

**AGE AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION: EXPLORING THE  
ADVANTAGES OF YOUNG LEARNERS' LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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**Abstract:** The ability of language learners to learn new languages and become proficient is significantly impacted by age. This article investigates how age impacts language development, cognitive functions, and language acquisition in order to better understand how age affects language learning. The disparities between younger and older learners' second language acquisition (SLA) are examined in this research. Childhood exposure to a second language early on frequently results in native-like competency, while some adults and teenagers find it difficult to acquire fluency. We contend that the interaction of intrinsic skills, cognitive growth, and social-cultural factors is what causes this discrepancy.

**Keywords:** age, language learning, second language acquisition, cognitive abilities, proficiency

**Introduction**

Some adolescents or adults who start to learn second language would fail to achieve language fluency, while children who were exposed to second language at their early age seem to be proficient like native speaker. In addition, language environments play an important role when language learners start foreign language acquisition. This hypothesis can be supported by saying that children seem to be involved in an efficient way to acquire the new language when set in the foreign language. On the other hand, the adolescents or adults would experience some great difficulties in acquiring a new language and maintaining the trace of foreignness. Accordingly, by given the discussion from the theory, it is accepted that young learners probably have great potential to acquire second languages rapidly, efficiently and proficiently, whereas adults or adolescents are at an inferior position in second language acquisition.

Language is basically a human activity that aims to communicate and is closely related to culture. According to Bullock (1975: 47) language is one of the ways in which we present the world to ourselves, that is, the objects, people and events that make up our environment. Language

is an important part of the learning process, because it is important to help children understand spoken and written words and express themselves in many ways.

### **Literature review**

Based on their age group, first language learners and non-native learners differ significantly. A person studying a second language is typically older than someone learning their first language. There are several hypotheses about second language acquisition that include behavioral, cognitive, and biological justifications. Many of these individuals think that when it comes to learning a second language, younger students are superior to older students. Chun (1980: 228), on the other hand, contends that the theory of a general reduction in second language acquisition ability with age is not well supported. A learner who is able to master the first language before becoming older is said to acquire the second language, according to Stevens (1978: 43). Stevens claims that it is widely acknowledged that learning a new language carries less responsibility than learning an old one. According to Klein (1986: 15), there are several approaches, times, goals, and levels at which a second language can be learned.

Lennenburg and other researchers used the theoretical period theory, which was founded on research on animal behavior, to study language acquisition (see. He thought that the optimal time to learn a language is between the ages of two and adulthood. Language acquisition halts at puberty before the age of two, and brain plasticity is lost during puberty as a result of the loss of brain control or the leftward or rightward reversal of voice action. It is harder to learn a language (Chun 1980: 288).

The notion that critical time is a factor is rejected by Klein (1986: 9). He claims that the myth that acquiring a first language is easy and quick is the source of the belief that language acquisition is optimal between the ages of two and adulthood, when the brain is more malleable. There is no conclusive biological evidence, according to Lamandella (Klein 1986: 10), that the brain does not change until adulthood, when the left and right hemispheres "link." The crucial period argument is refuted by the occurrence of successful adult language learners, despite their rarity. Chun (1980: 289) presents the results of four long-term research on the learning of natural second languages. While none of these refute the critical period theory, they all imply that, depending on biological, cognitive, and affective variables, certain facets of language are best learned at different times. both social and internal. The results of a laboratory study and a study on natural second language

learning were compared by Snow and Hofnagel-Hehl (1978). In the experiment, 136 English-speaking participants, ranging in age from five to thirty-one, were instructed to repeat five Dutch words twenty times each right after receiving a stimulus. In this naturalistic study, 47 English learners of Dutch in Holland, ranging in age from three to sixty, underwent tests covering phonological, morphological, syntactic, and vocabulary elements of language acquisition. In contrast to the naturalistic trial, where adults initially had an advantage over younger participants but eventually caught up, the results of the laboratory investigation demonstrated that pronunciation skill improved with age. Academic-type skills are acquired more quickly by adults or older children learning a second language than by younger children, according to studies conducted in official and informal settings. It has been observed that older students in school settings frequently perform on par with younger students. Burstall compared the French language proficiency of several schoolchildren in 1974; some started learning the language at age eight, while others started at age eleven. After three years, younger kids performed better on the speech test, while older students performed better on the tests of three of the four skills (writing, reading, and listening).

Chun (1980: 289) cites two cross-sectional investigations that yielded contradictory findings about pronunciation and age. Following two weeks of pronunciation instruction (ten sessions lasting 15 to 25 minutes each), Olson and Samuels tested sixty students (20 elementary, 20 junior high, and 20 college students) on thirty-three German phonemes. They discovered that the junior high and college students performed significantly better than the elementary students. In contrast, Asher and Garcia discovered that the younger children who had arrived between the ages of one and six years old performed best on a test consisting of reading four English sentences, achieving a native-like pronunciation. The study involved seventy-one Cuban immigrants, ages seven to nineteen, who had been in the United States for between one and eight years. However, some older kids had mastered good pronunciation, therefore age is not a definitive issue.

