

The Effect of Learning a Second Language at an Early Stage

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Abstract. Globalization is an international situation and is more and more widely accepted by people. With increasing globalization of the world economy, bilingualism is more and more widely used today as well. The effects of children learning a second language are hotly contested today. Through reviewing the previous studies, this paper aims to find out the positive and negative impacts on children of second language acquisition at the early stage. On the one hand, the benefits of learning a second language could help promote cognitive for example, memory, attentional ability and creativity. On the other hand, losing one's native language might happen if a second language is learned too early and native language not normally used. Apart from that, extra academic burden and tuition fees also could hinder the process of second language learning. Overall, this paper illustrates positive and negative impacts of learning a second language early that help their teachers and parent's bilingualism education of children. However, as of the relent previous studies and articles are limited that most of investigation lose sight of individual difference of interviewees and they are all conducted by earlier time from now, for the further research, it could be conducted by empirical research to update the new findings.

Keywords: Academic performance; Native language; Cognitive development; Motivation.

1. Introduction

With the increasing globalization of the world economy, bilingualism is more and more widely used today. There are numerous advantages when people learning the second language, for example, provides better career choices, boosts brain power, enhances the ability to multi-task and so on. According to Bamford & Mizokawa [1], the capacity to converse with individuals from other cultures and backgrounds will be a lifetime benefit of learning a second language. Other advantages include increased academic performance and greater problem-solving. In an increasingly diverse and multilingual world, language proficiency is a crucial 21st century skill. Because of this, many parents prefer to enroll their children in bilingual education as opposed to waiting for their grow up and acquire it on their own. However, some researchers believed learning the second language will bring an extra burden for children that may lead to children get bored with studying [1]. Overall, there is a lot of debate on the effect of second language learning at the early stage.

The commonly accepted the explanation for the effect of age on second language learning is that there is a "critical period" in the learning process. During this period, it can be learned more easily and once past this important period, it is much more difficult to learn a language. Many people believe that the critical period ends around the time of puberty while adults no longer take advantage of these learning abilities from nature. Therefore, this paper selects this period to analyze the effect of the second language learning through exams the stages, principles and behavior of early child development.

The following chapters defines the age range of early stage and behavior of each stage firstly. And then focus on finds out why and what motivation of learning a second language at an early stage, after that, this paper illustrates positive and negative impacts on early second language learning through study relevant previous researches and articles.

2. The Stage, Principles and Behavior of the Early Child Development

2.1 Age and Stages of Development

The age and stages usually outline several significant periods in the human development timeline [2]. Many schemata of life stage or categorization timelines have been presented in recent years. Despite the fact the phases are generally accepted, there is substantial controversy regarding how to label the stages and the ages to which they apply. Sheehy has written about the popularity of these stage classifications [2]. Bialystok also proposed their classifications of the “age and stages” [3]. Ignoring some fine distinctions, people typically divide life into the following time-line [3]: 0-2 years old is infancy, 2-6 years old is preschool, middle childhood is from 6 to 12 years old, and adolescence is from 13 to 18 years old.

The commonly accepted explanation for the effect of age on second language learning is that there is a “critical period” in the learning process. During this period, it can be learned more easily and once past this important period, it is much more difficult to learn a language. This is the Critical Period Hypothesis, which has received much attention in the linguistic community. Bialystok [3] states that the age from 2 to adolescence is the optimal period for language learning and the language learner begins the critical period at age of six [3]. Bialystok [3] also contends that the first ten years of a person’s life are the optimal time for language learning, whereas Salkind [2] states that the crucial time is just before puberty. In one word, many of them believe that the critical period ends around the time of puberty while adults no longer take advantage of these learning abilities from nature [2]. Therefore, this essay emphasizes the analysis the period of infancy, preschool years and middle childhood of second language learning.

2.2 The Characteristics of the Early Stage

2.2.1 Infancy (0-2 years old)

After the age of two, the amount of time spent sleeping each day reduces to 9-12 hours from the average 16-18 hours for newborns. Physical development, perception, cognition’s accumulation of worldly knowledge, and motor development all happen gradually [3].

2.2.2 Preschool years (2-6 years old)

The preschool period covers the ages between 2 and 6. Preschool period is one of the most sensitive periods of life and the age when the individual starts to experience his/her independence. The majority of parents refer to this period of time as the “terrible twos”, during which time children frequently say “no” to requests. The children’s cognitive and physical skills, notably language, grow rapidly from the age of two [3].

2.2.3 Middle childhood (6-12 years old)

The time between when kids start school and the start of puberty is known as middle childhood. Personality, moral and social development are some of the milestones for children during this period. Those factors include the level of cognitive development, the nature of the social environment and genetic elements. The most significant development at this time is that the youngster starts to lose perspective and develop an understanding of other people’s viewpoints [3].

