

## ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING IN ADULTHOOD: PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE ADULT LEARNERS

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**ABSTRACT:** *Adult learning in an EFL context is one of the most current issues researched in education. Just as the importance of learning a language is growing by the minute, the number of adult learners is enhancing too. The current study investigates the motivation of EFL adult Learners to go back to higher education, their preferred learning styles, and difficulties faced by them. The study consisted of 132 female participants from the College of Basic Education, who answered a 45 statements questionnaire. The answers were analysed quantitatively through SPSS to find the means, frequencies, and significance in correlation with several independent variables. It has been found that female adult learners have mixed intrinsic and extrinsic motives towards learning EFL, and while learning styles varied, institutional barriers such as poor facilities, strict regulations and traditional teaching practice appear to be the greatest difficulties to learners. The study is concluded with several suggestions that aim to provide effective adult EFL learning.*

**KEYWORDS:** adult learner, EFL, motivations, PLS, learning strategies, barriers

### INTRODUCTION

English language has increasingly gained a predominant importance in academic, civic, cultural, and economic domains all over the world. In recent years, the ability to speak English is considered a baseline skill in countries where English is taught as a foreign language (Graddol, 2006). Accordingly, the number of people studying English is significantly growing, not only among young learners' populations but also by adult learners. This gives rise to English language learning, making it a central topic in adult education.

Generally, the decision of adults to return to education is driven by a variety of motivational orientations (Houle, 1961). Earlier, researchers like Johnstone and Rivera (1965) reported that Adults' motives to participate in education vary with different subjects studied and with age, sex, and the socio-economic position of each learner (cited in Jarvis, 1995). Moreover, research showed that further factors can impinge adults' participation in higher education (HE hereafter) like the policy and practice of HE institutions and labour market opportunities (Davies, Osborne & Williams, 2002). In the same sense, adult language learners, as goal-oriented learners, direct their learning to fulfil particular needs or demands: to advance their studies, to progress up the career ladder, to follow business opportunities, to pass a driving test, to assist their children with homework, or simply to be successful users of the language (Smith and Strong, 2009).

Just as research on the reason adult participation has been helpful in providing a more complete understanding of adult learning, so is an understanding of those factors that deter adults from participation or learning; it represents the flip side of adult learning. There is extensive work that examines the challenges that adult learners face in their pursuit of a college education, particularly in the European nations and in the United States (Osam, Bergman, & Cumberland, 2017). Research

shows that knowledge relative to adults' learning barriers can offer potential solutions to college institutions to help their adult learners overcome the barriers they face, and can assist these institutions in attracting and retaining their adult learners' populations. Therefore, it is important to capture the whole picture and examine both the motives and barriers of adults' learning experience.

The college of Basic Education (CBE), one of the leading teachers' colleges in the State of Kuwait, has recently widened its enrolment and started to accept adult students. According to the statistics obtained from the Vice Dean for Admission and Registration, CBE accepted 327 non-traditional students, 134 males and 193 females (about 59% female students) in the second semester of the academic year 2016-2017, whereas the total number of the adult learners' population in the first semester of the academic year of 2017-2018 was 1940 students (247 male students and 1693 female students) (CBE, 2018, p.3). It is expected that the influx of adult learners into colleges will continue to increase due to recent local and global dynamics. This includes the growth of the economies which imposes college-level qualification as a requirement for most occupations, the outsourcing of job functions and cycles of layoffs (Osam et al., 2017), and most importantly, the shift in societal norms and perceptions which view women as active agents in their society, working hard for their attainments, making their own decisions as active contributors to the household income and not full-time homemakers (Alshebou, 2019).

As faculty members teaching in CBE, we use the term adult EFL (English as a foreign language) learners to distinguish them from the traditional young school leavers who enrolled in college to become EFL students. In the literature, adult learners are generally known as 'non-traditional students' which refer to the category of 20-65 years of age, who enrol into higher education studies in a non-traditional way, who is financially independent, with several social roles of life, studying full-time or part-time, and working fulltime or part-time, or not working at all (Treiniene, 2017). In Kuwait, adult college students are mainly adult learners who wish to pursue their university or college studies at a later-than-typical age or those employees who wish to pursue their university studies.

With relevance to language learning, there is an increasing number of studies investigating how differences between learners determine language achievement; these include gender, aptitude, motivation, learning styles and learning beliefs (Al-Adwani, 2017). While Many scholars believe that some learning preferences are biologically constructed, motivation and strong personal will are also believed to be reasons behind the learning preference (Tatarinceva, 2014). Reid (1987) stated that a better understanding of students preferred learning style (PLS hereafter) would help determine the appropriate instructional strategies, curriculum and classroom practices. The same can be said regarding EFL adult learners. EFL adult learners vary in their PLS depending upon their motivational orientations, social and personal circumstances. Adults as mature, competent, experienced, multitalented learners who live complex lives and fulfil a variety of different life roles, and hence, require teaching strategies that meet their needs. In addition, investigating PLS of female adult learners is crucial due to the recurrent research findings which show that CBE students and graduates in general confront difficulties in most areas in learning English (Dashti & Salama, 2013, Al-Darwish, 2017, Al-Edwani, 2005). Thus, identifying the PLS of EFL adult learners can assist in their retention, completion and achievement.

