



HÁSKÓLI ÍSLANDS

Hugvísindasvið

Second Language Acquisition

The Effect of Age and Motivation

Ritgerð til BA prófs

Einar Garibaldi Stefánsson

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Enska

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Abstract

This paper looks into the competence of second language acquisition by investigating how second language is acquired. Furthermore it explores the age factor in learning another language other than mother tongue and also attempts to answer if there is enough current evidence that can demonstrate clearly that starting young makes any real difference in achieving better language competence. Moreover, research such as on motivation in relation to the learning environment along with language exposure and attitudes will be discussed and data analysed to find out if it plays any significant role in aiding learners to achieve successful second language competence. It has been a common belief that starting young to learn a second language makes a significant difference in language learning. However, results indicate that this is not entirely true in all cases since there are further factors that affect successful second language acquisition achievement such as language exposure and motivation. Consequently, if there is not enough language exposure, this might prevent the learners from succeeding in learning the language. Clearly, those factors, motivation and exposure, seem to play a more important role in the learning process than the age factor and therefore it is extremely important to implement motivation and provide sufficient language exposure to the learner right from the start of the learning journey regardless of how old the learner is.

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1.0 Introduction

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) refers to the study of how students learn a second language (L2) additionally to their first language (L1). Although it is referred as Second Language Acquisition, it is the process of learning any language after the first language whether it is the second, third or fourth language. Therefore, any other language apart from the first language is called a second language (SL) or also referred to as a target language (TL). To distinguish between *Second Language* and *Foreign Language*, The Collins Dictionary defines *Second Language* as the language that a person learns after his or her native language and *Foreign Language* as a language that is used in a country other than one's native country (2013). There are different ways to acquire second or foreign languages. It can be in a formal way as in a classroom environment or informal way such as when the learner picks up the language by being culturally active participant of the society. This can be done by attending school in the target country, watching local television, listening to radio or/and reading newspapers in L2. By being actively involved in the learning environment, the learner is constantly in contact with the target language through normal daily routines. It is extremely important in second language acquisition to look at the learning environment and investigate if the age factor has any effect. Also, motivation is another significant factor of SLA that needs to be discussed to find out if it is related to higher language competences as Gardner and Lambert (1979) have thoroughly investigated. Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Early Language Learning (ELL) have been thoroughly investigated over the years and there is a popular belief that second language acquisition among children is achieved relatively fast and without effort (Nikolov and Djigunovi'c, 2006). However, more recent studies post criticism on this widely spread claim of the effortless and quick second language competence among children (Haynes 2007, Genesee 2006). Although age plays a significant role in SLA, the benefit of motivation and exposure can provide better results in achieving complete second language proficiency.

2.0 Theories of Second Language Acquisition

There are various factors that have impact on learning a second language and it is important to discuss the theories behind second language acquisition and try to find out how we learn a language and what elements needs to be present for a successful language acquisition. This chapter will discuss three SLA theories, the *Creative Construction Theory*, *Communicative Language Teaching* and the *Cognitive Approach*.

As indicated by Altenaichinger (2003) during the seminar about “The interface between theory and practice”, the *Creative Construction Theory*, often referred to as the *Naturalistic Approach*, deals with the assumption that we are born with a special language system that we use to acquire a language. Altenaichinger explains that Stephen Krashen is among scholars that singled out the differences between acquisition and learning by explaining that acquisition supposedly is a subconscious process that results in fluency while learning is conscious process that involves learning rules and structures. Additionally, Altenaichinger cites Krashen’s discussions and argues that there are three internal elements involved in second language acquisition. Those elements from Krashen’s book include a “filter”, an “organizer” and a “monitor”. He mentions that the “filter” deals with how the learner is influenced in a social context and how he reacts in various social environments. The “organizer” determines the arrangement of the learners language system and “the usage of incorrect grammatical constructions as provisional precursors of grammatical structures, the systematically occurrence of errors in the learner’s utterances as well as a common order in which structures are learnt” (Krashen 1983, as cited in Altenaichinger, 2003). The “monitor” operates the conscious learning part where the learners correct their speech according to their age (Altenaichinger 2003). Those highly debatable SLA elements, which are often fuelled by criticism, are based on the following five hypotheses from Brown (2002) as cited in Altenaichinger:

1. *The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis*: An acquisition is a “subconscious and intuitive process of constructing the system of a language” (p. 278) while learning is a conscious process that students are aware of their learning process and what is expected of them.

2. *The Monitor Hypothesis*: Is the learning process with the purpose to “monitor” the learning progress and propose improvements to what has already been learned.
3. *The Natural Order Hypothesis* claims that we acquire the rules of a language in a predictable order.
4. *The Input Hypothesis* bolsters the importance for the learner to understand the language a bit beyond his or her understanding with an influence such as motivation.
5. *The Affective Filter Hypothesis* suggests that language is acquired more easily if certain emotion factors are met, such as being mentally stable and not angry, anxious or bored. This means that positive attitude seems to be important in SLA (Brown 2002 as cited in Altenaichinger, 2003, p. 8-9).

