



تأثير العمر في تعلم اللغة الثانية نحو أداء أفضل للطلاب في اللغة الإنجليزية في المدارس الابتدائية في ليبيا

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الملخص :

هذه الورقة تناقش مدى تأثير العمر على اكتساب اللغة الثانية. وتحاول التحقق ما إذا كانت النظرة العامة "الأصغر سناً أفضل" مقبولة في بيئة تعليمية مختلفة عن تلك البيئة التي نتحدث اللغة الثانية. استناداً إلى الأبحاث والدراسات السابقة حول هذا الموضوع على مدار الستين عامًا الماضية فإن هذه الورقة تشير بأن النظرة العامة "الأصغر سناً أفضل" هو اعتقاد مقبول في البيئة التي يتعرض فيها المتعلمون الصغار للغة المستهدفة (الثانية) بشكل مكثف ويومي ، حيث إن وفرة المعلومات تعمل على تنشيط عمل آلية الضمنية للأطفال والتي تؤدي إلى اكتساب حقيقي للمعايير اللغوية تحديداً الصوتية منها للغة الثانية. ومع ذلك هذه النظرة تعتبر غير صحيحة إذا ما طبقت في بيئة تعليمية مختلفة عن تلك البيئة التي تتحدث اللغة الثانية بسبب التعرض المحدود لهذه اللغة. وبالتالي فإن النظرة المعاكسة "الأكبر سناً أفضل" هي أكثر منطقية في هذه البيئة. ومن أجل تحسين الأداء اللغوي للطلاب في المدارس الابتدائية في ليبيا ، يتعين على الحكومة الأخذ في الاعتبار إتاحة وتطوير وسائل التعلم المختلفة التي تسهم بشكل فعال في تعلم اللغة الثانية وعلى وجه التحديد المعلمين. بحيث يتم إعداد برامج عاجلة ومكثفة لرفع كفاءتهم في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية بالتحديد للمتعلمين الصغار ، وهذا يمكن تحقيقه من خلال إدماج المعلمين في برامج تدريبية جيدة التخطيط لضمان نتائج فعالة وقيمة .

Age Effect on Second Language Acquisition: A Critical Review and Implications for Education in Libya

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This paper discusses the influence of age in second language acquisition. It critically attempts to investigate whether the common view of ‘the younger the better’ is reasonable in different learning contexts. Based on literature research on this topic for over past sixty years, this paper disputes that ‘the younger the better’ is a reasonable belief in abroad contexts where children are exposed intensively and daily to the target language. This rich input helps to activate the work of their implicit mechanism leading to gaining close native-like norms and accent. Yet, “the younger the better” ineffectively works in foreign settings with a limited exposure of the target language. Thus, “the older the better” is more reasonable in foreign contexts. Therefore, for a better students’ linguistics competence in English in our schools in Libya, the government has to consider some favorable circumstances in particular *YL teachers* and it has to work urgently to raise their efficiency in teaching English to younger learners, and that can be achieved via well-planned training programmes to ensure effective and valuable results.

Key words: age effect, English language, foreign context, foreign/second language.

Introduction

Over the past half century, there has been a dramatic increase in investigating the effect that age has on a language acquisition (LA). It is widely believed that children and young language learners are successful in reaching the ultimate attainment (UA) in the second language acquisition. Researchers investigating the process of the language acquisition have found that there is a strong association between age of acquisition and ultimate attainment. This idea became widely popular after publishing the book called ‘Speech and Brain Mechanisms’ in (1959) by the brain surgeons, W. Penfield and L. Roberts (Muñoz, 2006). In this book, the surgeon Penfield argued for the idea of an early start of a second language and the best start is between the ages of



four and *ten*. Shortly, some researchers influenced by this idea and started investigating it; E. Lenneberg was one of those researchers who theoretically supported this view. Lenneberg, in his work ‘Biological foundations of language in (1967), suggested that it becomes increasingly difficult to learn a second language (L2) after a certain age, and it is possible to acquire the native norms of L2 only before that age (Abrahamsson, 2012; DeKeyser, 2000). According to this hypothesis, children and young people perform better than adults, because “their brains have a natural ability to absorb new information as part of their developmental growth” (Palea and Bostina-Bratu, 2015: 428).