Overall, the interaction of the aforementioned factors in the Kuwaiti context is still unexplored. This study argues that exploring adult learners' motives and hindrances is a typical starting point for effective adult EFL learning. Also, it is of utmost importance to identify the learning styles of adult

EFL learners in order to find the right teaching approach and then design the appropriate courses. Therefore, this study is designed to inform an understanding of these factors in more detail and greater depth. That will enable providers, instructors and educators to make decisions in adult learning provision, teaching and learning diagnosis, student counselling, and language teacher education.

The present study focuses on the academic experiences of female EFL adult learners enrolled in CBE in particular, their motivational orientations for choosing English language as a major, their PLS and obstacles they face. To this end, the study was guided by the following questions:

1. What are the motivators of female adult learners to learn EFL?
2. What are the PLS of female EFL adult learners?
3. How do they find their learning experience in terms of difficulties they face?
4. How do learners' perspectives vary according to their demographic and academic variables?
5. Do these PLS and learning difficulties differ according to learners' motivations?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Prior to examining the current study's questions, it is important to investigate the literature of adult education, particularly the attributes of adult learners' motivations and barriers of learning. As this study is concerned with PLS of EFL adult learners, a brief review of PLS is presented first.

### Preferred Learning Styles

Learning styles are defined as methods of dealing with information in learning environments (Keefe, 1979). Similarly, DeCapua and Wintergerst (2005) define learning preferences as an individual's inherent preference of learning styles. Hence, learning methods depend on the learner's choice of knowledge acquisition manner. While many scholars believe that some learning preferences are biologically constructed, motivation and strong personal will are also believed to be reasons behind the learning preference (Tatarinceva, 2014). Gender, according to Cavanaugh (2002), is one of the main factors affecting learning preferences. While studies do not provide a vivid picture of learning styles in association with gender, Kolb's (1985) study showed that men prefer the conceptualization mode of learning. Fear of failure (Entwistle, 1981) appears to be the basic motivation between such choice.

The current study adapted Reid's (1987) learning style preference typology, which is based on four basic perceptual learning styles (auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactile) and two social interaction factors (individual or group learning). The first style addressed by Reid (1987) is the "Auditory Learning Style", which clearly, from its name, is related to the association of learning with hearing. The auditory learner is able to recall 75% of information heard during a 45 to 50 minutes period (Dunn, 1988). In this case, teachers are advised to use audio-visual techniques, such as the radio, television or videos. The instructor is also advised to provide clear oral directions for tasks.

The second type of learning styles preference provided by Reid (1987) is called the "Kinesthetic Experience". The kinesthetic learners are able to learn with body experience (Dunn, 1988). Thus, the teachers are advised to involve the learners in activities that provide experience by planning and carrying out objectives. The third type of learning preference is what Reid (1987) calls a "hands on" task. The learners who prefer this style are able to learn better when underlining their books and

notes, and writing notes while listening. The instructors are advised to use three dimensional objects when teaching concepts to students who prefer these styles.

The fourth type of learning preference is the “Visual Mode” (Reid, 1987). Dunn (1988) defined the visual learners as the learner who retrieves details and events when they see them most. The instructors who cater for visual learners are advised to use pictures, videos, graphs, charts, drawings, books...etc. written assignments help visual learners gain more knowledge.

The “Sociological Style” is a learner’s preference of group and individual work. Some learners prefer to work in groups, or with another student. These learners are able to succeed when working in a group. On the other hand, the individual learner learns more effectively when working individually. These learners recall information they have learned alone and remember what they have learned when they have learned alone.

Many studies have recently found that a new learning style has emerged due to the advances in technology; namely, computer-assisted style preference (Hsu, 1994; Paran et al., 2004; Souriyavongsal et.al, 2013). The dependence on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) is also a method to be used by group and individual learners, as it is found to cater for the learner’s needs. Language learners seem to prefer web-based language learning (WBLL) since it helps in learning vocabulary (Gorjian, 2012). Moreover, Nachoua (2012) found that the use of computers not only links all the learning styles together, but it also motivates learners and effectively develops the learners’ listening skills. By the use of CALL, reading skills could also be enhanced (Marzban, 2011) and speaking skills improved immensely (Yamada, 2009).

Popescu (2014) maintains that every person has a mix of learning styles and these styles are not fixed depending on their dominance and the learning setting. Nonetheless, identifying adult learners’ PLS can assist instructors in selecting teaching techniques better suited to their learners, and thereby, improving the speed and quality of their learning.

### **Adult learning**

Malcolm Knowles introduced the term andragogy which means the ‘art and science of helping adults to learn’, as opposed to pedagogy, ‘the art and science of helping children to learn’ (Merriam & Brockett, 2007, p.85). He perceives adult learning as a process of active inquiry not passive reception of transmitted content. His six core andragogical principles are: the learner’s need to know- self-directed learning- prior experience of the learner, readiness to learn, orientation to learning and problem solving, and motivation to learn (Knowles et al., 2005, p.183).

