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Second Language Acquisition Research Significance for Foreign Language Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives

وجهات نظر الأساتذة حول أهمية أبحاث اكتساب لغة ثانية في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية

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Abstract

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When second language acquisition research began to emerge in the last few decades as an independent discipline, one of the hopes was that it could be beneficial to language education. The relevant language acquisition theories are of major significance for university English teaching whereby teachers are expected to base their instruction on second language acquisition theories to improve the current teaching strategies and methods and to upgrade the teaching quality. Hence, through an interview, the present paper attempts to investigate the teachers' experiences and standpoints on the relevance of research findings of second language acquisition regarding language teaching methods and practices. The results of the interview have uncovered that although teachers make use of second language acquisition research findings to some extent in their teaching practices with some issues raised, they believe that they are highly advantageous to language pedagogy. They have emphasized second language acquisition research significance in answering questions they had about teaching and in meeting the challenges they encounter in the classroom. Thus, second language acquisition pedagogical approaches and techniques should be given the required attention by addressing the factors specific to second/foreign language acquisition.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ملخص

تعليم اللغة

تعلم اللغات الأجنبية

ابحاث اكتساب لغة

ثانية.

عندما بدأت أبحاث اكتساب لغة ثانية بالظهور في العقود القليلة الماضية كفرع مستقل، كان أحد الآمال امكانية الاستفادة منها من أجل تعليم اللغة. تعتبر نظريات اكتساب اللغة ذات الصلة مهمة بشكل كبير في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بالجامعة حيث يُتوقع من الأساتذة الاعتماد في تعليمهم عليها لتحسين استراتيجيات وأساليب التدريس الحالية ورفع مستوى جودة التدريس. وعلى هذا الأساس يهدف هذا البحث الى التحقيق في تجارب الأساتذة ووجهات نظرهم حول أهمية نتائج أبحاث اكتساب اللغة الثانية عن طريق إجراء مقابلة مع عينة منهم. لقد كشفت نتائج المقابلة أنه بالرغم من أنهم استفادوا من نتائج تلك الأبحاث إلى حد ما في ممارساتهم التعليمية مع وجود بعض التحديات ، إلا أنهم يعتقدون أنها مفيدة للغاية في علم أصول التدريس اللغوي كما أنهم شددوا على أهميتها في الإجابة على أسئلتهم وفي مواجهة تحديات التدريس. و على هذا ، يجب إعطاء المناهج والتقنيات التربوية لاكتساب اللغة الثانية الاهتمام المطلوب من خلال معالجة العوامل الخاصة باكتساب اللغة الثانية/الأجنبية.

1. Introduction

Teaching a language to non-native speakers is among the most challenging tasks in education. Its difficulty lies in the various aspects that should be considered when teaching learners who still have an L1 present in their minds and who do not learn the L2 in the same way. Teachers are expected to have not only knowledge about the subject matter but also knowledge of pedagogy and knowledge of the learners. This can be possible if teachers make efforts in fueling their interests about the information they require to use in the classroom with learners who probably expect teachers to know how to aid them educationally, socially, and even psychologically inside the borders of the classroom. However, it seems that not all teachers possess the required knowledge of pedagogy. This may create impediments in the classroom that lacks many skills which could be acquired through consulting current relevant research and studies on Language Acquisition research (SLA). Hence, this study attempts to address the following main questions: (1) how does SLA research contribute to foreign language teaching? (2) To what extent do university teachers consider SLA research in their teaching practices?

2. ESL versus EFL

EFL refers to English that is learnt in a community whereby learners are speakers of a different language whereas ESL is much related to individuals (immigrants) who learn English in an English-speaking country. While EFL involves learning English in an academic setting as schools and universities, ESL is much linked to language acquisition that takes place in a more natural setting which is similar to first language acquisition. Nevertheless, further research has shown that although the two are different, they are perceived as “two facets of the same phenomenon, now jointly referred to as second language acquisition” (Szpyrakoztowska, 2015, p. 33). Likewise, according to Chen (2018), strictly speaking, the two terms ‘acquisition’ and ‘learning’ do not refer to the same thing; however researchers employed them synonymously and also extended the use of SLA to mean even a third, fourth or additional languages. Thus, SLA is the abbreviation preferred by most researchers in the field.

On the other hand, Biewer (2011) displayed two perspectives on the distinction between ESL and EFL. According to him, in the New English point of view, the differences that exist between ESL, EFL and even ENL is vital and has a social-historical background centering on the historical role of the English language in different countries. However from the SLA perspective, this distinction is of less importance; it considers all learners whose conditions and situations of language exposure of the target language can be very different. Perhaps, this is why some researchers on SLA do not explicitly differentiate between ESL and EFL or do not openly describe the individuals under study. In sum, while in the New English studies the distinction between ESL and EFL is overrated, in SLA it is not.

In this article, both language learning and language acquisition will be employed for the two terms are often used interchangeably in the literature. Further, SLA is a commonly used abbreviation in this field; second language (L2) can mean any additional language a learner learns in addition to his mother tongue which also includes a foreign language (FL), thus L2 and FL will be used.

3. Theories of Second Language Acquisition

3.1. The Input Hypothesis

One of the most prominent theories of SLA in the 1980s is the one proposed by Krashen. This theory encompasses five Hypotheses which, according to Krashen, represent all aspects of SLA research and practice (Shehadeh, 2013). The Input Hypothesis has been dwelled on in the literature on SLA for its relation to L2 teaching and learning. In this hypothesis, Krashen’s major idea is that L2 acquisition is much like L1 acquisition when enough ‘comprehensible input’ is provided to the acquirer (Harley, 2001). The importance of this hypothesis lies in the fact that it attempts to answer, perhaps, the most crucial inquiry in the field of second language acquisition that is ‘how do we acquire the language?’ (Krashen, 1982).

