can help organizers place learners in appropriate classes considering their learning abilities. Since no amount of pre-testing and careful placement can entirely prevent the mentioned problems of heterogeneous classes, other considerable sources of heterogeneity should also be taken into account.

Significance of the Study

If the results of the present study happen to show basic differences between the placed and promoted learners, it can make language educators reconsider the placement procedures and take care of cognitive and affective factors in placement along with the linguistic elements.

At the ILI, each student is allocated to the right level after going through a placement test. In this test two skills and two language elements are tested through written and oral test which are grammar, vocabulary, listening and speaking, respectively. After getting their scores in these areas the language learner is placed in his most appropriate level by the examiner.

In the world's education literature, this sort of placement test is known as personality assessment which is conducted before the start of the syllabus. The purpose of such a test is to assess the language repertoire of the learner which is unfortunately ignored to a great extent in educational system of our country.

It has sometime been observed that students are categorized in several classes only based on giving a very simple test accompanied by an inaccurate oral speaking test. Considering the objective written test the following advantages and disadvantages can be mentioned.

Advantages:

- 1) Presenting the subject in a simple and easy-to-understand framework
- 2) Being easily corrected by the examiner
- 3) Preventing any future objection on the result of the test

Disadvantages:

- 1) Not assessing the learners thoroughly (failing to go beyond linguistic level)
- 2) Being based on some wild guesses while choosing the right option in the written test
- 3) Being appropriate only for lower levels

It is expected that in a dynamic system of language education policy makers pay close attention to placing newcomers to the right level since this scientific method of placement will guarantee his future success or failure in the language learning system of the institute. To put it in a nutshell, it should be mentioned that

the first and the most important factor in guaranteeing language learners' loyalty to the institute is preparing a good and standard placement test being conducted by a group of professional examiners.

Research Questions

1. Is there a significant difference between the performance of placed students and promoted students studying English at the Iran Language Institute (ILI) in oral tests?
2. Is there a difference between the performance of placed students and promoted students studying English at the ILI in written tests?

Methodology**Participants**

The participants of the present study were 320 male language learners from Babol branch of Iran language Institute (ILI). The participants' age range was between 15 and 35 and they belonged to basic, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced levels of proficiency. It should be mentioned that these participants were allocated to different classes by the ILI staff.

Instruments

To fulfill the purpose of the present study, a number of instruments were utilized. These instruments include:

Final Written Examinations

These examinations which are designed by test developers in the central branch of ILI in Tehran are taken by students in all branches of the institute in Iran. These examinations which are given to the students to measure their written performance contain 60-75 multiple choice questions. The tests include four parts. In the first part the test takers are supposed to answer 10 listening comprehension questions. In the second part they provide answers to 20 vocabulary questions and the third part includes 20 grammar questions. The last part of the tests contains 10-20 reading comprehension questions. It should be mentioned that the overall score of the written test rates from 0-100.

Oral Proficiency Test

The oral proficiency of the students consisted of memorizing and acting out the dialogues in pairs, orally presenting a summary of the reading and orally answering comprehension questions asked by other students in class. Students' performances on these tasks were the criteria for grading their oral proficiency which rated from 0-100.

Observation

The researchers' observations in the classroom as an English teacher was used as a useful tool for evaluating the learners' performances on various tasks such as workbook exercises, pair works and group works.

Data Collection Procedure

The sample of the present study included both placed and promoted students studying in the adult department of Iran Language institute who entered the program either through a placement test or through transition from young adult department, respectively. Both placed and promoted language learners were in the same educational system and taught by the same teacher and methodology during the term. The educational department was contacted directly and arrangements were made by the researchers to obtain students' grades from the department at the end of the term. Only the students whose performances have been evaluated by the same examiners were included in the study. In other words, at each level, the examiners had to be the same to minimize rater difference unreliability.