Accordingly, this paper attempts to determine whether the notion of “the younger the better” is reasonable in all learning contexts. Before drawing any conclusion in this respect, it is reasonable to review exiting empirical studies in order to learn more detailed knowledge about this aspect. It also aims to discuss some implications for educational sector in Libya for better students’ academic performance in primary schools.

Methodology

For drawing a well conclusion of this issue, this research article followed a secondary research. I adopted a systematic review process in which voluminous literature on age effects in second language learning was reviewed. In this review, I emphasized on the Critical Period Hypothesis and Ultimate attainments in second language, and more emphasis was given in age effects in foreign settings. There has been a growing increase in the utilization of secondary data analysis in linguistics issues and specifically in second language acquisition. According to Johnston (2014: 619), “secondary data analysis is analysis of data that was collected by someone else for another primary purpose”. Among a number of its advantages, secondary data analysis was particularly chosen in this paper because it allowed the researchers to re-analyze and re-interpret the current research.

A systematic search was carried on basically in Google Scholar and Google Book for searching reviewed studies and articles by searching relevant keywords as Age effect on second language acquisition, Critical Period Hypothesis, and learning second language in foreign contexts. In analysis,

and for achieving the first aim, CPH and language acquisition was first analyzed. Then, age effect and language acquisition was discussed. Finally, the effect of Age in pedagogical Contexts in Foreign Settings was then critically analyzed. For achieving the second aim, the keywords related to second language teaching and learning in foreign contexts were searched critically to fit the focus of the study.

Critical Period Hypothesis and Language Acquisition:

CPH is one of the most significant hypotheses in explaining the phenomenon of language acquisition. This is because CPH is considered to be the success, effectiveness, and more likely the key to the accomplishment of the acquisition of any language (Alghizzi, 2014). According to Birdsong, (2005) the CP is concerned with the development of particular events within a limited period of time, and can be expected to be less successful in development if they did not occur at that time. Learning a language in particular, is believed to occur naturally during a fixed period of years after which it is unlikely to be successful. According to Lenneberg (1967:176), “automatic acquisition from mere exposure to a given language seems to disappear after this age [puberty]”. In other words, acquiring the language normally from exposed language is unlikely after puberty at the age of 12-13 which was suggested by Lenneberg based on his inference about synchronicity of puberty and the brain’s maturation after which it is assumed that there is some cerebral inflexibility in learning a language (Abrahamsson, 2012).

However, some researchers criticized Lenneberg’s interference about the brain’s maturation since the brain’s lateralization (which is one sign of brain maturation) is argued to be completed by the age of 5 (Krashen, 1973, cited in Snow & Hoefnagel-Höhle, 1977). This uncertainty in the precise age of lateralization caused “doubts about the neurological basis of the critical period hypothesis” (Nejadansari, and Nasrollahzadeh, 2011:19).

Age Effect and Language Acquisition

Many researchers have demonstrated a degree of agreement on the accuracy of CPH in L1. Although it appears difficult to investigate this matter since children are normally exposed to their L1 after a birth, a clearer understanding for this matter might be gained from studies of ‘feral and deaf children’



(Dörnyei, 2009; Alghizzi, 2014). An article written by Van Staden, et al., (2011), illustrated a deep insight into the effect of early exposure of sign language to deaf children. The article drew a conclusion on the significance of early exposure of the language to deaf children based on the overall findings of these studies which revealed that the earlier deaf learners were exposed to sign language, the better language development they had, which suggests the possibility of applying the CPH to sign language (Van Staden, et al., 2011).