Krashen argues that all that is required for L2 acquisition to take place is to be exposed to considerable comprehensible input (Han, 2013). Acquirers of L2 can pick up language if that language is understood. If

they are exposed to an L2 that contains vocabulary and structures which are away beyond their knowledge, then the acquisition process might be hindered. According to Krashen (1982), the acquisition process takes place when the acquirer moves from one stage to another successfully. He explains that to move from stage i (i accounts for the individual's current language competence) to $i+1$ which is the next level or stage, the individual acquirer has to understand input that contains $i+1$. In other terms, Krashen (1982) believes that we acquire only when we understand language that "contains structures 'a little beyond' where we are" (p.21). He adds that we are able to internalize input that is at a level just above our current level of competence, with the help of context, our knowledge of the world and our extra-linguistic information. These non-verbal clues aid the acquirer to understand the language directed to him and so move to the next level of competence. In Krashen's view (1982), traditional syllabi explicitly aimed at reaching an $i+1$ stage which is of minor importance while the best input should not. He believes that the problem with a typical grammar lesson is that it deliberately aims at a grammar structure, once mastered another structure is presented, taught and practiced. For him, this grammatically organized language syllabus may make no progress for the learner. Han (2013) explains "... explicit manipulation of the learner's consciousness – through rule based teaching or error correction is neither all that necessary nor much useful" (p. 314).

Another part of Krashen's Input Hypothesis is that oral proficiency cannot be taught explicitly instead, it develops overtime (1982). He argues that the only way to help students reach fluency is to provide comprehensible input. Early speech takes place only when learners are ready to speak no matter whether this speech is accurate or not. Harley (2001) points out that in the process of L2 acquisition, acquirers may go through a silent period where L2 is occasionally produced while comprehension is achieved. He adds that forcing students to speak in this silent period may harm them instead of doing good. For this silent periods should be given the required attention in second language acquisition (Newmark, as cited in Harley, 2001).

Krashen's Input Hypothesis can be summed up into four parts:

- 1- The input hypothesis relates to acquisition not learning.
- 2- We acquire by understanding language that contains structure a bit beyond our current level of competence ($i+1$). This is done with the help of context or extra-linguistic information.
- 3- Communication is successful, when the input is understood and there is enough of it, $i+1$ will be automatically provided.
- 4- Production ability emerges overtime. It is not taught directly. (Krashen, 1982)

One can understand from this hypothesis that exposure to the target language is of major significance and that it should not be too easy or too challenging to the learners for acquisition/learning to take place.

3.2. The Output Hypothesis

The output hypothesis was first introduced by Swain (1985) who states that L2 mastery is achieved through language action (speech and writing), and the feedback gained on how well the output was (Jacob & McCafferty, 2006). According to Grove, (2003) Swain's output hypothesis is, an addition to Krashen's input hypothesis, not an alternative one for she agrees that input is pivotal in SLA and that comprehensible output is another essential causal variable. Swain (2000) argues: "output pushes learners to process language more deeply - with more mental effort than does the input" (p, 99). Swain's (2000) basis for her claim on the output's role that plays in SLA was her research in 1985 with French immersion classes. The findings show that those students' language includes many grammatical and syntactic mistakes in spite of the six or seven years of being exposed to comprehensible input. Another research conducted by Swain (1991) which shows that comprehensible input is necessary not sufficient, took place in Canada with long term L2 programs. A noticeable difference found between non-native speakers and native speakers at the level of productive skills where non-native speakers show significantly poor results (as cited in Jacob & McCafferty, 2006). Swain's observations

help her to suppose that exposure to comprehensive input suggested by Krashen, is required along with comprehensible output (Grove, 2003).

Output is important to L2 acquisition not only considering it as making use of an already existing knowledge about the language but also as way of constructing novel linguistic knowledge (Muranoi, 2007). In this hypothesis, learners are required to be driven to produce language that exhibit their knowledge about that language in order to upgrade their competence in the target language.

Swain (1985, 1995, 2000, 2005 as cited in Pannell, Partsch and Fuller, 2017) suggests three main functions of output: noticing, hypothesis testing and metalinguistic reflection. Noticing is very important in language learning for it directs the speakers' attention towards incorrect linguistic forms produced. Once the learners notice this gap in their interlanguage, they attempt to fix it (Pannell, et al., 2017).

Another important function of output is hypothesis testing. L2 learners utilize their output as means to try out novel linguistic forms (hypotheses) to transmit the target meaning. Swain (2005) puts it: "Output may sometimes be, from a learner perspective, a 'trial run' reflecting their hypothesis of how to say (or write) their intent" (as cited in Pannell, 2017, p. 128). According to Swain and Lapkin (1995) when learners are pushed to adjust their output for noting a problem in language use, they, at times, engage in more syntactic processing mode in comparison to input comprehension. This is referred to as metalinguistic reflection, another function of output. This syntactic processing which may result in reprocessed output, contributes to L2 acquisition (Yaqubi & Damavandi, 2010). All in all, Swain (1993) proposes four ways in which output helps L2 acquisition that input could not:

- 1- Promoting fluency via meaningful language use.
- 2- Pushing learners to engage in syntactic processing of language.
- 3- Allowing hypothesis testing as to what works in the L2 in terms of appropriacy, correctness and understandability.

- 4- Providing opportunities for feedback from others in such forms as negotiating meaning or supplying missing words.

(as cited in Jacob & McCafferty, p.20, 2006).

