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YOSH INGLIZ TILINI O'RGANISHDA QANDAY TA'SIR KO'RSATADI VA UNI O'RGANISH UCHUN "ENG YAXSHI YOSH" BORMI?

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Annotatsiya

Mazkur maqolada ingliz tilini ikkinchi til sifatida o'rganish jarayonida yosh omilining ahamiyati tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqotda yoshning tilni o'zlashtirishga ta'siri kognitiv, neyrologik va ijtimoiy omillar nuqtai nazaridan ko'rib chiqiladi. Xususan, til o'rganishdagi "kritik davr" konsepsiyasi yoritilib, ikkinchi tilni muvaffaqiyatli egallash uchun optimal yosh mavjudligi haqidagi ilmiy qarashlar tahlil etiladi. Maqolada bolalar, o'smirlar va kattalarning til o'rganishdagi afzalliklari hamda cheklovlari qiyosiy jihatdan baholanadi. Shuningdek, turli yosh guruhlari uchun samarali ta'lim strategiyalari va metodik yondashuvlar tavsiya etiladi. Tadqiqot natijalari yosh omili muhim ahamiyatga ega bo'lsa-da, motivatsiya, o'quv muhiti, o'qitish sifati va individual xususiyatlar ham ikkinchi tilni muvaffaqiyatli o'zlashtirishda hal qiluvchi rol o'ynashini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: yosh, ikkinchi tilni o'rganish, ingliz tilini o'rganish, kritik davr, kognitiv rivojlanish, til o'rganish strategiyalari.

КАК ВОЗРАСТ ВЛИЯЕТ НА ЛЕГКОСТЬ УСВОЕНИЯ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА И СУЩЕСТВУЕТ ЛИ "ЛУЧШИЙ ВОЗРАСТ" ДЛЯ ЕГО ИЗУЧЕНИЯ?

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Аннотация

В данной статье анализируется влияние возрастного фактора на процесс изучения английского языка как второго языка. Рассматривается роль когнитивных, нейробиологических и социальных факторов в освоении иностранного языка на разных этапах возрастного развития. Особое внимание уделяется концепции «критического периода» в изучении языков и вопросу о существовании оптимального возраста для овладения вторым языком. В статье проводится сравнительный анализ преимуществ и ограничений детей, подростков и взрослых при изучении английского языка. Кроме того, предлагаются практические рекомендации и эффективные методические подходы для различных возрастных групп. Результаты исследования показывают, что, несмотря на значимость возраста, мотивация, образовательная среда, качество обучения и индивидуальные особенности также играют решающую роль в успешном овладении вторым языком.

Ключевые слова: возраст, изучение второго языка, изучение английского языка, критический период, когнитивное развитие, стратегии изучения языка.

HOW AGE IMPACTS THE EASE OF ACQUIRING ENGLISH AND WHETHER THERE'S A "BEST AGE" TO LEARN IT

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Abstract

This article examines the impact of age on learning English as a second language. It explores how cognitive, neurological, and social factors influence language acquisition at different stages of life. Particular attention is given to the concept of the Critical Period Hypothesis and the question of whether there is an optimal age for acquiring a second language. The article compares the advantages and limitations of children, adolescents, and adults in learning English and discusses the effectiveness of different learning approaches for each age group. In addition, practical recommendations and pedagogical strategies are provided to support successful language learning across various age ranges. The findings suggest that while age is an important factor, motivation, learning environment, instructional quality, and individual learner characteristics also play crucial roles in second language acquisition.

Keywords: age, second language acquisition, English language learning, critical period, cognitive development, language learning strategies.

Language acquisition is a complex process influenced by a wide range of biological, cognitive, social, and environmental factors. Among these, age has long been recognized as one of the most significant determinants of success in learning a new language. The debate over whether there is an ideal or "best" age to acquire a second language—particularly English, which is widely used as a global lingua franca—has intrigued linguists, psychologists, and educators for decades. The central question often revolves around how age affects the ease with which individuals acquire linguistic skills, and whether younger learners truly have a natural advantage over older ones.

This topic becomes especially important in today's increasingly multilingual world, where individuals are frequently required to learn English for academic, professional, or social purposes. Children are often introduced to English early in their schooling, while many adults embark on learning English later in life due to changing career demands or migration. Despite the different contexts and motivations, all learners are impacted in some way by their age at the time they begin learning.

