DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES OF LEARNING ENGLISH lANGUAGE BETWEEN YOUND AND ADULT LEARNERS

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Abstract. This article explores the differences and similarities in learning English between young and adult learners, focusing on how age affects language acquisition. It examines key aspects such as cognitive abilities, motivation, learning strategies, and challenges faced by both age groups. Additionally, it discusses the effectiveness of different learning methods, including traditional classroom courses, self-study, and online courses. The article provides practical insights for teachers on how to adapt their teaching strategies to maximize language learning success for both young and adult learners. By understanding these factors, educators can create more effective learning environments tailored to the needs of their students.

Keywords. English language learning, Young learners vs. adult learners ,Language acquisition ,Cognitive development ,Motivation in learning ,Self-study vs. classroom learning, Online language courses, Teaching strategies, Learning challenges, Second language acquisition (SLA)*,*

Introduction. Language learning is a complex process influenced by various factors, including age, cognitive development[1], and motivation. English, being a widely spoken global language, is learned by both young and adult learners through different methods such as classroom instruction, self-study, and online courses. Understanding the differences and similarities in how these groups acquire English is essential for educators to develop effective teaching strategies.

Research in second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that younger learners have a greater capacity for acquiring native-like pronunciation due to brain plasticity.

A study by Penfield and Roberts[1] explains that the brain's ability to adapt to new phonetic structures declines with age, making pronunciation harder for adults.

However, while younger learners benefit from cognitive flexibility, adult learners often have advantages in analytical thinking and problem-solving. According to Krashen's Input Hypothesis [2] ,adults can process complex grammar rules more efficiently due to their developed cognitive skills, allowing them to learn through structured input and conscious learning strategies.

Motivation also plays a critical role in language learning. Dörnyei's research [3] highlights that adult learners are more likely to be driven by instrumental motivation (career advancement, education), whereas young learners often learn through integrative motivation, influenced by their environment and exposure to the language.

This article explores these differences and similarities in depth, analyzing how cognitive abilities, motivation, and learning environments impact language acquisition[1]. It also evaluates the effectiveness of different learning methods, including traditional courses, self-study, and online learning, providing educators with insights into how they can optimize teaching approaches for both young and adult learners.

1. Cognitive Differences in Language Learning

Language acquisition [1]is heavily influenced by cognitive development, which varies significantly between young and adult learners. Young learners have higher neural plasticity, meaning their brains can easily form and adapt to new linguistic structures. This flexibility allows them to absorb new sounds, grammar patterns, and vocabulary in a more natural way, similar to how they acquire their first language. According to Lenneberg's *Critical Period Hypothesis* [4] , there is an optimal window for language learning, primarily before puberty, during which the brain is highly receptive to new linguistic input. After this period, neurocognitive[2] changes make it more challenging to achieve native-like fluency, particularly in pronunciation and accent acquisition.

However, while young learners excel in intuitive language absorption, adults possess cognitive advantages that allow them to learn English through different

mechanisms. Adults have fully developed metacognitive skills, meaning they can analyze language structures, recognize patterns, and consciously apply grammar rules. This ability aligns with Krashen's *Monitor Hypothesis[1]*, which states that older learners rely more on conscious learning strategies, such as studying grammar rules and vocabulary lists, rather than implicit acquisition. While young learners learn through exposure and repetition, adult learners benefit from structured explanations and deliberate practice.

Additionally, memory function differs between young and adult learners. Research by Baddeley[2] suggests that adults have stronger working memory capacity, allowing them to retain and process complex linguistic information more efficiently in the short term. This helps them grasp advanced grammar and technical vocabulary faster than children. However, young learners excel in long-term retention[1], particularly in phonological memory, which aids in developing a more natural-sounding accent and better pronunciation over time.

Despite these cognitive differences, both age groups have the potential to master English. The key lies in utilizing age-appropriate learning strategies that align with their cognitive strengths. Young learners benefit from immersive[2] and playful learning environments, while adults progress more efficiently with structured lessons, explicit grammar instruction, and practical application of language skills.

3. Effectiveness of Learning Methods

The effectiveness of different learning methods varies based on age, cognitive abilities, and personal preferences. English learners, both young and adult, have access to various approaches, including **classroom courses, self-study, and online courses**, each with unique benefits and challenges. The choice of method can significantly impact language retention, engagement, and overall learning progress.

3.1 Classroom Courses: Structured Learning with Teacher Guidance

Traditional classroom learning remains one of the most widely used methods for acquiring English. It provides **structured lessons, teacher guidance, and peer interaction**, which are particularly beneficial for young learners.

