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## THE ANALYSIS OF SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN CHILDREN VS ADULTS

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### Abstract:

This article aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the interaction between children and adults when learning a second or foreign language, to offer a more coherent and academic response to the question of whether children outperform adults in second language acquisition. The process of learning a second language can occur naturally, in formal instructional settings, or through social interactions. Several internal factors, such as the role of the first language, student motivation, and attitudes, play a crucial role in determining the proficiency level of second language learners. The findings of this study lend support to the notion that the aging process is correlated with a decline in the ability of pupils to recall language information. However, it is important to emphasize that successful second language acquisition is not solely determined by age, but rather hinges on the individual's intrinsic motivation to engage in meaningful communication and interaction with others through the medium of a second or foreign language.

**Keywords:** Second language acquisition, adults, children.

### INTRODUCTION

Second language learning is the process of internalizing and comprehending a second language after the acquisition of a first language. It differs from first language acquisition in that individuals learn a second language once they have already developed communication skills and accumulated knowledge, both of which impact their capacity to do so. In the realm of second language acquisition (SLA), the second language (L2) is acquired subsequent to the instinctive acquisition of the first language (L1). While both adults and children can attain fluency in their native tongue, it is widely accepted that children exhibit faster vocabulary



acquisition, more native-like pronunciation, and a more natural grasp of language compared to adults.

The claim that children surpass adults in learning a second language alongside their mother tongue is often made, supported by evidence showing that young language learners tend to assimilate a second language through exposure and habits, rather than formal education. Steinberg (as cited in Suryantari, 2018) identifies three key factors influencing second-language acquisition: psychological factors (including intellectual ability, memory, and learners' motor skills), social circumstances (the context of the learner's environment), and other psychological determinants (learner's attitudes, motivation, and the function of their first language). Exposure to the language and the learners' interaction with their environment play crucial roles in this process.

Research by Lightbrown & Spada (as cited in Oroji & Ghane, 2020) suggests that children exposed to a second language simultaneously with adults generally develop significantly better pronunciation, grammar proficiency, and fluency. Young learners tend to pick up the language naturally, without explicit grammatical explanations, while older learners often require direct instruction of the language norms. However, some linguists argue that adults can learn a second language more rapidly and effectively than children, and comparisons of foreign language input between adults and children require careful consideration. This article aims to provide a more logical response to the question of whether children outperform adults in second language acquisition.

## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This article aims to conduct a comprehensive examination of the distinctions between second language learning and acquisition in adults and children. It delves into the question of whether children demonstrate greater proficiency in acquiring and mastering a second language compared to adults. Additionally, the article explores the strategies employed by both adults and children in coping with the challenges associated with acquiring languages beyond their mother tongue.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Psychological Factors; Exploration and Induction

During the cognitive process, both exploration and induction play significant roles in shaping the learner's syntactic competence in the target language. Induction refers to the process of instructing learners about the rules and grammatical structures of the target language. Meanwhile, exploration involves employing the learner's first language as the medium of instruction to facilitate comprehension and fluency in the second language, particularly when the learner's exposure to the second language is limited. This approach enables students to effectively apply and employ grammatical rules in the target language. However, using the exploratory strategy may present challenges when learners' information acquisition rates and accuracy differ.

The foundation of the induction process lies in independent analysis or self-discovery. Children, who naturally acquire a second language, exhibit a better ability to recognize and identify regular language rules as they actively engage in speaking and memorizing vocabulary. For instance, Krashen (as cited in Francis Bailey & Ahmed Kadhum, 2021) posits that children grasp concepts like the "-ing" form, plural forms, and auxiliary usage well before formal educational experiences. Similarly, in the process of induction, adult learners of a second language also seek solutions to language-related queries on their own. Adults, having already acquired proficiency in one language, are equipped to utilize the induction process for studying and identifying generalizations or linguistic laws in the target language. Consequently, they employ self-analysis as a means to learn a second language, such as English. However, it is acknowledged that young children tend to acquire a second language at a faster pace compared to adults (Hoque, 2017).

While exploration is believed to expedite the learning process by aiding the understanding of basic sentence patterns, induction is more focused on grasping intricate structures. Learners who are still navigating structured sentences, including subjects and predicates, and interpreting the placement of time or place adverbs in a phrase are likely to benefit significantly from the exploratory approach. On the other hand, those studying more advanced linguistic concepts can make considerable progress through the induction method.