In contrast to the CP in L1, there is a considerable amount of controversy on this topic in L2. Understandably, many ordinary people believe that children are much better than adults in acquiring the L2 holding the view of “the younger the better” as it is widely common since Lenneberg’s hypothesis. Yet, researchers in our time argue against it. For example, there seems no consensus from researchers including psycholinguists regarding a definitive age in which UA in L2 is affected. Some studies suggest that the acquiring age can be earlier than what lenneberg suggested (i.e > 12 years). They speculate that the age between 6 and 7 years is the most appropriate age to have native-like competencies of L2. For example, Johnson & Newport’s (1989) study initially aimed to investigate the possibility of applying the CP to the L2. They tested the competence of 64 Chinese and Korean participants studying English in America in their use of syntax and morphology by asking them to determine whether the spoken sentences were grammatically correct or not. The length of residence (LOR) of all participants was a minimum 5 years but their ages of arrival (AOA) in the US varied. Although the study’s outcomes support the hypothesis that the L2 is better acquired in early age, the age at which performance decreases was suggested to be earlier than the one in Lenneberg’s hypothesis. The approximate age in their findings was 7 (Bowden, et al., 2005).

Although Lenneberg (1967) doubts the success of learning L2 after puberty, he implies that it is possible to be successful by teaching or learning the L2 consciously and with effort, but for adults there would still be difficulties in acquiring the native like accent. Giving more insight into this view, a hypothesis suggested by Bley-Vroman (1988) called the “Fundamental Difference Hypothesis” states that “adults can no longer rely on the innate

mechanisms for implicit language acquisition and must, therefore, rely on alternative, problem-solving mechanisms” (Bley-Vroman, 1988 cited in DeKeyser, 2000:500). There are some studies supporting this hypothesis such as DeKeyser’s (2000) study which shows that the morphosyntax level of proficiency in L2 was not achieved by post-puberty learners, except amongst those who had some ability in explicit processes, analysis and problem-solving.

Yet, research on early bilingualism implies that “the age of the first access to the second language is only one of the factors reflecting the ultimate jurisdiction” (Palea and Bostina-Bratu, 2015: 429). While the Lenneberg hypothesis indicates to the impossibility of acquiring the native like accent after puberty, data from research aiming at investigating the ultimate attainment and age concerning the pronunciation proved the opposite. For example, the work was done by Bongaerts, et al, (1997) aiming to explore effect of late starting age of the L2 in learners’ pronunciation. The results of study were obtained from two studies. The first study consisted of 3 groups of participants. The first group (a control group) contained 5 native speakers of English language; the second group contained 10 Dutch speakers of English. These participants were considered to be EFL speakers with high level of proficiency in English. The third group contained 12 Dutch Learners of EFL with different level of proficiency. The participants in the second and third groups started learning English lately at around the age of 18 in instructional settings where they continually received input from native speakers of English. The participant in the three groups participated in the four reading out tasks (an unplanned speech in English about their last holiday in a foreign country, short English text containing 84 words, ten English sentences, and a list of 25 English words). Focusing on accent, the participants were assessed and rated by 4 native speakers of English who were not experienced in linguistics. Unlike studies in literature concerning this issue, the results revealed that no differences were noticed between native speakers of English (first group) and EFL learners at high level of proficiency (second group).

In the second study, the participants were selected with more number in each group. The first group comprised 10 native speakers of English. The second



group consisted of 11 native speakers of Dutch with the same criteria of the second group of the previous study. The third group involved 20 native speakers of Dutch. Judges, in this study were not only with larger number (13), but also linguistically experienced. This time, the participated were asked to read out six English sentences twice. The study reported similar results. These two studies strongly argued against the statement of ‘the younger the better’ particularly in the terms of the language aspect of pronunciation showing that even late learners who started leaning second language at formal settings can speak that language similar to its native speakers. More importantly, by examining the learning histories of the highly successful learners, the researchers disputed that “certain learner characteristics and learning contexts may work together to override the disadvantages of a late start” (Bongaerts et al, 1997, 447).

