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Original article

# Exploring Age-Related Factors in Foreign Language Acquisition: Views from Language Specialists

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**Abstract**

The aim of this study is to examine the views of language specialist academics on age in foreign language acquisition and proficiency. The relationship between age and foreign language learning has long been a topic of interest in educational psychology and linguistics. The study examines expert views on the role of age-related factors, such as cognitive and neurological development, neuroplasticity, and socio-cultural influences, in shaping language learning outcomes at different stages of life. The research methodology involved conducting semi-structured interviews with language specialists, followed by content analysis to identify key themes. The participants included language instructors and linguists, providing a diverse range of perspectives on the topic. Additionally, the study explores the implications of these age-related differences for educational policy and practice, particularly in terms of age-appropriate instructional strategies and fostering supportive learning environments. By shedding light on both the advantages and challenges of acquiring a foreign language at various life stages, this study offers a deeper understanding of the complex interplay between age and language learning in the context of participants' views.

**Keywords:** Age and language acquisition, Neuroplasticity, Language proficiency.

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## INTRODUCTION

Behaviorists, among philosophers and psychologists assert that language is a social phenomenon and, similar to other social behaviors, is learned through acquisition. Certain adolescents or adults who embark upon the acquisition of a second language may encounter difficulties in attaining fluency, whereas children who were exposed to a second language during their formative years appear to exhibit a level of proficiency akin to that of a native speaker. (cf. Lenneberg 1967). Coppieters (1987), Scovel (1988), Johnson and Newport (1989) maintained the perspective that the sooner children acquire a second language, the more effortless it appears to be. Acquiring language proficiency prior to the age of ten helps children speak with accuracy and fluency comparable to that of a native speaker. The optimal period to acquaint a young child with new languages is during their tenth year of age. We can understand how it is better to learn a language in a young age from another research indicating that both first and second language acquisition have a critical period, during which children possess a significant advantage over adults and adolescents. The term critical period' is commonly used to describe the gradual decline in proficiency that occurs with advancing age and prolonged exposure, showing us how proficiency becomes weaker with age (Penfield & Roberts 1959).

Lenneberg (1967) used the term ‘lateralization’ to denote the phenomenon wherein puberty corresponds to a phase during which the localization of language-processing proficiency in the left hemisphere of the human brain becomes linked to the biological changes and development occurring in humans. We can understand that Lenneberg thinks there is a biological reason why it’s better to learn foreign language pre-puberty, but, Snow (2002) asserts that the dissimilarities in language acquisition between adults and children can be attributed solely to non-biological elements. The acknowledgment of the presence and significance of extra-linguistic factors is unanimous, although diverse theoretical perspectives diverge on the extent of biology's involvement.

Martohardjono and Flynn (2021) posit that the determination of L2A is contingent upon social psychological and experiential factors, which may exhibit significant variations. Language learning is influenced by age, particularly in accordance with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). In year 1959, Noam Chomsky's critique (Chomsky, 1959) of B.F. Skinner's (1957), Chomsky contended that the ability to generate new utterances using internalized rules, which involves creativity, cannot be adequately explained by stimulus-response psychology. The presence of creativity in language behavior suggests that the human mind engages in profound processing of meaning rather than relying on memorized responses to external stimuli. Chomsky's concepts ultimately resulted in the decline of structural linguistics, behaviorist psychology, and the ALM approach to language acquisition. Additionally, age is closely linked to cognitive, social-psychological, and various other factors that undoubtedly impact the acquisition of a second language by learners. Overall, the acquisition of a second language is influenced by non-linguistic factors that fluctuate depending on age. (cf. Singleton and Ryan

2004). Krashen mentioned that the process of human brain lateralization could reach completion by the age of five (1973, p. 65). However; Lamendella (1977) coined the phrase 'sensitive period' to describe the concept of 'lateralization', suggesting that the ability to acquire language proficiency may persist beyond the age of 5. Correspondingly, Ekstrand (1976) said that the ability to learn L2 language improves as one ages. But still, Snow and Hoefnagel-Hohle (1978) are in the same opinion that the majority of children tend to be more successful than adults in second language acquisition (SLA) in the long term, although not necessarily faster.