The second theory discussed by Altenaichinger revolves around *Communicative Language Teaching* and is completely learner centred. *Communicative Language Teaching* has been highly favoured for the last 20 years and scholars agree that this theory is excellent because it focuses on communicative proficiency in language teaching. In fact, one of the most important aspects of *Communicative Language Teaching* is a language competence, or in other words, the knowledge and ability to use the target language. As well, it is essential to incorporate activities that influence the learner to communicate in the target language. Through these activities, students need to be able to use the language in a meaningful way and they need to be motivated and aware of the importance of learning the language in order to benefit significantly from the learning process (Altenaichinger 2003).

The 3rd SLA theory from Altenaichinger’s paper is the *Cognitive Approach*. Scientists claim that one of the main features of SLA is to build up a system of knowledge that can be unconsciously automatically recollected. Due to that fact, the learner has to be provided with knowledge and exposure to the target language to understand and socially participate in a social context. Once the learner has experienced the language enough, he or she should be able recall the language automatically and focus on to improve other more complicated language skills. Indeed, the main function

of the *Cognitive Approach* is the process of being able to construct and use the language automatically (Altenaichinger, 2003, p.10-11).

Altenaichinger moves on to show the relationship between these three theories and how they inter-relate. Moreover, she mentions that many teachers will apply teaching strategies that involve all of the three theories. Those teachers who are native speakers of the target language might prefer the *Natural Approach* to others. *Communicative Language Teaching* today is an extremely important element of language learning and can be found in almost every language classroom and nearly every language textbook. However, the *Cognitive Approach* is a relatively new theory of Second Language Acquisition and might not be so popular yet to apply inside the classroom (Altenaichinger 2003). Nevertheless, it is important for instructors to understand the three approaches and use them properly as a guide to aid their students towards successful second language acquisition.

3.0 Young Learners and SLA

3.1 The Five Stages of Second Language Acquisition

The process of Second Language Acquisition occurs in stages. In order to examine SLA, it is important to look at the 5 stages of second language acquisition. According to Haynes (2007), the first stage is *Preproduction* and is also referred to as “the silent period” where learners gradually build up their vocabulary to about 500 words without speaking the language but more echoing the language. Then there is the second stage called *Early Production* and at this stage learners will have around 1000 word vocabulary with the capacity of constructing words in short phrases and memorize and use short language forms although not necessarily correctly (Haynes 2007). Haynes talks about the third stage, *Speech Emergence*, where learners have acquired around 3000 words and should be able to speak short sentences and simple phrases. By now, learners should be able to engage in conversation and ask simple questions. Also they can understand short stories if they are supported with pictures. The 4th development stage, *Intermediate Fluency*, he explains that the learners have an active vocabulary of 6000 words. Also, he adds that students can now form longer and more complex phrases both spoken and written with grammatical errors but demonstrate excellent

comprehension. The last developing stage is called *Advanced Fluency* and as he points out, it takes around 5- 10 years to achieve proficiency in second language acquisition and by now the learners are considered near-native. Indeed, Haynes says that on the surface it might look quite effortless to learn a second language but there are various factors that can have impact on the learning process such as motivation and age.

3.2 Children's Language Acquisition

It is argued that second language acquisition is learned among children in two ways, *simultaneously* or *sequentially* as demonstrated by Halgunseth (2009) as she cites Tabors (2008). Young children acquire L1 and L2 languages what it seems to be almost without any effort through a process that is called *simultaneous* second language learning. According to her, *simultaneous* learners are children under the age of three who are exposed to their mother tongue at home and another language in an early educational context such as kindergarten or other early program. However, those learners can also be children from a multi-language home where the child is exposed to two different languages at home, for example Spanish from mom and English from dad (Halgunseth 2009, as cited by Tabors, 2008). She points out that although being exposed to two different languages at home, children learn both languages the same way without favouring one or the other. As their brain mechanism allows them to learn more than one language, they construct two separate language systems in their brains for each language. Similarly, this language system is almost identical to the process that children develop through exposure to one language (Halgunseth 2009). When the child reaches the age of 6 months, they are able to distinguish between the two languages and at this point they may begin to favour one language over the other. If parents expose their child to one language more than the other, the child might focus more on the language that it receives more exposure from (Espinosa, 2008; Kuhl, 2004; Kuhl et al., 2006; Tabors, 2008).

In *sequential* language learning environment, the child speaks its native language but is also exposed or introduced to a second language. For example, when a Spanish speaking child attends class where English is the dominant language spoken. Halgunseth states that contrary to *simultaneous* language learning, *sequential* learning is not related to any age factor, but it can be stimulated or influenced by elements like

motivation. There are four stages of *sequential* second language learning according to her, which are the following:

Stage 1: *Home Language Use*: Children might refuse to use their native language even though others do not understand them.

Stage 2: *Silent Period*: Children can hardly speak but rely on nonverbal communication. It is argued that the younger the child is, the longer the silent period might last.

Stage 3: *Telegraphic and Formulaic Speech*: At this stage children will start to speak in the target language but only using short phrases or repeat the words of others.

Stage 4: *Productive Language*, children construct their own sentences. Those sentences might be very basic and incorrect but with time it will improve (Helgunseth 2009).

Although children are exposed to two languages at the same time at an early age, it does not have to mean that they confuse the languages easily. As mentioned, children become bilingual sometimes when one parent converses in one language while the other converses in the second language. Additionally, parents might converse to each other in both languages so children are exposed to both languages. However, being bilingual has its downside also (Helgunseth 2009).

