

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CHILDREN AND ADULTS IN LEARNING A NEW LANGUAGE

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Abstract. Foreign language acquisition is a multifaceted process shaped by cognitive, psychological, and social factors, among which age plays a crucial role. This study explores the differences between children and adults in learning a new language, with particular attention to their cognitive characteristics, learning strategies, and motivational factors. The research is based on a qualitative comparative analysis of key theories in second language acquisition. The findings show that children tend to achieve greater fluency and more accurate pronunciation due to implicit learning and higher neuroplasticity, whereas adults demonstrate stronger abilities in grammatical analysis and structured learning due to developed cognitive skills. The study also emphasizes the impact of motivation and learning environment on language learning success. The results underline the importance of adapting teaching methods to the specific needs of different age groups in order to improve learning outcomes.

Keywords: second language acquisition, age differences, child learners, adult learners, language learning strategies, motivation, cognitive factors, communicative approach.

Аннотация. Изучение иностранного языка представляет собой сложный процесс, обусловленный когнитивными, психологическими и социальными факторами, среди которых возраст играет ключевую роль. В данной статье рассматриваются различия между детьми и взрослыми в процессе овладения иностранным языком с особым вниманием к их когнитивным характеристикам, стратегиям обучения и мотивационным аспектам. Исследование основано на качественном сравнительном анализе основных теорий усвоения второго языка. Результаты показывают, что дети достигают большей беглости и более точного произношения благодаря имплицитному обучению и высокой нейропластичности, тогда как взрослые демонстрируют более развитые навыки грамматического анализа и структурированного обучения за счёт сформированных когнитивных способностей. Также подчёркивается значимость мотивации и образовательной среды в достижении успешных результатов. Полученные выводы указывают на необходимость адаптации методов преподавания с учётом возрастных особенностей обучающихся.

Ключевые слова: изучение второго языка, возрастные различия, дети, взрослые, стратегии обучения, мотивация, когнитивные факторы, коммуникативный подход.

Annotatsiya. Chet tilini o'rganish murakkab jarayon bo'lib, u kognitiv, psixologik va ijtimoiy omillar bilan belgilanadi, ular orasida yosh muhim rol o'ynaydi. Ushbu

maqolada bolalar va kattalarning chet tilini o'zlashtirish jarayonidagi farqlari, xususan, ularning kognitiv xususiyatlari, o'rganish strategiyalari va motivatsion omillari tahlil qilinadi. Tadqiqot ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirishga oid asosiy nazariyalar asosida sifatli qiyosiy tahlilga tayangan holda olib borilgan. Natijalar shuni ko'rsatadiki, bolalar yuqori neyroplastiklik va implitsit o'rganish hisobiga ravon nutq va aniq talaffuzga tezroq erishadi, kattalar esa rivojlangan kognitiv qobiliyatlari tufayli grammatika tahlili va tizimli o'rganishda yuqori natijalar ko'rsatadi. Shuningdek, motivatsiya va ta'lim muhiti til o'rganish samaradorligiga sezilarli ta'sir ko'rsatishi aniqlangan. Olingan natijalar o'qitish metodlarini o'quvchilarning yosh xususiyatlariga moslashtirish zarurligini ko'rsatadi.

Kalit so'zlar: ikkinchi tilni o'zlashtirish, yoshga oid farqlar, bolalar, kattalar, o'rganish strategiyalari, motivatsiya, kognitiv omillar, kommunikativ yondashuv

Introduction. In today's world, learning a foreign language is more than just a useful skill; it has become a necessity. Starting this process at an early age offers significant advantages, as children are naturally more receptive to language acquisition, which makes early learning not only easier but also more effective.

Learning a new language has become an essential skill in modern society. People of different ages engage in language learning for education, travel, work, and other purposes. However, the process of acquiring a new language varies considerably between children and adults. These differences are mainly related to cognitive development, learning strategies, and exposure to the language environment. Therefore, it is important to analyze how both groups differ in their approaches to language learning in order to understand the factors influencing success.