Sampling

Due to such practical limitations as the shortage of time, lack of cooperation of ILI directors other than the one in which one of the researchers had worked as a teacher for years, he had no choice but to resort to convenience sampling.

Design

The present study has an exploratory design in the sense that it seeks to explore the possible differences between the performances of placed and promoted students as well as their attrition rate across proficiency levels at the ILI.

Data Analysis

Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used in the present study. As the comparison was drawn between two groups, independent samples t-test or the equivalent non-parametric test was utilized to analyze the obtained data. The use of independent samples t-test was further justified by the fact that the assumption of the normality of the collected data was also established by the researchers. In order to fulfill the purpose of the study, the present researchers collected the scores of the two groups of placed and promoted students on their oral and written performances at the end of the term. It should be noted that the researchers chose 220 male participants from the ILI branch in Babol, which were divided into two groups of placed students and promoted students.

RESULTS**Test of Normality**

As it is usual, researchers need to make sure whether the data they have collected meet the assumption of normality or not to be able to decide whether to use parametric or non-parametric tests. To this end, the present researchers ran the test of normality using SPSS. As shown in table 1, the sig. values of the Shapiro-wilk test of normality for all groups are larger the cut-off .05 meaning that the collected data at all levels are normal and the researchers can use the parametric test of independent sample T-test to compare the means of the promoted and placed learners of language.

Table 1: Tests of Normality

Shapiro-Wilk			
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Ele. Written	.960	40	.167
Ele. Oral	.976	40	.533
Pre. Written	.976	40	.555
Pre. Oral	.965	40	.256
Inter. Written	.983	40	.801
Inter. Oral	.925	40	.051
High. Written	.976	40	.554
High. Oral	.918	40	.057
Adv. Written	.970	40	.366
Adv. Oral	.929	40	.055

Investigation of the First and Second Research Questions

In order to investigate the first and second research questions, the researchers compared the oral and written performances of the participants of the present study at five levels of proficiency as follows.

Table 2: Statistics for Elementary Level

Group Statistics					
	VAROOO32	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Ele. Written	1.00	20	73.0500	13.83540	3.09369
	2.00	20	78.1000	12.84687	2.87265
Ele. oral	1.00	20	84.70005	.94802	1.33002
	2.00	20	82.9000	6.24837	1.39718

As table 2 shows, the mean and standard deviation for the elementary promoted participants on the oral test were 84.7 and 5.94 respectively. The mean of placed students was 82.9 and the standard deviation was 6.24. Regarding the performance of the elementary students on the written test as table 2 shows the

mean for the promoted students was 73.05 and the standard deviation was 13.83. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the placed students were 78.1 and 12.84, respectively. In order to see if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups the researchers ran independent sample t-test as it is shown in table 3 below.

Table 3: Independent Sample Test for Elementary Level

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means				
	f	sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval Difference	Confidence of the Difference
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.044	.835	-1.196	38	.239	-5.05000	4.22173	-13.59645	3.49645
			-	37.793	.239	-5.05000	4.22173	-13.59799	3.49799
Equal variances not assumed			1.196						
Equal variances assumed	.286	.596	.933	38	.357	1.80000	1.92900	-2.10506	5.70506
			.933	37	.908	1.80000	1.92900	-2.10537	5.70537
Equal variances not assumed									

In order to see whether the two groups' performances in oral and written tests were statistically significantly different from each other or not, the scores were subjected to the parametric test of independent sample T-test. As shown in Table 3 above, the sig. value for the oral test is bigger than the cut-off .05 which means the performances of the two groups were not statistically significantly different from each other. The sig. value for the written test, as shown in table 3 above, is .83 which means that the null hypothesis assuming that the performance of the promoted and placed students at the elementary level are not different is confirmed. In other words, the two groups performed similarly in the written test, and the oral test as well. Considering the mean of the two groups, we can safely conclude that the promoted students performed the same as the placed students in this level.