Rogers (2002) notes that despite the diverse theories of adult learning (such as theories focusing on the individual learner, context-based theories where learning is based on the interaction between the individual and the outside world, or the knowledge-based theories that distinguish between different kinds of knowing), the active interrelation process of adult learners with experience, new knowledge or their social or total environment is a central factor in most of them. Experiential learning is also a significant factor in most adult learning theories as there is a general consensus that adults learn more effectively when learning is related to their own experiences, problems and needs (Jarvis, 1995). Rogers (2002) suggests that adults have a wealth of experience and instructors should value and capitalize on that experience. This can be accomplished simply by including and building upon the students’ experiences in the learning process.

Adults' success in learning a second or a foreign language is an intense debate. Various studies have been carried out in order to investigate the issue of age regarding language learning. Although many studies have revealed that there is a suitable time (Critical Period) in human development when the brain is predisposed for success in language learning, it has been concluded that age is not an obstacle for adults in terms of learning another language (Hapci, 2017). Further, Robertson (2002) claims that adult learners can learn faster and more efficiently than young learners because of their greater memory storage and greater capability of their conceptual system which provide them lots of benefits in learning a second language. Also, Hammerly (1991) points out that although adult language learners are generally known as their lack of ultimate mastery of language structure, adults are better than young learners considering their greater cognitive maturity, better learning strategies and study habits, better focus and goal orientation, a longer attention span, the ability to make a greater variety of associations, and better short-term memory. Consequently, adults' language learning can be fostered by planning activities where adults can direct their own learning, using active participation and groups for social interaction, using a variety of teaching and learning methods, making the learning relevant to their needs, spending less time lecturing and guiding them work on solving problems, and providing a supportive learning environment with multiple resources, breaks and opportunities for asking questions and correcting mistakes (Rasmussen, 2015). In sum, with the increasing number of adult language learners, interest and research in how adults learn continues to grow, and adults' language learning continues to be a lifelong learning process.

### **Motivations to learn**

Adult learning theorists (*e.g.* Cross, 1981; Knowles, 1989; Jarvis, 1995; Merriam and Caffarella, 1999; Rogers, 2002) commonly describe adult learners, among other characteristics, as highly diversified group of individuals with widely differing preferences, needs, backgrounds, and skills; they tend to be life-centred in their orientation to learning; they are motivated to learn by a variety of factors; and they maintain active participation in the learning process. Taking this into consideration, reasons and purposes why adults learn are varied especially at different stages in adult learners' life and in different contexts. In the same sense, Yamagata (1995) maintained that teaching English to EFL adult learners is quite different from teaching children or traditional students. Therefore, understanding reasons and purposes (motivations for learning) of adult learners is crucial to EFL instructors and providers involved in the adult learning process.

Large quantities of studies related to motivations of adult learning can be found in the literature (Houle, (1961); Boshier, (1973); Morstain and Smart,1974, Pintrich & Schunk,1996; Carré, 2000), and yet as proposed by Jarvis (1995), the overall findings do not differ greatly. In their effort to define motivation in its intrinsic and extrinsic forms, Pintrich & Schunk (1996) made the following statement:

*'intrinsic' motivation refers to motivation to engage in an activity for its own sake. People who are intrinsically motivated work to on tasks because they find them enjoyable. Task motivation is its own reward and doesn't depend on explicit rewards or other external constraints. In contrast, 'extrinsic' motivation is motivation to engage in an activity as a means to an end. Individuals who are extrinsically motivated work on tasks because they believe that participation will result in desirable outcomes such as a reward, praise, or avoidance of punishment. (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996, p. 257-258).*

A well-known model of motivation for adult education is Philippe Carré's model (Carré, 2000) which is organized on two axes: first axis is oriented towards (intrinsic versus extrinsic motivations), while the second axis is oriented towards (learning versus participating). The combination of these orientations and axes produces 10 specific motives which are labelled as follows: intrinsic motives include epistemic (learning as a source of satisfaction), socio-affective (to develop social contacts) and hedonic (pleasure taken from space and materials available in the educational setting). Extrinsic motives include economic benefits, prescribed (when the learning activity is provided for by someone else), derivative (participation to avoid unpleasant activities), professional-operational (to develop competencies, knowledge or skills for professional activities), personal-operational (to develop competencies, knowledge or skills required for activities outside the job and working life), vocational (demand for skills or symbolic recognition needed to get, preserve or evolve in a job) and identity-based (appreciation of one's own identity). The diversity of motivations is significant in a large number of researches. Carré (2000) maintains that adult motives are not exclusive, they can be diverse and combined (with a minimum of two); he states that 'they are plural, changeable and contingent upon the individual's life context' (Carré, 2000, p.3).