3.3 Bilingual Children Better Language Learners?

Although many research, such as claimed by Halgunseth indicate that bilingual children tend to perform better than monolingual children in many language tasks, Bialystok (2001) shows that any language knowledge of a child is incomplete when compared with the knowledge of an adult. Continuing with Bialystok's discussion, she explains how bilingualism is acquired and mentions that some people live "in home environments where the language of the extended family reveals an ethnic, cultural, or national background that is different from that of the community" (p.3). In fact, children who become bilingual in those family environments could become more efficient and productive learners.

Despite many studies favour bilingual children as being more effective than monolingual children, there are downsides of being bilingual. In an article by Genesee (2008), he raises concerns about bilingual acquisition in early childhood and points out that it can be a difficult task for a child to learn more than one language and can eventually lead to delays in language development. However, it is extremely important to take into account the individual learning differences in second language acquisition and therefore have in mind the different learning abilities as some children learn faster than others. He explains how this “delay” does not have to be a negative aspect of language gaining and explains that the process of acquiring the language for the child takes longer time. The importance of sufficient exposure is confirmed as he states how important it is to provide learners with sufficient exposure to both languages all the time. Also, how important it is to avoid any radical changes to the language environment because that can create problems and difficulties for the child (Genesee 2008)

Another concern from parents and professionals and discussed by Genesee is the problem that bilingual children might never master either language fully and in comparison to monolingual children, they might never become as proficient in the language. He talks about how bilingual children might have different language development patterns in the short term. Moreover, he points out in comparison with monolingual children at the same age, that young bilingual children struggle in vocabulary and they know fewer words in one or both of their languages. His reasoning is mainly because all young children have limited memory capacities as bilingual children need to memorize words from two languages and not one like monolingual children. In addition, it is worth noting that bilingual children might know certain words from one language but not the other. However, these are “short term” problems that most likely will disappear by the time that the children begin their school journey (Genesee 2008).

Continuing with the earlier concerns about bilingual children who might encounter problems on their learning journey, Genesee shows how bilingual children’s proficiency and competence’s in the second language reflects the amount of time they spend in each of the two language environments. He supports his claim by giving an

example of a child who just arrived back home after visiting grandparents for short periods of time and only one of the languages was used. The child might favour that language over the other for a while, and therefore the child loses proficiency in the other language. Note that this is just a temporary shift that will revert back once the exposure to the other language is sufficient (Genesee 2008).

Another concern discussed by Genesee is the belief that young bilingual children are unable to keep their languages separate which mean that they can get confused and use both languages at the same time. He points out that most bilingual children use sounds and words from both languages in the same utterances although people talking with them are using only one language. This particular problem has raised concerns among childhood educators as they tend to believe that this is because the child is confused and unable to distinguish between the two languages. Moreover, his claims are based on the reason that children mix their languages simply because they lack vocabulary in one or both languages to express themselves entirely in each language. Therefore he states that they borrow words from the other language. This is an effective communication strategy in most families due to parents and other adults that are part of the child's language environment tend to mix the languages themselves when they talk to the child as they understand both languages. Genesee states that it is common to mix up languages and it is actually a natural and normal process of early bilingual acquisition that will occur even between proficient adult bilinguals. The role of parents is very important in this case and they should not stop or worry when their children mix up languages because children will naturally stop doing it (Genesee 2008).

The exposure mentioned above is extremely important. To help the child to develop its own identity, it is important that parents provide their children with sufficient exposure to the target language. Similarly, like discussed earlier, parents who speak two different languages but only use one language at home might result in the child favouring that language unconsciously because there is not enough language input and the ability to express in that language declines. Hence, the motivation becomes evident now because if instructors and parents motivate children and provide them with enough exposure, it could lead to effortless second language acquisition (Genesee 2008).

4.0 Age and Second Language Acquisition

The second language acquisition competences among adults seem to differ significantly from the way children acquire their first language. This has led researchers on the path of investigating the development of the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH). Originally CPH was introduced by Penfield and Roberts in 1959 and was later made popular and discussed further by Lenneberg in 1967. Brown (2007) refers to this hypothesis (CPH) as “a biologically determined period of life when language can be acquired more easily and beyond which time language is increasingly difficult to acquire” (p. 57). According to him, “Critical point for second language acquisition occurs around puberty, beyond which people seem to be relatively incapable of acquiring a second language”(p. 58). Also, this has led to confusion among many who took it for granted that once you reach a certain age level (12-13) you would be considered too late for successful second language acquisition (Brown 2002).

It is important to investigate if L2 learning capacity declines over a period. There are rather few studies that thoroughly investigate SLA achievement between old and young language learners. David Singleton (2004) cites Seright (1985), who points out that only few studies that deal with success and age-related issues between young and old learners, show that the younger learners perform better than adult L2 learners. Furthermore, Seright supports her claims by citing an experiment on the learning of Esperanto that was conducted by Thorndike in 1928. Singleton says that this study shows young learners performing better than the old ones. In addition, she also cites d’Anglejan et al.’s study from 1981 of Canadian immigrants who were learning French in an intensive language course which also shows how young learners gained more success than older learners, or in other words, less success with age (Singleton 2004).