Age Effect and Pedagogical Context in Foreign Settings

It seems the language education policy in many countries has been influenced by the CPH. This belief has led the educational policy in some countries to advance the age of first exposure to English as a foreign language. Nevertheless, some educators and researchers argue that learning second language does not effectively occur in the typical classroom setting. For example, Hildreth (1959) highlighted that there are many obstacles restrict the benefits of learning second language in foreign settings even if the learners are early exposed to L2 as at the first grade. Such these obstacles are: short classroom period for teaching a second language, large number of students in one classroom, and obstacles in speaking and behaving freely. Such these reasons make some educators as Hildreth called for delay in a starting age of the study of L2 in a foreign setting. In accordance with these educators and researchers, the most suitable age for starting the study of the L2 in foreign settings is between 11 and 13. It has been assumed that learners at these ages have a good knowledge of facts in most basic subjects of different disciplines. Furthermore, students are being more motivated to acquire the second language perfectly since it is the language that is obviously needed for almost all careers.

Consequently, there has been a demand that language education declarations should be based on the results from the studies conducted in the related

environment. In the sense of this point, DeKeyser (2013) in his written work ‘Age Effects in Second Language Learning’ attempted to raise our awareness and understanding of ‘the conceptual misunderstandings and methodological difficulties of this issue’, and its vital importance and relation to educational policy and curriculum design. He suggested that “if studies aim to make any educational pronouncements, research needs to be conducted in the relevant educational contexts” (Dekeyser , 2013:57). That is to say, when the interest of the language plan is in learning foreign language, the research should be conducted in a foreign language setting.

In fact, there are some studies which investigate the effect of contexts and amount of exposure to L2 on children’s and adult’s performance, and conclude that adults usually do better in an instructional context than children after a limited amount of instructional hours, and children later catch up if they continue to use the language (see Lightbown & Spada, 2013). An example study is Alvarez’s (2006) study which aimed to show the difference in competence among three different groups of learners where the age of first exposure to English in foreign context was varied but had the same total number of hours. The study tested 180 children who were divided into two groups; one group included those who started studying English at the age of 8, and the other group included those who started at the age of 11. The variety in age of first exposure between these groups was as a result of a change in the education policy of a country in which English at that time is taught earlier than ever before, starting from the age of 8 instead of 11. The third group was 45 adults who studied English aged from 14.9 to 17.9. In order to investigate the effect of the total amount of instructional hours on learning across the ages, the data was collected from each group according to the amount of total instructional hours as follows: after (1) 200 h, (2) 416 h, (3) 726 h. That means each group was divided again into three groups according to the total amount of hours they were exposed to, but the adults had only two groups (1 & 2). The data was collected from an oral narrative task in which each participant was shown six drawings; each drawing described an event in a story. Thereafter, each participant was given some time to understand the story and then he/she narrated it. The study reveals that adults and older school students



were faster in terms of the level of acquisition according to the total instructional hours.

Besides, Foster et al, (2014: 101-132) study aimed to investigate nativelike selection (NLS) knowledge of second language users of English and the effect of different individual factors on this knowledge supports these results. Data of study was collected from 79 participants who were all comfortably bilingual in Polish and English. They were divided into two groups according to their place of residence; 39 participants live in West London, while the rest (40) live in Poland. The participants were deliberately chosen in which the minimum duration of exposure to English was 12 years. To measure ability to spot non-nativelike selection in English, the test was made to contain two stories, one story with 193 words and the other with 130 words. The stories were written by non-native speaker of English; the grammatical errors were corrected but the lexical combinations were left without correction. The texts contain 24 non-native selections in collection (the collection that are odd in English). To test the participants' knowledge in nativelike selection, the participants were confirmed that the texts were completely accurate in terms of grammar and spelling and they then were asked to read the stories and highlight any odd expression. Each identified non-native selection was scored with one point.