With relevance to female adult learners, Hardin (2008) maintains that their motivations to return to college are various: on one hand, to prepare themselves for future jobs and financial security and to support their families; on the other hand, to pursue their self-actualization after waiting for their children to start school or leave home. All in all, previous research shows that, contrary to older male adult learners who are mainly motivated by economic motives, younger adults, and women in particular, have mixed motives (Kitiashvili and Tasker, 2016). The relevance of intrinsic motivations in female adult learning is key, as Bye, Pushkar, and Conway (2007) stated: 'this is particularly outstanding for the non-traditional female students' (Bye et al., 2007, p. 2). Similar results are found in Rothes, Lemos & Goncalves (2014), in which men scored significantly higher than women in the economic, professional-operational, personal-operational, vocational and prescribed motives, that is, in five out of the seven extrinsic motives. Additionally, female adult learners appear to be highly motivated with more perceived competence (self-efficacy) and more self-determination than male learners (Carré, 2000).

### **Barriers of adult learning**

Research shows that adults participate in adult education for a variety of reasons and purposes. Conversely, many adults are confronted with barriers that impede or deter their participation. A well-known approach to examine these barriers is Cross's model (1981, 1992) which identifies three types of barriers: situational, dispositional and institutional. Situational barriers refer to barriers that arise from one's situation or environment at a point like lack of money and time, having too many personal home or work responsibilities, childcare, lack of transportation, poor health etc. Dispositional barriers are those that relate to the attitude and self-perceptions about one-self as a learner such as negative attitudes and perceptions about further education, its usefulness and the appropriateness of engaging in learning; low self-esteem having poor study habits, and evidence of prior poor academic performance are also dispositional barriers. Institutional barriers are usually caused by institutions of learning including those practices and procedures that exclude or discourage adults from participating in organized learning activities or those that affect degree completion among adult learners such as inconvenient scheduling; location; lack of interesting, practical or relevant courses; administrative or procedural issues; the lack of information about programs and procedures, etc. (Cross, 1992). Procedures and time requirements can be problematic too (Hardin, 2008), as well as difficulty in dealing with admissions and advising staff (Kasworm, 2010).

Despite the numerous barriers adults face to engage in adult learning activities, many are able to persist and participate. However, when they enter the learning environment, they may be confronted with additional institutional obstacles such as poor physical environment, unfriendly staff and indifferent instructors.

## METHODOLOGY

This study follows a descriptive analytical approach utilising a structured self-reported questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. The questionnaire focuses on three main concepts of adult learning; namely, motivations for learning, preferred learning styles, and difficulties of learning. Each concept involved 15 statements on a five-point Likert scale, starting from 5 (completely agree) to 1 (completely disagree). The independent variables measured are age, social status, number of children, nationality, district of residence, previous jobs, years in CBE, last certificate obtained, and type of study leave. GPA was excluded as all participants reflected high GPA (3.30-3.97). Age was calculated in groups of 25-30, 31-35, 36-40 and 41+. Issues of validity, both face and content validity, were considered before distributing. Reliability of the scale was also checked through Cronbach alphas which reported good scores for the three main constructs of the scale as shown in Table 1.

Construct	Alpha
Intrinsic motives	.721
Extrinsic motives	.717
Preferred Learning Styles	.728
Situational barriers	.738
Institutional barriers	.871
Dispositional barriers	.676

*Table 1. Cronbach alpha coefficients for the scale*

In the academic year 2017-2018, the total population of female adult learners studying at the English department at CBE was estimated as 186 learners. During the second semester, a sample of 132 respondents were selected randomly to take part in this study. Collected data was analyzed using the statistical package for social sciences (SPSS) WIN version 20.0. Statistical analyses include descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean, and standard deviation) as well as inferential statistics like (T-test, ANOVA, L.S.D). Also, Pearson Correlation Coefficient test was used to understand the potential interaction between the main study constructs.

## RESULTS

The first criteria under investigation is motivation. In the first section of the questionnaire respondents were asked to indicate their motivational orientations towards 15 purposes for enrolling CBE and choosing the English major, seven purposes represent intrinsic motivations and eight represent extrinsic motivations. Findings show that respondents are greatly motivated by both intrinsic ( $m=4.29$ ) and extrinsic motives ( $m=3.94$ ) towards EFL learning with slightly higher levels of intrinsic motivations.

The first two statements of motivations touch upon the idea that most adult learners chose the English major because they like the language and would like to improve their language command.

91% of the informants stated that they like the major, and 93.2% believed that by studying in the English department, they would be able to develop their language skills. However, a closer look at the data collected reflects the significance of the independent variables on the previous statements. Age, previous job, and social status seem to play a major role in the participants' answers. In a one-way ANOVA by social status, significance was found at  $f > 0.01$  (where significance is calculated at  $f \geq 0.05$ ). When analysing the mean, it was found that divorced students like the major less ( $m = 4.00$  where average mean (am hereafter) is 4.55), and they aim to develop their language abilities significantly less ( $m = 3.71$ , where  $am = 4.66$  with standard deviation of 0.616). Moreover, a two-way ANOVA by age and social status reflected that the divorced informants in the age range of 36-40 like the major less ( $f > 0.01$ ). Students who used to work as operators have reflected the least interest in the English major ( $m = 4.33$  an average of 4.55). Overall, getting financial advantages seems to be the main motivation for operators, while participants who had no previous jobs seem to be motivated by obtaining a higher degree and becoming independent when travelling abroad.

