

A Study on the Acquisition of English as Second Language at the Critical Age

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Abstract - This research studied about acquisition of second language (hereinafter referred to as L2) at the critical age. Critical age plays a crucial role in Language Acquisition. Critical period (hereinafter referred to as CP) refers to the span of time in one's life within which one must acquire a first language. A learner can never gain full proficiency if no language is acquired during the CP. The aim of this study is to find out a child's capability of L2 acquisition during the CP i.e. how far the age can determine the skill gained in CP. The competence and performance shows a significant difference between children exposed to L2 in the CP and children exposed to L2 after the CP. The research is embodied with scholarly findings. Details and findings of previous researches done by many linguists, grammarians and scholars were taken into consideration. Namely Noam Chomsky, Leonard Bloomfield, Lev Vygotsky, Prof. Lydia White, Roger Browns etc. are prominent names in the field of study of L2 acquisition. A sample of 100 subjects was selected for data collection. ANOVA was computed to see the difference between critical age group and non-critical group in listening and writing. The results clearly revealed that the subjects who were fallen under the category of critical age showed better performance and the subjects who were fallen under the category of non-critical age showed poor performance. The results were categorized as poor, below average, average, good and excellent.

Keywords - Critical age, Second language, Second Language acquisition.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Hypothesis

Exposure to L2 at the critical age speed up the L2 acquisition of a child.

Critical age plays a significant role in language acquisition. Critical age starts from birth and ends from puberty. There is no exact cut-off of the end of the critical period (hereinafter referred as CP) but it is believed that the critical age ends with puberty. One must acquire the native language during the CP. If any language is not acquired during the CP it is believed that the full proficiency of language will not be gained.

Apart from the native language one can grasp a number of languages in the CP without any hassle. This research studies about the exposure to second language (hereinafter referred as L2) at the critical age and how the exposure can speed up the L2 acquisition of a child. L2 is learnt in addition to the native language. L2 learning has many reasons and benefits. If a child exposes to L2 at the critical age the acquisition is speed up than the child exposes to L2 after the critical age. The level of proficiency has a larger impact. Also the acquisition at the early ages of CP is enormous compared to acquisition at the later ages of the CP itself.

B. Research Problem

How does a child acquire the L2 when he/she exposed to the L2 at a critical age (hereinafter referred to as CA)?

With regard to the global trend, a child who exposes to an L2 in the CA, and a child who exposes after age 6 or upwards will have a difference in L2 proficiency. As soon as a child is motivated to learn more languages except L1 in the CP, the sooner the child gains fluency. In many western countries children who are in CP are encouraged to learn more than L1. For example they tend to learn French, Spanish, Latin, Italian, English etc.

With regard to the Sri Lankan context the emphasis given to L1 learning is comparably higher than learning second languages. People may learn second languages in a later stage or sometimes in need. Therefore a child for example, who learns English as L2 in the CP, will attain higher fluency in later stages. A comparable difference will follow with the ones who followed later or weren't motivated to learn L2. In Sri Lankan context a child may be encouraged to learn English, Sinhala or Tamil. Apart from these three the other languages may be learnt in need or as a hobby or depending on the interests in learning languages.

C. Aims and Objectives of the Research

The aim of conducting the particular research was to encourage parents and to make awareness among commoners about the importance of learning second language/s in the critical period of a child. The sooner the

child is entered to the stream more the proficiency will follow. Within the CP child will have the intellectual capacity to obtain more than one second language.

Most importantly the aim of this study was to find out a child's capacity of second language acquisition during critical period i.e. how far the age can determine the skill gained in this period of life. The findings emphasized the importance of learning an L2. The study will also counted the different environments the students came from and how the environment can help them to expose to second language at different ages and situations. Especially the home environment which plays a crucial role was considered. Other factors influencing the course were also measured.

D. Research Methodology

A group of 100 students were chosen for the research. 50 students among them started studying English as the L2 at the age of 8 years. The rest started studying English at the age of 3 years. All 100 students were studying in grade 3 during the time of experiment.

All subjects were provided with activities to measure the competence of English as the second language. The activities were designed in such a way grade 3 students can attend and suit the level of knowledge. The activities contained listening and writing (two components of a language).

According to the performance shown in each category, the evaluation proceeded i.e. how the two different groups of students showed fluency in all bands and the observations confirmed or altered the hypothesis.

The competency differed by the students who started studying English at the beginning of the critical age and after a few years.