3.3. The Interaction Hypothesis

The interaction hypothesis claims that second language acquisition takes place when learners interact with other speakers. It is attributed to Michael Long who accepts the underlying idea of comprehensible input and only refuting the part of 'necessary but not sufficient' and he has tried to fill in perceived gaps in the comprehensible input hypothesis by assuming that interaction adjustments triggered by interlocutors when interacting is crucial in making input comprehensible and fostering L2 acquisition (Storch, 2013). About this hypothesis, Ellis (1999, p. 03) points out: "this concerns the conversational exchanges that arise when interlocutors seek to prevent communicative impasse occurring or to remedy an actual impasse that has arisen."

Long (1996) explains that the changes made by the interlocutors and the shared efforts that occur in social interaction aid L2 acquisition for they help them to access input for mental processing namely negotiation of meaning and particularly negotiation work that encourages changes in the linguistic forms by more competent speakers (Ns). This what facilitates acquisition for it relates input, attention and output (as cited in Savill-Troike, 2005).

In his adapted version of the Interaction Hypothesis, Long (1996) gives more importance to cognition which is referred to as attention, negative feedback and especially negotiation of meaning construction (as cited in Garcia-Mayo, 2013). Gass and Mackey (2015) mention that the current form of the Interaction Hypothesis includes some underlying concepts of Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) and Swain's Output Hypothesis (1985). According to them, the interaction approach has also been proposed as the Input, Interaction, Output Model of Blcok (2003) and Interaction Theory of Carroll (1999). For Storch (2013), Long's claim that verbal interaction facilitates L2 acquisition was based on his study on native speakers and non-native speakers' conversations. Long

has found out differences in certain conversational moves between pairs of native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS). In NS-NNS, pairs, the conversational moves involved clarification, request, confirmation and comprehension checks. These moves were referred to as negotiation of meaning. Long observed that when input was not comprehended by the interlocutors and there is a potential failure in communication, speakers use collaborative work to avoid or fix such failures. Such collaborative efforts (negotiation of meaning) fosters acquisition because interaction provides the learners with comprehensible input they require to acquire the target language.

The interaction hypothesis can be summarized into three major points. The first part suggests that comprehensible input is required for learners to upgrade their interlanguages. The second part states that the opportunities learners given to change the linguistic form they use in conversations fosters their comprehension. The third part relates to conditions that triggers opportunities for output reformulation (Ellis, 1991).

4. Individual Differences and SLA

Why do some learners seem to be very competent in L2 while others struggle to communicate effectively? The reason is that probably learners do not hold the same traits and potentials cognitively, socially, psychologically, etc. Individual Differences (IDs) according to Li, Hiver and Papi (2022) “refer to traits, dispositions and characteristics be they biological, social, psychological or a combination of these, that make learners unique individuals, cause variation among learners and they are hypothesized to have direct/indirect impact on learning outcomes” (p.04).

Since 1960s, IDs have been a prominent research area in L2 studies as it is viewed to be a source of the variant degree of success among language learners in their pursuit of mastering the L2. In the 1970s, significant studies point out that in addition to a high degree of language aptitude and motivation, there exist other variables which aid learners to succeed? specifically the learners ability to be active and creative when engaged in the learning process via applying their own individual learning modes and

techniques. Hence, language learning strategies were involved into the component of significant learner characteristics (Dörnyei, 2010).

According to Bedir (2011), it has been a growing interest on the impact of IDs on L2 learning and teaching attempting to know why learners differ in the degree of success in language learning. If teachers are conscious of how much their learners are different in their classrooms, they can develop materials, modify their instruction style, implement novel teaching strategies and assess the learners considering all the differences that exist in the classroom (Griffiths & Sourç, 2020).

The significance of IDs has been largely considered in the educational sector regarding teaching that is more conducive to strengths, weaknesses, and performances of learners. For Li, et al. (2022), these variables have been found to be predictors for L2 success. The results of IDs studies help in comprehending the process of language learning and their recommendations for practical purposes in language instruction and learning. Likewise, Selinker (1972) states, “a theory of ... language learning that does not provide a central place for individual differences among learners *cannot* be considered acceptable (as cited in Griffiths & Sourç, 2020, p.02). Thus, it is not sufficient that teachers know about the subject matter, they are required to have knowledge about the learners as well as pedagogical knowledge.

There has been a wide variation of what should be considered as an individual difference. According to Griffiths and Sourç (2020), having a universally agreed on classification of IDs is far to reach even among those who are viewed as specialist and who have publication(s) on this issue such as Skehan, Dörnyei, Arabski and Wojtaszek and Pawlak. Griffiths and Sourç (2020) further explain that Skehan (1989) who was the first to deal with IDs extendedly, included aptitude, motivation, language learning strategies, extroversion/introversion, risk-taking, intelligence, field independence and anxiety; thereafter, Dörnyei (2005) discussed personality, aptitude, motivation, strategies and beliefs, whereas Arabski and Wojtaszek (2011) listed strategies, autonomy, personality,

gender and self-efficacy; and Pawlak (2012) included aptitude, age, intelligence, affect, and motivation.