A high 96.4% of the informants agreed that they have come to study to get a better qualification and 94.8% of them to get a better job. Statistics show that although married participants are the least motivated by the degree itself in comparison to the other social statuses ( $m = 4.75$  while  $am = 4.82$ , where  $f = 0.023$ ), bachelorettes are mostly motivated by developing their language skills. Financial advantages are also motivating for 91.6% of the participants. All non-Kuwaitis have completely agreed that financial advantages are important motivators. Thus, financial advantages have shown to be the main motivator for non-Kuwaitis alongside with flexibility of acceptance.

On the other hand, 94.2% of the informants agreed that they were motivated to study English because it would enhance promotion chances. Yet, as expected, students who have not been in a job previously found this statement the least motivating ( $m = 2.50$ ). 91.4% of the participants were motivated by the thought that they would be able to depend on themselves while travelling abroad if they study in the English department.

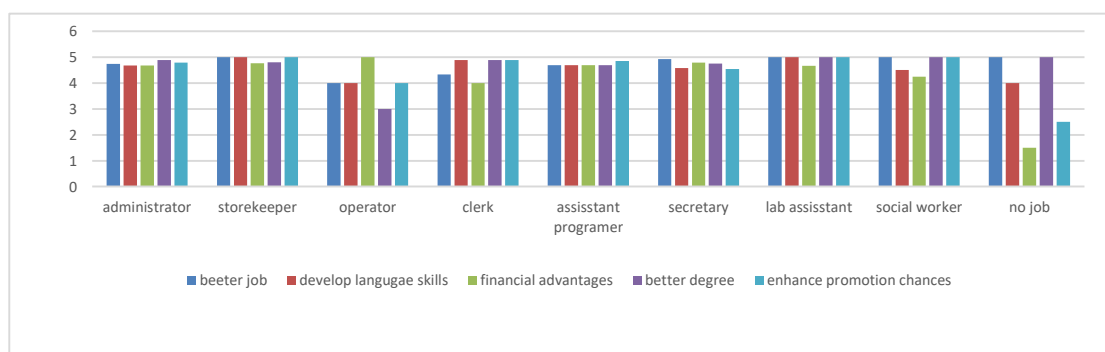


Chart 1. Top motivators of participants by previous jobs

The final statements of motivation did not reflect clear majority agreement as the other motivators stated previously. Chart 2 below reflects the variation of answers in the three final motivation related statements; namely, the will to build new relationships (70.2% of agreement), the ease of study (61.4%), and the effect of other people on the participant's choice of major (54%). Conversely, a one-way ANOVA on the ease of study by district of residence reflects that the participants living in Hawalli district agree with the statement significantly more than residents from other districts ( $f > 0.0$ ).



The second scope of the study investigates the PLS of female EFL adult learners. This section investigates the four basic learning styles (auditory, visual, kinaesthetic, and tactile), the two social interaction factors (individual or group learning), and the computer-assisted language learning (CALL). Statistics illustrate that the most PLS by respondents is CALL style ( $m=4.58$ ) followed consecutively by the auditory style ( $m=4.51$ ), the kinaesthetic style ( $m=4.35$ ), the visual style ( $m=4.26$ ), the tactile (hands-on) style ( $m=4.12$ ), the group work style ( $m=3.45$ ), whereas the least PLS was the individual learning style ( $m=3.34$ ).

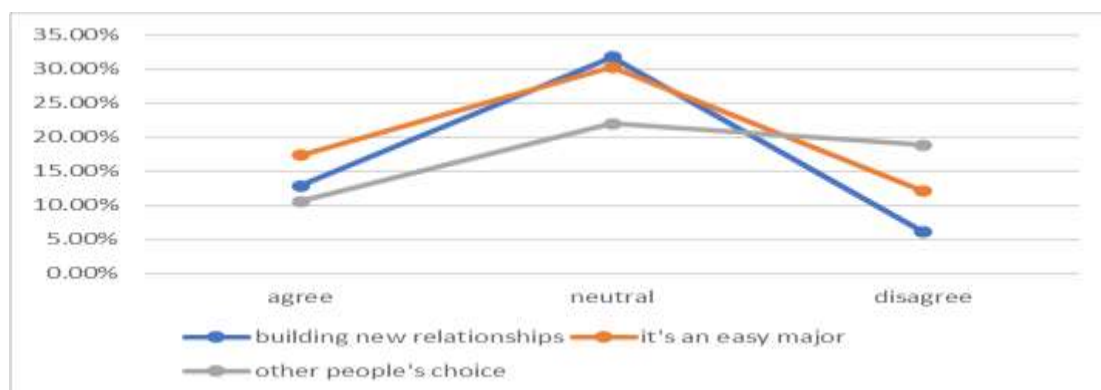


Chart 2. Percentages found in the last 3 motivating statements

At first, 91.6% of respondents expressed that CALL improves their language abilities faster, including using electronic dictionaries and digital equipments. The auditory learning style also came to the forefront as a PLS by the sample. Most of the informants completely agree that listening to the English language either in class, or through listening to TV and radio help in developing their language skills. In a T-test performed on the correlation of this statement with age and job showed significance of  $f > 0.0$  as operators in the youngest age group agree least ( $m=4.00$  and  $am=4.45$ ).