Table 4: Statistics for pre-intermediate Level

Group Statistics					
	VAROOO32	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
pre. Written	1.00	20	68.1500	14.96056	3.34528
	2.00	20	70.7500	11.41502	2.55248
pre. Oral	1.00	20	84.3500	7.01333	1.56823
	2.00	20	81.9000	4.75616	1.06351

As table 4 shows, the mean and standard deviation for the pre-intermediate promoted participants on the oral test were 84.35 and 7.01, respectively. The mean of placed students was 81.9 and the standard deviation was 4.75. Regarding the performance of the pre-intermediate students on the written test as table 4 shows the mean for the promoted students was 68.15 and the standard deviation was 14.96. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the placed students were 70.75 and 11.41, respectively. In order to see if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups, the researchers ran independent sample t-test as it is shown in table 5 below.

Table 5: Independent Sample Test for Pre-intermediate Level

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means	
	f	sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	.544	.465	-.618	38	.540	-2.600000	4.20786	-	11.11836	5.91836
pre. written			-.618	35.523	.541	-2.600000	4.20786	-	11.13791	5.93791
Equal variances not assumed										
Equal variances assumed	2.730	.107	1.293	38	.204	2.45000	1.89483	-1.38589	6.28589	6.28589
pre. oral			1.293	33.425	.205	2.45000	1.89483	-1.40321	6.30321	6.30321
Equal variances not assumed										

In order to see whether the two groups' performances in oral and written tests were statistically significantly different from each other or not, the scores were subjected to the parametric test of independent sample T-test. As shown in Table 5 above, the sig. value for the oral test is bigger than the cut-off .05 which means the performances of the two groups were not statistically significantly different from each other. The sig. value for the written test, as shown in table 5 above, is .465 which means that the null hypothesis assuming that the performance of the promoted and placed students at the pre-intermediate level are not different is confirmed. In other words, the two groups performed similarly in the written test and in the oral

test as well. Considering the mean of the two mentioned groups, we can safely conclude that the promoted students performed the same as the placed students in this level.

Table 6: Statistics for Intermediate Level

Group Statistics					
	VAROOO32	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Inter. Written	1.00	20	74.5000	9.59989	2.14660
	2.00	20	67.6500	7.91584	1.77004
Inter. Oral	1.00	20	86.6000	3.48531	.77934
	2.00	20	74.7500	1.97017	.44054

As table 6 shows, the mean and standard deviation for the intermediate promoted participants on the oral test were 86.6 and 3.48, respectively. The mean of placed students was 74.75 and the standard deviation was 1.97. Regarding the performance of the intermediate students on the written test as table 6 shows the mean for the promoted students was 74.5 and the standard deviation was 9.59. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the placed students were 67.65 and 7.91, respectively. In order to see if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups, the researchers ran independent sample t-test as it is shown in table 7 below.

Table 7: Independent Sample Test for Intermediate Level

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means					
	F	sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval Difference	Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	1.425	.240	2.462	38	.018	6.85000	2.78225	1.21763	12.48237	
			2.462	36.669	.019	6.85000	2.78225	1.21091	12.48909	
Equal variances not assumed	5.628	.023	13.237	38	.000	11.85000	.89524	10.03769	13.66231	
					.000	11.85000	.89524	10.02173	13.67827	
Equal variances assumed										
Equal variances not assumed										

In order to see whether the two groups' performances in oral and written tests were statistically significantly different from each other or not, the scores were subjected to the parametric test of independent sample T-test. As shown in table 7 above, the sig. value for the oral test is smaller than the cut-off .05 which means the performances of the two groups were statistically significantly different from each other. The sig.

value for the written test, as shown in table 7 above, is .240 which means that the null hypothesis assuming that the performance of the promoted and placed students at the intermediate level are not different is confirmed. In other words, the two groups performed similarly in the written test, but differently in the oral test. Considering the bigger mean of the promoted students, we can safely conclude that the promoted students performed better than the placed students.