On the other hand, there is evidence that favours the hypothesis that “the older the better” in terms of second language acquisition. However, Singleton points out that all of those investigations were the result of formal instruction. In other words, these investigations are short-term research and based on SLA in primary school classroom and L2 bilingual programs. Also, he does mention that the results of some immigrant studies indicate an advantage for older learners. Most of the relevant studies that Singleton mentions involve children as at least one element of comparison. Hence, there

are few studies that incorporate teenagers and adults of different ages and that show evidence that older learners perform better than those who are older. Singleton shows that some immigrant studies suggest that L2 learning improves with age, as he cites and refers to a study from 1974 that Ervin-Tripp conducted of 31 young English speaking children who had been exposed to French for a period that spanned nine months. The results of Ervin-Tripp's research showed that the older students outperformed the younger learners in every field of the learning process (Singleton 2004).

Since the early 1990s, studies have shown positive results of older beginners that achieve high level of L2 proficiency. Singleton explains how White and Genesee (1996) hardly found any differences between English Grammaticality test scores among native-like French speakers who begun learning English after the age of twelve and those attained by native-speakers in language control groups. Moreover, Singleton talks about an investigation conducted by Bongaerts et al. (1995) about Dutch learners that were beginning to learn English in a classroom environment after the age of twelve. This research demonstrated that classroom learners were able to gain English pronunciation ratings within the same range as native-speakers (Singleton 2004). Interestingly, this shows that even though L2 acquisition began at the age of 12 and in classroom instruction setting, those learners could nevertheless attain a native-like accent.

As previously stated, there are evidence that favour "the younger the better" and also studies indicating that older students can exceed younger learners. In addition, there is another hypothesis that indicates that younger learners are extremely efficient in acquiring native-like accent in second language. It has to be taken into account that for this to happen, it is important that the exposure to the target language is sufficient. Moreover, this is confirmed by Singleton (2004) as he states "the strong version of this position being that unless exposure to the L2 begins in the childhood years an authentic accent will not normally be acquired" (p. 84).

It is also important to discuss if it is better over the long run to start learning L2 at an early age. Krashen et al. (1979) explore this subject further and show the short-term and long-term results in L2 acquisition. They claim that:

- (1) Adults proceed through early stages of syntactic and morphological development faster than children (where time and exposure are held constant).
- (2) Older children acquire faster than younger children (again, in early stages of syntactic and morphological development where time and exposure are held constant).
- (3) Acquirers who begin natural exposure to second languages during childhood generally achieve higher second language proficiency than those beginning as adults. (p.161).

There seems to be no clear evidence that can without a doubt conclude that children learning an L2 will outperform older language learners in the long run. Singleton's conclusion and summary regarding this matter is that it is not possible to conclude, based on current studies that younger L2 learners are more efficient and successful language learners than the older ones (Singleton 2004). On the other hand, Singleton does mention that there is extremely reliable evidence to support the hypothesis that over the long run, those who begin learning an L2 in childhood generally gain higher level of proficiency than those who begin at later stages in life (Singleton 2004). However, the studies that contradict this hypothesis are those made in a classroom environment. Therefore, it is hard to compare classroom instruction over the long run and natural L2 acquisition that does not take place inside a classroom.

4.1 Does age really matter in SLA?

The question when is the best age for Second language acquisition seems to be connected with the amount input or exposure to the target language. Scholars are still struggling to understand sufficiently what effect age has on the language learner when the exposure to the target language is not enough. Munoz (2010) argues that the amount and the quality of the language input is extremely important to young learners at the early stages of second language learning. She presents results that compare younger and older language learners and declares that young learners consistently show better language results than those who start SLA later on in life as adults. Similarly, she declares that those results provide positive support for the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) and indicate what has been discussed earlier about the existence of certain age

period and incomplete language acquisition. Discussing this further, this strong evidence supporting the claim that children benefit much more by participating in the cultural environment, where they are naturally exposed to the language input rather than starting at an early age in classroom environment, show that children are exposed to more quality of natural input of the target language (Munoz, 2010, p. 40-41). This suggest that exposure is more important than the age factor when comes to SLA.

According to Larson-Hall (2008), most studies on the critical period seem to favour the theory that “the younger, the better”. However those studies have been conducted when learners were active participants and culturally involved in the target country. The participants were actively exposed to the target language on daily basis and received great amount of exposure to the target language outside of the classroom. Researchers agree on the importance of the amount of exposure regarding the critical age of SLA because there is no guarantee of “the younger the better” when the exposure is minimal. As discussed by Larson-Hall, children and adults learn language through different strategies and have different learning abilities. She talks about how young learners learn in an implicit way, which makes minimal exposure to the target language not enough to form morphological, syntactic or phonological system. This statement is confirmed when older results are analysed and show that there is no linguistic advantage of SLA, having in mind “the younger the better” when the exposure is minimal (Larson-Hall 2008). One of those earlier studies from 1974, conducted by Oller and Nagato and later cited by Larson-Hall involve Japanese elementary school students who were starting to learn English (1-2 hours per week) and they compared them with older students who were beginning their SLA in junior high. Statistical differences were diagnosed within the younger learners but not within the older and the conclusion was that the advantages of the younger learners were not present anymore. Oller & Nagato’s argument for this particular reason show no differences within the older group and results were purely statistical because the older students had 50 students and the younger group had 24 which demonstrate that if effects sizes are small, the results from statistics can disappear (Tversky and Kahneman 1971). However, more recent investigations regarding “the earlier, the better” are still debatable and the focal point has led scholars to investigate further the language exposure and motivational factors.

