

## UNLOCKING POTENTIAL: THE ROLE OF EARLY LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN CHILDREN'S LINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT

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### *Abstract:*

In exploring the importance of early interaction with language has in children's linguistic development, this article emphasizes the effects of early language acquisition has on academic, social, and cognitive development of children. Article includes points from studies on the importance of early education, long-term advantages of early language exposure and advancements in academic performance, literacy, and cognitive function. At the end the writer urges readers to acknowledge their part in supporting linguistic growth in young children, both at home as well as in educational settings.

*Key words:* critical period hypothesis; early education; brain flexibility; language learning; early language acquisition

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### Introduction

According to Lenneberg's 1967 research, the critical period theory suggests that there is a window which gives an opportunity for language acquisition, and most scholars claim that this window is usually in early life, during which the brain is more adaptable and receptive to language input. The richness and diversity of the linguistic environment around children has a major effect on their ability to acquire language skills as they navigate this period of fast brain development (Hoff, 2013). According to this theory the foundation for children's future academic achievement and general well-being is laid by early childhood education. Fernald et. al. (2013), on his studies claimed that language acquisition during this crucial stage of development is an essential part of cognitive growth and would have a significant impact on linguistic competency and communication abilities in the future. Furthermore, studies show how flexible children's brains are at this developmental time, emphasizing the significance of early language exposure in forming neural circuits and promoting the effectiveness of language acquisition (Werker & Hensch, 2015).

According to Lenneberg (1967), the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) suggests that language acquisition has a physiological window of opportunity during early life, beyond which language learning becomes noticeably more difficult. This idea originated from studies of people who struggled to become native-like speakers in later life after experiencing language deprivation in infancy or early childhood as a result of congenital deafness or delayed introduction to language (Curtiss, 1977). Wilder Penfield was one of the trailblazing individuals in the field of revealing the neurological basis of language acquisition. His innovative research conducted in the 1950s provided insight into the exact position of language processes in the brain (Penfield & Roberts, 1959). After conducting

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researches Penfield demonstrated that language production and processing “happens” on certain brain areas, mostly in perisylvian area of the left hemisphere of brain (Penfield & Boldrey, 1937). In order to come to this findings he did pioneering research on cortical stimulation techniques in neurosurgical patients. Wegner and Hensch (2015) argue that the brain's structure, which underpins language competence and aids in developing phonology, symmetrical or sylmatic processing abilities, is influenced by exposure to languages at a critical stage. According to Kuhl's (2010) research, neuroimaging studies have demonstrated increased neural connection and synaptic plasticity in the brains of early children, which allows them to quickly process language information and create strong language structures. In addition, the sensitive period of language acquisition is aligned with other important stages of neurodevelopment, such as synaptic pruning, which helps to consolidate and improve neural circuits related to language processing (Johnson & Newport, 1989). Penfield and his colleagues' research produced strong evidence in support of the theory that language learning has a key time. Penfield and Roberts (1959) demonstrated the functional specialisation of the brain for language processing by observing that electrical stimulation of certain cortical regions resulted in linguistic difficulties in patients having neurosurgical operations for the treatment of epilepsy. Curtiss (1977) also recorded the linguistic results of people who had been language-impaired as young children because of neurological disorders, and found that even after extensive rehabilitation, these people continued to struggle with grammar and language comprehension.

Early learning a language during this crucial stage helps children build their cognitive and socioemotional skills over the long term, in addition to making language competency easier to acquire (Hoff, 2013). Metalinguistic awareness, sophisticated vocabulary knowledge, and pragmatic communication abilities are more likely to emerge in children who are exposed to rich and varied language input from an early age (Fernald et al., 2013). Furthermore, it has been demonstrated that early language competency improves academic accomplishment, including readiness for school and literacy attainment (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998).

Enhancing children's language proficiency requires contact between parents and exposure to a variety of language input. Language development is strongly impacted by the volume and quality of verbal interactions that carers and children have, according to a number of studies (Hoff, 2003). In a seminal research, Hart and Risley (1995) revealed the significant differences in linguistic input that kids from varying socioeconomic backgrounds encounter. They discovered that, in comparison to their classmates from lower-income households, children from higher-income families were exposed to noticeably more words and had greater vocabularies. Children's linguistic development is greatly influenced by a rich language environment that offers them exposure to, practice with, and engagement with language. Children's language learning and competence levels are highly influenced by the amount and calibre of language input they get (Hoff, 2003). A rich language environment includes a variety of elements, such as conversational situations, grammatical structures, and exposure to a wide range of terminology. Frequent conversations with carers, exposure to a variety of linguistic stimuli, and participation in language-rich activities like storytelling, reading, and discussion are all beneficial for children who grow up in language-rich settings (Weizman & Snow, 2001). According to Byers-Heinlein and Fennell (2014), children's linguistic flexibility and competence are further enhanced by exposure to a range of linguistic stimuli, including multiple languages and dialects. According to Bialystok et al. (2012), children who grow up in multilingual homes have enhanced metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility, which facilitates their ability to transition between several linguistic systems with more efficiency. Additionally, children who are exposed to