Table 8: Statistics for High-intermediate Level

Group Statistics					
	VAROOO32	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
High. Written	1.00	20	68.3000	10.54863	2.35875
	2.00	20	65.4000	8.76836	1.96067
High. Oral	1.00	20	83.0000	5.53458	1.23757
	2.00	20	76.4500	3.57587	.79959

As table 8 shows, the mean and standard deviation for the high- intermediate promoted participants on the oral test were 83.0 and 5.53, respectively. The mean of placed students was 76.45 and the standard deviation was 3.57. Regarding the performance of the high- intermediate students on the written test as table 8 shows the mean for the promoted students was 68.3 and the standard deviation was 10.54. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the placed students were 65.4 and 8.76, respectively. In order to see if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups, the researchers ran independent sample t-test as it is shown in table 9 below.

Table 9: Independent Sample Test for High-Intermediate Level

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means	
	F	sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	Upper
High. written assumed variances	Equal	1.255	.270	0.945	38	.350	2.90000	3.06723	-	9.10928
	not assumed			0.945	36.772	.351	2.90000	3.06723	-	9.11610
High. oral assumed variances	Equal	5.552	.024	4.445	38	.000	6.55000	1.47340	3.56725	9.53275
	not assumed			4.445	32.509	.000	6.55000	1.47340	3.55061	9.54939

In order to see whether the two groups' performances in oral and written tests were statistically significantly different from each other or not, the scores were subjected to the parametric test of independent

sample T-test. As shown in table 9 above, the sig. value for the oral test is smaller than the cut-off .05 which means the performances of the two groups were statistically significantly different from each other. The sig. value for the written test, as shown in table 9 above, is .270 which means that the null hypothesis assuming that the performance of the promoted and placed students at the high-intermediate level are not different is confirmed. In other words, the two groups performed similarly in the written test, but differently in the oral test. Considering the bigger mean of the promoted students, we can safely conclude that the promoted students performed better than the placed students.

Table 10: Statistics for Advanced Level

Group Statistics					
	VAROOO32	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Adv. Written	1.00	20	72.7500	8.62600	1.92883
	2.00	20	68.0500	9.48947	2.12191
Adv. Oral	1.00	20	83.8500	3.77352	.84379
	2.00	20	74.4000	2.34857	.52516

As table 10 shows, the mean and standard deviation for the advanced promoted participants on the oral test were 83.85 and 3.77, respectively. The mean of placed students was 74.4 and the standard deviation was 2.34. Regarding the performance of the advanced students on the written test as table 10 shows, the mean for the promoted students was 72.75 and the standard deviation was 8.62. Moreover, the mean and standard deviation of the placed students were 68.05 and 9.48, respectively. In order to see if there were statistically significant differences between the two groups, the researchers ran independent sample t-test as it is shown in table 11 below.

Table 11: Independent Sample Test for Advanced Level

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means		t-test for Equality of Means	
	F	sig	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Interval Difference	Lower	Upper
Adv. written assumed equal variances	.083	.774	1.639	38	.109	4.70000	2.86756	-1.10507	10.50507	10.50679
Adv. written assumed not equal variances			1.639	37.659	0.110	4.70000	2.86756	-1.10679	10.50679	10.50679
Adv. oral assumed equal variances	8.378	.006	9.508	38	.000	9.45000	.99386	7.43803	11.46197	11.47493
Adv. oral assumed not equal variances			9.508	31.799	.000	9.45000	.99386	7.42507	11.47493	11.47493

In order to see whether the two groups' performances in oral and written tests were statistically significantly different from each other or not, the scores were subjected to the parametric test of independent sample t-test. As shown in table 11 above, the sig. value for the oral test is smaller than the cut-off .05 which means the performances of the two groups were statistically significantly different from each other. The sig. value for the written test, as shown in table 11 above, is .774 which means that the null hypothesis assuming that the performance of the promoted and placed students at the advanced level are not different is confirmed. In other words, the two groups performed similarly in the written test, but differently in the oral test. Considering the bigger mean of the promoted students, we can safely conclude that the promoted students performed better than the placed students in this level.