The kinaesthetic learning style came as the third favourite style in this study. Female EFL adult learners agreed and completely agreed that they enhance their language learning through participation in class (87.6%) and through practical application of material studied (86%). As for the tactile learning style, the point of view of the informants reflects fluctuation. While most learners prefer hands on strategies like taking notes in class (93.8%), and using mind maps in understanding the course content (89%), the statement around writing a diary or short essays yielded the least agreement score (65.2%).

The association of learning with students' involvement was also investigated in this study. Do students prefer to study alone? Or in a group? Would students prefer to work alone in class? Or in a group? The answers to these questions were found in the data where informants reflected their preference to study and work in groups over individual learning as means' scores indicate above. Significance was found by nationality ( $f > 0.01$ ) as non-Kuwaitis completely disagree with working in a group and prefer to work alone. Although non-Kuwaitis also completely disagree with working on homework with a team ( $f > 0.01$ ), 70.4% of the participants agree that they like to do their homework in a group.

The third theme under investigation is concerned with difficulties that female adult learners face during their years of study. In this part, respondents were asked to indicate their responses towards 15 types of potential barriers they face in their learning experience, four dispositional, six institutional, and five situational as shown in Table 2 below. Statistics illustrate that responses

towards learning barriers come in moderate and less than moderate degrees. The most significant barriers expressed by the study sample are the institutional barriers ( $m= 2.97$ ) followed by the dispositional ones ( $m= 2.55$ ), then the situational barriers ( $m=2.55$ ).

Breaking down the scores of these different barriers, scores show that 66.6% of participants agree that the facilities provided in college are not sufficient for adult learners. While divorced participants showed significantly most agreement with this statement ( $f=0.04$ ), participants with 3 children agreed least reflecting a mean of 2.76 ( $am=4.00$ ). Additionally, 62.8% of the informants believed that regulations and laws of the college are not proper to them as non-traditional learners. Another institutional barrier is linked to teachers' practice; more than half of the sample agree that teachers do not give them enough space to share their experience with other students (57.4%). Further investigation of this statement with the correlation with social status and year in CBE revealed significance of  $f>0.01$  and  $f=0.045$  successively. This significance is due to the fact that most divorced female adult learners agree with this statement, along with 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> year students.

N	Items	Std.		
		Mean	Deviation	% rank
3	I don't go along with younger girls when working together in class	3.36	1.447	67.2% 1
5	The facilities in the college are not sufficient for adult learners	3.33	1.335	66.6% 2
12	The educational requirements are different to what I was used to before	3.25	1.427	65.0% 3
15	The laws and regulations do not appreciate the situation of adult learners.	3.14	1.564	62.8% 4
11	My family duties negatively affect my educational responsibilities	3.08	1.446	61.6% 5
4	the teachers don't give me enough space to share my experience with other students	2.87	1.345	57.4% 6
6	I Find it difficult to make friendships with younger students	2.76	1.399	55.2% 7
7	my age and experience are not appreciated by teachers	2.74	1.385	54.8% 8
8	I'm embarrassed of participating in class	2.61	1.282	52.2% 9
9	my financial situation negatively affects my responsibilities as a learner	2.55	1.432	51.0% 10
2	the techniques used by the teachers do not match my experience or age	2.48	1.142	49.6% 11
10	my health affects my attendance	2.42	1.308	48.4% 12
13	I don't feel like I have the Educational skills required	2.15	1.095	43.0% 13
14	I don't find enough support from my family	1.95	1.141	39.0% 14
1	I don't like my current major	1.85	.842	37.0% 15

Table 2. Means, Std. deviation and ranks of barriers

On the other hand, 67.2% of the students stated that they do not get along with younger girls when working in class. While participants with most children disagree completely with this statement ( $f > 0.01$ ); participants from Ahmadi district all agreed with this statement ( $f > 0.01$ ) resulting in a mean of 4.55 where the average mean is 3.36 and the standard deviation is 1.34. Yet, a one-way ANOVA by social status reflects total agreement by all divorced participants, as  $f > 0.01$ .

When asked if the educational requirements are different from what the participants were used to before in their previous educational experience, the results were scattered between answers, but agreement was reflected most with a mean of 3.25. Nevertheless, further investigation of the effect of independent variables show that divorced participants all agree with this statement ( $m = 4.57$ ), with  $f = 0.01$ . A major situational barrier from the sample's point of view was family commitment. 61.6% of the respondents agreed that their families' responsibilities and duties negatively affect their academic studies.

On the other hand, barriers like 'I do not like my current major' and 'I do not get enough support from my family' have yielded the least scores of agreements, meaning that respondents do not see them as important hurdles in their learning experience. Correspondingly, this was confirmed when 91% of the sample expressed their fondness of the English language as a motivator to study this major. Yet, a one-way ANOVA by type of registration shows  $f = 0.043$  as students with old certificates mostly agree ( $m = 4.66$ ) that they find support from their families.