4.1. Motivation

The significance of the concept of motivation in SLA has received considerable attention by researchers in the educational sector for several decades. Gardner (1985) describes motivation as “the combination of efforts plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language” (as cited in Noels, 2001, p. 23). There are two orientations of motivation. The first one is the integrative motivation which refers to the individual’s willingness to learn the target language in order to be closer psychologically with individuals of the speech community and culture. The instrumental type of motivation, however, deals with more practical aims for L2 learning (Gardner, 2001). Instrumentally motivated learners learn L2 for reasons as getting good, grades, getting a job, passing an exam, etc. “ In its purest form, this type of motivation is sometimes referred to as the ‘carrot and stick’ type: the learner wants to learn the second language to gain something ‘now’ from it (De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, Verspoor, 2005, p. 72). Several research have taken place in relation to instrumental and integrative motivation. Zhao (2012), for instance, conducted a study on the types of motivation of 124 Chinese ESL students. The findings of this research indicate that students were more instrumentally motivated in comparison to other forms of motivation. Likewise, Chunmei, Zhu, and Liping’s (2013) study on 45 pupils in Gejiu, China as a case study, reveal that instrumental motivation characterize these learners more than the other types. However, Engin’s (2009) in his research on 44 students in Turkey, had different findings. He found out that, in learning a foreign language, integrative motivation was more effective than instrumental motivation (as cited in Ametova, 2020). The difference in research findings may reflect a difference in cultures and interests among learners. Nevertheless, whatever the students’ interests towards learning the language, teachers have to consider them and shape their teaching practices accordingly for better academic achievement.

4.2. Language Aptitude

One of the factors that has a predictive power for L2 success is language aptitude. Ellis (1997) defines it as “the natural ability for L2 learning” which is generally equated with intelligence but not necessarily equivalent to it” (p. 73). Language aptitude refers to the potential or talent that an individual possesses for learning foreign languages. Early work by John Carroll (1963) has provided us with the following four components which constitute language aptitude:

- 1- Phonemic coding ability (discriminates and encodes foreign sounds)
- 2- Grammatical sensitivity (recognizes functions of words in sentences)
- 3- Inductive language learning (infer or induces rules from samples)
- 4- Memory and learning (makes and recalls association between words and phrases in L1 and L2)

(as cited in Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012, p. 640)

Research related to language aptitude was concerned with whether and to what extent language aptitude is conducive to L2 successful learning. Research findings have shown that individual learners who had high scores on language aptitude test learn faster and seem to be more proficient compared to learners who had low scores (Ellis, 1997). However, many scholars think that aptitude alone does not have an effect on the language learning ability of the learner. Skehan (1989) proposes that the learners’ ability may vary if other factors are considered. This involves factors as personality, motivation and language learning styles (as cited in Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012).

4.3. Learning Styles

Learning styles are preferences and patterns learners use to direct their learning process. These preferences describe how they collect, analyze, organize data memorize information. Dörnyei (2010) states that the concept of learning styles “represents a profile of the individual’s approach to learning, a blueprint of the habitual or preferred way the individual perceives, interacts with and respond to the learning environment”.

Unlike other individual variables as motivation and aptitude, learning styles do not have a predictive power for L2 success. In this context, Brown (2000) points out that learners individual preferred way of approaching language do not seem to provide data about why some learners are more competent than others (as cited in Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). According to Oxford (1992), four main types of learning styles are considered to be prominent: the analytic- global aspect, sensory preferences, intuitive/random vs sensory sequential learning and the orientations towards closure or openness. For him these styles largely determine what strategies individual learners use to learn a language. In other words, the learners own learning styles are closely related to their choice of language learning strategies.

4.4. Learning Strategies

Learning strategies are techniques learners use to get by the job of learning a language. As stated by Vanlatten and Benati (2010), learning strategies “refer to any conscious strategies learners use to acquire language and can be anything as mundane underlying new words in texts to more social strategies in which learners actively seek out speakers of the L1 with whom to practice” (p. 45). Several types have been distinguished regarding language learning strategies. Ellis (1997) lists three kinds. Cognitive strategies are concerned with analyzing, synthesizing or transforming learning materials as paraphrasing. Metacognitive strategies are associated with organizing controlling and assessing learning. Social/affective strategies include the approach by which language learners select to interact with other interlocutors.

There have been several attempts to uncover which strategies are significant for SLA. One way is concerned with identifying successful L2 learners questioning them about what strategies that seem to be effective for them. One of the main results is that these learners are attentive to both form and meaning, they are autonomous, they are aware of the learning strategies that allied with their learning styles, they use learning strategies appropriately and flexibly and the most used strategies are metacognitive. Other

studies have shown that successful learners use more strategies in comparison to unsuccessful learners (Ellis, 1997).

Although considering learning styles when teaching is undoubtedly and educationally appropriate, it seems that in learning strategies instruction, learners probably require some sort of help in those strategies which might not correspond to their natural learning style. Nevertheless, all strategies are considered valuable and effective in the process of language learning (O'Malley, O'Malley & Chamot, 1990).

4.5. Personality

Human personality in all its types brings variety to the world. Despite the fact that personality has been closely related to human psychology, its relevance to SLA has been subject to many scholars. In this context, Ehrman (1996) suggests that the relationship between personality and SLA is clear and it defines what individuals perceive as comfortable (as cited in Zafar & Meenakshi, 2012). Several personality traits have a direct and indirect impact on SLA such as extroversion vs introversion, self-esteem, inhibition, risk-taking and anxiety. Extroversion and introversion are the most studied aspects of personality in SLA. Szyszka, (2017) explains that although the impact of this personality trait on L2 oral production has been widely the core of several studies, the findings were uncertain and indecisive. He adds that Gan (2008) in his study, has not detected statically significant correlation between oral production and extroversion/introversion. On the other, Szyszka states that with his Arabic participants, Hassan (2001) found that extrovert learners performed better than introvert ones regarding English pronunciation accuracy.

According to Norfazlik, Dzeelfa and Siti (2016), in SLA, personality variables are viewed to impact the L2 process of learning. For this reason, they have added, teachers should not only consider processing enough linguistic knowledge variant in instructional strategies and techniques, they should also consider whether or not learners use learning strategies and styles that adequately match with their personalities.