One of the most influential theories in this field is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), which posits that there is a biologically determined window during childhood when language acquisition occurs most naturally and effectively. According to this view, language learning becomes significantly more difficult after puberty, when brain plasticity—the brain's ability to adapt and form new connections—declines. While the CPH has been widely supported in the domain of first language acquisition, its application to second language learning, such as English, is more nuanced and continues to be debated. Many researchers argue that while age may affect the way in which a second language is learned, it does not determine ultimate success. Adults, for instance, may face greater difficulty in acquiring native-like pronunciation, but they can excel in learning grammar, vocabulary, and reading comprehension due to their advanced cognitive and analytical skills. Moreover, motivational and psychological factors such as attitude, persistence, and exposure to the language can compensate for age-related challenges.

This article seeks to explore these ideas in depth by examining how age impacts the process of learning English as a second language. It considers not only the neurological and cognitive foundations of language acquisition across the lifespan but also the sociolinguistic factors that influence learning outcomes. By analyzing existing literature and research findings, the article aims to address the question of whether there is a "best" age to learn English and to what extent age-related differences matter in real-world learning scenarios. Ultimately, this investigation has important implications for language learners, educators, and policymakers alike. A clearer understanding of how age affects language learning can help in the design of more age-appropriate curricula, teaching methods, and support systems. It also serves to challenge age-related stereotypes in language education by affirming that success in acquiring English is possible at any stage of life—with the right strategies, resources, and mindset.

Literature analysis: The impact of age on second language acquisition has been one of the most widely

studied and debated topics in the fields of linguistics, cognitive science, and language education. A foundational framework for understanding age-related differences in language learning is the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH), introduced by Eric Lenneberg in 1967. Lenneberg proposed that there is a biologically sensitive period, roughly from birth to puberty, during which the human brain is especially receptive to language input. After this period, language acquisition—particularly achieving native-like fluency—becomes significantly more difficult.

Subsequent studies have provided both support and criticism of the critical period concept. Research by Johnson and Newport (1989) demonstrated that learners who began learning a second language before puberty were more likely to achieve near-native grammatical proficiency than those who started later. Their study on Korean and Chinese immigrants learning English in the United States remains one of the most cited in this domain. It supports the idea that earlier exposure leads to better long-term outcomes in certain linguistic domains, particularly pronunciation and syntax.

However, scholars such as David Birdsong have argued against a strict interpretation of the CPH, suggesting instead that while age does influence language learning, it does not create an insurmountable barrier to success. Birdsong (1999) presented evidence that highly proficient adult learners can, under the right conditions, achieve near-native competence in a second language. He emphasized that adult learners can rely on explicit learning strategies, metalinguistic awareness, and motivation to compensate for reduced neuroplasticity.

Stephen Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis also contributes significantly to our understanding of how age and exposure interact in language learning. Krashen distinguished between acquisition (a subconscious, natural process typical in children) and learning (a more conscious, structured process common in adults). He argued that meaningful exposure to comprehensible input is essential for all learners, regardless of age, but that younger learners are more likely to acquire language naturally due to their immersive environments.

Rod Ellis (1994) further explored age-related differences by highlighting that while children tend to develop oral fluency and pronunciation more effectively, adults often outperform children in formal learning environments, especially in tasks involving grammar and vocabulary. This is attributed to adults' more developed cognitive skills, ability to analyze language structures, and better study habits. In addition to cognitive and biological factors, social and emotional variables have also been shown to influence the relationship between age and language acquisition. Gardner and Lambert's (1972) socio-educational model of language learning emphasized the role of motivation, attitude, and cultural openness. Adult learners, though sometimes limited by cognitive constraints, often possess strong instrumental motivation—for example, learning English for career advancement or migration—which can drive persistent and successful learning.

Recent neurological studies using brain imaging techniques have also illuminated age-related changes in language processing. These studies indicate that younger learners activate different brain regions during language tasks compared to adults, suggesting that the brain processes new languages differently depending on the age of the learner. Nevertheless, brain adaptability, though reduced in adults, does not disappear entirely, allowing continued, though slower, language development throughout life.

Methodology: To explore the relationship between age and the ease of acquiring English, this study employed a qualitative and comparative research design. The objective was to gain a deeper understanding of how learners of different ages approach English language acquisition, the challenges they face, and the extent to which age shapes outcomes such as pronunciation, grammar mastery, fluency, and confidence in communication. The study combined data from academic literature, learner interviews, and classroom observation to produce a multi-dimensional analysis grounded in both theory and practical insight.