### **Methods**

Young and older learners differ in their experience, cognitive abilities, and maturity. Learners at different ages have different types of brain organization). In Vygotsky's work, the inclusion of culture and society are most evident as elements that impact cognitive development. The influence of culture and society are essential to social development theory. Every higher mental function, according to Vygotsky, should initially be filtrated through an external stage in

the form of social occurrences. Afterwards, these mental functions, through the use of language, are combined into an individual's thinking. According to Barac and Bialystok this "dialectical discovery" is a constant process that becomes

gradually more complicated as time goes by. Hence, every higher function originates as an authentic interpersonal relationship among and between individuals. Teachers should be aware of age-related factors, when preparing a lesson plan for a particular age category. The general assumption is that young learners who are literate enough in their L1 have an advantage in SLA. There are some external factors, however, that can influence learning both positively and negatively for any age category. For instance, motivation may result in great success in the language acquisition of older learners. Learners differ not only by age because linguistic and cultural background influence their learning. McLaughlin confirmed this argument saying that two systems differentiate learners from each other. These are the individual system of language and the individual linguistic factor (code levels during the communication). conversation.

#### **Discussion:**

The literature review showed that age has a major impact on language learning, affecting learners' language skills and results. Younger students typically show quicker language learning and pronunciation abilities because of their brain's flexibility and exposure to language input. Nevertheless, older individuals can also gain expertise in new languages with consistent dedication and effort.

Memory, metacognitive strategies, and prior linguistic knowledge are vital elements in language acquisition across all ages. Older learners may analyze language patterns and rules using explicit learning strategies, whereas younger learners may depend more on implicit learning processes. Furthermore, language learning outcomes at any age can also be affected by motivation, learning environment, and exposure to the target language.

In general, the findings indicate that age plays a multifaceted role in affecting language learning results. Although younger learners may possess distinct benefits in acquiring a language, older learners exhibit flexibility and effective techniques that enhance their language learning success.

#### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion, age is a critical factor that influences language learning outcomes, shaping learners' proficiency and success in acquiring new languages. While younger learners often demonstrate faster initial language acquisition, older learners can achieve proficiency through sustained practice and cognitive strategies. Educators and language learners should consider age-related factors when designing language learning programs and strategies, taking into account learners' cognitive abilities, motivation, and prior linguistic knowledge.

As a result, the research results do not support the theory of a critical period when language learning becomes more difficult after adulthood, but show (like Chun and Fatman) that different situations of language learning is perfect for learning different levels and language needs. Learning improves with age (eg, Tripp, and Snow and Hofnagel-Holl). Ekstrand found that children's pronunciation and comprehension improved with age. Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle, as well as Chun, found similar results in pronunciation, although Chun and Seliger found that the younger a child begins to learn a language, the greater the chance of speak Maori.

By understanding the role of age in language learning, educators can tailor their teaching approaches to meet the diverse needs of learners across different age groups. Language learning is a lifelong process, and individuals of all ages can benefit from engaging and effective language learning experiences that leverage their unique strengths and abilities. Ultimately, age should be viewed as one of many factors that shape language learning outcomes, with each learner's journey towards language proficiency reflecting their individual characteristics and learning trajectory.

It is tempting to believe that children learn a second language better than adults because their brains are specially designed to learn a language, while adults are not. This is the explanation of the critical period hypothesis. Supporting evidence comes from several sources. Informal observation irrefutably shows that children are more successful than adults in acquiring a second language. Empirical studies support this model by demonstrating differences in performance between children and adults in various activities and measures. But informal observations and empirical tests are also exceptions to this rule. Late learners sometimes achieve proficiency comparable to that of native speakers of a second language (e.g., Ioup, Boustagui, El Tigi, & Moselle, 1994), and experimental results sometimes show that late learners perform as and the first students, although the older group. performs less well on average (e.g. Birdsong, 1992). Biological constraints, such as brain maturation, should not be so easily overridden.

Our discussion has outlined several linguistic and cognitive factors involved in the language learning process that challenge the specific pretexts of the critical period hypothesis and provide an alternative way to explain the advantage that young learners usually enjoy in 1 second language acquisition. In addition, social factors conspire to facilitate children's efforts by providing a stimulating environment, facilitated input, educational opportunities, cooperative peers, and other supportive aspects of a social context that facilitate the acquisition of any language. They rely on these problems in experimental studies designed to support the hypothesis of the critical period, dissatisfied that the differences in performance between young and old students reflect more than a simple correlation, and considering alternative explanations of data patterns which are found, we see no reason to reject the null value. the hypothesis that there is no critical period for the acquisition of the second language.

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