E. Limitations of the Research

- 1- The students were studying in a school environment.
- 2- The students were chosen as they study in grade 3.
- 3- 50 out of them started studying English at the age of 3: from the beginning of CP
- 4- The remaining 50 started with schooling at the age of 8 years.
- 5- The activities took place only in English medium.
- 6- The activities were done by the students individually without any help of their teacher, parents.
- 7- The testing took place in the classroom environment.

- 8- One hour was allocated for writing and 20 minutes was allocated for listening.
- 9- The students were not prepared beforehand to face the activities.
- 10- The activities which were given for testing remained untold beforehand.

F. Significance of the Research

The need remained mainly to draw awareness and attention towards the importance of second language learning. The parents, caregivers and teachers were mostly focused to encourage their kids to have an exposure towards L2 learning with the start of the CP. This also referred to the importance of English language learning and the global interests and tendencies rely upon English as the International Language. This challenged a person while conversing or using English in later stages and the comfort another, will follow the importance given to English language learning as a second language.

G. Scope of the Research

The scope of this particular research extended up to motivating parents, caregivers, teaches to gain a clear thought about second language, second language learning, critical period, and critical period hypothesis. Meanwhile learning English as a second language and gaining proficiency in different stages depending upon the age in which a child is exposed to learn the same. A successful research may influence the above mentioned categories to motivate their children to pay more attention towards the global language while gaining fluency in L1 where both or even more paid off with greater results.

II. METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

A. Conceptual Framework: Identification of Variables

This research contained both dependent and independent variables. Independent variables could be identified as below.

- Exposure to environment
- Family background
- Time

This research notified the Dependent variable as follows.

- Second Language Competence

The dependent variable differed with the effects from independent variables. The dependent variable showed the differences among the subjects population.

B. Population

The subjects were chosen from grade 3. They study the local government syllabus in Sinhala Medium. The population was 100 students who were in the age of 7-8 years. 50 among them were who have studied English as

the second language since age 3-4. The rest were the ones who started studying English since age 7-8. English is the second language of all these students. The study was considered acquiring English language as second language acquisition.

Students of grade 3 were selected on a reason. These students were at the age of 7-8. 50 of these students started studying English as their second language at the age of 7-8 i.e. as soon as they entered grade 3. 50 of them started studying English as their second language at the age of 3-4. The former exposed to English at the later ages of critical age and the latter exposed in the early ages of critical age because they learnt English in the preschool, they had exposure and background at home in their families.

The study wanted to emphasize the difference between the 50 students who exposed to English as the second language at the age of 3-4 and who never had an exposure at that age and exposed at the age of 7-8. This study showed the difference in competence they had gained by age 7-8 because of the age they got exposure to English as the second language. The age is very significant because it is more crucial in second language and foreign language acquisition in the critical period of a human being.

C. Method

The study conducted by using primary data. A questionnaire was prepared to assess the knowledge of students on two components of language. i.e. Listening and Writing.

The question paper on writing and listening contained 100 marks each.

The listening section contained a small paragraph which was to be read out to the students. They should listen carefully and keep the incidents in mind. Then they should attend the questions given on the read passage. The passage was read out twice.

The writing section contained 5 sub sections. Each counted 20 marks. The five sub sections consisted of 10 questions on vocabulary, 10 questions on grammar, 10 questions on sentence construction where the words in the sentences were not given in order where the student had to understand what could be the meaningful sentence and arrange them to express a meaningful utterance, 10 questions were on closed passage where the passage had 15 blanks and the appropriate words were given on the top, the student had to read the passage and fill it with the suitable word, 10 marks will be

given for comprehension where the student had to read the passage and answer the 5 questions given. They could re-read and understand the passage as many times as they wish while answering the questions given on the comprehension section.

All 100 marks were counted for 5 sections and the competence was measured among the students of two groups.

The results were both qualitative data and quantitative data.

Qualitative data were the fluency, thinking power, organizing language in mind, memory, constructing sentences and ideas in mind, family background, environment the student come from i.e. student Vs. teacher, student Vs. Colleague, student Vs. parents etc. Quantitative data consisted time, age, marks scored etc.