In case of the UK participants, the results show no differences between native speaker participants and the nonnative participants who start learning English before the age of 12. The participants whose AoO was ≤ 12 years old scored within native speaker range from 17 to 24 out of 24, but the relationship was negative but not significant for those who their AoO was > 12 in which they scored below this range. However, this is not the case with the NNS Poland participants. Data demonstrated that only six participants could achieve nativelike selection scores within the native speakers range; four participants with AoO under ten years, and the other two were above 12 years. The researchers concluded that "an early AoO (< 13) serves as a guarantee of nativelikeness in an immersion context" (Foster, et al, 2014: 121) as AoO greatly influences on SLA than other factors: motivation, engagement or length of exposure. They emphasized that this fact cannot be applied in a foreign language learning context where L2 is taught usually in schools. Thus,

an early exposure to second language was considered to be essential but not enough for reaching an ultimate attainment in L2. Taking length of exposure (LoE) to second language in account, the study also found out that LoE to English influences NNSs in immersion context only if their AoO was less than 12 years. On contrary, the LoE does influence second language users in foreign context, who their AoO above 12 years.

Towards a better Students' Performance in English at primary schools in Libya.

As it was discussed earlier, adult learners continually prove to outperform the younger learners in most if not all aspects of language in short run period including foreign language contexts. According to Sorace, in instructional context where foreign language is taught, adults are much better than children. Sorace explained that children are not good at explicit learning because of the lack of 'the cognitive control and the attention and memory capabilities' because these are features develops over time (Sorace, cited in Hardach, 2018). In a foreign setting, children study English only because it is timetabled subject, and the role of an implicit learning mechanism of children is often neglected by both the educational system and by parents because not enough time is given to children to encourage them to engage in the learning process. To achieve better outcomes of L2, the educational policy of language should discuss when the foreign language should be introduced based on its aim. Lightbown & Spada (2013:98) suggest the "decision about when to start second language instruction in schools should be based on realistic goals and on realistic estimates of how long it takes to achieve them". If the focus of introducing the foreign language is not linguistics outcome, then introducing it at the primary level school can be advantageous for some reasons. For example, "it helps children to learn about other cultures, develop positive attitudes about languages, and promote language awareness" (Pinter, 2012: 105). In this respect, Johnstone (2002) as cited in Nikolov (2009: 10) stated that

"those making an early start may benefit from advantages at an early point in their education (relative ease of enquiring the sound system and unanalysed wholes, higher level of motivation, lower anxiety, more time over years, ect) as well as at later stage (more background knowledge, literacy and learning skills, strategies and analytical skills)."



Moreover, Edelenbos and Kubanek (2009) state that an early start can provide them with “linguistics and intercultural experience”. This may affect positively on learners’ “cognitive, social, cultural, acoustic, linguistic, and personal development (including qualities of persistence and participation) and on their sense of self” (p.45).

However, if the aim of the induction of foreign language is second language competence, then the effectiveness for learning this language depends on some elements. Todd, et al (2002) as cited in Pinter (2012: 105), mentioned some of these exceptions which we can name them as favorable circumstances for learning foreign language:

“Only if teachers are themselves native or nativelylike speakers and well-trained in the needs of younger learners, if the early learning opportunities are built upon with consistent, well- planned, ongoing instruction in higher grades, and if the learners are given some opportunities for authentic communicate experience in the target language.”

Pinter (2012, 105) also added that “plenty of opportunity for practice, access to good quality teaching, supportive learning environment” can also contribute to the effectiveness of learning foreign language.