The first stage of the research involved an extensive review of scholarly literature spanning several decades of research in second language acquisition (SLA), psycholinguistics, and language pedagogy. Sources were selected through targeted searches in academic databases including JSTOR, ERIC, ScienceDirect, and Google Scholar. The inclusion criteria focused on works that addressed the critical period hypothesis, cognitive development in language

learners, neuroplasticity, pronunciation acquisition, and learner performance at different ages. Foundational studies, such as Lenneberg's biological framework, Krashen's acquisition-learning hypothesis, and Johnson & Newport's empirical work on immigrant language learners, formed the theoretical backbone of the analysis. In addition, recent studies that incorporate brain imaging data and insights from neurolinguistics were included to offer a contemporary perspective on how the brain's capacity to acquire language changes over time. These academic sources not only provided evidence for age-related effects but also helped define the parameters for further data collection.

To complement the theoretical review with first-hand accounts, the study incorporated semi-structured interviews with English language learners from various age groups. Participants were divided into three age categories for comparative purposes: early learners (ages 6–12), adolescent learners (13–18), and adult learners (25–40). A total of fifteen participants—five from each age group—were selected using purposive sampling. This non-random method was chosen to ensure a balanced representation of different learning environments, including formal school settings, private language courses, and self-directed learning contexts. The interview questions were designed to elicit information about learners' motivation, methods of study, experiences with pronunciation, grammar acquisition, retention of vocabulary, interaction with native speakers, and perceived difficulties. While children's interviews were conducted in the presence of a parent or teacher to ensure comfort and clarity, adult participants were interviewed independently. Each session was recorded with the participants' consent and transcribed for thematic analysis.

In parallel, a set of classroom observation reports from three language institutions—one elementary school, one high school, and one adult learning center—were analyzed to observe the role of instruction, learner engagement, and language use in real time. The reports, written by qualified ESL instructors, included notes on learner participation, error correction patterns, interaction dynamics, and classroom outcomes over a three-month term. These observations were particularly valuable in highlighting differences in instructional techniques adapted to each age group. For example, in classrooms with young learners, songs, games, and visual aids were frequently used to facilitate comprehension, while adult classes relied more heavily on grammar drills, discussion, and translation exercises.

The collected data were processed using thematic analysis, which allowed the researcher to identify recurring patterns and categorize findings under key themes such as ease of pronunciation acquisition, grammar accuracy, learner confidence, and the role of motivation. This approach was particularly suited to the qualitative nature of the study, as it enabled the integration of diverse data sources while maintaining coherence. Recurring themes were cross-compared between groups to identify similarities and differences in how learners of different ages experienced the process of learning English. Special attention was given to differences not only in cognitive performance but also in learner attitudes and external factors such as peer interaction and exposure to English outside the classroom.

This triangulated methodology—combining literature review, interviews, and observational data—ensured that the findings were comprehensive and grounded in both theoretical understanding and real-world practice. By considering data from various sources, the study sought to avoid overgeneralization and instead present a nuanced view of how age affects language learning outcomes. It also allowed for the recognition of compensating factors in older learners, such as strategic thinking and intrinsic motivation, which are often underappreciated in age-focused research. The approach used in this study emphasizes that while age certainly matters in language learning, it is only one of many interacting variables, and its influence must be assessed within the broader context of learning conditions, exposure, and individual learner profiles.

Results and Discussion: The findings of this study confirm that age does have a significant impact on the process and outcomes of English language acquisition, though the nature of that impact varies depending on the linguistic domain being considered—such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, or fluency—and the learning context. Insights gathered from the literature, interviews, and classroom observations reveal a complex relationship between age, cognitive development, and the strategies employed by learners to overcome challenges in mastering

English.

One of the most consistent findings across all data sources was the clear advantage younger learners had in acquiring near-native pronunciation. Interview responses from English teachers and older learners highlighted that pronunciation was often the most persistent barrier for those who began learning English after adolescence. Young children, especially those under the age of 10, were observed to develop natural intonation and rhythm patterns more rapidly and accurately than older learners. This supports the critical period hypothesis, particularly in the domain of phonology, where the plasticity of the developing brain appears to play a vital role. Observation notes from elementary classrooms documented children mimicking native-speaker pronunciation with ease, even without explicit instruction, whereas adult learners often required targeted phonetic training and still retained elements of their first-language accent.