D. Research Procedure

Students from both ends were selected. i.e. 50 students who exposed to English as a second language at the age of 3-4 and 50 students exposed to English language at the age of 7-8. The writing paper was given at the same time to the selected 50 students and will be collected after 1 hour. Listening paper was also given at the same time and the passage was read at once and they could attend to the questions given within 20 minutes. The papers were collected at the same time. Finally the marks obtained in each section out of 100 were counted on each student's basis. Marks for both listening and writing were counted from 100 (each) and the average was counted out of 100. Then it was analyzed and compared among the two groups. Which group scored more in both was considered. Then the researcher tends to find whether the hypothesis was proved or it is otherwise.

E. Analysis

The study consisted with both qualitative data and quantitative data.

Qualitative data were the fluency, thinking power, organizing language in mind, memory, constructing sentences and ideas in mind, family background, environment the student come from i.e. student Vs. teacher, student Vs. Colleague, student Vs. parents etc.

Quantitative data consisted with time, age, marks scored etc.

To analyze results SPSS (Statistical package for social sciences) and Microsoft Excel were used.

F. Application

The study concluded with a number of findings while proving the hypothesis or otherwise. Accordingly the findings were taken into account to apply them to the betterment of the second language standards of students. These findings were applicable to students who study the local syllabus in Sinhala medium from the beginning.

III. RESULTS

| Description | Group A | Group B |
|------------------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Sample | 50 students | 50 students |
| School | Musaeus College | Arawwala Vidyaloka Vidyalaya |
| Age | 8 years | 8 years |
| Exposure to L2 at the age of | 3-4 | 7-8 |
| Family background | English usage is high | English usage is nil |
| Exposure to environment | Environment has tendencies to use English | English usage is nil |

A. Age

The selected schools were Musaeus College Colombo and the other was Arawwala Vidyaloka Vidyalaya in a suburb of Colombo. Both schools taught the local syllabus in Sinhala medium. The difference was the age of exposure to English as L2. Students at Musaeus College exposed to L2 at the age of 3-4 years during their pre-school period. Since then they continued to study L2. By grade 3 the students have studied L2 for approx. 4-5 years. They gradually improved their area of knowledge in L2.

Students at Arawwala Vidyaloka Vidyalaya exposed to L2 at the age of 7-8 during their school period. Since then they continued to study L2. By grade 3 the students started studying English as L2. Due to that reason they need more time to improve their knowledge in L2.

The sample was taken from grade 3 because the specific grade remarks the start of learning English as the L2 in government schools. By grade 3 students were at the age of 7-8 years. Students of Arawwala Vidyaloka Vidyalaya started studying English as the L2 at the age of 8 years. 8 years denotes the end of critical age or the late period of critical age. Exceptionally in students of Musaeus College the observation was different. The students were encouraged to study English from the early ages of the

critical period though they follow the local government syllabus in Sinhala medium. Due to that reason the competence level was different among the two groups. The reason was the age of exposure i.e. during the critical period or after the critical period/later ages of the critical period.

B. Family Background

Family background was different among the two groups. Students of Group A are from an English speaking background or the usage is high because the parents know English, they work using English, they might have obtained their higher studies/qualifications in English and they know the importance of improving competency in English. Sometimes they speak to their children in English so they learn English at home. Due to the interest in L2 the parents encourage the kids to learn from their pre-school age so the pre-schools also teach English for these kids. Sometimes English is a subject, sometimes English is the medium at these pre-schools.

C. Environment

The situation was different in Group B. They have no background of English at home. The support from home is nil. The parents are less educated and most of them are minor employees. They have no background in English so they do not understand the value if gifting it to their children. They have financial difficulties at home and hardly find ways and means to educate their children at a school. The encouragement at home is nil. The families speak dialects of native language so they have no interest in speaking in English. If they enter their children to a pre-school if possible the pre-school will also follow Sinhala medium.

D. ANOVA

1) Critical age: Non critical age- Listening

Since the interaction between critical age and non-critical age was observed the simple main effect on the critical age: non-critical age interaction was computed. There was a significant difference between critical age and non-critical age students in listening $F= 98.286^{***}$ ($1,p> .001$).

2) Critical age: Non critical age- Writing

Since the interaction between critical age and non-critical age was observed the simple main effect on the critical age: non-critical age interaction was computed. There was a significant difference between critical age and non-critical age students in writing $F= 186.042^{***}$ ($1,p> .001$).