5. Teachers' challenges Bridging the Gap between SLA Research and EFL Classrooms

Ellis stated that the results of SLA studies do not offer direct guidelines for teachers and probably will never do. The issue with these results is that, generally, they are not displayed in accessible and meaningful ways to educators. Further, SLA interests may not match with teachers' areas of interest (as cited in Haly & Rentz, 2002). In the same vein, Block (2008) explains that there is a real gap between SLA research and language teachers and most SLA research findings is not specifically linked to teaching practices.

Another challenge teachers may encounter is how to identify links between theory and practice in a manner that is conducive, encouraging and applicable in their daily classroom practices (Hall, 2018). In a study conducted by Nassaji (2012) on teachers' perspectives towards the relationship between SLA research and language pedagogy, the results show that although most teachers had no problems accessing research materials, few of them read research articles for a number of reasons among which lack of time, difficulty of research articles and lack of interest. It is argued that demanding teachers to consult and use SLA research is not plausible; instructors have no time, efforts or access to SLA theories and research (Hall, 2018).

It is very important to come up with a theory-based methodology for EFL classes that considers SLA research and implement them in the classroom. Therefore, a collaboration should exist between specialists in the field of SLA, applied linguists and practitioners (KeBler, 2007).

6. SLA Research Application and Implications

Ellis and Shintani (2014) in their book *'Exploring Language Pedagogy through Second Language Acquisition Research'* had an interesting discussion on applying SLA or not applying it in language pedagogy from different perspectives. The following is a synthesis of the discussion. According to them a number of SLA researchers emphasized the significance of SLA research for L2/FL education. For example, they have cited Spolsky (1990) who considers not only the explanation that a theory

provides but also the relevance that it has with L2 pedagogy. Long (2006) also reckons that SLA is believed to be a scope with significant social outcomes for many people worldwide. However, they continued, no agreement among SLA researchers is made about to what extent SLA should be informative to language education as Bardori-Harlig (1995) observed. In the same vein, Long (1990) explains that SLA research is complex so better clarification should be provided to guide teachers in their pursuit of implementing effective instructional methods. On the other hand, SLA researchers tend not to impose nor forbid the use of certain teaching practices, suggesting that the results drawn from SLA research merely serve a 'provisional specifications' as stated by Stenhouse (1975). Ellis and Shintani (2014), in this discussion, state that another issue in SLA research is that there is a plethora of SLA theories to select from and up to now, there is no consensus about which theory has an explanatory power for L2 acquisition. Furthermore, some of these theories have different/contradictory content accounting for L2 acquisition. A part of this discussion, Ellis and Shintani (2014) cited Lightbown (2000) who is considered very careful in persuading other teachers and educators to implement SLA research. She suggested that SLA research should not be the source of certain recommendations suggesting, instead, SLA researchers to discuss issues and matters with classroom teachers and take their views into account. Another way which can pave the way to SLA research application in the classroom is involving teachers themselves in research.

Ellis and Shintani (2014) ended this discussion by suggesting their own way to apply SLA research in language education. This approach which they have adopted in their book, involves identifying a series of pedagogical issues as a starting point than scrutinize them in relation to results drawn from SLA.

Likewise and according to Tragant and Munoz (2004), the linkage between language instruction and SLA is not direct and it is not clear to what extent SLA has an impact on language pedagogy. Notwithstanding, they admit that SLA is central for teachers' knowledge considering that SLA is often a part of TESOL MA programs.

About the implications that can be drawn from mainstream SLA research, Dubiner (2018, p. 9-12) summarizes how research inform practice in the following points much of which are related to points already discussed in this article:

Linguistic factors to be considered

- Teachers should maximize exposure to the target language.
- Teachers should provide opportunities for language output in the target language.
- Teachers should be determined to capitalize on the benefits of interaction.
- Teachers should provide students with tools for effective vocabulary building.
- Teachers should tailor teaching practices to realize principles of repetition and automaticity.

Extralinguistic factors to be considered

- Teachers should make an effort to understand students' attitudes.
- Teachers should take steps to understand and influence students' motivation to learn.
- Teachers should include culture-rich materials in the curriculum.
- Teachers should understand and define parameters of good teaching.

Although SLA research cannot tell teachers what and how exactly to teach in classroom settings, it can help to shape their expectations. To efficiently make use of the major SLA studies, a collaboration between instructors and researchers should be established to get the most out of theory and practice which in turn aid to upgrade the students learning of L2/FL.

7. Methodology

7.1. Participants

The participants who have taken part in this study are 12 teachers at the Department of the English Language, University of Frères Mentouri, Constantine, Algeria. Each interviewee received the interview individually via e-mail. The teachers who participated this study were randomly selected and has prior experience in

teaching English as a foreign language.

7.2. Research Tool

The research tool employed in this study is of a qualitative nature: the asynchronous email interview. It is a data collection instrument that takes place asynchronously. This online interview is conducted in non-real time where the interviewer sends questions to the interviewee via an email to be answered at his/her own pace. One advantage of this interviewing mode is that both the researcher and the participant have enough time to think about the questions and answers (O'Connor & Madge, 2017). This advantage best serves the aim of this study in inspecting the teachers' experiences and attitudes towards the significance of SLA research in language pedagogy. In effect, our interviewees require enough time to reflect on and recall prior experiences on their teaching practices and SLA knowledge.

7.3. The Interview

The e-mail interview used in this study is a structured one which includes 07 questions. The questions were around knowing about the subjects the interviewees often teach and challenges they encounter when teaching English as a system. Other questions are about their familiarity with the SLA research, their experiences on any kind of training/seminar on SLA research and applications, and their attitudes and beliefs on the significance of SLA research findings and its implementations in language pedagogy in general and in meeting teaching challenges in particular.

