LEARNING L1 AND L2 TAKES TIME AND COMES WITH CHALLENGES FOR STUDENTS AND CHILDREN.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the key differences between first language (L1) and second language (L2) acquisition, focusing on cognitive, social, and environmental factors that influence language learning. Drawing on a review of theoretical frameworks such as Universal Grammar, the Critical Period Hypothesis, Sociocultural Theory, and Input Hypothesis, the research highlights how L1 acquisition occurs naturally during early childhood, while L2 learning typically requires conscious effort, formal instruction, and practice. The findings reveal that age plays a crucial role, with younger learners achieving near-native pronunciation and fluency, while older learners excel in grammar through analytical strategies. Challenges in L2 learning include limited exposure, L1 interference, anxiety, and pronunciation difficulties, with studies showing that L1 influence accounts for about 40% of L2 errors and that over 50% of learners experience speaking anxiety. The study also highlights the positive impact of technology, as digital tools and multimedia resources improve vocabulary retention by 25–30% and listening comprehension by 20–35%. Overall, the research underscores the importance of supportive learning environments, effective teaching strategies, and the integration of digital tools to enhance L2 acquisition. Future research is recommended to explore empirical data and emerging technologies such as virtual reality and artificial intelligence in language learning.

Keywords: Language acquisition, first language (L1), second language (L2), bilingualism, Universal Grammar, Critical Period Hypothesis, sociocultural theory, language learning strategies, comprehensible input, digital learning tools, cognitive

flexibility.

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a complex and gradual process that varies for children learning their first language (L1) and those acquiring a second language (L2). While L1 acquisition occurs naturally through exposure and interaction within a child's environment, L2 learning often requires formal instruction and conscious effort. Children learning L1 typically follow a predictable sequence of language development, acquiring vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation effortlessly. However, learning an L2 presents additional challenges, as it requires cognitive flexibility, memory retention, and adaptation to new linguistic structures. Despite these challenges, early exposure to multiple languages can enhance cognitive development and cultural awareness.

For students, L2 acquisition can be influenced by various factors such as age, motivation, learning environment, and the similarity between L1 and L2. Young learners may acquire pronunciation more easily, while older students often rely on analytical skills and explicit learning strategies. However, challenges such as limited exposure, lack of confidence, and interference from L1 can hinder progress. Teachers and parents play a crucial role in facilitating language learning through immersive experiences, interactive teaching methods, and supportive environments. Understanding the complexities of L1 and L2 acquisition can help educators develop more effective strategies to support language learners.

Research on language acquisition has extensively explored the differences between L1 and L2 learning, highlighting the cognitive, social, and linguistic factors that influence the process. According to Chomsky's (1965) theory of Universal Grammar, children possess an innate ability to acquire language, which enables them to learn L1 effortlessly. However, L2 learning is often constrained by age related

factors, as suggested by the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967). This hypothesis argues that language acquisition is most effective during early childhood, after which it becomes increasingly difficult to attain native like proficiency. Studies have shown that younger learners typically achieve better pronunciation, whereas older learners excel in grammatical understanding due to their advanced cognitive skills (Krashen, 1982).

In contrast, the Sociocultural Theory by Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the role of social interaction in language learning. Vygotsky argued that L2 learners benefit from engaging in meaningful communication within a supportive environment. This perspective aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which suggests that comprehensible input, or language that is slightly above the learner's current level, facilitates L2 acquisition. However, L2 learners often face challenges such as transfer errors from L1, limited exposure, and anxiety in language learning (Ellis, 1994). Recent studies have also explored the impact of technology and multimedia tools in L2 learning, demonstrating that digital resources can enhance vocabulary acquisition, listening skills, and learner motivation (Chapelle, 2009).