2.3 The Second Language-learning Ability at an Early Stage

Oyama conducted sixty immigration interviews in the US. The ages of immigrants range from six to twenty, and their stays in the nation typically last five to eighteen years [4]. In contrast to years of living in the USA, it founded that age at the time of immigration had a significant impact on English proficiency level. Younger immigrants were more likely than older ones to reach native language competency levels [4]. In another study by Patkowski [5] that 67 immigrants educated in the USA, this study found some similar findings that those who immigrated to the USA before the age of 15 were more skilled use English than those who immigrated after the age of 15 [5] Apart from that,

Cummins and Nakajima [6] also surveyed 273 Japanese children who had immigrated to Toronto and found that immigrants' reading and writing levels of foreign languages strongly increased with age, this could be occurred because older immigrants benefited more from their previous cultural experiences. Overall, it is stated that age has different effects on different aspects of foreign language learning through the previous studies on relative research. The younger you are, the better your oral imitation skills are. However, adults are significantly better than children in learning grammar, reading and writing skills.

3. The Stage, Principles and Behavior of the Early Child Development

Over the past decades, as of increasing international trade, tourism, modern technology and so on, most countries today began to embrace the concept of a society that is multicultural. There are over 7100 languages spoken in the world currently [7]. As a result, a multicultural would be a multilingual society. The majority recognize that and believed that the globalization is a future trend in the world. Around 1.2 billion individuals worldwide currently learning a second language [7]. Most of them want to ride the wave of the globalization to seize opportunities.

The desire to learn a language is a form of motivation that is important in the field of education [8]. If a student does not have a desire to study a language, teaching or learning a second language in a classroom may be highly challenging for both teachers and students. According to Reece and Walker, motivation is the primary driver of second language acquisition [8]. Furthermore, they demonstrate that a less intelligent student who is very motivated can also succeed more than a cleverer student who lacks motivation. Similar findings are made by Schulman, who asserts that motivating kids to study is a key to maximizing learning outcomes [9].

The desire to acquire a second language may vary from person to person, as may the opportunities that may present themselves to do so, as well as the individual's ability and aptitude in that regard. Learning a second language is not generally motivated in the same way. According to Schumann, who bases this claim on the hypothesis of "the interactional instinct", kids have an innate need to form ties and identify with their caretakers [9]. Essentially, they are motivated to resemble other species members. Through this intrinsic want for engagement, the kids are inspired to acquire their first language.

The theory of motivation developed by Gardner and Lambert in 1972 primarily concentrated on two significant motivational components [10]. Those two types of motivation affect the success of second language learning from different views. The two main classifications of motivation include integrative motivation and instrumental motivation. Integrative motivation is essential for effective language acquisition. When second language learners' view and motivation toward the target culture are favorable, they readily integrate into that culture [10]. Brown states that the integrative motivation is learners who have desire to integrate into the target language community, culture, and society [10]. Learners study a second language in order to socialize or participate in the target language group. Additionally, interactively motivated students typically exhibit greater learning perseverance. All in one word, interactively motivated learners are those who are receptive to learning from various language groups and who also exhibit positive attitudes throughout the learning process. Practical demands of students, including finding a job, making more money, or passing an exam, are tied to instrumental motivation. Students that are driven by an objective do so to satisfy them [9].

According to Schumann, children learn their first language with integrative motivation, and they learn their second language with instrumental drive [9]. Comparatively, integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn a language in order to get to know, communicate with, and maybe resemble the speakers of the target language, instrumental motivation is more pragmatic or practical. The instrumental motive is the drive to lean toward more realistic and practical goals. There is no debate on which motivation is more supremacy one over the other, generally known that there is a mixture of integrative and instrumental influences.

4. The Effect of Learning a Second Language at an early Stage

4.1 Positive Impacts

4.1.1 Brain and cognitive development

There is a study from Sweden that illustrates the advantages of learning a new language on the brain. The investigation was done on two groups of scholars: one who studied languages and another who studied proportionately hard non-linguistic disciplines. The MRI scans revealed that the brains of those learning languages had larger brains whereas the brains of the other group maintained the same size [11]. Another study conducted by Dr. Thomas Bak, a lecturer at Edinburgh's School of Philosophy, Psychology, and Language Science, found that bilingual young people outperform monolingual individuals on attention and concentration tests. Dr. Bak evaluated 853 volunteers in 1947, all of them were 11 years old. They were retested when they were in their early 70s in 2008 and 2010 [11]. He founded that learning a new language even as an adult still has advantages, for example general intelligence and reading, multilingual people outperformed expectations in their performance. Learning a second language "can develop new area of mind and strengthen brain's natural ability to focus" due to flexibility of the language centers in the brain [10]. Dr. Bak believes that people's thinking and memory capabilities can be improved by learning a new language and students who are bilingual could focus better than those who only know one language [11].

4.1.2 Academic development

There are three studies that try to find the relation between children's second language and academic performance. According to a recent study of the reading ability of 134 children aged 4 to 5 years old, revealed that wide symbolic representation of print more easily understood by bilingual children than by monolingual children [1]. Another study examined the outcomes of kids in Fairfax Country who had spent five years enrolled in the most rigorous foreign language program. To summarize, the students outperformed all comparison groups and maintained high academic performance [12]. Finally, a study done in Louisiana in the 1980s discovered that kids who got daily foreign language training outperformed those who did not. This research is conducted without regard to race, gender, or academic level [13]. In conclusion, the benefit of acquiring a second language at a young age that can assist children achieve academic growth.