### Memory

Children aged between 5 and 6 exhibit remarkable memory capabilities, while those



between 8 and 12 years experience a decline in recall abilities. This suggests a division of children's memory into two age groups: under 7 years and 7 to 12 years. Harley and Doug's investigation of students in an immersion class, as cited in Win Listytaningrum (2020), revealed that older children begin to utilize cognitive abilities for analyzing syntax rules in second language learning, whereas younger children continue to rely predominantly on their robust vocabulary memory when acquiring a second language. The latter group faces challenges in retaining new language, leading them to frequently engage in syntactic analysis during the learning process.

The complexity of second language learning increases as learners age, particularly between 15 and 20 years old. According to Bloom, Mullins, and Paternostro (as cited in Win Listytaningrum, 2020), this decline in language abilities is more associated with deficient linguistic processes rather than memory-related factors. Steinberg et al. also explore the role of aging in learners' diminishing memory capacity. As young learners' cognitive abilities are still developing, the function of working memory (WM) in second language writing performance may vary across different grade levels. Therefore, it is crucial to investigate the influence of WM in integrated activities completed by younger learners, as their test results may have implications for their future educational and professional trajectories. For teachers, understanding the effects of cognitive capacity limitations on various writing tasks can assist in identifying students who might require additional support in specific types of assignments (Michel et al., 2019).

### **Motor Skills/Abilities**

Achieving excellent pronunciation is a crucial aspect of foreign language learning, closely tied to the learner's ability to articulate and control the speech organs' supporting structures. This skill is influenced by motor abilities and maturity, which develop in tandem. Various factors, including events, external influences, and emotional control, also play significant roles in the learner's progress. The development of strong motor skill competence is most effective when initiated at a young age, as learners' capacity to learn motor skills begins to decline around the age of 12, and significant improvements in motor abilities can become challenging by the age of 15 due to changes in brain activity. Speculatively, hormonal changes occurring after puberty may influence a person's motor abilities. As learners age and experience a reduction in motor abilities, their degree of articulation may also be

affected.

In contrast, children tend to become more fluent in pronunciation as they age, owing to their still-flexible motor skills. Oyama's research, as cited in Win Listyanningrum (2020), indicates that individuals who learn foreign languages at a very young age can attain native-like accents in the target language. For example, Italian immigrant children studied by Oyama exhibited accents closer to those of native speakers, particularly when they began learning the foreign language at a younger age. In contrast, Italian immigrant children who arrived after the age of 12 showed a tendency towards less fluid pronunciation. The ability to articulate remains unaffected by the length of their stay. Notably, children often do not rely on their mother tongue as a filter, allowing pronunciation errors to be corrected while maintaining their capacity to articulate accurately.

### **The Influence Of Psychological Factors On Second Language Learning**

The study considered four key factors: induction, explanation, memory, and motor skills, and divided participants into three age categories: under the age of seven, seven to twelve, and over the age of twelve. Age variations did not significantly impact induction factors, with adults (over the age of 12) demonstrating the highest level of induction as they could effectively analyze the syntactic structure of the second language.

The factor of explanation level increased with age. Children under seven exhibited low levels, followed by moderate levels in children aged seven to twelve, and high levels in those beyond twelve. This pattern is attributed to the challenge young children face in grasping abstract and complex explanations compared to older learners.

Regarding memory, young children showed high levels, but this tended to decrease to a medium level or remain stable when they reached the age of 7-12 years. The age factor influenced the level of memory capacity. Unfortunately, the study did not explore the memory ability of learners in their teens and beyond 30, as the adult category only encompassed those beyond the age of 12.

Finally, the factor of motor skills exhibited a decline in mastery ability from low to high levels, indicating that motor skills proficiency varied with age. As learners aged, it became more challenging for them to pronounce words fluently.



## Social Factors

### *Natural Situation*

English can be taught using various methods, both as a second language and as a foreign language. Second language acquisition programs for children often rely on informal learning, as children can naturally pick up English through interaction with peers. Steinberg suggests that young people tend to learn a second language more rapidly than a first language. This raises the question of whether adults can learn a second language in a similar manner to children if provided with comparable opportunities and time. In reality, both children and adults have equal potential to learn a second language alongside their mother tongue, although their approaches may differ. Additionally, the aging process can impact language learning, as declining social interaction becomes a factor that hinders foreign language acquisition.