Generally, significance was calculated in a one-way ANOVA by year in CBE, and was found at  $f > .05$  as first year adult learners are the ones who perceived least the institutional and dispositional barriers but not the situational ones; meaning that learners experience more difficulties as they progress in their studies.

Finally, a Pearson-Coefficients Correlation test is computed to assess the relationships between learners' motivations and their PLS and difficulties they experience. Statistics showed that there is a positive correlation between learners' intrinsic motivations and kinesthetic PLS (.331,  $p > 0.01$ ), visual PLS (.297,  $p > 0.01$ ) and group PLS (.294,  $p > 0.01$ ), whereas a significant negative correlation was found between their intrinsic motivations and institutional barriers (-.328,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as dispositional barriers (-.157,  $p < 0.05$ ). Similarly, data analysis illustrated a significant positive correlation between learners' extrinsic motivations and kinesthetic PLS (.221,  $p > 0.01$ ) and individual PLS (.245,  $p > 0.01$ ).

## DISCUSSION

From the data analysis presented above, this discussion section will link the findings with the literature reviewed, highlighting resembling issues and points of divergence. This study aimed at identifying female adult EFL learners' motivations, their PLS, and barriers they face enable to optimise learning outcomes.

In accordance with findings of previous research in various adult learning contexts and subjects (*e.g.* Davies et al., 2002; Pires, 2009; Boeren, 2011) which show consistently that adult learners state mixed intrinsic and extrinsic motives, with higher level of the intrinsic ones (Bye et al., 2007; Rothes et al., 2014), female adult learners in this study featured mixed motivations towards enrolling CBE and choosing English language as a major, with slightly higher level of intrinsic epistemic motives. These findings coincided with Al-Yaseen (2018) who found that intrinsic motivations are more important than extrinsic and altruistic motivations to traditional female EFL student-teachers at

Kuwait University. In the present study, the primary motives of learners are seen as either related to their interest in the subject, to get a better qualification, or to prove themselves as successful independent speakers of English. In other words, they are mainly driven by their cognitive interest and their desire to pursue their self-actualisation, self-efficacy, and self-fulfilment.

Surprisingly, conflicting findings come from a recent study conducted in the same setting of CBE researching motivations and barriers of female adult learners from various majors. In her study, Alshebou (2019) noted that although female adult learners were strongly driven by both intrinsic and extrinsic motives to enrol CBE, their extrinsic motives towards improving their financial situation appeared to be more important. However, present findings show that motives emerging from external pressures, such as the ease of the study or being obliged or forced by others like friends and family, are not present among most female adult EFL learners. A justification for this can be related to the fact that English language study is not an easy major and students who enrol this major are really interested in the subject (Al-Yaseen, 2018).

But, the situation is significantly different to non-Kuwaiti female adult learners who appear to be greatly motivated by extrinsic motives like financial advantages and flexibility of acceptance. This result is unsurprising due to the difficult societal, economic, and cultural circumstances those learners experience. Being a non-Kuwaiti learner, apart from being an adult learner, makes enrolling in CBE a valued opportunity no matter how the admission rules are competitive, or how the learning experience is difficult. Besides, any learning practice involving societal interaction either in/out classroom including group work or discussions are negatively perceived by those learners reflecting the cultural fragmentation in which they live. A case that entails further consideration and deep investigation.

Another notable remark pertains to the social status of the sample. In this study, divorced female EFL adult learners revealed distinctive characteristics that require serious consideration. Amongst others, divorced learners are the ones who mostly experience institutional, situational, as well as dispositional hurdles. Results expose that they are primarily motivated by financial rewards, they are not satisfied with the college facilities nor the teaching practice, they lack appropriate learning skills and interest in the subject, they do not prefer interacting with young learners, and they experience difficult family responsibilities. It appears that this group of learners undergo important emotional and psychological issues like low confidence, negative past experience, lack of energy, fear of failure, negative attitudes towards intellectual activity and social interaction, which might impact their learning experience negatively. Such findings coincide with Glass and Rose (1994) who reported that single mothers experienced both institutional and dispositional factors that made their ability to learn and complete their education more difficult. Against this, divorced female learners need to seek emotional support from various sources to cope with the stress associated with attending college. Several scholars (*e.g.* Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002) have thus called for increased levels of support from college institutions for adult learners to aid progression toward degree completion. An issue that should be addressed carefully by Students Affairs Office at CBE. On the other hand, married learners in this study revealed intrinsic motivations which reflect learners' autonomy, an important trait of the adult language learner. This finding agrees with Al-Adwani (2017) who found that married students at CBE reflected learner autonomy and self-direction to their educational goals more than single or divorced students by utilising more learning strategies. In the literature, marital status was used as an indicator of maturity and stability that may enhance academic focus, and it was found that it contributes significantly to success in academic performance (Jarvis, 1987). From a cultural perspective, this is more likely to appear among female adult learners' population in Kuwait, as females marry at a roughly early age. In this vein, Osam et

al. (2017) reported that women who marry early double their chances of returning to school as adults, and those who had heavy combinations of work and family demands were more likely to return to school than those who did not.