4.1.3 Greater social understanding

According to neuropsychologist Boxer, kids who grow up speaking at least two languages are more likely to be socially intelligent. In comparison to monolinguals, children who are reared with at least two languages have a greater understanding of others' "perspective, thoughts, desires, and intentions" [14]. Boxer argues that some of this from a more robust language system that can identify certain aspects of communication more easily, such as prosody, the rhythm of speech and tone of voice [14]. It's better to adopt a solid comprehension of another person's viewpoint or demand theory. According to Wellman & Peterson [13], really theory demand begins between the ages 4 and 5 when children begin to think about the views of others.

4.2 Negative Impacts

4.2.1 Learning a second language affect ability to use native language

As a result of linguistic assimilation into the English-speaking milieu of school and society, many American-born children of immigrants have lost their original language, which is a well-known phenomenon in the United States. Wallace Lambert, a psychologist, was first to identify this phenomenon, which is known as subtractive bilingualism. Through his study on the language development of French-Canadian and Canadian children indicated that the learning of English in school resulted not in bilingualism, but in the erosion or less of their primary language used [15]. Unfortunately, children of various minorities are losing not just their fluency in speaking, but also their capacity to talk in their own language.

While learning a second language might help one's connected with the other community, it should be equally considering the effects of losing its native language. Maintaining native language could bring a lot of advantages. To start with, speaking in native language allows for more meaningful connection, such as communicating with parents and grandparents to maintain a close relationship from the family implications. Native language maintenance is also an important factor in the retention of personal identity. Isolation and rejection can develop in the social realm if the native language is not maintained [15]. Teachers and parents should actively encourage and help these children to preserve their native language in order to prevent the loss of their bilingualism.

The benefits of connecting with the other community through the learning of a second language should be weighed against the negative effects of losing one's native language. Maintaining native language could bring a lot of benefits. To start with, speaking in native language allows for more meaningful connection, such as communicating with parents and grandparents to maintain a close relationship from the family implications. Native language maintenance is also an important factor in the retention of personal identity. Isolation and rejection can develop in the social realm if the native language is not maintained. Teachers and parents should actively encourage and help these children to preserve their native language in order to prevent the loss of their bilingualism.

4.2.2 Pressure is placed on children and parents to learn a second language

Silke Rehman believes that planning language classes took a significant amount of time and money [8]. The stress of an increased academic burden and higher tuition costs of learning a second language on top of the first could be faced by both parents and children. That implies bilingual children must study considerably harder than previously, which may take away their activity time or leisure time, such as sports and games. As a result, it becomes boring and difficult for children and they may decide to discontinue their second language learning.

5. Limitation, Future Direction and Recommendations

This paper examines studies and article all conducted by earlier time, there could be a lot of change in the world. In the last three years, there is a lot of change in the world. For example, COVID-19 has turned the world upside down. A lot of things have been impacted. Every aspect of people lives has been affected. How people work and communicate, how people study and learn and how people travel and move around. According to these, there are some suggestions that can be made based on present research. Future research could provide analysis of qualitative research and quantitative research based on the current situation. If COVID-19 continues, the quantitative research such as interview could be via online rather than face to face. And qualitative research could be assessing complex multi-component interventions and focus on intervention improvement, for example, through semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

As of quantitative research focuses on the collection and analysis of numerical data that it's less time-consuming and less biased compares with qualitative research. Bases on the advantages and disadvantages of quantitative and qualitative research that future research could use a mixed-method approach for better research.

6. Summary

Globalization is an international situation and is more and more widely accepted by people. As of different countries are simultaneously participating in the process of employment, production and investment that its system has spread beyond the territorial boundaries to the international arena. The majority of people recognize that and believed that globalization is a future trend in the world. Most of them want to ride the wave of globalization to seize opportunities so they learn the second language or send their children to the learn second language.

Through exams prior studies found that there are many positive and negative impacts on learn a second language at an early stage. It illustrates three positive impacts and two negative impacts. First

of all, the early stages of the brain are directly strongly connected to learning a second language. People's thinking and memory capabilities can be improved by learning a new language and students who are bilingual could focus better than those who only know one language. Secondly, three studies are illustrated to find the relation between children's second language and academic performance, which suggest that early second-language learning may promote in a children's academic development. Thirdly, children who are grow up speaking at least two languages generally have a greater social understanding. For the negative impacts, to start with, while learning a second language might help one's connected with the other community, it should be equally considering the effects of losing its native language. Then, both kids and parents could face the pressure of an additional academic burden and a supplementary tuition fee for language lessons. Bilingual children could work much harder than before that could take their activity time or leisure time. And may result in children deciding to discontinue their second language learning.

There is a lot of debate on the effect of learning the second language at an early stage. This paper provides an overview of the effect of learning the second language at an early stage. All the studies and articles conducted earlier time that may differ with the current situation. Apart from that, all the studies examined in this paper through quantitative research that will lose insight of the cause of the result and individual difference of Interviewer. Further research can use a mixed-method approach which are quantitative and qualitative research for better research based on current situation.

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