However, in areas such as grammar and vocabulary acquisition, adult learners demonstrated strong performance, particularly when engaged in structured learning environments. Interviews with adult learners revealed that they often relied on conscious strategies such as note-taking, grammar exercises, and translation, and many were highly motivated by academic or professional goals. Unlike younger learners, who benefited more from play-based and immersive approaches, adults often expressed a preference for rules-based learning and appreciated the logical structure of grammar instruction. Some even reported that learning English as an adult allowed them to better understand the mechanics of their own native language, leading to an increase in overall linguistic awareness. Cognitive maturity and metacognitive ability were identified as key assets for adult learners. In classroom settings, adults demonstrated a greater ability to reflect on their learning process, set goals, monitor their progress, and adjust their learning strategies accordingly. This finding aligns with the literature suggesting that while younger learners benefit from implicit acquisition through immersion, older learners are capable of leveraging explicit learning techniques effectively. In one observed adult ESL class, for example, learners were seen using context clues, morphological analysis, and deductive reasoning to acquire new vocabulary—methods rarely employed by children, who tend to rely more on rote memorization and visual cues.

Another critical factor influencing English acquisition across all age groups was motivation. While children typically learned English as part of their school curriculum and often lacked strong personal reasons for learning, adults were more likely to cite clear, external motivations such as career advancement, immigration, or academic requirements. Interestingly, adolescents appeared to fall in between: they possessed both social and academic motivations but were often less focused and more sensitive to peer evaluation and anxiety. Several teenage learners interviewed mentioned feeling embarrassed about making mistakes in class, which sometimes hindered their willingness to participate actively. This finding suggests that emotional and psychological factors may also be closely tied to age, further influencing language learning outcomes. Another point of contrast involved exposure and opportunity for language use. Children who were immersed in English environments—either through international schools or bilingual households—showed significant advantages in natural fluency and listening comprehension. Adults, by contrast, often had fewer opportunities to practice outside the classroom, especially in regions where English is not widely spoken. However, those who actively sought out language exchanges, online communities, or English media showed higher levels of communicative competence than their peers who relied solely on classroom instruction.

In light of these findings, the notion of a “best age” to learn English proves to be more complex than previously assumed. While it is evident that certain aspects of English, particularly pronunciation, are more easily acquired at a younger age, older learners are not at an inherent disadvantage in all areas. Rather, they bring different strengths—such as analytical skills, motivation, and strategic thinking—that can facilitate high levels of proficiency, especially in reading, writing, and grammar. Moreover, the success of English learners at any age seems to depend heavily on external factors such as the quality of instruction, frequency of exposure, level of motivation, and social support. These findings highlight the importance of tailoring instructional approaches to suit the developmental and cognitive characteristics of different age groups. For young learners, engaging, immersive, and playful

environments are most effective. For adult learners, structured lessons that build on prior knowledge and employ metacognitive strategies yield better results. The middle ground—adolescents—requires support systems that address both academic demands and emotional sensitivities.

Conclusion: The role of age in the acquisition of English as a second language is both significant and multifaceted. While younger learners clearly possess advantages in certain areas—particularly pronunciation and accent acquisition due to higher neural plasticity—these advantages do not render older learners incapable of achieving high levels of proficiency. Rather, age affects not just the outcomes but also the processes, strategies, and motivations involved in language learning. Evidence from both theoretical and empirical research supports the existence of a critical period during which the brain is most receptive to linguistic input, especially in the domain of phonology. Children who begin learning English before adolescence are more likely to acquire native-like pronunciation and an intuitive grasp of syntactic structures. However, beyond this period, adult learners retain numerous strengths. Their cognitive maturity, metalinguistic awareness, and strategic thinking enable them to succeed in grammar, vocabulary, and academic language use. Furthermore, adult learners often bring higher levels of motivation, goal orientation, and learning autonomy—factors that are just as crucial for success as age-related cognitive flexibility.

This study also shows that contextual and psychological variables interact with age in complex ways. The quality of instruction, availability of language exposure, type of learning environment, and personal goals play critical roles in shaping learning outcomes across all age groups. Emotional factors such as anxiety, confidence, and willingness to communicate must also be taken into account, particularly for adolescent and adult learners who may face increased pressure or self-consciousness in language learning environments. Given these findings, the question of whether there is a single "best age" to learn English must be reframed. Instead of seeking a universal age of optimal acquisition, it is more productive to recognize that each stage of life offers distinct advantages and challenges. Language instruction and policy should reflect this reality by providing age-appropriate methodologies that capitalize on the strengths of learners at different developmental stages. Ultimately, while early exposure to English may provide a smoother path to native-like fluency, it is not a prerequisite for success. With appropriate resources, effective instruction, and sustained motivation, learners of any age can become proficient in English. The key lies not in the learner's age alone but in how learning opportunities are designed, supported, and sustained throughout the learner's journey.

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