Older learners make use of their first language learning strategies to acquire grammar skills and attain superior performance compared to their younger counterparts. Taking this into consideration, children are deemed superior to adults solely in certain aspects of second language acquisition (Herschensohn, 2007). It can be inferred that young learners do not possess a significant advantage; however, they are capable of attaining exceptional language proficiency in the final stages of acquiring a second language. There are many ups and downs in acquisition of a language both in young learners and adults. In certain aspects, such as possessing a native accent, children may outperform adults, but adults tend to be quicker language learners overall. Children effortlessly acquire the language through sheer exposure, achieving complete mastery without any conscious exertion. In contrast, adults face difficulties in fully grasping a second language reasoning incomplete instruction, enforced motivation and negative evidence (cf. Lenneberg, 1967). It is not readily apparent whether children in L2 acquisition perform as well as adults, as the latter's L2 acquisition cannot be definitively confirmed due to the conscious effort required, which goes beyond mere exposure and the results of an incomplete final state (Herschensohn, 2000).

There are many significant benefits associated with acquiring proficiency in a foreign language. One of them is the increased access to improved employment prospects. Additionally, individuals who possess this skill gain a deeper understanding of their own culture as well as other nations. Moreover, the advantages of being multilingual in today's society extend to enhancing economic competitiveness on an international scale, facilitating global communications, and effectively managing a country's political and security interests. Furthermore, the exposure of a child to the customs and traditions of diverse nations enhances their perspectives and inclinations, enabling them to engage in meaningful interactions with individuals from different backgrounds. This exposure not only enhances their communication skills but also fosters their cognitive growth, enriches their cultural consciousness, and ultimately opens doors to enhanced career prospects for individuals proficient in a foreign language (Ferreira, F., & Morrison, F. J. 1994).

Exposing a child to a foreign language at an early age enables the child to maximize their learning capacity, contributing to the development of their brain during its most adaptable phase. Learning a foreign language during childhood is cognitively equivalent to learning a native language, owing to the

fact that the cognitive ease of learning a foreign language decreases as one grows older. As a child enters puberty, the process of language acquisition and retention undergoes a transformation, resulting in reduced adaptability. Children possess several significant advantages over adults when it comes to language acquisition. They have the luxury of dedicating a substantial amount of their time to this endeavor, and their motivation is remarkably strong. If adults were to find themselves in a comparable circumstance, it is plausible that they would acquire languages with the same ease as children (Ghasemi & Hashemi, 2011).

Teaching materials hold significant importance in the process of language teaching and learning. The primary aim is to stimulate the curiosity of young learners towards acquiring a second language. In recent years, the Chinese approach to teaching foreign languages, previously referred to as traditional English language teaching, has centered on the teacher and placed greater emphasis on teaching grammar within sentence structures. This is largely due to the importance placed on passing school and college entrance exams. There is a reduced focus on oral speaking within the examinations, as it is given less importance. This concludes to young learners often feel disinterested and unengaged when it comes to learning a foreign language. New teaching materials place a greater emphasis on young learners' language ability, aiming to immerse them in foreign language learning with enjoyment and interest. The crucial objective for foreign language teachers is to stimulate young learners' interest and enthusiasm for learning a foreign language (Hu, 2016).

In summary, the concept of second language acquisition (SLA) encompasses the process of acquiring a foreign language and explores the ability of individuals to learn languages other than their first language after its acquisition. Additional ways to foster intercultural competence and language learning are indicated by the latest advancements in foreign language teaching, including public pedagogy, social media, and action research. New insights into successful language learning strategies have been provided by inquiries into learning and teaching innovations. L2 acquisition enables learners to effectively and creatively communicate and engage in authentic cultural situations using the language (Singleton & Ryan, 2004). Additionally, it fosters an interdisciplinary approach and enhances intercultural awareness. Language experts make a clear distinction between the concepts of acquisition and learning. The term 'acquisition' pertains to the natural process of acquiring first and second languages without any formal instruction, while 'learning' is exclusively used for the formal study of foreign or second languages in a classroom environment (Herschensohn, 2007).

This study is expected to contribute to the field by examining expert opinions in the field to reveal the effect of language learning through age. In the context of language specialists' views, it explores the implications of the age-related differences for educational policy and practice in terms of age-appropriate instructional strategies and fostering supportive learning environments.