To explore further the motivation and attitudes towards learning a second language, Larson-Hall's investigation from 2008 suggests that young learners have more positive attitude towards studying a foreign language (Larson-Hall 2008). In conclusion, the study made by her focused on if there was any correlation between starting early and high scores in environment that provided minimal input of exposure to the second language as the debate has often been about how age plays a significant role in a natural or immersion environments. According to her, this is not always true as she argues that "age does seem to play a non-negligible role in improving second language acquisition, given that language learners receive enough input" (p.24). Moreover, the reality is that age can play a role in improving second language acquisition, but it is important to provide students with enough exposure to the target language during their learning process.

5.0 Motivation and the Learning Environment

5.1 Motivation

It is extremely important to understand the role of motivation in SLA because investigations (Gardner and Lambert 1972 and Dörnyei 2001) show that motivation plays a significant role in achieving SL proficiency and competence. According to Pandey (2005) "motivation, defined as the impetus to create and sustain intentions and goal-seeking acts, is important because it determines the extent of the learner's active involvement and attitude toward learning"(p.79). Gardner and Lambert (1972) state that motivation is extremely influential factor in successful second language acquisition and the term *motivation* was brilliantly bolstered in 1985 by Gardner who defined *motivation* as being "the combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning the language plus favourable attitudes toward learning the language" (p. 10). Gardner and Lambert (1972) are considered to be research pioneers on the field of second language learning and motivation. In their investigation, they included two motivational factors, *integrative* and *instrumental motivation* where the learner is focusing on achieving certain goals perpetrated in those two sets of motivational factors. In second language acquisition, instrumental motivation can be thought of as a motivation for those who want to learn a second or foreign language for educational purpose or seeking work opportunities (Gardner and Lambert 1972). However,

integrated motivation, as explained by Shirbagi are those learners who want to culturally interact with other community members and are willing to participate as valuable members of the target language country. In other words, the main goal of the language learner is to use the language for social interaction (Shirbagi 2010).

Early investigations conducted by Gardner and Lambert from 1972 focus on *integration motivation* as being more important than *instrumental motivation*. Shirbagi points out that in later studies, the focus has been shifting towards *integrative motivation* as being more important. *Instrumental motivation* is still considered valuable element but today *integrative motivation* is constantly being linked to successful second language competence (Shirbagi 2010). Gardner's statement from 1985 confirms this belief as he claims that "An integratively oriented learner would likely have a stronger desire to learn the language, have more positive attitudes towards the learning situation, and be more likely to expend more effort in learning the language" (p.11).

In those two learning contexts the students should be aware of the importance of the SLA process because it might be easier for the teacher to help the student towards success. Shirbagi shows how students are driven by a motivational force because of their awareness of the importance of SLA which will furthermore develop *integrative* and *instrumental motivation*. He continues to argue the essence of *integrative* and *instrumental motivation* for the student. Additionally, he states that an extremely important factor of integrative and instrumental motivation is the instructor's role because the teacher needs to be aware and understand the ability of each student and how they are motivated (Shirbagi 2010). For that reason, he states the importance of providing language learners with opportunities to practice integrative and instrumental motivation. Instructors need to provide activities that promote such motivation and this is only possible as long as the teacher understands the learning abilities of his/her learners (Shirbagi 2010).

Consequently, teachers should be aware of the importance of the motivational element in order to assist students to develop their learning techniques and to achieve their language learning goals. Engin (2009) also investigated the role of motivation and found out that it can significantly influence the student to succeed. Engin suggests that the teacher should focus on positive reinforcement rather than empathise on error or

negative motivation which can decrease the learner's ability to succeed. Also, he continues and says that implement positive motivation during the learning process will benefit the learner more from learning the target language. Students need to receive enough motivation and the instructor needs to make his students aware of their learning expectations (Engin 2009). Motivation is an important factor that needs to be discussed in terms of SLA but the learner also needs to be provided with proper learning environment.

5.2 Natural Setting and Instructed Setting

It is extremely important to be aware of the natural and instructional settings, in order to investigate the effect of the methods in relation to age factor. It is essential to understand the two settings to be able to implement the methods in the learning period and for the learner to be able to succeed. In Munoz (2010), she heavily favours the natural setting and points out the negative elements of instructed setting. Her point is that in instructed setting the instruction is limited to 2-4 sessions per week of approximately 50 minutes each session. Also, the target language exposure is extremely limited in addition to the target language not being used as form of communication between learners and tutor. Moreover, the oral fluency of the teacher in the target language might be limited and at last the language is not spoken outside of the classroom (Munoz 2010). Just by pointing out the differences between the two setting, it is easy to notice that exposure to the target language is a significant factor in any language acquisition. Traditional *instructional setting* focuses on the language itself rather than the use of the language. But in regards to age and sufficient exposure, one might think that it is better to start as early as possible in order to succeed in language acquisition. As pointed out by Munoz, there are differences between the two learning setting and she explored further four aspects that need to be discussed regarding the effect on age in second language acquisition as she doubts whether "the younger, the better" is better or not.