E. *Listening_ Critical Age_ Non Critical Age_ Cross Tabulation*

| Number | Range |
|--------|---------------|
| 1 | Poor |
| 2 | Below Average |
| 3 | Average |
| 4 | Good |

| Listening (V3) | Age | | Total |
|-----------------|--------------|------------------|-------|
| | critical age | non-critical age | |
| Poor 1 | Count | 7 | 57 |
| | % within V3 | 12.3% | 87.7% |
| Below Average 2 | Count | 23 | 23 |
| | % within V3 | 100.0% | .0% |
| Average 3 | Count | 17 | 17 |
| | % within V3 | 100.0% | .0% |
| Good 4 | Count | 3 | 3 |
| | % within V3 | 100.0% | .0% |
| Total | Count | 50 | 100 |
| | % within V3 | 50.0% | 50.0% |

The above chart shows a cross tabulation of the result distribution for listening. When we consider the range poor there are 7 students in the critical age and overall percentage is 12.3%. There are 50 (which is the full count of students) students in the non-critical age and as a percentage it is 87.7%. The total in poor category is 57 students which is the 100% of the section poor.

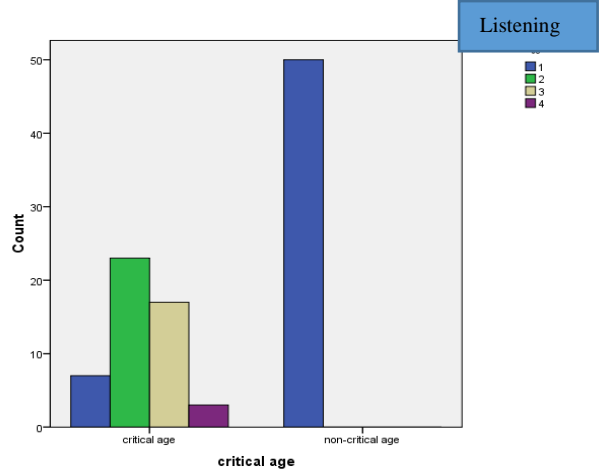
In below average there are 23 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 23 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In average there are 17 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 17 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In section good there are 03 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 03 students and it represents 100% of the section.

There were no students for the section excellent from either critical age or non-critical age. This means no student has obtained results 81-100 for listening component.

The total of critical and non-critical age becomes 50 at the end which is a total of 100 i.e. the sample size and both covers 50% of the whole in each age category.



The above graph shows the performance of both critical age and non-critical age in the writing component. When considering the range of critical age it is spread in all 5 ranges out of 5 i.e. poor, below average, average, and good and excellent. It is contrasting with the non-critical age group because the range is limited to poor. There is a clear difference in the spread between these ranges with regards to both critical age and non-critical age.

In non-critical age group the total 50 is spread only in poor category but in critical age group there is 0-10 in poor, 20-30 in below average, 10-20 in average and 0-10 in good category and 0-10 in excellent.

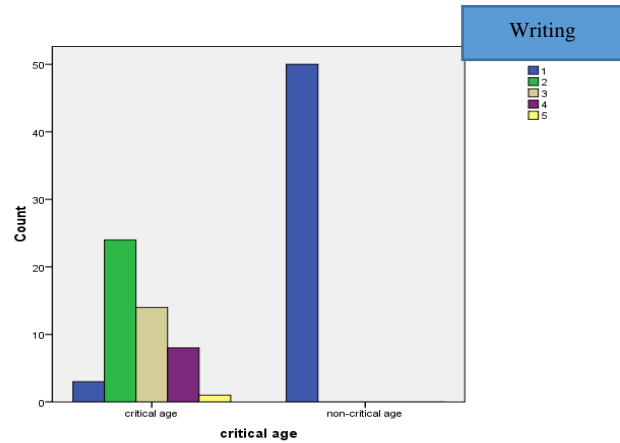
F. *Writing_ Critical Age_ Non Critical Age_ Cross Tabulation*

The below chart shows a cross tabulation of the result distribution for writing. When we consider the range poor there are 3 students in the critical age and overall percentage is 5.7%. There are 50 (which is the full count of students) students in the non-critical age and as a percentage it is 94.3%. The total in poor category is 53 students which is the 100% of the section poor.

| Number | Range |
|--------|---------------|
| 1 | Poor |
| 2 | Below Average |
| 3 | Average |
| 4 | Good |
| 5 | Excellent |

| Writing (V4) | | | Age | | Total |
|---------------|---|-------------|--------------|------------------|--------|
| | | | critical age | non-critical age | |
| Poor | 1 | Count | 3 | 50 | 53 |
| | | % within V4 | 5.7% | 94.3% | 100.0% |
| Below Average | 2 | Count | 24 | 0 | 24 |
| | | % within V4 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Average | 3 | Count | 14 | 0 | 14 |
| | | % within V4 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Good | 4 | Count | 8 | 0 | 8 |
| | | % within V4 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Excellent | 5 | Count | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| | | % within V4 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| | | % within V4 | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |

clear difference in the spread between these ranges with regards to both critical age and non-critical age.