## MATERIALS and METHODS

The study focuses on the research model, study group, data collection tools and data analysis. It adopts a case study methodology to explore the influence of age on foreign language acquisition, focusing on the views of language specialist academics. The case study research is a qualitative approach that allows for an in-depth exploration of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Yin, 2018). In case study research, the researcher investigates a particular case or set of cases, which can provide rich insights into the complex dynamics of the subject matter (Stake, 1995). This methodology is particularly suitable for exploring the nuanced experiences and perspectives of experts on a specific topic, in this case, the effect of age on foreign language learning.

### Study Group

The current study group consists of 5 participants on foreign languages. They work in universities as academician in the 2024-2025 Academic - Year and who volunteered to participate in the study. Table 1 provides the demographic characteristics of the people who participated in the study.

**Table 1.** Demographic features of the participants

| Participants | Gender | Title | Type of School | Education Level | Professional Experience |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A1 | Female | Associate Prof. | University | PhD | 10 |
| A2 | Male | Associate Prof. | University | PhD | 10 |
| A3 | Female | Dr. | University | PhD | 8 |
| A4 | Male | Dr. | University | PhD | 7 |
| A5 | Male | Dr. | University | PhD | 6 |

As seen in Table 1, two participants are female, and three are male. All of the participants have finished PhD and they are academicians. Two participants have an associate professor degree, while three have a Dr. degree. Two of the participants have 10 years of professional experience. Three of them have 8-6 years of professional experiences.

### Data Collection Tools

In the study examining the views of language learning on age, semi-structured interview technique, one of the qualitative data collection methods, was used. Interview is defined as an interactive communication process between the researcher and the participants based on asking and answering questions for a predetermined purpose, as a data collection technique verbally (Karasar, 2004; Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Interviews can be conducted face to face, by phone or with other technological tools. With the interview technique, people's experiences, attitudes, perceptions, comments on a subject are tried to be understood for a certain purpose (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). Semi-structured interview technique is more flexible than the interview technique. Instead of tests and surveys based on writing

and filling in that restrict the participant's views, it also consists of open-ended questions that allow the participant to express their views openly, thus adding depth to the research and guiding the researcher if necessary (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). This research consists of open-ended questions prepared to examine the views of experts on language learning since it allows the participants to express their views verbally without any restrictions, a semi-structured interview technique was used. In the research, a semi-structured interview form prepared by the researcher was used to examine the views of experts working at the universities. The form used in the interview consists demographic information of the participants, and includes the participants' views on Web 2.0 tools and consisting of 5 open-ended questions. The questions are as follows:

- What is the effect of learning a foreign language at an early age on neurological and cognitive development?
- In the context of the importance of brain plasticity, how do children's language learning abilities differ from those of adults?
- How does learning a foreign language at an early age affect the development of language skills at later ages?
- In cultural terms, how does learning a foreign language at an early age shape children's sense of global citizenship?
- What are the long-term effects of learning a foreign language at an early age on professional and academic success? The questions are stated as such.

**Data Collection**

The interviews were conducted face-to-face and the consent forms were obtained from the participants before interviews. The data obtained in the study were collected in an environment where the participants could express themselves comfortably and where voice recording was made. The semi-structured interview questions were directed to all participants with the same words and intonations that evoked the same meaning. Due to time constraints, note-taking and voice recorder techniques were used together in the interviews with experts. The interviews lasted between 4-9 minutes. The names of the experts were not used, so during the reporting process of the research, the experts were described with codes such as A1, A2, A3, A4, A5.

**Data Analysis**

The data collected from the semi-structured interview form were accurately transcribed using a word processing program without any alterations, ensuring the authenticity of participants' responses. A content analysis approach was adopted to analyze the data. This method involves systematically summarizing participants' opinions, categorizing them, and generating codes to facilitate comparison

and interpretation (Yıldırım & Şimşek, 2008). To ensure that the content was captured accurately, the researcher repeatedly listened to the audio recordings, transcribed them verbatim, and carefully read the transcriptions multiple times to identify main themes. Codes were created by interpreting the content within these themes.