8. Data Analysis

The teachers' interview answers are analyzed and summarized as follows:

Question 01

The first question addresses the participants' subjects they have often taught the aim of which is to check whether they have already taught English as a system such as grammar, writing, speaking, etc. It is very crucial to know this particular information for SLA research is much more related to subjects of this kind than other subjects which deal with contents.

The interviewees, in their responses to this question, indicated that they taught a variety of subjects. However, the researcher is more interested in subjects that are more related to the language as a system and consequently more related to SLA research. Most of the participants have taught modules as Grammar, Phonetics, Oral Expression and Written Expression or modules that involve primarily one of the four skills as 'Research Methodology' (writing a research paper, reading articles), translation, ESP and Study Skills. It worth mentioning that teaching Oral Expression also involves teaching pronunciation, listening and vocabulary. Likewise, writing can involve reading texts and learning new words and expressions. Considering that the participants have already taught such kind of subjects, it makes them a good fit to answer the rest of the interview questions.

Question 02

In question 02, we inquired the teachers about the challenges they usually encounter when they teach English grammar /and one or more of the four skills (writing, speaking, listening, reading) in terms of factors that influence acquisition/learning language such as: aptitude, motivation, learning styles and strategies, personality differences, etc. The reason behind asking this question is to relate their answers with their beliefs on SLA research application, later, in another question (Q06).

Students' lack of motivation is the most indicated challenge by the interviewees. Almost all of them think that unmotivated students represent a challenge in language pedagogy. They stated: *"the majority of them are just careless and not willing to make efforts"* (participant #01), *"they are not keen during writing tasks (difficulty getting started)"* (participant #02), *"students' serious lack of motivation to learn grammar rules"* (participant #03), *"When I teach Grammar, the most common problem I face is the learners' lack of motivation, predominantly due to the nature of the module itself and absence of materials in the classroom"* (participant #05), *"the problematic issue is when they read, they lose interest and get bored in the first stages of the reading process"* (participant #06). This situation leads the teacher to work even

harder trying to encourage students get involved in the learning process as participant (# 11) indicated. Motivation is said to be a significant predictor of success in language learning. Hence, if students are not motivated they are less likely to learn effectively. The teachers' job in this case is to create an atmosphere that is more conducive to learning.

The second most indicated challenge is the disparity in students' levels. Students with different aptitude can cause a workload in terms of teacher's role in the classroom. Participant (#11) also explains: *"I was obliged to support and guide those students with lower aptitude without neglecting those who have higher aptitude to keep them engaged in the classroom"*. Another interviewee ("07) mentions that this problem may lead to a less collaborative classroom: *"Students' different level that sometimes cause division among students"*.

Other challenges mentioned by the teachers include the students' proficiency level that does not reflect the teachers' expectations and the insufficient teaching time which makes *"the teacher feel obliged not to introduce some time consuming teaching strategies, though effective, and opt for the old monotonous way of teaching only to cover all what should be dealt with"* (participant #01). Other least pointed out issues involve introvert students, lack of confidence, anxiety, overcrowded classes, passive attitude toward learning in general, students' limited linguistic bath and inadequate classroom materials.

Question 03

With question three, it is attempted to find out whether or not the interviewees, as teachers researchers, read on SLA content (theories, hypotheses, studies, etc.) and to what extent they have made use of the implications of SLA research findings regarding course design, teaching practices, teacher's role, etc. The teachers also were asked to explain the reasons/challenges in case they do not read on SLA research and in case they have not made use of their implications. The objective of this questions is to uncover the teachers' awareness of the importance of having knowledge of mainstream SLA research, whether in any way they apply this knowledge in classroom settings as well as

the issues they face in the process.

Answers to this question uncover that the interviewees, to some extent, read on SLA content (theories, hypotheses, studies, etc.). Teachers stated a number of theories and models they are familiar with: Krashen's model (participants #02, #08, #10, #11 and #12), Krashen's input hypothesis (participants #04, #09 and #10), constructivism and behaviorism theories (participant #05, #08, and #09), cognitivism, collaborative/cooperative learning the affective filter hypothesis and ZPD (participant #05), and Chomsky's universal grammar (participant #08 and #11). However, some other teachers have not pointed out to a particular theory instead they have just mentioned areas of interest as participant (#01) who stated that she usually read on how to teach reading and grammar. Participant (#03) has various areas of interest, she reported: *"The content I am familiar with is related to curriculum, course and syllabus design in terms of planning, development and evaluation. I also read on language assessment, especially rubrics for assessing speaking which I am still struggling with."*

The theories the interviewees have stated are relevant to SLA research particularly behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism theories and Krashen's hypotheses about second language acquisition namely the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis which are said to be among mainstream research in SLA and the most indicated by the interviewees.

Regarding making use of SLA research findings the majority the participants seem to use some of what they have read on. For example, participant (#03) benefited from SLA research in terms of course design and solving teaching issues, she stated that *"Such readings help me design courses, when asked to teach a new course, or at least make modifications in a pedagogical way, based on research insights and theoretical frameworks. Besides, the implications I learn from my readings on FLA research have helped me limit many impressionistic practices especially in the teaching of oral/ aural skills"*. In addition to this, participant (#04), who has already indicated that she is familiar with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, asserted *"My experience both as a learner and teacher of*

English continues to confirm that the more we get exposed to the language in engaging ways, the easier we find it to acquire a foreign language." This teacher understands well the essence of the Input Hypothesis that the more we receive comprehensible input the more we pick up or learn language. This hypothesis in particular has been one of Krashen's major hypotheses stated earlier in this article.