Family obligations emerged as important constraint in this study, as it is the case in most previous research. The implication is that situational barriers may be a heavier factor hindering women's college studies. Nonetheless, the literature reveals conflicting information. As reported by Home & Hinds (2000), being married or having children increased the learners' autonomy and self-confidence as they appear to be intrinsically driven. A result that is confirmed in the present study. As for the PLS of the sample, similar to the findings of Tai (2013), CALL appears to be the most preferred PLS while individual style was perceived as the least PLS. In this regard, Hiemstra (1991) maintained that incorporating computers in the learning environment can improve adults' learning (cited in Brookfield, 1986, p.150). But how technology is arranged and used in the learning space is of key importance (Brookfield, 1986). At this point, additional assistance can be provided to help female EFL adult learners at CBE to become familiar with the technology since adults have different access and skills in computer using.

An interesting disparity was revealed in this study regarding group work. Most learners in the present study expressed their preference of group work over individual learning. This finding is already confirmed in previous research where Taqi and Al-Nouh (2014) noted that adult students (aged 24-29) in EFL classes worked best in groups while the youngest age group showed higher grades when working individually. Ironically, in this study, most of the sample reported that they do not get along with young students in class although they prefer group work. Contrasting findings can be found in Alshebou (2019) where female adult learners reported their satisfaction about the small gap between them and young learners at CBE classes. A possible justification is that being in a traditional college like CBE, opportunities for in class interactions and discussions are rather limited as teachers, who lack the proper andragogical knowledge need to follow a more pedagogic, teacher-focused approach to help attain instructional objectives. Previous work noted that the traditional method of rote learning and memorizing is the norm at CBE EFL classes, and teachers are still authoritative and continue to employ the same teaching methods like lectures, tests and assignments (Al-Adwani, 2017; Al-Darwish, 2017). This can be resolved by utilising innovative teaching methods like group discussion as it meets adults' need for Kinaesthetic/tactile styles of learning like communication, participation, social interaction, and practical application as present findings showed. This is confirmed by the significant positive correlation found between learners' extrinsic and intrinsic motivations and kinaesthetic PLS. Group real-life tasks can also be another teaching strategy which provide comprehensive input and frequently involve adult language learners interacting in group projects, particularly in language classes where task types can be manipulated to develop fluency, complexity, appropriacy, accuracy, and confidence among learners (Smith & Strong, 2009). In addition, instructors could invite and encourage female adult students to share their life experiences towards a special topic. In this way, not only female adult learners could build a good rapport and get involved with the class, younger students also have an opportunity to gain practical knowledge from real life examples.

Further andragogical concerns are related to the discouraging learning environment. Various indicators reinforce that female adult participation will be put in jeopardy if present practices continue on its current trajectory. Poor learning environment, inconvenient facilities, unsupportive teachers, traditional teaching methods, and rigid admission criteria are likely to impede female adults' learning. In this regard, Brookfield (1986) stressed that the learning environment in its

physical, psychological, and social dimensions plays an important role in successful adult learning. Therefore, CBE should consider providing several services for female adult learners such as long library working hours, separate registration and orientation, separate lounges, and day-care centres. It should continue to explore ways to integrate adult learners into the academic community. For example, it is possible to encourage adult learners to serve on committees to increase their sense of belonging.

## CONCLUSION

This study aimed to form an understanding of the academic experiences of female EFL adult learners enrolled in CBE, their motivational orientations for choosing English language as a major, their PLS and obstacles they face. Results of the quantitative analysis showed that these learners are intrinsically and extrinsically motivated to learn EFL. While they expressed different learning styles preferences, difficulties they encounter appear to be alike.

Notwithstanding the difficulties of gaining an accurate estimate of the numbers of adult learners in higher education in Kuwait, it seems clear that adults now constitute a fast-growing population in these institutes. With such expansion, and based upon the empirical evidence of the present study, it is speculated that there would be a need for the provision of adult learners' counselling services, specialised programmes for adults preparing to enrol HE, and off courses and services that help adults acquire learning-to-learn skills. Female adults are motivated learners and can bring an incredible amount of knowledge to the class, but they can be critical of the teaching process. Results of this study provide support for EFL instructors to incorporate instructional strategies that do stress prior experience of adult learners into teaching. In addition, instructors' knowledge of adult learners' PLS is important as they can weave it into their daily teaching routines. If a group of learners' language needs can be accurately specified, then this identification can be used to determine the content of a language programme that will meet these needs. By which, a teacher has to make methodological decisions about the course aims, the teaching techniques, the type of activities, the methods of assessment. Nonetheless, CBE classes may not always address individual interests, as the ultimate goal in any traditional university is to prepare students for graduation. Consequently, care should also be taken that excessive structure and authority in the program do not become a demotivation for learning, and that flexibility is built within EFL programmes.

Lastly, based on the findings of this study and considering the relatively scarce research in the field of adult learning in Kuwaiti HE, a similar study is required with male EFL adult learners at CBE and other HE institutions to verify and compare findings. In addition, a follow up qualitative research with female EFL adult learners at CBE can provide further rich interpretations to their academic experiences.

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