To conclude if "the younger the better" is true, Munoz mentions four crucial asymmetries between the natural approach of learning and the instructed setting approach. Past results of the effect of age and natural setting indicate that young learners tend to outperform older learner in many different skills (Munoz 2010).

However, other studies cited by Munoz show that the primary focus has been to compare learners in *natural setting* and that older language learning starters in most cases outperform younger starters in short period of time. The reason for this, as argued by Munoz, is that the older learner becomes a more efficient learner in the earlier stages of the learning process and tends to advance much faster than the younger learner. Furthermore, young learners might start slower to learn the language but in the long term they acquire a superior proficiency level that can be compared to almost native-like language skills (Munoz 2010). The fact that the older students are more efficient learners than the younger ones leads to the conclusion that “if the older learners’ advantage is mainly due to their superior cognitive development, no differences in proficiency are to be expected when differences in cognitive development also disappear with age” (Munoz, 2006, p. 34). This clearly demonstrates that older starters in instructed setting seem to have advantage over younger starters and as Munoz (2010) argues when she summarizes the results from the BAF Project that focused on investigating if age has any effect on foreign language learning:

“in an instructed foreign language learning setting an early start does not automatically confer an ultimate attainment advantage. This may be considered to be a crucial age-related difference between a foreign language learning setting and a naturalistic language learning setting”(p. 43-44).

Munoz furthermore claims that the early beginning learning process cannot play the same role in both of the learning contexts. It is obvious that the amount of exposure is significant factor in second language acquisition. However, she explains that the “parallelism between age effects in a naturalistic language learning context and in an instructed language” (p. 43) indicates that the time that the learner spends in the target country (living and learning) comes to an end as a measurement tool of L2 proficiency level. Clearly, she points out that this will not happen in a classroom environment with a language exposure that is nowhere near the same as in a natural learning environment. This leads to an interesting fact from Alderson (1999) that Munoz refers to and explains that research have shown that the connection between the time spent learning a language and the level of proficiency is not always linear

Continuing with Munoz's discussions from 2010, she states that "the long term advantage of younger starters is not found in a foreign language learning setting" (p. 46). Pursuing this further, she states that instructed language learners are missing the important exposure that naturalistic context environment provides to the learners. In other words, students in instructed environment do not have the same access to the amount of quality exposure to the language. As Munoz claims, this lack of exposure results in children not being able to benefit enough from the learning concepts that they are acquiring. On the other hand, direct teacher instructions (instructed context) favours older learners because they are more efficient learners and they know what the teacher is expecting from them and also they are more aware of their learning outcomes (Munoz (2010).

At last, Munoz's argument regarding "the younger the better" and taking into account all the past studies that favours natural context of learning, the earlier might be better but it has to be followed with motivation and enough exposure to the target language. Therefore, the amount of exposure and motivation are key elements in SLA. Additionally, instructors should always provide learners with enough opportunities to practice the language in various L2 social contexts. Munoz compares a young second language learner in an instructed learning context and an older language starter in a natural learning context and showed that the natural learner outperformed the instructed one. She claimed that the reason was that the natural learner receives constant exposure from the social environment and therefor will be a more successful language learner than the younger one who does not receive any target language exposure. She argues that the quality of the exposure to the target language has a significant influence on the effect of second language learners. Moreover she points out that this particular influence "explains the older learners' persistent advantage in rate of learning as well as the difficulty that younger learners have to show any long-term benefits due to an early start in a school setting." (Munoz, 2010, p. 39)

5.3 Educational Context and Cultural Context

In order to investigate the roots of motivation in second language acquisition it is essential to discuss both the *educational context* (classroom learning) and the *cultural*

context (outside the classroom). Gardner(2000) shows how complex it is to study a second language that involves learning exotic cultural concepts such as new vocabulary, pronunciation and language structure while other school subjects focus on parts that the learner can relate to his own culture (Gardner(2000)).

The *educational context* is the environment that the learner is familiar with. There are factors in the *educational context* that can contribute to greatly influence the learning during SLA. The expectations of the school system, quality of the language program, classroom environment, materials used in class and the curriculum are among few factors that Gardner (2000) considers being influential elements of motivation in SLA. The *Cultural Context* is reflected in the learner's ability to express attitude, beliefs, personality, characteristics, expectations, ideals, etc. Gardner (2000).

It might be easier for adults to learn a second language because they are more aware of their learning process and more aware of what kind of results they want to achieve. On the other hand, language environment seems to play an important role in this case as children might catch up native-like accent much quicker and better than adults if they are learning the language in the natural way such as when they participate in the community rather than in the classroom (Gardner 2000). Consequently, Gardner suggests that since the learner will be motivated by various elements and attitudes that exist in the *cultural context* such as values, meaningfulness, awareness of the learners learning potential, differences in personality. For that reason, he claims that "the cultural context can have an effect on the individual's ultimate success in learning the language" (Gardner, 2000, p.6). Pursuing this further, his discussions leads to the point that *educational context* and *cultural context* are not independent elements and do not influence each other. Interestingly, *cultural context* can influence the learner's attitude towards the classroom environment and *educational context* can have an effect on the learner's integrativeness. Key element in Gardner's investigation is his assumption that the *educational context* plays a significant motivational role as the learner has built up attitude toward the learning situation. This is extremely important because within the *educational context*, this attitude is the factor that influences the individual level of motivation (Gardner 2000).