However, participant (#08) has a different point of view; she explained that, in grammar teaching, she could not really adopt Krashen's hypotheses for they rely on unconscious teaching of grammar while she tries to teach it explicitly raising students' awareness of the grammatical rules and the syntactic structures. Likewise, one of the teachers revealed that she does not usually make use of any kind of research, she explains: *"I find them too ambitious to be applied in our setting; we, unfortunately, do not share the same conditions"* (participant #01). On the other hand, participant (#11) mentions that there are several pivotal implications for course design, teaching practices and teacher's role in the learning process.

The interviewees' responses, as far as SLA research and theory applications, seem to be different in terms of their suitability in EFL classes. However, most of the participants' views favor their application.

Question 04

Considering the significance of possessing some kind of knowledge on SLA body of research we inquired our informants about how they would describe their experience in case they have been offered training or seminar(s) by their University/Department that includes/summarizes SLA research and implications for teaching.

Most of teachers said that they had no training or any kind of seminars on SLA/FLL. Three teachers, however, mentioned that what they had are only courses as students on TEFL (Teaching English as a Foreign Language) and Language Acquisition (participant #03 and #10) and a training with other educational organizations outside the university (participant #05). Another teacher (participant #07) mentioned that she was offered a training during her first year of teaching which briefly explains teaching by objectives and

the competency base approach but this experience was not promising as she explained. However, only one teacher (participant #04) mentioned that she had an opportunity to be trained by trainers from SIT (School of International Training) which was offered by her University in the year 2009-2010 and included University and ENS teachers from the East of Algeria. This teacher has explained her experience: *“The course consisted of best practices in English language teaching and was all guided by principles and theories of SLA. I think the course was successful as it focused on the practical implementations of SLA instead of the theoretical concepts which were grasped by all the participants.”* Considering that only one teacher among all the interviewed teachers had a real training on SLA research and implications means that probably more teachers in our university had no similar training.

Question 05

In Question 05, we asked the teachers whether the knowledge they gained from their teaching experiences is more relevant to their teaching practices or it is the knowledge gained from SLA research and why. With this question, we attempt to figure out which knowledge they prefer to apply in their classes. Even if our participants are familiar with SLA body of research and implications, do they still favor their personal experience with their particular classroom setting and learners that might be different from the ones stated in SLA research, or not?

Two interviewees asserted that the knowledge they gained from their own instructional situations reflects their teaching practices. One teacher explains that the knowledge she forms herself is more realistic and can be applicable in our settings (with our students). She added that there is no doubt that knowledge gained from research is of assistance to teachers, however, as she reported, it helps *“only if adapted to the circumstances under which teaching takes place at our university; their teaching practices usually tend to be too ambitious to be applied in our setting.”* (Participant #01). However, most participants (#03, #04, #06 #07, #09, #11 and #12) think that the combination of the two describes their teaching experiences for some

times they seem to be reliant on SLA research/theories and other times it is their teaching experiences which is more relevant to classroom practices. For example, participant (#06), revealed that her teaching practices reflect and consolidate the research she conducted and that the interrelationship between research and the teacher’s experience has a major role in observing the students’ problematic situations. On the other hand, other participants primarily rely on SLA research. Participant (#05) explains that she does as long as they are effective in her instructional settings and participant (#10) asserts that her teaching practices are highly influenced by some studies in SLA while interviewee (#08) emphasizes that although we can learn from real life situations, *“...SLA research is very helpful in teaching ... it cannot be compared to the knowledge gained from my teaching experiences...”*

Question 06

In Question 06, we seek to know the teachers’ opinion about how can bridging between SLA research and classroom teaching meet the challenges stated in their answers for *Question 02*. It is, in effect, significant to understand to what extent they relate SLA research to solve issues that may arise in their particular teaching contexts.

In their answers to this questions, most teachers have emphasized the significance of SLA research and its implications which, for them, is a source of inspiration to teachers by understanding how teaching methods can be adapted to the students’ needs, learning processes, problems and classroom situations. In this vein, participant (#03) wrote. *“SLA/ FLA research insights and implications are inevitable for any teacher if the aim is to limit impressionistic, unsystematic and random practices and start worming the way towards more homogeneous and research-based pedagogy”*. Likewise participant (#11) reported: *“... curriculum design should be informed by research on the learners’ age, personality traits, level, language background, motivation, and learning styles...”* One interviewee suggested more practice to SLA research through teachers’ collaborative work: *“The role of research is undeniable but unless it is made more practical through dedicated workshops it will not*

have its effect. Personally, I have learnt a great deal about SLA research through hands-on workshops rather than theoretical methods such as reading or presentations” (participant #05). Bridging between SLA research and classroom teaching equips answers to the inquiries instructors may have and equally aids to meet the challenges they have in their particular teaching settings, as it is the case for participants (#03, #07, #08, #10 and #12); for example, participant (#10) explained: *“SLA research when linked to classroom teaching could lead to brilliant outcomes regarding the quality of teaching and learning. For example, if we take into consideration the factor of aptitude, our classrooms will not end up with promoting mediocrity.”*

Question 07

Regarding their beliefs on the significance of SLA research, the interviewees were asked to what extent they believe that the implications of SLA research is advantageous and relevant for L2 language pedagogy. The answers to this question represent their attitudes towards this issue.

