LANGUAGE LEARNING IN DIFFERENT AGES: EXPLORING HOW AGE LINKS TO EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

Marvabonu Mahammadaliyeva Oybek qizi
Student of Fergana State University, English Language and Literature Faculty
marvabonumahammadaliyeva@gmail.com

Abstract: *Age has historically been regarded as a key factor affecting second language acquisition (SLA). Scholars have discussed whether adults or children acquire languages more efficiently and how the educational setting affects this learning. This article examines the connection between age and language acquisition in various educational environments. Through a small-scale experimental study, students from various age groups were evaluated regarding vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation precision, and grammar skills. The findings indicate that younger students exhibit superior pronunciation skills, whereas adult students excel in explicit grammar acquisition. The research also affirms that the educational environment and instructional techniques greatly impact learning results, irrespective of age. The results emphasize the need to modify teaching methods according to learners' developmental phases to enhance the effectiveness of language acquisition*

Keywords: *Second Language Acquisition, age factor, educational context, language learning, critical period hypothesis, teaching methods*

Introduction

Learning languages has grown more essential in today's interconnected world. English and various other foreign languages are extensively utilized for communication, education, and career advancement. A highly debated subject in second language acquisition studies is the influence of age on language learning. Numerous researchers contend that younger individuals possess benefits in language learning due to the brain's neuroplasticity and inherent capacity to mimic sounds. The Critical Period Hypothesis suggests that the most effective language acquisition occurs in childhood, as the brain is more flexible in its early developmental phases. Post-puberty, learning a language might become more challenging, particularly regarding pronunciation and accent. Nonetheless, other scholars propose that adult learners might possess strengths in aspects like grammar comprehension, analytical reasoning, and educational techniques. These disparities indicate that age by itself does not dictate success in language acquisition. The learning environment, instructional techniques, and motivation significantly influence language learning. This article aims to explore the impact of age on language acquisition and how educational environments affect the success of language instruction for learners across various age groups

Literature Review

The relationship between age and second language acquisition (SLA) has been widely discussed in linguistic and educational research. One of the central theories explaining age

differences in language learning is the Critical Period Hypothesis, which suggests that there is an optimal period during childhood when language acquisition occurs most naturally and efficiently. According to Lenneberg (1969), language development in children is closely connected to biological maturation, and the ability to acquire language decreases after puberty due to neurological changes in the brain [3]. This perspective has influenced many later studies examining how age affects language learning outcomes. Similarly, Penfield and Roberts (2014) argued that the human brain in early childhood has greater flexibility for language learning [4]. They suggested that children can acquire pronunciation and language patterns more easily than adults because their brains are more adaptable during the early stages of development. Their work highlights the importance of early exposure to foreign languages, especially in educational settings where children can develop natural pronunciation and listening skills. Empirical research has also provided evidence supporting the influence of age on language learning. For example, Johnson and Newport (1989) conducted a well-known study examining English language acquisition among immigrants in the United States [6]. Their findings showed that individuals who began learning English at younger ages achieved higher levels of grammatical accuracy than those who started learning later in life. This research strongly supports the idea that age plays a significant role in second language acquisition. However, other researchers argue that age does not always determine language learning success. Singleton and Ryan (2004) emphasized that while younger learners often achieve better pronunciation, adult learners can still reach high levels of proficiency, especially when effective teaching methods and strong motivation are present [5]. Their research suggests that cognitive maturity and learning strategies may give adult learners advantages in certain aspects of language learning. Recent studies also continue to explore how age interacts with educational context. Dey, Amelia, and Setiawan (2024) conducted a critical review of research on age and second language acquisition and concluded that younger learners often acquire pronunciation and fluency more naturally, while adult learners may perform better in grammar learning due to their developed analytical abilities [1]. In addition, Kulmamatov and Ochildiyev (2025) compared language learning outcomes among adolescents and adults using AI-assisted learning tools [2]. Their study found that adolescents tend to develop more natural fluency, whereas adults demonstrate stronger performance in vocabulary and grammar acquisition.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that age is an important factor in language learning, but it interacts with other elements such as educational context, learning environment, teaching methodology, and learner motivation. These studies demonstrate that successful language learning depends not only on biological age but also on the conditions in which learning takes place.