Over the years, Dörnyei (1994) has been investigating the motivation within the educational context and moreover he has been looking at factors that affect second language learners' motivation. One of the factors discussed by him is the role of the teacher in the classroom. He explains how the teacher is considered to be one of the most significant parts of L2 learners' motivation because of the many roles that he has in the classroom. The teacher is not only considered an instructor but also a role model, motivator, mentor, consultant. In fact, the role of the teacher should be to engage the student into the learning process so the student can benefit and gain successful competence in the target language (Dörnyei 1994). Also, more recent discussion from 2001 by Dörnyei, he empathises that the motivational effectiveness of the teaching strategies should highly depend on the perception that the students have on teaching strategies. Additionally, he went further than Gardner and investigated the elements in the language learning process that affects learner motivation and additionally constructed a framework of L2 motivation based on three key elements of L2 learning in education context. Dörnyei's framework from 1994 is divided into three sections of levels; *language level, learner level, and learning situation levels*. *Learning situation level* is then subdivided into three more levels:

- *Course-Specific Motivational Components*; which involves learner's interest, expectancy and satisfaction.
- *Teacher-Specific Motivational Components*; involving the student's desire to please the teacher. Authority type (controlling vs. autonomy-supporting) and Direct Socialization of Motivation (includes modelling, task presentation and feedback)
- *Group-Specific Motivational Components*.

With his framework idea, Dörnyei suggested that the L2 teacher should be aware of students learning ability and needs as mentioned earlier. He agrees that the teachers should be more of a facilitators rather than authorities and he stresses the importance of promoting learner autonomy. In conclusion, he empathises on the importance of using proper teaching strategies to motivate students towards successful language competence (Dörnyei 1994).

5.4 Motivation in the Learning Environment

Although earlier studies suggest that age is an important influential factor in gaining complete SLA competence, motivation seems to be key element in the learning process. However, Gardner (2007) says that “Motivation to learn a second language is not a simple construct. It cannot be measured by one scale; perhaps the whole range of motivation cannot be assessed by even three or four scales” (p. 10). Moreover, he proposes the question why motivation plays so important role in learning a second or foreign language and explains that children that come from bilingual home easily learn two languages. Additionally, they seem to be capable of understanding, write and read the language properly (Gardner 2007). There has to be some sort of motivation involved in SLA, whether it concerns young learners or adults. The question how motivation is fostered leads to another important aspect of SLA, which involves the learning environment of the student, whether it is classroom instruction or simply a cultural participation.

There have been numerous studies conducted over the years that deal with the learning environment and motivation. That is to say, to find out if classroom environment or cultural participation is more motivating among learners to gain complete second language acquisition. Kissau (2006) explored the field of motivational environment and focused on motivation theory in his study in Canada. He points out how studies of second language (L2) motivation from the past 30 years have evolved by stating that societal approaches dominated the research of 1970s and 1980s but has gradually changed to an approach that focuses on the classroom based environment of the L2 learner.

Kissau agrees with Gardner (2007) regarding the influential aspect of motivation in language learning. He moreover claims that Gardner is one of the most exceptional researchers in the field of SLA area who claims that motivation is considered to be the most influential factor in learning a new language (Gardner 1985). Later study conducted by Gardner in 2001 and cited by Kissau (2006) where Gardner claims that the attitudes toward the learning situation are key elements for motivation but it is the motivation that is responsible for the achievement. Gardner stated that language learning success was determined by the attitude of the learner toward the target language and country. Like Kissau mentions, Gardner categorized learners as being

integratively or *instrumentally oriented* meaning that they are *integratively oriented* if they have positive attitudes towards culture and language of the target country. On the other hand, those who are considered *instrumentally oriented* are students who learn in classroom environment (Kissau 2006). Gardner (1985) supports his claims and says that if a student is showing positive attitude towards the culture and people who speaks the language that the student is learning, then it will be an important determinant for success. However, researchers have been calling for more investigations on classroom approach to L2 motivation that involves more input from the classroom instructor.

5.5 Motivation and Young Learners in the Classroom

As pointed out in this paper, it has been explored if it is better to start learning second language when you are young. Discussions have been debatable and there seem to be no unambiguous results that declare if “the younger the better”. Moreover, those who favour “the younger the better“ argue that young learners easily achieve second language from what it seems almost effortless, they are interested to learn, motivated and curious to participate in creative activities (Nikolov and Djigunovi'c 2006). Furthermore, scholars favouring the statement say that children learn by doing, and are not conscious about the learning process, contrary to old learners who are more aware of what is expected of them. This will lead to the fact that the second language acquisition in young learners is more natural (Halliwell 1992, Cameron 2001).