In non-critical age group the total 50 is spread only in poor category but in critical age group there is 0-10 in poor, 20-30 in below average, 10-20 in average and 0-10 in good category and 0-10 in excellent.

In below average there are 24 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 24 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In average there are 14 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 14 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In section good there are 08 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 08 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In section excellent there is 01 student in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 01 student and it represents 100% of the section.

The total of critical and non-critical age becomes 50 at the end which is a total of 100 i.e. the sample size and both covers 50% of the whole in each age category.

The below graph shows the performance of both critical age and non-critical age in the writing component. When considering the range of critical age it is spread in all 5 ranges out of 5 i.e. poor, below average, average, and good and excellent. It is contrasting with the non-critical age group because the range is limited to poor. There is a

G. Average_Critical Age_ Non Critical Age_ Cross Tabulation

| Number | Range |
|--------|---------------|
| 1 | Poor |
| 2 | Below Average |
| 3 | Average |
| 4 | Good |

| Average (V5) | | | Age | | Total |
|---------------|---|-------------|--------------|------------------|--------|
| | | | critical age | non-critical age | |
| Poor | 1 | Count | 3 | 50 | 53 |
| | | % within V5 | 5.7% | 94.3% | 100.0% |
| Below Average | 2 | Count | 16 | 0 | 16 |
| | | % within V5 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Average | 3 | Count | 26 | 0 | 26 |
| | | % within V5 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Good | 4 | Count | 5 | 0 | 5 |
| | | % within V5 | 100.0% | .0% | 100.0% |
| Total | | Count | 50 | 50 | 100 |
| | | % within V5 | 50.0% | 50.0% | 100.0% |

The above chart shows a cross tabulation of the result distribution for average. When we consider the range poor there are 3 students in the critical age and overall percentage is 5.7%. There are 50 (which is the full count of students) students in the non-critical age and as a percentage it is 94.3%. The total in poor category is 53 students which is the 100% of the section poor.

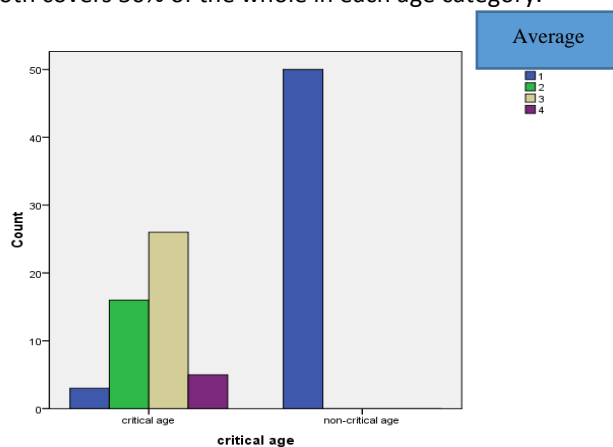
In below average there are 16 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 16 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In average there are 26 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 26 students and it represents 100% of the section.

In section good there are 05 students in the critical age which is almost 100% for the section. There is no student from non-critical age which is 0%. The total is 05 students and it represents 100% of the section.

There were no students for the section excellent from either critical age or non-critical age. This means no student has obtained results 81-100 as an average.

The total of critical and non-critical age becomes 50 at the end which is a total of 100 i.e. the sample size and both covers 50% of the whole in each age category.



The above graph shows the performance of both critical age and non-critical age as an average. When considering the range of critical age it is spread in 4 ranges out of 5 i.e. poor, below average, average and good. The excellent category is nil. It is contrasting with the non-critical age group because the range is limited to poor. There is a clear difference in the spread between these ranges with regards to both critical age and non-critical age.