The interview protocol was initially designed to elicit comprehensive insights from the participants. A pool of potential questions was developed, which were subsequently evaluated by three field experts. Based on their feedback, certain questions that were deemed redundant or unclear were removed to improve the clarity and focus of the protocol. A pilot study was conducted with two additional experts in the field to further refine the instrument. Following the pilot study, several questions were revised to enhance clarity, eliminate ambiguity, and ensure they were aligned with the study's objectives. This process of expert review and piloting helped to increase the content validity by ensuring that the questions were clear, relevant, and comprehensively covered the research topic.

Furthermore, using direct quotations from participants during the content analysis stage contributed to the study's reliability by providing a transparent and evidence-based representation of the data. Repeated listening, transcription, and thematic analysis helped to maintain a high level of reliability by minimizing the risk of researcher bias and ensuring consistency in interpreting the participants' responses.

## FINDINGS

In this section, the answers given by the participants to the questions in the interview form of language specialists were analyzed, and the findings obtained from the analysis are presented through five themes and codes.

### Cognitive and Neurological Development

The interviews revealed a strong consensus on the positive impact of early foreign language learning on cognitive and neurological development. Participants highlighted several benefits:

***Memory and Attention:*** Early language learners exhibited enhanced memory capabilities and improved attention spans. A1 stated that "learning a second language generally contributes greatly to the child's cognitive development," reinforcing the idea that bilingualism fosters cognitive flexibility. Similarly, A3 mentioned that learning a language at an early age "helps people strengthen their memory," indicating a direct link between language acquisition and cognitive enhancement.

***Problem-Solving Skills:*** Learning a foreign language was associated with fostering creative and critical thinking skills. A5 noted that language learning "supports creative and critical thinking skills, which are the steps of problem solving." A4 also mentioned that "bilingualism can increase children's

capacity to process multiple pieces of information simultaneously," further emphasizing the cognitive advantages.

***Neuroplasticity:*** The ability of children's brains to form new neuronal connections was underscored, particularly during the critical period for language acquisition. A2 emphasized that "learning a foreign language during this critical period contributes to the development of cognitive functions by helping to form new neuronal connections." A4 highlighted the significance of brain plasticity, noting that "children's brains have the ability to establish and change synaptic connections more quickly," making language learning more accessible for them compared to adults.

***Critical Period Advantage:*** Participants unanimously acknowledged that children benefit from a "critical period" in language learning. A2 articulated that "infancy and early childhood is a time when brain cells and the connections between them are extremely flexible," underscoring the timing's importance in language acquisition. A1 also remarked that this period allows for "the rapid development of skills such as learning a second language," making it evident that early exposure is crucial.

***Effort Disparity:*** Adults face more challenges in language learning due to established neural pathways. A5 noted that "children are in a more advantageous position than adults in terms of learning and assimilating a new language," while A2 emphasized that adults "require more effort and time for language acquisition because their brain plasticity is less than that of children." This disparity was a recurring theme among participants, highlighting the importance of early language exposure.

***Language Naturalization:*** The naturalization of language skills was also emphasized, with A3 stating that "learning a foreign language in childhood, especially when it is learned among people who use that language, also learns the culture," indicating that early exposure leads to deeper assimilation of both language and culture. A1 added that "learning a new language enables a person to receive postgraduate education and take advantage of education and internship opportunities abroad," illustrating the long-term benefits of early language acquisition.

**Brain Plasticity and Age-Based Learning Differences**

The concept of brain plasticity emerged as a critical theme in understanding the differences in language acquisition between children and adults. Participants shared insights regarding the effects of brain plasticity on language learning:

***Critical Period Advantage:*** Participants unanimously acknowledged that children benefit from a "critical period" in language learning. A2 noted that "the human brain structure is more open to new languages, especially in the so-called 'critical period' at an early age," emphasizing the neurological advantages that children possess. A4 further elaborated, stating that "children's brains have the ability to establish and change synaptic connections more quickly," making it evident that early exposure to foreign languages capitalizes on this natural developmental window.

***Ease of Language Acquisition:*** The interviews highlighted that children learn languages more easily and naturally than adults. A1 commented on the ease of establishing "mathematical basic connections in the brain," which supports language learning, while A3 noted that "people who learn a foreign language at an early age can learn different languages more easily and comfortably later on." This perspective reinforces the idea that early exposure lays a foundation for future language learning.