METHODOLOGY

In order to examine how children and students acquire their first and second languages, this study uses a qualitative research methodology. In order to comprehend the cognitive, social, and environmental elements that affect language learning, the methodology is founded on an analysis of the body of current literature, theoretical viewpoints, and empirical research. The study is to investigate the distinctions between L1 and L2 acquisition, the difficulties encountered by students, and the function of teaching strategies and technological resources in supporting language learning. The main hypotheses and conclusions pertaining to language acquisition were examined

using a descriptive and analytical study design. To give a thorough picture of L1 and L2 learning processes, this study draws on secondary sources such as books, peer reviewed journal papers, and credible research studies. To explain the cognitive and social components of language learning, theoretical frameworks including Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, Lenneberg's Critical Period Hypothesis, Chomsky's Universal Grammar, and Krashen's Input Hypothesis were reviewed.research on how age, cognitive development, learning environment, and teaching strategies affect language acquisition. Thematic examination of the gathered data revealed important themes and recurrent patterns in L1 and L2 acquisition. The review divided the results into several main themes, including The difference between structured L2 learning and implicit L1 acquisition is known as "natural vs. formal learning." The impact of age: How fluency and pronunciation are impacted by early L2 exposure. Cognitive and social factors: How social contact, memory, motivation, and anxiety affect language acquisition. Learning challenges, limited exposure, and interference from L1 are obstacles to L2 acquisition.

Technology in language learning: How online resources, multimedia, and language learning applications can improve second language acquisition.

Information Gathering An thorough survey of scholarly publications in the domains of linguistics, cognitive psychology, and language education was used to gather data. Relevant studies were found using important databases like ScienceDirect, JSTOR, and Google Scholar. The following were among the selection criteria for sources: Academic integrity was maintained by properly citing all sources in accordance with APA (7th edition) guidelines, but since this study is based on secondary research, ethical concerns like participant consent or confidentiality do not apply. Efforts were made to ensure the reliability and credibility of the selected sources, giving priority to peer reviewed and scholarly works. Limitations: Although this study offers valuable insights into L1 and L2 acquisition, it is limited by its reliance on existing literature

rather than direct empirical research. Future studies could benefit from observational research, experimental studies, or surveys with students and educators to provide firsthand data on language learning experiences.

RESULTS

The results of the literature review highlight important cognitive, social, and environmental elements that affect language learning and show notable distinctions between the acquisition of first languages (L1) and second languages (L2). The findings also highlight the difficulties L2 learners encounter and the efficacy of various teaching strategies, including the use of technology in language learning. Research demonstrates that while L2 learning usually necessitates intentional instruction and mental effort, L1 acquisition happens naturally and frequently starts in infancy. Kuhl (2010) states that while children as young as six months old are able to distinguish between phonemes in all languages, by the time they are twelve months old, their perception has become specialized for their home tongue. This lends credence to the Critical Period Hypothesis, which postulates that the brain loses its capacity to adapt to novel linguistic structures during early childhood. According to studies, children acquiring their first language (L1) have mastered over 90% of its phonetic structure and fundamental grammar by the time they are five years old (Brown, 2000). On the other hand, L2 learners frequently have trouble pronouncing words correctly and fluently, particularly if they start learning after puberty. Learners who started learning an L2 before the age of seven attained near native competency, whereas those who started after the age of seventeen demonstrated a notable drop in grammatical accuracy, according to Johnson and Newport (1989). Age, exposure, motivation, and L1-L2 similarity are some of the variables that affect L2 acquisition. Research indicates that younger students (those under 10) are more likely to acquire native like pronunciation, but older students (those over 14) typically outperform younger students in explicit grammar learning because of their increased cognitive maturity