numerous languages from a young age might develop greater linguistic flexibility and metalinguistic awareness, which will improve their ability to switch between other linguistic systems (Bialystok et al., 2012). Family dynamics, cultural background, and socioeconomic level (SES) are some of the elements that might affect how much and how well children are exposed to language. Compared to their classmates from lower SES families, children from higher SES backgrounds often acquire greater language exposure and receive more broad language input (Hart & Risley, 1995). This difference in language exposure feeds into the well-known "word gap," where kids from poorer homes start school with less vocabulary and less language proficiency than their wealthier peers (Fernald et al., 2013). The language environments of children are also greatly influenced by family dynamics, which include parental education, parenting style, and communication patterns (Hoff, 2003). Children tend to demonstrate more advanced language abilities and more linguistic competence when they grow up in caring, language-rich homes with regular verbal exchanges and attentive parenting (Rowe, 2012). According to Gutierrez-Clellen and Kreiter (2003), children's exposure to a variety of languages, dialects, and communication styles is shaped by their cultural background and linguistic history, which also has large effects on the language environment.

Children's linguistic development must be supported by a rich language environment that includes cultural immersion, exposure to a variety of linguistic input, and supportive family connections. In order to support children's language learning journeys and provide equal access to language-rich environments, educators and policymakers should acknowledge and address variables such as family dynamics, cultural background, and SES gaps.

Children's cognitive, linguistic, and academic development are greatly influenced by early language exposure, which has significant impacts on their academic achievement in the future (Hoff, 2013). Scarborough and Dobrich (1994), claim that early language exposure is highly linked to improved literacy abilities, such as vocabulary knowledge, reading comprehension, and writing ability in the elder age. Rich language environment where children can communicate with other or learn actively help children improve understanding of phonology, letter knowledge, and comprehension at an early age (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 1998). Early linguistic abilities, especially vocabulary quantity and syntactic competence, have been linked to subsequent reading proficiency and academic success, according to longitudinal research done by Snow et al in 1998. Moreover, the development of cognitive skills including memory, concentration, and problem-solving techniques is believed to be aided by early language exposure (Rowe, 2012). Youngsters who communicate verbally on a regular basis show more sophisticated cognitive processing skills and increased critical thinking abilities (Weizman & Snow, 2001). Furthermore, studies indicate that children who are bilingual and who is able to switch between several languages at a young age have improved executive functions (Bialystok et al., 2012).

Academic ability in a variety of subjects, such as language arts, math, and science, is highly predicted by early language exposure (Hart & Risley, 1995). Early language development makes children more capable of understanding academic material, contributing actively to classroom discussions, and participating in meaningful classroom discourse (Fernald et al., 2013). Additionally, longitudinal research has shown a correlation between school preparedness and early language competency, underscoring the significance of language-rich environments in fostering children's academic achievement (Hoff-Ginsberg, 1998).

After summing up above given information, we can conclude that children's linguistic development is greatly influenced by early language exposure, which plays major role on their academic, social, and cognitive development. We investigated a number of language acquisition-related topics, highlighting the importance of developmental stages, the impact of environment, and the long-term advantages of surroundings rich in languages.

Early life of humans is a vital time for establishing the groundwork for language skills that will influence children's communication ability throughout their life, from babble to vocabulary growth and grammatical development. We spoke about how important is interactive language-rich activities like reading, storytelling, and discussion for youngsters as they develop important literacy and communication skills. Furthermore, we underlined how crucial it is to understand how family background, finance, and culture may affect children's linguistic surroundings. Highlighting that study results we can say that parents, and instructors may better support the kids language development and create language-rich settings that promote optimal language growth. So, by giving early language exposure the highest priority and actively supporting language development of children, we can help kids reach their full potential and establish the foundation for a lifetime of successful learning, communication, and interaction with the world around them.

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