***Effort Disparity:*** Adults face more challenges in language learning due to established neural pathways that make it harder to assimilate new languages. A5 articulated that "adults may have difficulty learning a second language because a system has already been established in their brains," indicating that the cognitive framework developed through their native language complicates the acquisition of new languages. A2 supported this by stating that "learning a new language requires more effort and time for adults because their brain plasticity is less than that of children," highlighting the additional cognitive load that adult learners experience.

***Language Naturalization:*** Participants noted that children have an advantage in naturalizing language skills. A4 mentioned that "children have stronger accent and correct pronunciation skills when learning a language," which leads to a more natural and effective learning process. A1 reiterated this point by saying that teaching a child a second language at an early age "creates the opportunity for the child to learn new languages when he becomes an adult," indicating that early exposure facilitates a lifelong ability to learn languages.

***Exposure and Repetition Opportunities:*** The interviews emphasized the significance of exposure and practice in language learning. A4 pointed out that "children have more exposure and repetition opportunities during the language learning process," allowing them to internalize new language structures naturally. A2 echoed this sentiment by stating that "when children are exposed to languages intensively during this period, they can acquire the ability to acquire both their native language and other languages very quickly and naturally."

**Future Language Proficiency and Skill Retention**

Participants noted that early foreign language learning significantly impacts long-term language proficiency and skill retention. The following insights were highlighted:

***Ease of Learning Additional Languages:*** Participants observed that individuals who learn a foreign language at an early age tend to find it easier to acquire additional languages later in life. A3 stated, “I think that people who learn a foreign language at an early age can learn different languages more easily and comfortably later on.” This sentiment was echoed by A5, who mentioned that early exposure "contributes to increasing proficiency in both the native language and the learned language," indicating that the foundational skills developed through early language learning enhance the capacity for future language acquisition.

***Language Fluency and Retention:*** The interviews revealed that languages learned during childhood tend to become more automatic and easier to use later in life. A4 highlighted that "language learned during childhood ensures that the language becomes automatic by establishing more permanent and strong connections in the brain." A1 added that "learning a foreign language at an early age affects the development of language skills at later ages," indicating that early language experiences facilitate long-term retention and fluency.

***Long-Term Cognitive Benefits:*** Participants noted that early language learning has lasting cognitive benefits that extend beyond language itself. A3 shared that "different language-related learning facilitates other learning, either directly or indirectly," suggesting that the cognitive skills developed through early language acquisition can support academic achievement in other subjects. A2 reinforced this by stating that early foreign language learning "will help individuals use the language more effectively and understand new languages easily in the future."

***Neural Connections and Language Automaticity:*** The participants underscored the importance of neural connections formed during childhood. A4 explained that "individuals who learn a foreign language at an early age tend to take their language skills to more advanced levels in later ages," emphasizing the role of early exposure in establishing strong neural pathways for language use. A1 mentioned that "learning a new language enables a person to receive postgraduate education," indicating that early language skills contribute to future academic opportunities.

***Cultural and Contextual Understanding:*** The context in which a language is learned also plays a role in proficiency and retention. A3 noted that "learning a foreign language from people who use it as their native language will provide both language and culture learning," suggesting that immersive experiences enhance language retention. A5 added that exposure to different cultures through language learning fosters a deeper understanding, which can facilitate ongoing engagement with the language throughout life.

**Cultural Understanding and Global Citizenship**

The impact of early foreign language learning on cultural understanding and the development of global citizenship was a significant theme in the interviews. Participants emphasized the following points:

***Cultural Awareness and Empathy:*** Many participants noted that learning a foreign language at an early age fosters a deeper understanding of cultural diversity. A4 stated, "Learning a foreign language at an early age enables children to be more open to different cultures and perspectives." This openness can lead to greater empathy, as A5 emphasized the ability to "meet different cultures and traditions," which helps individuals to "think versatile and empathize with people from different cultures in later ages."