All teachers agreed that SLA research is highly advantageous and relevant to L2/FL pedagogy to a great extent: *“I think that SLA research has gained a lot of maturity throughout the last decades that we can confidently build our teaching practices based on its findings”* (participant #04). They believe that quality of teaching a foreign language will be promoted by aiding instructors identifying problems and finding possible solutions for them (participant #01, #02 & #06). Two participants explained that SLA research implications are highly advantageous to EFL classrooms: *“...The latter provides teachers with insights from psychology, sociology, neurology ...etc to be applied in language pedagogy”* (#10); *“... it provides insights into cognitive processes involved in SLA, individual differences, as well as language teaching methodologies such as the communicative approach, to inform language teaching methods, materials and classroom practices...”* (#11). However, teachers have to be selective in choosing what to apply from SLA research (participant #05 & #08) because *“not every theory is applicable and*

not all situations are alike” (#08). Furthermore, instructors are required not only to profit from SLA research but they can also make use of the general principles of foreign language teaching which have also proved to be successful (participant #04).

9. Discussion of the Results

The findings of this interview have uncovered the teachers' experiences with SLA research and its implications in their own teaching situations. They have been inquired about several issues regarding their stand points, applications and knowledge of the theories and studies' findings which seem to be conducive to language education. One of the most significant findings of the interview is the teachers' agreement that students' lack of motivation is one of the challenges that affects the teaching process. It has been proved in the SLA research that motivation is one of the main factors that contributes to the success of language learning. Hence, if the students lack the required motivation for learning, this does not only affect their learning but also the way teachers proceed in the classroom. Students' lack of motivation can be due to a number of reasons among which is the teaching practices adopted. Instructors need to know why unmotivated learners are unmotivated. SLA research and literature offer several strategies to approach this issue. What teachers are required to do is, perhaps, to dig deeper into the different motivational strategies that best suit specific context in language classrooms. When teachers possess the required skills and knowledge about how to motivate the students based on research findings or theories, this would probably maximize students' willingness to learn a foreign language. Motivating students extrinsically or intrinsically should be given the required attention by educators as it is the push that gets learners to exhibit their potentials and skills. It is true that SLA research is not *‘the panacea that cures all ills’* but having a look at it trying to find solutions to teaching problems seems to be relevant as far teachers know what to take and what to use for what subject matter, situation and students.

It has also been revealed in the interview findings that teachers seem to read about SLA research to some

extent. Most of them are familiar with Krashen's works particularly Krashen's Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis. These two models or hypotheses have been widely discussed in the literature and considered to be prominent among Krashen's works. Reading about the Input hypothesis informs the teacher about how much exposure to language is important. Not only this, in the classroom, the teacher has to use a language that is understood by students and that is a little beyond or better than what they know so that they can progress and acquire more complex and new language structures.

Having knowledge about the Affective Filter Hypothesis consolidates teachers' knowledge about the importance of considering affective factors in the language classroom namely motivation, self-confidence/esteem and anxiety. A part of the participants' readings include other mainstream theories as Universal Grammar, constructivism, cognitivism and behaviorism. These are also relevant theories from which educators can draw principles of cooperative learning, student motivation, cognitive/metacognitive strategies, etc. Although the participants are familiar with only the above mentioned relevant theories in addition to a couple of theories (Lado's theory, meta-cognitivism and ZPD), it is perhaps not safe to claim that they know enough about SLA research and theories considering that none of them mentioned research on individual differences (IDs) and other prominent theories as the ones related to 'Interaction' and 'Output'.

Concerning the SLA research implementation, most of the participants seem to apply what they have drawn from their readings. However, two teachers had a different point of view. One teacher explained that the conditions under which other research and studies have taken place are quite different from our conditions. The other teacher, considers Krashen's perspective towards teaching grammar not suitable in EFL classes. In this vein, as stated earlier in this article teachers have to be 'careful' in adapting any instructional practices in the classroom with their particular students. Certain specifications appear in every learning context; while some theories seem to be applicable in specific situations others might

not be. For this reason, teachers are recommended to be aware enough of what best suit their students and classroom contexts. One way to ensure this is to provide teachers with relevant knowledge on SLA by training them through workshops and collaborative research work which the majority of the participants had no experience of as stated in their responses.

Other findings of the interview concern the source of the interviewees' classroom practices. Most of them claim that their instructional methods are drawn from both their teaching experiences and the readings they had on SLA. This may indicate that the participants use SLA research selectively and not thoroughly. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, not all SLA research is suitable to be adopted. Teachers are not compelled to use the findings and implications of all they read. It has been stated in the interviewees' answers that SLA research can be used to solve some instructional issues and find answers to the teachers' questions. According to them, the importance of SLA in education lies in the understanding of what best suit the learners needs, learning problems and classroom situations. Hence, the participants believe that SLA research is highly advantageous to foreign language pedagogy.

10. Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the teachers' experiences with bridging the gap between SLA research and foreign language pedagogy. The findings have uncovered that teachers to some extent attempt to develop knowledge of research into second language acquisition. Not all teachers seem to possess the required knowledge and implications of SLA and theories, however, they all agreed that having such knowledge feed into educators an understanding of learning and teaching a foreign language to a high extent. Nevertheless, some teachers raised the concern of the inapplicability of some SLA theories in EFL classes which represents a challenge for them when trying to mediate between the two. Others suggested a selective approach when it comes to adopting SLA research findings. When selecting what to be used, teachers should first take into account the conditions under which teaching and learning

take place considering that every classroom has its own specifications and learning settings. In this vein, teachers should discover for themselves what best suit their students for research, in general, does not provide straightforward guidance to follow. It is generally assumed that the relationship between SLA research and language pedagogy is complex and that it has its limitations, however, SLA research can serve as help shaping the teachers understanding of the various possible strategies/methods that can be implemented and adopted/adapted in the EFL classroom and which might be highly advantageous for their own instructional settings.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that she has no conflict of interest.

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