As for the motivational aspect of young learners towards SLA, they generally have more positive attitude towards SLA and are highly motivated. Nikolov (1999) has been exploring the field of SLA among young learners and has showed that motivation is normally high at the beginning but tends to decrease with time. Therefore, as discussed earlier, it is extremely important to provide young learners with supportive learning environment at the very beginning of the learning process. Therefore, the teacher plays a significant role during the learning period. However, as they grow older, the impact changes and other factors seem to influence the ups and downs of young learner's motivation (Djigonovic 2012).

Despite these findings, there are not yet any sufficient evidences that indicate it is more beneficial to start language learning at an early stage but results has shown that it

could be beneficial to start early although (contrary to what has been discussed earlier) the benefit is not noticeable. Although it has not yet been proofed significantly that “the younger the better”, Torfadóttir and associates expose that there is great interest in adapting foreign/second language at an early stage in Europe for example. In fact, to motivate young learners in the language process and provide them with positive attitudes towards the target language it is extremely important to look at the factor that influence the learning process. They continue by explaining that there are certain conditions that need to be present during the language learning process. Students need discipline, repetition, support and motivation to learn a new language. Students need opportunity to listen to the target language as much as possible (Torfadóttir, et al., 2006). As a matter of fact, one motivational aspect of SLA in young learners is to make the classroom environment alive with pictures, posters, flashcards and real objects that stimulate the learning. Moreover, they argue that the exposure needs to be sufficient and the more students listen, the better they get used to hear the language. Because when students constantly hear the language, they get used to it and they start to feel more confident using the language, or at least try to use it. The instructor should use the language at all times and make simple instructions and a lot of repetition because with time children tend to absorb the language unconsciously. Despite the importance of using the target language as much as possible, it can be essential to switch to mother tongue in order to explain better more complicated instructions (Torfadóttir, et al., 2006).

It is evident that young learners need opportunities to explore the language inside the classroom and practice it in a social context. It is generally believed that the language is learned by doing, children learn the language through games, singing, movements and imitation games (Torfadóttir, et al., 2006). The methods used in the classroom can have significant influence on how young learners learn the second language and the type of vocabulary used can influence their learning process. Therefore it is important that the instructor uses variety of teaching methods and topics to use in the classroom because children learn from their teacher and tend to absorb the accent and vocabulary of the teacher as discussed by Torfadóttir and associates. Besides, if the target language is supposed to be used in the classroom, it is important to make the young learners used to the language inside the classroom and emphasize that

the target language will only be used and also that it is all right to make mistakes. Alternatively, if the teacher always uses the language in the classroom he will influence and motivate students to practice it and use it as well. Furthermore, motivation plays an important role in second language acquisition and it influences the learner. If he is not interested in the subject or topic, it is likely that he will not succeed. Studies conducted by Torfadóttir and associates have demonstrated that motivation and a positive attitude towards the target language tend to lead towards better grades.

Interestingly, it is important to focus on the teaching methods and supportive classroom environment in order to engage the student into the learning process. The teacher's responsibility is extremely important in this case. The instructor needs to provide students with proper learning environment so that students can feel confident in exploring the language. In order for this to happen, the instructors need to be properly trained because the teacher sets the groundwork for the student's future and therefore he needs to motivate the student with the suitable tools to build on the future success of learning the language (Torfadóttir, et al., 2006).

6.0 Conclusion

Although the hypothesis about "the younger the better" and the debate about if learning a second language at later stages in life is not effective, it is interesting to note from the discussions in this paper that the main factor seems to rely on the language exposure along with motivation and the type of learning environment that is provided to the learner. For best second language attainment it seems to be beneficial to be culturally involved in the target language. Young language learners who are starting to learn a second language seem to outperform older learners but it has been pointed out here that over the long run the older students are more effective learners if they are provided with the sufficient target language exposure and motivation. Larson-Hall (2008) showed us that there is no linguistic advantage of SLA when having in mind the hypothesis "the younger the better". The amount of exposure to the target language is extremely important element in this case and Larson-Hall (2008) among others conclude that age does play an important role in SLA but certain conditions need be present such as sufficient exposure to the target language and motivation. Almost any second language learner who is provided with sufficient exposure to the target language will outperform

those who are not giving the opportunity to practice the target language in a social environment. To influence second language learners the teacher's role is extremely important to achieve complete SL competence. Gardner and Lambert (1972) argued that motivation is an extremely influential factor in successful second language acquisition. Moreover, by involving motivation in the learning process it will benefit the learner from learning. Gardner (2000) also favours the idea that students who are motivated in the cultural context will be more successful in SLA than those who practice instructional way. It is almost impossible to declare based on current data that starting young to learn second language is better than to start at later stage in life. The reason is the amount of participants in every research. For that matter, it is hard to generalize that young is better if for example 2000 participants in few schools are supposed to conclude the hypothesis. There is a huge demand for bigger and broader research on age and SLA and this topic will always be debatable although there are excellent scholars out there that have investigated the age factor, motivation, exposure and the learning environment in SLA.

In conclusion, "the younger the better" hypothesis, as mentioned above, is not always true because Munoz provided several evidence that if sufficient exposure is not available for young learners, they can lose their advantage and it might prevent them from benefit from the learning. As a final point, the age might play an important role in SLA and earlier might be better but for that to happen, there has to be motivation and sufficient exposure to the target language for the learner to benefit from. In other words, for successful SLA, exposure and the role of motivation seems to be more significant than the age factor.

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