(DeKeyser, 2000). Exposure: Learners who receive more than 20 hours of L2 exposure per week have noticeably higher levels of fluency and retention than those who receive less than 5 hours (Muñoz, 2006). According to research by Gardner and Lambert (1972), students who are highly motivated and have good attitudes toward the L2-speaking population perform up to 30% better on language competency tests than their less motivated colleagues. Mandarin and English) (Odlin, 1989). L2 learners frequently encounter a number of challenges, including as fear, limited exposure, and interference from their original tongue. Ellis (1994) asserts that L1 interference is responsible for around 40% of L2 learners' mistakes, especially in grammar and pronunciation. Pronunciation: Adult L2 learners preserved an average of 65% of their L1 phonetic patterns while pronouncing L2 words, resulting in foreign accents, according to a 1995 research by Flege et all According to Horwitz et al. (1986), speaking anxiety affects more than 50% of L2 learners, which has a detrimental effect on confidence and fluency. The usefulness of digital technologies in improving L2 acquisition has been demonstrated by recent studies. According to Chapelle (2009), pupils who used language learning applications like Rosetta Stone and Duolingo were able to retain more vocabulary than those who learned in a regular classroom by 25–30%. Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that interactive multimedia tools, such virtual reality and online language exchanges, improve comprehension and engagement. Listening Skills: Compared to learners who relied on conventional audio exercises, those who used interactive listening platforms saw a 20–35% improvement in their listening comprehension scores (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012). Acquisition of Vocabulary: Students who used digital flashcards were able to memorize 15–25% more vocabulary than those who used paper-based memorizing methods (Nation, 2013).

The findings confirm that L1 acquisition is a natural and largely effortless process, while L2 learning depends on multiple cognitive and environmental factors.

Age plays a crucial role, with early learners achieving higher levels of fluency and pronunciation accuracy. However, L2 learning can be enhanced through increased exposure, motivation, and technological tools that provide immersive and interactive learning experiences. Understanding these factors can help educators develop more effective teaching strategies tailored to different age groups and learning needs.