Methods

This research utilized a limited experimental design to investigate the connection between age and language acquisition results across various educational settings. Thirty beginner-level English learners took part in the study and were categorized into three age groups: children

(ages 10–12), adolescents (ages 15–17), and adults (ages 25–35), with ten participants in each category. Every participant engaged in a six-week English course that covered vocabulary acquisition, pronunciation exercises, and fundamental grammar teaching for three hours weekly. All groups utilized identical teaching materials and instructional methods to maintain consistency. Upon completing the course, participants took a language proficiency exam that included vocabulary and grammar questions, along with a pronunciation assessment graded by the instructor. The data obtained were examined through descriptive statistics to compare the average performance across various age groups and to uncover trends in language learning results associated with age

Results

The results of the study revealed noticeable differences in language learning performance among the three age groups. In the vocabulary test (maximum score 30), adult learners achieved the highest average score of 26, followed by adolescents with 24, while children scored 21 on average. A similar pattern was observed in the grammar test, where adults obtained the highest mean score of 27, adolescents scored 23, and children achieved 18. However, the pronunciation assessment showed a different trend. Children demonstrated the highest pronunciation accuracy with 88%, adolescents achieved 81%, and adults recorded the lowest score at 70%. These findings indicate that younger learners tend to perform better in pronunciation skills, while older learners generally show stronger performance in grammar and vocabulary acquisition.

Discussion

The results of this research back up earlier studies regarding age variations in language acquisition. Younger students showed better pronunciation skills, possibly due to their enhanced capacity to mimic sounds and accents. This finding aligns with the Critical Period Hypothesis, indicating that early language exposure can result in pronunciation that resembles that of native speakers. In contrast, adult learners excelled in grammar and vocabulary activities. This could be attributed to their enhanced cognitive and analytical abilities. Adults frequently depend on clear learning techniques like grammar descriptions and rote memorization. The educational environment also has a significant impact. Children typically acquire languages via engaging activities, games, and immersion, whereas adults gain more from organized instruction and clear grammar lessons. Consequently, the success of language acquisition relies on both age and the instructional techniques employed in the educational setting

Conclusion

Age plays a significant role in second language acquisition, yet it is not the sole factor that contributes to effective language learning. Younger students tend to have strengths in pronunciation and innate language acquisition, whereas adult students typically perform better in grammar and vocabulary acquisition. The results of this study indicate that language instruction must be modified to suit the age and cognitive traits of students. Educational institutions need to create teaching strategies suitable for different age groups to enhance

language learning results. Future studies might include bigger participant groups and extended learning durations to gain a clearer insight into how age interacts with factors like motivation, exposure, and learning contexts

Reference

1. Dey, M., Amelia, R., & Setiawan, A. (2024). The impact of age on second language acquisition: A critical review. International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education (IJERE), 13(3560), 3560-3570.

2. Kulmamatov, O., & Ochildiyev, I. (2025). Learning a second language at different ages: A comparative analysis of adolescents and adults using AI-assisted approaches. Western European Journal of Linguistics and Education.

3. Lenneberg, E. H. (1969). On Explaining Language: The development of language in children can best be understood in the context of developmental biology. Science, 164(3880), 635-643.

4. Penfield, W., & Roberts, L. (2014). Speech and brain mechanisms. Princeton University Press.

5. Singleton, D., & Ryan, L. (2004). Language acquisition: The age factor. Multilingual Matters.

6. Johnson, J. S., & Newport, E. L. (1989). Critical period effects in second language learning: The influence of maturational state on the acquisition of English as a second language. Cognitive psychology, 21(1), 60-99.