In non-critical age group the total 50 is spread only in poor category but in critical age group there is 0-10 in poor, 10-20 in below average, 20-30 in average and 0-10 in good category. There is no count in excellent category.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

A. Findings

Exposure to L2 at the critical age speed up the L2 acquisition of a child is the major finding of the research. The students examined in this research were both who exposed at the critical age and after the critical age. It was evident that students who exposed to learn a second language in the critical period of their life gain more competencies and performance is significant. The other group also belongs to same age but the difference was in the age of exposure. They exposed at non-critical age period. Their performance was poor in both tests. It is evident from this research as well as the researches done earlier by different scholars, linguists and grammarians that critical age plays a crucial role in determining the fluency of L2 acquisition.

Influence of the family background plays a significant role in L2 acquisition. The research was conducted for one hundred subjects of two groups. They belonged to two different family backgrounds. One group had a family background that uses English as the second language at daily basis. The parents have learnt English from younger days and have completed higher studies in English. The parents encourage their children to learn English from their younger days. The family background also helps to teach English to their children. Then of course subjects reflected the family assistance they receive. The next group was a different situation. The subjects didn't have any assistance from the family. That was due to many reasons such as the parents didn't have enough knowledge of English and were unaware of the importance of English. So they don't encourage their children to learn English. Even if they learn there is no one to help at home or there is no one to teach the English at home. Since there is less back-up from the family the said group showed poor performance.

Influence of the environment plays a significant role in L2 acquisition. One group had a favorable environment to learn L2. The other group had an unfavorable environment to learn L2. The group who performed well had a supportive environment as in friends who speak and learn English, teachers who speak and assist in learning English. They also experienced the help of care givers, neighbours, family friends etc. But the other group didn't have any assistance provided by the environment supportive to learn English as the second

language. They didn't have any friend, family friends, neighbours, care givers who speak or learn or teach English but instead of that they were limited to the native language. In such a situation the said group had no background influence to learn English as the second language.

B. Discussion

As stated by Krishna K. Bista in 'Age is an affective factor in second language acquisition', age is an important concept in second language acquisition. In Mark Patkowski's study completed in 1982 he has found that native like language abilities and performance level are lower in older children than younger children. In the research carried out by David Singleton in 2003 the researchers found that younger learners do better in the long run in the matter of second language lexical acquisition is no more than a tendency. Asher and Gracia in their research have found that the younger a child had been efficient when entering to learn a second language, the higher the probability of a native like accent. The Lenneburgian notion of Critical Period Hypothesis states that puberty as a milestone for Second Language Acquisition.

As per the results gained in the experiment it is evident that the period of exposure is crucial in learning an L2. In this research English is considered as L2. The performance was categorized as poor who gained results from 0-20, below average who gained results from 21-40, average who gained results from 41-60, good who gained results from 61-80, excellent who gained results from 81-100.

In the pilot test all four components were examined i.e. speaking, reading, listening and writing. In the pilot test it was observed that the test consumes more time so it was difficult to keep the subjects in concentration and also examining all 4 components was too heavy for the students of age 8. It was finalized to examine writing and listening due to above reason.

Depending on the performance of the question paper given in the writing component the following was observed. All 50 students of the non-critical age group were fallen in poor category. That is when the subjects gained results between 0-20. All 50 students on critical age group were fallen under all five categories i.e. poor, below average, average, good and excellent. Least of them have fallen in excellent category and most of them have fallen in below average category.

Depending on the performance of the question paper given in the listening component the following was

observed. All 50 students of the non-critical age group were fallen in poor category. That is when the subjects gained results between 0-20. All 50 students of critical age group were fallen under four categories i.e. poor, below average, average and good. Least of them have fallen in good category and most of them have fallen in below average category.

Depending on the performance of the question paper the average was observed. All 50 students of the non-critical age group were fallen in poor category. That is when the subjects gained results between 0-20. All 50 students of critical age group were fallen under four categories i.e. poor, below average, average and good. Least of them have fallen in poor category and most of them have fallen in average category.

As stated by Linguists like Noam Chomsky and Eric Lenneberg the critical age plays a crucial role in L2 acquisition. It is evident and proved in this research as well. Exposure in the critical age speeds-up the language acquisition of a child. There are instances where people gain acquisition after the critical age. The competency and the performance are lower when compared to the acquisition gained in the critical period. When L2 is acquired in the critical age the subject will gain native like fluency.