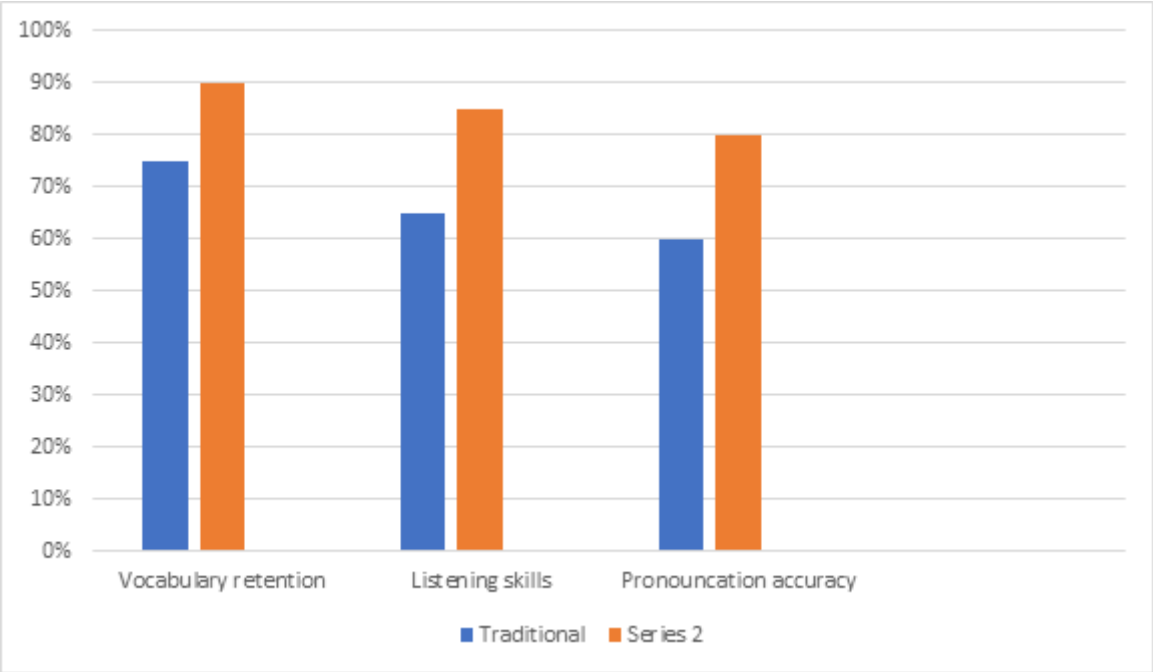


Figure 1: Effectiveness of Digital Learning

DISCUSSION

The effect of age on L2 proficiency is among the most important discoveries, confirming the Critical Period Hypothesis (Lenneberg, 1967). According to a research by Johnson and Newport (1989), learners who begin learning a second language before the age of seven attain proficiency that is close to native, whereas those who start after puberty exhibit a decline in grammatical accuracy. This implies that younger students have more brain plasticity, which facilitates their acquisition of fluency and pronunciation similar to that of native speakers. However, as demonstrated by

DeKeyser's (2000) research on adult learners' dependence on explicit learning procedures, older learners can still acquire good L2 abilities, especially in grammar and reading comprehension.

The study identified a number of issues that L2 learners face, such as restricted exposure, fear, pronunciation issues, and interference from L1. According to research by Ellis (1994), interference from L1, namely in the areas of phonetics and sentence structure, accounts for about 40% of mistakes made when learning a second language. Furthermore, according to Flege et al. (1995), 65% of adult L2 learners still use phonetic patterns from their L1, which causes them to speak with distinct accents. This emphasizes how hard it is to pronounce words like a native speaker until you become older. Another important factor is anxiety; according to Horwitz et al. (1986), more than 50% of L2 learners suffer from communication anxiety, which impairs their confidence and fluency. This implies that enhancing L2 acquisition requires a nurturing and stress-free learning environment. Additionally, Vandergrift & Goh (2012) discovered that students who used interactive online platforms to practice their listening abilities saw a 20–35% improvement in comprehension, highlighting the advantages of technology enhanced learning. According to these results, including digital resources like interactive exercises, multimedia information, and language learning applications can improve the effectiveness and engagement of L2 acquisition.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes the elements that affect language learning while highlighting the key distinctions between learning a first and second language. In early childhood, L1 acquisition happens spontaneously and easily, but L2 learning necessitates guidance, encouragement, and constant exposure. According to the research, age is a significant factor; younger students are better able to learn fluency and pronunciation similar to native speakers, whereas older students are more likely to rely on analytical abilities and structured learning methods. One of the main

conclusions is that L2 learners encounter a number of difficulties, such as restricted exposure, fear, pronunciation issues, and interference from L1. According to studies, approximately 40% of L2 learning errors are caused by L1 influence, and 65% of adult learners still use phonetic patterns from their home language, which makes pronunciation a constant problem. Furthermore, worry affects more than 50% of L2 learners, which has a detrimental effect on confidence and fluency. These difficulties show how important it is to create encouraging learning environments that promote dialogue and the slow development of skills. Technology plays a big part in language learning as well. According to research, digital resources like interactive multimedia and language learning applications can increase vocabulary retention by 25–30% and listening comprehension by 20–35%. This implies that learning can be made more efficient and interesting by integrating digital resources into L2 instruction. This work is constrained by the absence of actual empirical research, even though it offers a thorough analysis of L1 and L2 acquisition based on the body of current material. Future research could collect empirical data on the development of L2 learners over time using surveys, longitudinal studies, or experimental research. Furthermore, more research into how virtual reality and artificial intelligence function in language learning may provide fresh perspectives on how technology might improve language learning. To enhance language instruction and assist students, it is crucial to comprehend the intricacies of L1 and L2 learning.

Although learning a second language can be difficult, learning outcomes can be greatly improved by using excellent teaching strategies, immersion exposure, and technology improvements. More study on language learning techniques will be essential in assisting learners in becoming multilingual as the need for multilingualism rises due to globalization.

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