Based on the quoted suggestions, the first fundamental favorable circumstance to discuss is appropriate teaching methodology and curricula. These can be crucial and influential element as they affect the children’s attitude toward the target language. The content and materials used in the course need to be suitable for the students’ age, cognitive and linguistic level. Thus, designing the curriculum should be reachable, authentic, learnable and enjoyable. More importantly, the induction of the content need to be in order from easy to more difficult and in sequences and continuity in which a child study the language from the primary school to the higher school without discontinuing.

Assessing students is another aspect which is closely linked to learning language process in a class. It is necessary for Learning and assessing processes to work smoothly to achieve the curriculum aims. For assessing younger learners at our primary schools, formative assessment is seen as an appropriate type of assessment; this means collecting data should be while

learning is taking place and not as in traditional way. According to Moon (2005: 31), “.... over-emphasis on testing at primary levels can have a strongly negative wash-back effect on what happens in the classroom and undermine attempts to introduce more experiential and activity based teaching”. Apparently, children at this age are busy with developing their knowledge in their first language. Starting repeating some English words, recognizing the words from pictures, greeting friends in English or singing some common educational songs (e.g ABCs song) can reveal the amount of knowledge children have in foreign language (Caudwell, 2019).

Another critical factor is the length of exposure to foreign language and the frequency of classes over the week. The amount of time in receiving English as foreign language is assumed to be between 60 and 80 hours yearly for 30-40 minutes a week, in many public schools around the world (Moon, 2005). According to English language learning plan in primary and elementary school in Libya, English is taught 3 to 4 classes in a week for about 40 minutes for each class. The total number of hours students receive English in Libyan context in year is about 54 hours from stage 1 to 3, and 71 hours from stage 4-5, and 66 hours from stage 6-8. This amount seems to be less than the expected amount of exposure around the world especially for first, second and third grades. The next table shows the length of exposure to English as FL as planned by the ministry in 2020. In this table, only the final tests days in first and second semester (26/01-06/02/2020 and 07/06-18/07/2020 respectively) and the teachers’ annual teachers’ vocations (09/05-06/06/2020) were excluded from stage 6 - 8.



Table (1) The total number of minutes and hours per semester

	stages	Length of Semester	No. weeks	The amount of Minutes weekly= No. of classes a week*40		The amount of minutes in one term= No. minutes*No. weeks		The approximate number of hours in one term= total minutes in term/60m	
First Semester	1-3	13/10-6/02	17	3*40	120	120*17	2040 m	2040/60	≈34 h
	4-5	13/10-6/02	17	4*40	160	160*17	2720 m	2720/60	≈45 h
	6-8	13/10-12/01	15	4*40	160	160*15	2400 m	2400/60	≈40 h
Second Semester	1-3	23/2-2/5	10	3*40	120	120*10	1200 m	1200/60	20 h
	4-5	23/2-2/5	10	4*40	160	160*10	1600 m	1600/60	≈26 h
	6-8	23/2-2/5	10	4*40	160	160*10	1600 m	1600/60	≈26 h

Table (2) the total number of hours per year

Stages	The total numbers of hours in a year= first term hours+ second term hours	
1-3	34+20	54 h
4-5	45+26	71 h
6-8	40+26	66 h

Myles (2017) pointed out that while older learners have ability to use their cognitive competences to support their learning, children learn in implicitly and unconscious way. They need rich input and interaction to activate the work of their implicit mechanism. Children at this age need to do a lot of activities and tasks to learn a target language. Such these tasks require many hours of foreign language a week.

Another feature which is highly discussed in literature relating to teaching process is *a teacher*. Younger learners YL teachers are expected to be proficient speakers in their first language as well as in the foreign language; they need to know the general curriculum and the principles of the way younger learners learn the L2 in foreign context (Moon, 2005, Nikolov, 2009). Teachers also need to be familiar with the way children learn foreign

languages and an effective method for teaching this language. Additionally, they need to know “children's cognitive, linguistic and emotional development because they affect the learning process” (Moon, 2005: 32). This factor has greatly influenced the effectiveness of teaching foreign languages around the world.