Lindfors, 1991: Winner, McCarthy, Kleinman, & Gardner, 1979 have found that children constantly modify their speech when talking to younger children. In the research conducted by Garcia, 1994: Lindfors, 1991: McLaughlin, 1984: Shatz & Gelman, 1973 it was found that children constantly modify their speech depending on their audience. Berk & Winsler, 1995: California Department of Education, 1988: Lindfors, 1991: Tabors, 1997 found that the central role of language is the way we communicate with other people and with ourselves.

Apart from the age of exposure, environment and family background also play significant roles in L2 acquisition. The usage of L2 of the parents and close relatives influence the subject to gain more competence and performance. Due to the higher usage, knowledge and interest in conversing with the L2, the subject has more chances to be affluent in L2.

If the subject has an influence by the environment as in with friends, school, etc the subject has more chances to gain better competence and performance as it is evident from the research.

Apart from the age of exposure the above said factors environment and family background were very significant on the performance of the subjects in this research.

Many scholars, linguists have proved that critical age is a crucial factor to obtain L2 namely, David Crystal, Leonard Bloomfield, Lev Vygotsky, Prof. Lydia White, Roger Browns, Steevan Krashen, Sharad Rajimwale are some of them.

Depending on the results gained in the research the hypothesis is proved which is "Exposure to L2 at the critical age speed up the L2 acquisition of a child." Therefore it is understood that critical age is a crucial matter in L2 acquisition. The statements provided by linguists, grammarians and scholars assisted to study the hypothesis.

C. Conclusion

Subjects exposed to L2 at the age of critical period showed a considerable amount of competency and performance in the question paper in both listening and writing so in average as well. Subjects exposed to L2 at the age of non-critical period showed poor performance in competency and performance in the question paper in both listening and writing so in average as well. This shows the importance of exposure to L2 at the age of critical period which in turn reflects in the fluency, competence and performance of a subject.

As well as the age the research indicates the need of a favourable family background and a favourable environment to gain competence and performance in L2 learning.

Finally the hypothesis is proved that Exposure to L2 at the critical age speed up the L2 acquisition of a child.

D. Recommendation

Subjects should be exposed to L2 at the critical age by parents and care givers. If they obtain a suitable environment and a family background the acquisition will be more prominent. The research can emphasis many steps to expose a child to L2 at the critical age.

Preschool education at early childhood can help a child to learn the L2 better. In preschools the students are taught the alphabet, words, nursery rhymes, songs and simple activities to learn English. With the help of these activities students are exposed to learn English as the L2.

Learning the basics of L2 as a subject is another opportunity. The students are taught the letters and to construct words with two letters, three letters and so on. They can develop till construction of simple sentences

with two, three or more words. They are taught to recite simple stories, songs, drama etc.

In a situation of learning the basics of L2 as the medium of education, the students feel more comfortable with the L2 even though it is different from their native language. Since the age of pre-school if they obtain education in the medium of L2 it is likely to obtain native like fluency. They learn L2 as the second language and also the medium of instruction. The competency and performance have more tendencies to improve in such an instance.

Usage of L2 at home environment is another important factor in L2 acquisition. Home environment is the place the child will be when he/she is out from school environment. If L2 is given priority in communication at home, the child has more tendencies to gain competency and performance in L2 because L2 is often to share thoughts and information at home setting which in turn makes the child to be more confident in understanding and conversing in L2.

Exposing to an environment that supports L2 learning helps a child to be fluent in L2. The environment here means the close association with friends, family friends, caregivers, relations, teachers etc. If the environment influences more to use L2 the child is likely to feel comfortable in using L2. The child will get adapted to the environment and will try to converse and understand L2. In such instance the child communicates in L2 and will be influenced to use L2 in more frequent occasions.

Language games can develop the language abilities of children. It is similar to L2 as well. Language games can include innovative games designed to improve all four components of language i.e. speaking, listening, reading and writing.

E. Future Research

Future research can be extended in various ways. Namely the research occupied girls and boys amounting 50 each for data collection. In further research the sample size can be extended in various numbers.

Further in this research English is considered as L2. In future research the same can be conducted taking various other languages into consideration as the second language.

The subjects were at the age of 7-8 years who study in grade 3. The research can be further extended into subjects of different ages to see how well the subjects perform in second language acquisition.

Writing and listening skills are examined in the research due to many reasons. The subjects became exhausted and uncomfortable to pay attention till all the four components complete. There can be systems designed to examine all four components to the students of same age without making the tired and uneasy.

The research data is gathered in the context of Colombo area. It can be further extended to other parts of the country.

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