Considering the results of the t-tests run to compare the performances of the two groups at all proficiency levels, we can safely state that the oral and written performances of the placed and promoted students at the ILL are not statistically significantly different from each other at lower levels of proficiency (elementary and pre-intermediate) but the promoted learners had better performances at intermediate, high intermediate and advanced levels. Therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis.

DISCUSSION

After obtaining the learners' score on the final exam plus their oral performances during the term it became clear that there weren't any significant differences between the learners' oral and written performances in elementary and pre-intermediate levels. As table 2 shows, in elementary level, the promoted learners' performance on the written test was lower than those of the placed learners (their obtained means were 78.07 to 73.05) while on the oral test their performance was almost the same (84.70 to 82.90).

For the pre-intermediate level the difference of the mean in both oral and written test was not that much significant. As table 4 shows, in the written test the mean of the promoted learners was 68.15 whereas the mean for the placed learners was 70.75.

Due to lack of strong educational background the placed learners started to lag behind and perform differently in both oral and written tests in higher levels as it is clear from table 6. It should be mentioned that in intermediate level their differences in the oral test was much more significant than their written test with a sig value of .023.

As these learners began to progress and enter high-intermediate level their differences in the oral performance began to become more visible while their scores on the written test were almost the same as it was in intermediate level. As table 9 shows, the sig value in the written test was calculated as .270 while it was .024 in the oral test.

And finally, when these learners reached advanced level, it has been observed that they had much more differences in their means and sig values. The means in their written test were as follows: promoted: 72.75 and placed: 68.05, respectively and in the oral test their means were 83.85 and 74.40, respectively. Considering their sig value again in the written test it was not very much significant (.77) but statistically quite significant in the oral test (.006) which shows that the promoted learners of advanced level performed much better than those of placed learners in oral test.

To put it in a nutshell, we can safely conclude that placed learners were better than or equal to promoted learners in their written performance in different levels. The only justification for this could be that the placed learners benefited from a higher repertoire of vocabulary and world knowledge compared with promoted students. In the oral test, however, promoted learners showed great priority over placed learners which can be traced back to their educational background in the young adult department and earlier start of language learning process. As these two groups lead forward, this educational background played a much more influential role in their speaking ability or oral performance.

Conducting language placement tests has always been considered a safe and quick way for placing the learners in their right levels. This procedure has deeply been rooted in the field of second language acquisition till some disadvantages of these tests started to arise. As mentioned before, some of these disadvantages are:

- Failing to consider the age of learners
- Failing to consider the educational background of language learners

- Failing to consider the metacognitive and motivational factors of the learners
- Being subjective due to being dependent on the mood of the learner and the examiner
- Leading to the formation of heterogeneous classes

These shortcomings have led some scholars and policy makers to find an alternative for these tests or at least find a complement for them. They came to this conclusion that going on with this old system of placement would cause the language learners to lag behind and gradually leave the system which will lead to imposing lots of financial and educational costs on the language institutes and the learners as well.

Omitting the placement tests totally is not feasible due to its advantages like being cheap and convenient. Therefore, the best way is complementing them with other educational policies like guiding the learners from young adults department to adult department or encouraging parents to provide a situation for the children to learn the second language at an earlier age (before puberty). This procedure will lead to more homogeneous language classes regarding both their educational background and their age factor.

CONCLUSION

The learners' obtained scores on the final exam and their oral performances during the term showed that there weren't any significant differences between the two groups of learners on oral and written performances in the elementary and pre-intermediate level which means that the two groups in lower levels were almost the same regarding their linguistic competence.

As the learners entered higher levels of English learning it was obvious that the placed learners started to lag behind the promoted learners owing to the fact that they probably suffered from lack of strong educational background and performed differently in oral performance so that in intermediate level the difference in oral performance was much more considerable than the written test. This means that the promoted learners performed much better than the placed learners orally.