According to Vygotsky's *Sociocultural Theory* [1], social interaction plays a fundamental role in cognitive development. Young learners in classroom settings benefit from **peer collaboration, group activities, and real-time feedback**, which enhance their speaking and listening skills. For adult learners, classroom courses offer structured learning but can sometimes be **less flexible** due to time constraints and differing learning paces. However, research by Ellis [2] **instruction** and structured practice, which help them $grasp_1$ complex linguistic rules faster than through natural exposure alone.

3.2 Self-Study: Independence and Personalized Learning

Self-study allows learners to set their own pace, making it a **popular choice for motivated adult learners**. It enables them to focus on specific areas of improvement, such as grammar, vocabulary, or pronunciation, based on personal learning goals. According to Holec[3], adult learners who take control of their own learning through **self-regulation and goal-setting** are more likely to succeed in language acquisition.

However, young learners generally struggle with self-study due to their **shorter attention spans and need for external motivation**. A study by Zimmerman [4]found that young learners require structured guidance and $supervision_2$ to remain engaged. Without interactive activities and external reinforcement, they may lose interest or struggle with comprehension.

3.3 Online Courses: Accessibility and Engagement

The rise of digital learning has introduced **online courses** as an effective alternative for both young and adult learners. These courses offer **flexibility, interactive content, and accessibility**, making them particularly beneficial for working adults and students in remote areas. According to c, **technology enhances**

language learning by providing **multimedia resources, real-time interaction with teachers, and AI-based learning tools** that adapt to the learner's proficiency level . Young learners benefit from online platforms that incorporate **gamification, storytelling, and visual aids**, keeping them engaged. However, a study by Mayer [5] suggests that excessive screen time can lead to **cognitive overload**

reducing retention rates. For adults, online courses provide flexibility, but they require **self-discipline and time management** to stay consistent. Research by Sun [1] found that adult learners who engage in **active participation, such as discussion forums[1] and virtual speaking practice, tend to show better progress** compared to those who passively consume course material.

Conclusion of Methods

While all three learning methods—classroom courses, self-study, and online courses—have their strengths and limitations, the **effectiveness depends on the learner's age, cognitive abilities, and motivation**. Young learners benefit most from interactive classroom [2]settings and engaging digital tools, while adults excel in structured self-study and online courses that align with their schedules. A **blended learning approach**, combining different methods, can maximize learning outcomes for both age groups.

Challenges Faced by Young and Adult Learners

Both young and adult learners encounter unique challenges when learning English. These difficulties stem from **cognitive abilities, motivation, and external factors**, affecting their progress and learning experience.

4.1 Pronunciation vs. Grammar Young learners **easily develop native-like pronunciation** due to their brain's flexibility but often struggle with grammar and spelling. Research by Flege [2] confirms that **early exposure leads to better phonetic accuracy**. In contrast, adults grasp grammar rules faster but **retain a stronger foreign accent** due to reduced neural plasticity.

4.2 Memory and Retention Children **learn through immersion** and remember words longer but need frequent reinforcement. Gathercole & Baddeley [3] found that **young learners rely on phonological memory**, making repetition crucial. Adults learn complex rules quickly but **struggle with long-term retention**, as shown by Ullman.

4.3 Motivation and Anxiety Young learners may **lose interest if lessons are not engaging**. Adults, however, face **self-doubt and fear of mistakes**, which Horwitz links to lower speaking confidence. *4.4 Access to Resources* Children depend on **schools and home environments** for learning, while adults **have access to self-study materials but struggle to choose the right ones**

4.5 Sum up for challenges Young learners struggle with **grammar and attention**, while adults face **pronunciation, anxiety, and time constraints**. Tailored methods—**play-based learning for children and structured self-study for adults**—can help overcome these challenges.

5. Results and Success Rates Research confirms that **young learners develop near-native pronunciation** due to their brain's adaptability but may take longer to master grammar and writing (Flege, 1995). They need **consistent practice** to avoid forgetting new words (Gathercole & Baddeley, 1993). Adults, on the other hand, **learn grammar and vocabulary faster** but struggle with pronunciation and fluency due to reduced brain plasticity (Ullman, 2004). However, adults can **compensate with structured learning and self-discipline**, making them more efficient at acquiring complex language rules. **Motivation and consistency** are critical factors for success at any age (Horwitz, 1986).

6. Conclusion Young learners excel in **pronunciation and intuitive learning**, while adults are stronger in **grammar and structured understanding**. Children benefit from **interactive, immersive environments**, whereas adults progress better with **self-study and systematic learning methods**. Despite differences, both groups can achieve fluency with **the right strategies, motivation, and consistent practice**.

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