Interconnectedness of Language and Culture: Participants frequently mentioned the inseparable connection between language and culture. A1 noted that "language and culture are inseparable," suggesting that learning a language provides insights into the cultural norms and values of its speakers. A3 echoed this sentiment, indicating that "languages are shaped according to culture," highlighting how language instruction should include cultural context for deeper understanding.

***Global Citizenship Development:*** The theme of global citizenship was prevalent in the discussions, with participants agreeing that language learning enhances a child's sense of belonging in a global community. A2 remarked that "learning a foreign language will undoubtedly positively affect children's global citizenship," as it equips them with the skills to engage with diverse communities. A5 elaborated that language learning "supports the individual to look at phenomena such as global equality and justice from a broader perspective," illustrating how language fosters awareness of global issues.

***Facilitating Intercultural Communication:*** Learning foreign languages was also seen as a way to facilitate communication across cultures. A4 pointed out that "learning a language supports the individual to communicate with people whose native language is different," which is essential in today's globalized world. A2 mentioned the importance of "familiarizing children with the language structures and expressions of different cultures," suggesting that early language education should include cultural elements to enhance intercultural communication skills.

***Long-term Benefits of Cultural Exposure:*** Participants highlighted the lasting effects of cultural exposure gained through early language learning. A1 stated that "understanding the social and cultural structures of communities where different languages are spoken" inspires individuals to plan their future with a global perspective. A4 reinforced this by suggesting that exposure to different cultures during language learning "gives the opportunity to look at his own culture from the outside," promoting a more nuanced view of one's own cultural identity.

**Professional and Academic Success**

The participants highlighted the significant impact of early foreign language learning on long-term professional and academic outcomes. The key insights include:

***Enhanced Academic Opportunities:*** Participants consistently emphasized that early foreign language learning opens doors to various academic opportunities. A1 stated that "learning a new language enables a person to receive postgraduate education and take advantage of education and internship opportunities abroad," showcasing the advantages that language skills provide in higher education contexts. A5 also noted that early language proficiency "helps individuals improve themselves personally," suggesting that language skills contribute to overall academic development.

***Competitive Edge in the Job Market:*** The interviews underscored the professional advantages associated with bilingualism. A4 pointed out that "language skills provide a competitive advantage in

the job market," indicating that proficiency in multiple languages can enhance employability. A5 added that "being proficient in more than one language can open the door to many career opportunities," highlighting how language skills can facilitate access to diverse professional pathways.

***Increased Research Capacity:*** Participants observed that early language learning supports critical skills such as research and analytical thinking. A3 noted that "learning a foreign language has long-term effects on both professional and academic success," suggesting that language skills enable individuals to engage more effectively with academic literature. This capacity to conduct research in multiple languages can significantly enhance one's professional expertise and academic contributions.

***Self-Confidence and Personal Growth:*** The participants also recognized that learning foreign languages fosters self-confidence, which is crucial for academic and professional success. A5 mentioned that "it enables people to become self-confident individuals," suggesting that the ability to communicate in another language enhances overall self-esteem. A1 emphasized that knowing a foreign language "helps a person improve himself in the field of education," indicating a link between language proficiency and personal development.

***Cultural Competence in Professional Settings:*** Finally, participants acknowledged that language skills contribute to cultural competence, which is increasingly valued in globalized workplaces. A4 stated that "multilingual individuals can gain more opportunities in the global business world," underscoring the importance of understanding cultural nuances in professional interactions. A2 echoed this sentiment, noting that "early learning of a foreign language positively affects academic and professional success in the long term," emphasizing the connection between language, culture, and successful professional engagement.

## DISCUSSION

The study's findings underscore the multifaceted benefits of early foreign language acquisition, particularly regarding cognitive development, brain plasticity, cultural understanding, and long-term professional success. These themes are supported by both Turkish and international literature, highlighting the alignment of the study's results with existing research.

### Cognitive and Neurological Development

The interviews pointed to cognitive advantages associated with early language learning, such as improved memory, attention, and problem-solving skills. This aligns with studies by Genç (2018) in Turkish contexts, which emphasize that early bilingualism enhances cognitive flexibility and executive function. International research, such as that by Bialystok (2017), supports these findings by showing that children who learn a second language early demonstrate superior cognitive control. The evidence from both Turkish and foreign sources indicates that early language exposure positively affects neurological development, confirming the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Children's heightened

neuroplasticity during early years, as A2 and A4 highlighted, facilitates the formation of robust neural networks, a finding echoed by Kaya (2020), who noted similar cognitive benefits among young bilinguals in Turkey.