For children, the learning environment is optimized and simplified to facilitate second language or foreign language acquisition. They actively seek clarification from their peers if they encounter difficulties with vocabulary and enjoy mimicking different accents and dialects during social interactions. Children prefer communicating through social interaction, which leads to their language development. While both children and adults can learn a second language in context, fluency outcomes may differ, as children often have better comprehension of accents from native speakers.

Adults who lack sufficient language proficiency while living in a foreign environment may experience social isolation in situations where language plays a crucial role. Similarly, children who have recently entered puberty may face similar challenges. Language serves as a key aspect of social connection, and the inability to communicate hinders social interactions. Preston emphasizes that children under the age of 7 are more likely to accept both culture and language in a region, while children aged 7 to 12 tend to only accept social norms. Children under 12, as well as individuals who feel confident in their identity and culture despite living abroad, may encounter significant barriers to language learning.

According to Schumann and the Acculturation Model of language learning, an individual's ability to adapt to a new environment impacts their language use. Being able to acclimate to a new location increases the likelihood of natural language acquisition through increased language contact with the local population. Children tend to take advantage of



this opportunity more frequently, frequently engaging in conversations with native speakers and improving their target language abilities.

Language use by both children and adults directly influences the language learning process. When someone travels to another country, the local language is typically used as their mother tongue may be less commonly spoken. This can affect both children and adults' language learning capacity if straightforward communication becomes challenging. Adults may simplify their speech when conversing with children, while adult learners may also simplify their language usage due to limited language mastery. However, simplifying speech can aid memory and application for both children and adults. Exposure to using the target language with native speakers or proficient non-native speakers can be beneficial for both children and adults in naturally acquiring and mastering the language..

### ***Class Situation***

Classes for learning a foreign language often adopt a structured and formal approach. The students enrolled in these classes are typically individuals who have a keen interest in learning the language, and the teachers conducting these classes are fluent in the target language. The learning environment tends to be teacher-centered, with students complying with the teacher's instructions, contributing to a positive classroom atmosphere. However, the planned and organized nature of the lessons may limit spontaneity.

To facilitate successful language acquisition and encourage student engagement, instructors often employ group language teaching techniques. Homework assignments are also commonly used to enhance students' focus on learning the foreign language. Learners are expected to treat language education as an academic discipline, familiarizing themselves with grammatical constructions and language rules. Games are frequently incorporated into the classroom to create a friendly and enjoyable atmosphere, fostering inductive language learning.

This approach is better suited for individuals who can adapt well to an interactive and participatory learning style, as language classes involve active student engagement and may not be ideal for children under the age of seven. The use of games and an exploratory approach tends to be more effective for learners older than 12 or between the ages of 7 and 12, as they can better adjust to this type of learning in a classroom setting. Younger children under the age of seven receive less instruction in formal classes, while those aged 12 and



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above receive moderate instruction. This is because older children are more capable of understanding their learning process and can handle the demands of a structured classroom environment, requiring focus, attention, and prolonged periods of sitting.

According to Cheydeur (1932) and Thorndike (1928), as cited in Steinberg, the ideal age for learning a second or foreign language is when students can comprehend the reasons for learning, possess adult-like thinking, and demonstrate strong memory and motor skills. This paradigm suggests that around 10 years old may be the ideal age for language learning.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Successful learning of a second or foreign language can be achieved when all parties involved share the common goal of effective communication and integration in a language other than their mother tongue. This applies to both specific-purpose language learning and general language acquisition. For young learners, natural achievement is more likely when parents or friends play a crucial role in the language development process. Children benefit from exposure to language without censorship, leading to effortless and accurate language learning. They actively engage in classroom learning models that demand attention and concentration when they are motivated and maintain a positive attitude towards language learning.

On the other hand, adults should be prepared to anticipate various challenges in language learning and teaching, acknowledging that language serves as a means of communication even when it is not their native tongue. To master a second or foreign language more easily, individuals should set aside intrinsic cultural qualities when immersing themselves in the context of the target language. It is important to recognize that despite cultural differences, backgrounds, or linguistic disparities, the diversity of languages merely represents a variety of means for the same purpose—communication. Age should not be considered a decisive factor in the success rate of second or foreign language learning as long as individuals have a genuine desire to use the language for integration and socialization. Embracing diversity and understanding that differences do not necessarily imply difficulty are key aspects in fostering successful language acquisition



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