As the two groups of learners entered high-intermediate and advanced levels the differences in their oral and written performance reached the utmost level; in other words, the promoted learners outperformed the placed learners considerably especially in the oral performance which can be traced back to their strong educational background from the young adults department.

Moreover, by considering the statistics it can be concluded that expected number of students in the two groups of placed and promoted learners was not significantly different in lower levels of learning the English language at the ILI whereas in higher levels we began to observe an attrition rate in the number of placed learners which means that the placed learners left the institute much more frequently than the promoted learners. This is due to the fact that when these learners reach the high levels of the ILI, the gap between their linguistic competence and the level's difficulty becomes too deep to be filled easily so that they will have no chance except leaving the system.

On the whole, we can safely conclude that placed learners were better than or equal to promoted learners in their written performance in different levels. The only justification for this could be that the placed learners benefited from a higher repertoire of vocabulary and world knowledge compared with promoted learners. However, in the oral test, promoted learners showed great priority over placed learners which can be traced back to their educational background in the young adult department and earlier start of language learning process. As these two groups lead forward, this educational background played a much more influential role in their speaking ability or oral performance

Based on the present study, it became clear that age factor play an important role in learning a second language as it was stated previously by various scholars in this field (e.g. Lenneberg, 1967; Long, 1990; Pinker, 1992 and Collier, 1989). In the present study, it was observed that the promoted learners who started their learning of the second language before the puberty in the young adult department at the ILI outperformed mostly in oral skills the placed learners who started their learning of the second language after puberty.

Moreover, based on what many scholars believe, achieving a native-like attainment after puberty seems to be rare to occur.

Considering the short term and long term results in L2 acquisition the findings of the present study are in line with Krashen et al. (1979) as follows:

- At the beginning of the process of learning the syntactic and morphological development, adult learners perform better than younger learners but were later left behind due to lack of sufficient educational background and limitations imposed by age factor.
- Learners who begin early exposure to second language during childhood generally achieve higher language proficiency than those beginning as adults.
- According to Munoz (2010), what caused our younger participants to outperform adult participants especially in the oral skills may be due to their longer periods of exposure to second language besides their age factor. In other words, the more exposures the learners had, the more proficient they became.
- It can be concluded that omitting certain academic experiences simply because older learners are more efficient may be an insufficient justification for curriculum design that is just because older learners may be faster learners does not mean that foreign language learning should be delayed.

To cut a long story short, it seems that we can ensure the worried parents who never seize to ask language teachers about the most appropriate time for children's language learning that they'd better send their children to language institute at an early age since the idea of "the younger the better" has to a large extent been approved in the literature and the present study as well.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the present study may have a number of implications for various groups in the field of second language acquisition:

- First, in the phase of identifying educational policies, educationalists had better bear in mind the concept of age of learners in identifying and defining educational policies. They should remember that reaching a dynamic and homogeneous class without recognizing the individual differences of students, their age and educational background is impossible.
- Second, in the phase of syllabus design, the syllabus designers should try to separate students according to their age and linguistic knowledge. The discipline-specific design of syllabi must be in accordance with learners' related background knowledge to guarantee their effectiveness. The educational material provided in the course books should be based on learners' age and educational background to prevent high attrition rate in future.
- Third, in the phase of teaching and classroom procedure, teachers should try to be creative enough to create such an atmosphere in class that all learners feel relaxed in participating in classroom discussions. By doing this, adult learners' affective filter will be lowered so that they won't feel shy or embarrassed. Infantilization may be a good technique in this regard.
- Fourth and the last, in the phase of language testing and measurement, test makers (both professional test makers and teachers themselves) should bear in mind age difference of the learners and try to incorporate easier items for younger learners and more difficult items for the adults. On the oral test, they should take into consideration the weak educational background of adult learners and their affective limitations.

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