In Libya context, it is claimed that many English teachers are not competent enough to teach English especially to younger learners. Mohsen (2014), in his article ‘Teaching English as a Foreign Language in Libya’ has indicated to this issue as one of challenges that educational system in Libya is suffering from. He argued that “employing not-well qualified teachers of English has badly added to the process of teaching English” (p. 63). To raise the efficiency of our teachers, English teachers should be exposed to a long term training as to expose them to long term training programmes lasting for about one or two years at a college if they did not obtained a degree from a university and for shorter period if they have already studied at university. These training programmes, however, need to be well planned. Mohsen (2014) suggested that these programmes better run by specialized world organizations for example, the British council and the British universities. In these programmes, teachers should be supplied with educational supportive materials for learning; for example: lectures, workshops, printed and audio-visual materials which can be used inside and outside the class for self-study.

Focusing heavily on qualifying the teachers is due to their crucial role they play in teaching foreign languages. That is because a good qualified teacher has a great and positive influence on his students. The following are some positive points we can gain by employing a qualified English teacher at primary schools:

1. Promoting the positive attitude toward the target language. So, children can accept the target language as a language which is spoken by other children abroad and not as a difficult timetabled subject.
2. Creating appropriate learning strategies depends on children needs.
3. Making use of the classroom environment. A teacher might change the organization of classroom, or change children’s places so that they can practice English with different children regularly; or even a teacher



might teach students outside the class when it is needed for better outcomes, as to take them to the school park to teach them the surrounding objects.

4. Encouraging the children to study independently especially when the learning opportunities are limited in class room context. For example a teacher can ask children to use online educational resources (reading short stories, listening to educational English songs, or/and watching episodic cartoons. To limit the disadvantages of online searching, a teacher can create online page as in Whatapp, Facebook, or Website, and make the children engage to that under the supervision of their parents.

Although what was discussed in this section seems to be essential for teaching foreign languages effectively, many governments around the world continue to advance the age for studying foreign language in primary schools as compulsory subject without considering these factors. Ministry of education of Libya has experienced the ineffectiveness of teaching foreign languages in public schools for many years. It is generally noticed that Libyan students' performance is by far considered to be poor. A lot of Libyan students who started the study of English as foreign language at the fifth or seven grade often express their performing in this language as disappointing, although they were exposed to this language for six or eight years during their study at schools. Most of them cannot use English effectively when they start study at university and experience a lot of pressure in their academic study specially in majors which use English language as the instructional language as in the fields of medicine, electrical and electronic engineering. These students usually point out that they studied English language as timetabled subject only, and they usually taught to pass the exams especially for the 9th grade in primary schools and third year in secondary schools. In fact, continuing ignorance of such discussed factors (favorable circumstances) by the government can lead to the similar outcomes even when English is taught from first grade at a primary school since it is taught in foreign context.

Conclusion

This paper has generally discussed the effect of age in learning second languages, in particular, learning English in foreign pedagogical context.

Many related issues have been raised throughout this paper such as the influence of Lenneberg's hypothesis of CP in early and recent studies. Generally, this paper argues that "the younger the better" is reasonable belief in naturalistic/study abroad contexts since children learn L2 implicitly in a naturalistic context with sufficient amounts of exposure to L2. However, it argues for the effectiveness of "the older the better" view in foreign context. Several favorable circumstances are considered essential and beneficial for foreign language learning as in Libya when the aim of education language policy is a linguistics competence. Among the discussed factors, qualified teachers appear to be essential factors for better students achievements in primary schools. Therefore, this paper suggests that engaging teachers in several training programmes based on their degrees can lead to positive outcomes in teaching English. More importantly, these programmes should run by well-known organizations in teaching English as foreign languages to ensure effective and valuable results. For further research, this paper suggests that the discussed favorable circumstances should be explored more in real specific Libyan context for highlighting the most influential circumstances and their challenges in order to be taken into consideration by the government.

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