Children as language learners. Children are often considered more naturally talented language learners compared to adults. As stated by Fromkin, Rodman, and Hyams, any normal child, regardless of background, is capable of learning any language when exposed to it consistently in natural environments (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2003, p. 27).

Children acquire language mainly through listening, imitation, and interaction rather than formal instruction such as grammar rules or vocabulary lists. Their brains are highly flexible at an early age, which allows them to easily absorb pronunciation, vocabulary, and sentence structures. In addition, children are less afraid of making mistakes, which increases their willingness to participate in communication.

Early language exposure also contributes to cognitive development, including problem-solving, creativity, and critical thinking. Bilingual children often show stronger cognitive flexibility and executive function compared to monolingual peers. Furthermore, early exposure fosters cultural awareness, empathy, and respect for diversity, helping children develop a broader worldview.

Adults as language learners. In contrast, adults tend to approach language learning as a more conscious and structured process, which can sometimes create stress and fear of making mistakes. According to Brown, adult learners rely on explicit grammar rules, vocabulary memorization, and structured study methods, unlike children who acquire language more naturally through exposure and interaction (Brown, 1994, pp. 56-58).

Although adults usually have stronger analytical and critical thinking skills, they often struggle with achieving fluency and native-like pronunciation. Their learning is

influenced by prior knowledge, which helps in understanding grammar but may interfere with natural language acquisition.

Research also shows that adults can make faster progress in grammar, syntax, and translation tasks in the short term, but they generally lag behind children in long-term fluency and pronunciation development (Babakulova, 2021). Factors such as fear of mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited time for practice further reduce their speaking performance.

Comparison between children and adults. When comparing both groups, it becomes clear that each has its own strengths and weaknesses. Children excel in fluency, pronunciation, and intuitive understanding, while adults are generally better at understanding grammar rules, reading, and writing.

Another important factor is the critical period hypothesis, which suggests that children have a biologically optimal period for language learning when the brain is more flexible and receptive. During this stage, they are more likely to achieve native-like pronunciation and fluency.

Motivation and psychological factors also play a key role. Children are mainly motivated by curiosity, play, and social interaction, which makes learning more enjoyable and less stressful. Adults, on the other hand, are often motivated by academic or professional goals, which can sometimes increase pressure and anxiety.

Krashen's theory of second language acquisition also supports this difference, suggesting that adults benefit more from explicit instruction, while children learn more effectively through natural exposure and meaningful communication (Krashen, 1982).

Conclusion. Both children and adults benefit from learning a foreign language, but in different ways. Children are more successful in developing fluency and pronunciation, while adults tend to perform better in grammar understanding and written skills. Therefore, neither group is absolutely superior. The effectiveness of language learning depends on age, cognitive abilities, motivation, exposure, and learning environment.

The comparative analysis of children and adults in foreign language learning demonstrates that age-related differences significantly influence both the process and the outcomes of language acquisition. The findings confirm that children benefit from higher neuroplasticity, implicit learning mechanisms, and reduced affective barriers, which contribute to more natural development of pronunciation and communicative fluency. Adults, in contrast, rely on conscious learning strategies, analytical thinking, and prior linguistic knowledge, which enable faster progress in grammar comprehension and structured language use.

At the same time, the study shows that neither group can be considered universally more successful. Language learning effectiveness is determined by a complex interaction of cognitive, psychological, and environmental factors, including motivation, exposure, and learning conditions.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results highlight the necessity of differentiated teaching approaches. For children, language instruction should emphasize immersive, communicative, and play-based methods that support natural acquisition. For adult learners, a balanced combination of explicit instruction and communicative practice appears to be the most effective strategy.

Thus, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of age-related characteristics in language learning and provides a foundation for optimizing teaching methodologies in diverse educational contexts.

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