**Brain Plasticity and Age-Based Learning Differences**

The participants stressed the critical differences in language acquisition between children and adults. Children's capacity to learn languages with less effort and greater ease than adults aligns with Yıldırım's (2019) research, which shows that early learners benefit from natural language acquisition processes, leading to better pronunciation and fluency. This view is further validated by Newport (2021), whose study supports the notion that younger learners excel in attaining native-like linguistic skills due to their brain's flexibility. In both Turkish and international studies, this disparity is attributed to the decline in brain plasticity with age, suggesting that younger learners have a unique advantage, as articulated by both A5 and scholars like Singleton and Ryan (2004).

**Future Language Proficiency and Skill Retention**

Participants noted that early language learning facilitates future language acquisition and retention, which supports findings in Turkish research by Demir and Aydın (2022). Their study revealed that individuals who learn a foreign language early maintain a higher level of proficiency and fluency in the long term. This is consistent with international studies, such as that by DeKeyser (2023), which emphasize that early exposure leads to automaticity in language skills and a higher likelihood of multilingualism. Both Turkish and global literature highlight the lasting cognitive and linguistic advantages conferred by early bilingualism, underscoring the findings that early language learning enhances not only immediate proficiency but also lifelong language retention.

**Cultural Understanding and Global Citizenship**

The study found that early foreign language learning promotes cultural awareness and global citizenship, a theme well-supported by the work of Öztürk and Yılmaz (2021) in Turkish contexts. Their research shows that early bilingualism fosters intercultural sensitivity and empathy, which aligns with international findings by Fantini (2020). Participants A4 and A5 emphasized the role of language in understanding diverse cultural perspectives, echoing the argument that language and culture are deeply intertwined. This consensus is backed by Turkish and foreign sources alike, highlighting the importance of early multilingual education in preparing children for global engagement. The development of cultural competence, as mentioned by participants, is a key factor in shaping children into informed global citizens.

### Professional and Academic Success

The long-term benefits of early language acquisition for academic and professional achievements were emphasized by the participants. This is in line with Turkish studies like that of Çelik and Karaca (2023), who found that early bilinguals often excel in their academic pursuits and exhibit greater self-confidence in professional settings. Similarly, international literature by Hakuta (2019) indicates that early exposure to foreign languages provides a competitive edge in the job market, enhances research skills, and fosters personal growth. These findings suggest that integrating foreign language education in early childhood is crucial for equipping children with skills for a globalized workforce, supporting both local and international perspectives.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the study illustrates that learning a foreign language at an early age significantly enhances cognitive and neurological development, leverages the brain's plasticity, and establishes a foundation for future language proficiency. The differences between children and adults in language acquisition processes highlight the critical role of age and developmental stage in effective learning. Additionally, early exposure to foreign languages cultivates cultural understanding and fosters essential skills for professional and academic success.

These findings affirm the critical importance of early language education as a means of enriching children's cognitive development and preparing them for future challenges in a multicultural and multilingual world.

## Suggestions

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made:

1. Integrate Language Learning Early: Educational policymakers should prioritize foreign language programs in early childhood education settings to harness the cognitive advantages observed in young learners.
2. Focus on Immersive Learning: Language instruction should emphasize immersive, context-based approaches that promote natural acquisition over formal rote learning. Engaging children in activities that involve cultural experiences can enhance their understanding and appreciation of the language.
3. Support Teacher Training: Professional development programs for educators should include training on the importance of language acquisition theories and effective teaching strategies that leverage children's natural learning capabilities.

4. Incorporate Technology: Utilize modern technological tools, such as apps and interactive platforms, to provide children with diverse language exposure and practice opportunities outside the traditional classroom setting.

5. Promote Family Engagement: Encourage families to support language learning at home through exposure to multilingual resources, conversations, and cultural activities that reinforce the benefits of bilingualism and multilingualism.

By implementing these suggestions, stakeholders can better support children in their language learning journeys and prepare them for a future where language skills are increasingly vital.

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